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(RE)CREATING HISTORY: HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY, JEWISH COLLECTIVE
MEMORY, AND POLISH-JEWISH RELATIONS

by

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to Grampy, for the love of history

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¹ Bertha Goldwasser, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview by David Boder (August 4, 1946), Paris, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=goldwasserB>.

² Pinchas Gutter, Interview #54192, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #14.

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Introduction

Sitting in front of Anna Ornstein, a Holocaust survivor, child trauma psychologist, and grandmother of a high school friend, I realized very quickly I did not have the tools I needed to interview a survivor. Near the end of our three hours together, Ornstein began to grow tired of my ill-formed yet relentless questions. Then a high school senior working on an independent history project, I was overwhelmed when she asked me: “what will the children learn from knowing this? What, ultimately is the benefit? [...] What do you really want when you tell this story?”¹ In my own personal challenges with recording testimony, from working with survivors who share their stories in classrooms every day to survivors who chose me as one of the few with whom they would share their stories, I began to realize that testimony is not merely “what happened.” Holocaust testimony is an organism of its own; it is fluid, dynamic, ever-changing. It is influenced by past, present, and future. It is inconsistent and contradictory, unsatisfying and unorganized. Testimony is *not* history, and yet it is also *not* merely story-telling. Testimony is the conveyance of the memory of trauma, brought forth through time and in time, to new interlocutors in new places for many different reasons. Survivors themselves, their interviewers, and the collections through which their testimonies are stored have different goals, aspirations, and reasons for sharing. Creating testimony, therefore, constitutes contributing an extensive amount of primary source material for the study of history, which functions both as a record of the past and an interpretation of that past based on everything else that has happened.² How then, one might ask, can survivor testimony be most effectively used to study history?

This thesis examines how Jewish Holocaust survivors, in two significant periods of the postwar era, interpreted a topic of historical and personal interest to survivors: Polish

¹ Anna Ornstein. Interview by author, in-person, February 2, 2015.

² Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), xi.

antisemitism. First, I explore how survivors, in the immediate aftermath of the war, discussed their feelings and understandings of Polish antisemitism. In 1946, Polish antisemitism became a widely recognized phenomenon that pushed thousands of Polish Jews westward instead of rebuilding their lives in Poland. Fast-forwarding fifty years to the 1990s, I then examine how survivors discussed Polish-Jewish relations at another significant turning point of history: when a global collective memory of the Holocaust was solidifying, and tens of thousands of Jewish survivors participated in projects to record their testimonies. From 1946, through the 1990s, and even today in 2019, Polish and Jewish memories or interpretations of the history of World War II and its aftermath remain deeply divided and emotionally charged. An analysis of survivor testimony on the topic of Polish antisemitism reveals the ways in which survivors themselves reinterpret their own memories both in support of and in contrast to what they view as the “traditional” history of the subject. The past does not exist in a vacuum; rather, present interpretations of what happened have caused survivors to reexamine what they experienced through a new lens.

By analyzing how Polish Jewish survivors understood the role of Poles in the Holocaust, this thesis ultimately aims to study the history of collective memory. Polish “collective memory” has categorized Poles’ role in the German occupation as “victim” and/or “resistor.”³ Jewish survivors frequently apply the labels “collaborator” or “perpetrator.” Both groups’ viewpoints appear intractable, and each has become more extreme in the assertion of Polish innocence or guilt as one decries the other’s “falsehood.” In memory politics, it seems, the group with the “power and influence within and among nations” will create the “dominant narrative... assigning moral judgements to historical narratives.”⁴ In the past twenty-five years, it has been Holocaust survivors themselves who have held the world stage

³ Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain, *Power and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 78-81.

⁴ Langenbacher and Shain, *Power and the Past*, 218.

in the battle for memory. The transnational focus on and attention paid to survivor testimony has worked to reinforce Polish collective narratives of Poles as the conventional “victim.”⁵ The changes apparent between Jewish testimony recorded immediately after the events themselves and their public retelling in the 1990s itself reveals much about Jewish collective memory. Specifically, Jewish collective memory has formed both as a composite of shared survivor experiences and as a response to the rise of a Polish collective memory centered around denial and antisemitism.

Comparing testimonies from 1946 and the 1990s, this thesis asks the following: how and why do these testimonies change (and not change) over fifty years? Specifically, how do survivors, in these two distinct time frames, characterize the role of Polish antisemitism in having shaped their experience during the war and in its aftermath? What stories of Polish antisemitism do they choose to share and how do they select to construct narratives about these experiences? What roles do place, time, language, or culture play in the content and structure of testimony? In answering these questions, historians can gain insight into the permeability of the boundaries between individual and collective memory, between memory and history.

Testimony as History

It is precisely in the fluidity and incoherence of testimony that its usefulness as primary source material arises. Its subjectivity, its permeability to outside sources, and even its canonization through the establishment and popularization of archives make testimony a source in need of analysis in its own right. Dori Laub, a child survivor and psychologist and one of the founders of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale

⁵ David Engel, “On reconciling the histories of two chosen peoples,” *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 4 (2009): 921.

University, writes the following on witnessing: “I recognize three separate, distinct levels of witnessing in relation to the Holocaust experience: the level of being a witness oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself.”⁶ All three levels of witnessing do not operate in a vacuum. A survivor’s own testimonies (in an intentional plural) change over time and through the filters of memory and experience. A witness to testimony, as interviewer or listener/viewer, is “a companion on the eerie journey of the testimony.”⁷ But while Laub limits the permeability of testimony to these three levels, this thesis posits that there is a further level of witnessing. The process of other survivors sharing their experiences can influence the survivor’s testimony in terms of details emphasized, context given, or interpretations provided, adding another layer to the ways in which testimonies change.

In their groundbreaking work, *Testimony*, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman provided a classic example of how testimony breaks through typical conventions of “historical record.” Laub interviewed a survivor who had witnessed the revolt in Auschwitz in 1944 that was organized and carried out by a group of Jewish prisoners who worked in the crematoria. The survivor recounted, with “a sudden intensity, passion and color,” the experience of watching four chimneys explode.⁸ This person’s testimony ran counter to that of other testimonies and Nazi documentation, however, in which it is clear that only one chimney was successfully blown up during the uprising. Laub presented this contradiction as an opening to reflect on the value of testimony: if a survivor gives factually *incorrect* information in their testimony, what does this suggest about the testimony? Laub criticized historians for suggesting that the testimony could not be used as a historical source on account of its inaccuracy, arguing that

⁶ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London: Routledge, 1991), 75.

⁷ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 76.

⁸ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 59.

“the number mattered less than the fact of the occurrence.”⁹ This is the challenge of testimony: it is a trauma of the past recounted in the present. The survivor “knows” some things (that the revolt happened) and not others (how many chimneys were successfully destroyed). Likewise, the interviewer “knows” some things (in this case the specific details of the uprising based on other testimonies and evidence) and not others (the experience of watching the chimneys explode at Auschwitz). Testimony thus functions both as the creation of Holocaust history— the evidence through which historians have and continue to piece together how the Holocaust occurred – and a challenge to the traditionally rigid frameworks of historical convention, by conveying trauma in a manner that may be anachronistic, factually “incorrect,” and deeply filtered through present experience.¹⁰ Many historians quote Elie Wiesel as saying: “some things that never happened nevertheless are true.”¹¹ Testimony, then, is a survivor’s truth, even if it not always that of the empirically-minded historian.

The dual nature of testimony – as a past event conceptualized through the lens of the present – does not make testimony unusable as a historical source; rather it makes for a unique examination of how history inevitably straddles past and present. Consider the survivor who gives testimony over a large span of time; even if the “facts” – the basic outline of their experience – remain the same, the testimony is nonetheless influenced by “collective considerations,” or more simply put, the context in and through which survivors are “bearing witness.”¹²

So, what are the “facts”? In my fifth-grade history class, I learned that historians worked with two types of sources: primary and secondary materials. Primary source materials were written by people that lived through the events or wrote at the time of the events taking

⁹ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 60.

¹⁰ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 63.

¹¹ John Silber, “Chapter 4: Memory, History, Ethics” in *Obligated by Memory: Literature, Religion, Ethics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 65.

¹² Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 83.

place. Secondary source materials were written later and were based on that primary source material. What then is testimony, if it is not both of these? Felman and Laub posit the following about this duality: “knowledge in the testimony is, in other words, not simply a factual given that is reproduced and replicated by the testifier, but a genuine advent, an event in its own right.”¹³ The nature of testimony thus complicates our basic understandings of how history functions. In doing so, however, it does not lose its utility to historical analysis, but gains a level of nuance that allows historians to learn more about the ties between memory and history, past and present, and, perhaps, more on the reality of human experience. Memory pushes us to “keep on writing and rewriting” history as our interpretations of the past change in the present.¹⁴

If it is reasonable to assume that testimony is as much a commentary on the present as it is on the past, then the context under which survivors are asked to remember their experiences plays a significant role in their interpretations of those very experiences.¹⁵ In an ideal world, there would be a vast number of survivors interviewed immediately after the war and again some fifty years after the fact, so that historians could more readily identify how an individual’s testimony changes over time. We do not live in an ideal world, and as will be discussed later in this introduction in more detail, this project will not be comparing survivors across their own interviews. Instead, this thesis will examine two major collections of testimony, one from 1946 and one from the 1990s. This research strategy raises the question: how can historians compare testimonies over time, if we are not comparing specific individuals’ testimonies? The answer to this question requires one first to consider what cannot be found: “clarification of precise events, places, dates, and numbers,” which as one

¹³ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 62.

¹⁴ Susan Rubin Suleiman, “Chapter 2: Do Facts Matter in Holocaust Memoirs?” in *Obligated by Memory: Literature, Religion, Ethics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 42.

¹⁵ Hannah Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing: Language, Place, and Holocaust Testimony* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 16.

historian puts it, “are wrong with the regularity of a metronome.”¹⁶ Testimony, as a “lexicon of disruption, absence, and irreversible loss,” does not necessarily fit “modern historiographical practice.” But if historians can accept the failure of testimonies to fit “a single, all-embracing analytical framework,” there is much to be gained historiographically from listening to them.¹⁷ These testimonies carry a “subtle” truth.¹⁸ To compare testimonies, then, requires context on three periods of history: early 1939 to mid-1946, when the events occurred, and the two periods of time when survivors were interviewed: Autumn 1946 and the 1990s. Through knowledge of these contexts, tools from collective memory theory, and a familiarity with testimony itself, one can learn a great deal about how consistent a survivor’s primary experiences (sights, sounds, and events) can remain, even as their interpretation (context, analysis, and argument) can change drastically over time.

Collective Memory and Testimony Analysis

How we interpret the past influences how we act in the present. Thus, at its core, collective memory can be understood as the bridge between what happened in the past and the present day.¹⁹ But what exactly is “collective memory”? Sociologists, historians, psychologists, and other academics have presented a number of different, equally credible theories of collective memory in the past fifty years. This section aims to introduce the reader to some of these theories, in order to knit together theories of testimony analysis with theories of collective memory. Memory is amorphous and difficult to categorize, and various theories exist to categorize it: “some memories are collective, some collected. Some are social, some

¹⁶ Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 132.

¹⁷ David Engel, *Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 15.

¹⁸ Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 132.

¹⁹ Langenbacher and Shain, *Power and the Past*, 26.

more cultural. Some relate more to actual experiences of past events, and others more to the experience of their mediation in the present.”²⁰

Basic theories of memory argue that there are two components of individual memory: core and narrative. Core memory is understood as the “original phenomenal experience in the form of images, emotion, and bodily sensations” which is then integrated into narrative memory: “interpreted, narrative construction of events.”²¹ While a survivor’s core memory remains relatively consistent (and indeed, research shows that traumatic memories are actually less likely to be forgotten), the *narrative* memory (the interpretation) can change.²² As Sharon Kangisser Cohen has noted in her comparison of specific survivors’ testimony over time, later interviews tend to focus on “emotional reckoning and meaning-making” of the past, while the original interviews focus on the details: “the physical suffering and abuse, memories of the primal screams of the victims, and the fear of one’s own death.”²³ Moreover, the process of retelling means that the survivor creates a “performance” that “not only elevates the account but also acts to detach the interviewee from his/her memories.”²⁴

Collective memory helps “shape [...] moral consciousness.”²⁵ In the case of the Holocaust, what belongs in the realm of collective memory rather than that of history are the “moral roles” assigned to various actors. Which person receives the label “victim,” “perpetrator,” “survivor,” “bystander” et cetera has changed over time based on available information, subsequent globalization of that information, and changes in moral

²⁰ Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 14.

²¹ Robert N. Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 24.

²² Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*, 1.

²³ Sharon Kangisser Cohen, *Testimony & Time: Holocaust Survivors Remember* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Press, 2014), 107.

²⁴ Cohen, *Testimony & Time*, 107.

²⁵ Julia Epstein and Lori Hope Lefkowitz, *Shaping Losses: Cultural Memory and the Holocaust* (Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2001), 197.

interpretation. How we determine these labels thus depends not only on what is known about past events but also on culture, politics, and religion, among other values.²⁶

The subconscious and conscious incorporations of collective memory into Holocaust testimony can be as straightforward as survivors “misremembering” events based on other people’s stories or popular cultural media. For example, two female survivors were interviewed in the 1990s and described the following experience in Auschwitz: “upon entering a small chamber shortly after their arrival in the camp, [they] were relieved to see that the Germans had ‘turned on the water instead of the gas.’”²⁷ This is, of course, a scene from *Schindler’s List*. The gas chambers in Auschwitz did not dispense water or gas depending on the choice of the guards, but rather only dispensed gas, while the real showers were in a different location. The women have incorporated a scene from a 1990s film into their memory of their own lives, without realizing they did so. This is an example of how movies such as *Schindler’s List* and other images of the Holocaust that circulated in the media become constitutive of collective memory, even for Holocaust survivors.

Individuals’ narrative memory both contributes to and is influenced by collective memory. People think and remember within social frameworks. Another example of such a social framework is when survivors give testimony in the context of an archive. These social frameworks, as formed by individual memories, allow for the establishment of collective memory.²⁸ “Collected” memories take the form of individual contributions to a larger story or experience. “Collective” memory is instead a “reconstruction of the past in light of the constraints of the present, particularly as enforced by the authority of social institutions.”²⁹

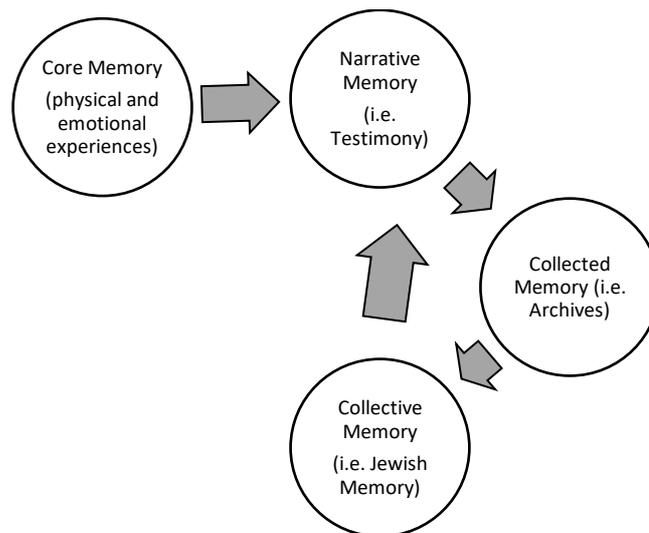
²⁶ Alvin Rosenfeld, *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1995), 7.

²⁷ Steven T. Katz and Alan Rosen, *Obligated by Memory: Literature, Religion, Ethics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), xv.

²⁸ Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 4.

²⁹ Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 4.

Some theorists, such as James Young, use the term “collected memories” to describe archives of testimony and other groupings of individual memory that come to be communally understood and adapted. This thesis will use the term “collective memory” as often survivors in individual testimony are not responding to or interacting with a specific “collected” memory but a generalized sense of what the “other” believes. One can understand the memory process in the following framework:



What is clear here is that core memory is not influenced by the collective, while narrative memory (memory mediated through interpretation) is. Specifically, in the case of Holocaust testimony, studies indicate that Holocaust memories are not usually “integrated” into a survivor’s perception of their own self, but rather that survivors view that person as “another at another time in another place.”³⁰ By creating separation between one’s trauma and one’s present life, a survivor’s testimony can more easily emphasize the collective, rather than the individual experience.

It is important in this situation also to consider collective memory in the context of Jewish memory culture. Jewish memory culture around the Holocaust has become an extremely important aspect of the culture and religion of Judaism. Long before the mid-

³⁰ Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*, 1.

twentieth century, the “ruptures and discontinuities” of Jewish life made memory a key piece of recognizing and healing from “the experience of trauma and catastrophe,” and the genocide of European Jewry deepened and broadened this phenomenon within Jewish culture.³¹ The long tradition of Jewish memory sharing, combined with a variety of phenomenon including the popularity of *Schindler’s List* and the newfound interest in testimony led to an explosion of interviews of Jewish Holocaust survivors in the 1990s. Survivors who chose to share their stories in the 1990s, fifty years after the fact, had entirely different motivations, contexts, and reasoning from survivors who talked to psychologist David Boder in Displaced Persons camps in 1946. Married or remarried, surrounded by children or grandchildren, with decades of reflection behind them, survivors were convinced of the power of their testimony and the moral imperative “to share” and “bear witness.” The consciousness of the value of their testimony and the cultural emphasis on the collective memory of trauma combined to encouraged survivors to incorporate collective memory into their narrative memory, both consciously and subconsciously. Survivors felt that it was important to “communicate” their experiences rather than simply to “report” what happened. This process by its very nature incorporates new experiences, beliefs, contexts, and analysis into the survivor’s narrative memory.

Survivors in the 1990s directly responded to what they felt was a rise of denial or inaccurate perceptions of the Holocaust. One survivor, Nesse Golden, felt impelled to share her testimony for the very first time in the 1990s, in order to “teach the living what hatred and indifference can do.”³² Another survivor, Lily Margules, decided that it was “time for us to speak up,” having heard that Holocaust deniers were attempting to “rewrite history.”³³

³¹ Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 17.

³² Arlene Stein, *Reluctant Witnesses: Survivors, Their Children, and the Rise of Holocaust Consciousness*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 112.

³³ Stein, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 115.

Historian and psychologist Henry Greenspan describes this as an attempt to create a “cultural memory” – a moral code based in the memory of the wrongs of the past.³⁴

Survivors often had specific memories or experiences they wanted to share to correct the moral record. Often this was not about factual but moral “inaccuracies.” In the case of Polish Jewish relations, a number of survivors were impelled to respond to the designations of Poles as “bystander,” “collaborator,” and “perpetrator.” In the early survivor interviews, there was a degree of moral fluidity. By the 1990s in the United States, that sort of moral “gray zone” vis-à-vis Polish people during the Holocaust was no longer evident. Nevertheless, Jewish attitudes towards Poles, however moralistic they were in the 1990s, still varied significantly: sometimes Jews viewed Poles as “partners” against the Germans, sometimes as active perpetrators of a “traditional” Polish antisemitic violence conducted against Jews, in the setting of a larger Holocaust.³⁵ Ultimately, Holocaust testimony itself “can assign to an actor a historical position of villain, victim, or liberator.”³⁶ What those designations were in the immediate postwar period, what they became in the past fifty years, and why they changed will be examined over the course of this thesis.

A (Brief) History of Polish-Jewish relations, 1939–1946

The interweaving of past and present – as is so characteristic of both individual and collective memory – makes it extremely difficult to tease out perception from intent and action from reaction. In an attempt to understand how and why Polish-Jewish memory is so fraught, it is important to construct a “Polish” timeline as it is felt and understood by Polish

³⁴ Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors*, 2nd edition (St. Paul: Paragon, 1998).

A good example of “cultural memory” would be the morals and values that arise when the American Revolution is discussed. None of us were alive in 1776 nor do we know anyone who was alive then. Yet a collective memory exists that from which “moral lessons” – however factually inaccurate – are derived, such as fighting for your beliefs and standing up to a bully. For more see, Janice Hume, *Popular Media and the American Revolution: Shaping collective memory* (London: Routledge, 2013), epilogue.

³⁵ Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 125.

³⁶ Langenbacher and Shain, *Power and the Past*, 11.

nationalists, and a “Jewish” timeline as it is felt and understood by Holocaust survivors. The major difference here is that Poles consistently place more weight and emotional symbolism on events that victimized Poles specifically and spared Jews, whereas Jews tend to emphasize the events that victimized Jews and were perpetrated exclusively by Poles. Given the malleability of memory, Poles have emphasized their victimhood almost to the neglect of Jewish victimhood, and their Jewish counterparts have often done the same.³⁷ Ultimately, the Holocaust and its aftermath is a “traumatic past” for both groups, and a victimhood competition benefits neither group. These experiences have not been “assimilated or accepted” into the general lives of Poles or Jews who survived the war, even as historians attempt to tease out “history” from memory.³⁸

Like many countries in Eastern and Western Europe, Poland has a long history of antisemitism. Poland was distinct from other nations for two reasons. First, it had the largest Jewish population of any nation in Europe aside from the Soviet Union on the eve of World War II, a population of some 3.5 million representing 10 percent of the Polish population in 1939. Second, 90 percent of Poland’s Jewish population were killed in the Holocaust, the largest total number of Jews killed from any one country.³⁹ The issue of Polish involvement in the genocide of their fellow citizens has been a painful topic and has given rise to considerable controversy. What historians have uncovered is that many Poles helped the German occupiers to exterminate the Jewish population. Many Poles were given financial incentives or rewards by the German occupying forces to aid in the hunting and discovery of Jews. Others denounced Jews for no incentives at all.⁴⁰ Some extorted Jews for their

³⁷ Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 144.

³⁸ Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

³⁹ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 3.

⁴⁰ Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 57.

possessions and wealth. Others killed Jews, sometimes with and sometimes without the aid of the Germans. These facts are reported by Jewish survivors as well as historians. According to Jewish memory, at best Poles passively allowed the Nazis to murder the Jews, and at worst eagerly aided them. The fact that some Poles did attempt to help Jews survive was ultimately not enough to counter the number of denouncers and blackmailers.⁴¹

Jewish testimony emphasizes the role of local Poles in the deaths of friends and family.⁴² Yet the critical nature of Jewish testimony towards Poles was also a product of the rampant antisemitism and violence in Poland in the wake of the German defeat, which solidified a Jewish sentiment that Jewish life in Poland was no long viable. Most (in)famously, on July 4, 1946, forty-one Jews were killed in a pogrom in Kielce, shocking much of the international community. The Kielce Pogrom became a fixture in Jewish collective memory, symbolising the ways in which, even after the war, the Poles had not and would not change their attitudes toward Jews.

Did the Poles deserve this reputation as the eternal antisemites? Polish collective memory of the Holocaust reveals much as to how and why Poles may have felt unfairly judged by their Jewish counterparts. Polish responses to Jewish accusations of collaboration and perpetration generally fall into two categories: accusations of Jewish communism and the neglect of Polish victimhood. It is important to understand both of these arguments as they function as aspects of collective memory, setting aside their potential historical inaccuracy.

A foundational criticism of Poles towards Jews centered on the Polish belief in the “*zydokumuna*” or “Jewish Bolshevik” who voluntarily lent support to the Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland from 1939-1941.⁴³ Poles viewed Jews who worked for or with the Soviet government as collaborators, and in extreme cases, some Poles argue that the German murder

⁴¹ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 3.

⁴² Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews*, 1.

⁴³ I. Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory: the Jew in Contemporary Poland*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publications, 1999), 163.

of Jews was aimed to kill “Judeo-Bolsheviks” who collaborated with the Soviets.⁴⁴ Regardless, it is clear that there was simply less “social stigma” in Poland during the war associated with killing Jews or handing them over to the Germans. Documentation further demonstrates that in the case of some Polish underground forces, helping Jews was considered a betrayal of Polish nationalist aims.⁴⁵ Antisemitism was certainly rampant in Poland during and immediately after the war, and it was written off as the result of “nationalist” needs, linking Jews with the hated Soviets.

The end of the Second World War was a time of major transition for Poland from German-occupied territory to Soviet satellite state. This transition was violent. The remnant underground Polish nationalist forces fought the communist government that was taking over, and antisemitic military groups took violent actions to prevent Jews from returning to their hometowns.⁴⁶ While Jewish collective memory of the 1946 to 1948 period focuses on the latter experiences of violence and antisemitism, Polish collective memory centers on the rise of the communist government. Moreover, Polish collective memory identifies Jewish complicity during the Soviet occupation as a root source of animosity between Poles and Jews. Yet after the establishment of a communist state of in Poland the understanding of Jews changed significantly.⁴⁷ Rather than viewing them as a threat, Poles began to view the persecution of Jews and Poles by the Nazis as equal experiences, reorganizing their perception of the role of Jews from communist sympathizer/collaborator to co-victim.⁴⁸

In communist Poland, the Holocaust and its memory were manipulated by the government.⁴⁹ As a result, there was little room for uncensored questioning or reckoning with

⁴⁴ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 17.

⁴⁵ “We have to punish those who want to hide Jews and declare them traitors to the common Polish cause. Because every true Pole knows that in a reborn Poland there will be room neither for a German nor for a Jew.” - Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews*, 58.

⁴⁶ Jan Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2007).

⁴⁷ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 8.

⁴⁸ Daniel Blatman, “Polish antisemitism and ‘judeocommunist’: Historiography and memory,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 27, no. 1 (1997): 23.

⁴⁹ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 5.

Polish actions during and immediately after the war.⁵⁰ The government explicitly linked the condemnation of war-time collaboration in Poland to enemies of communism, and actively condemned collaboration only in the case of their “political and social adversaries.”⁵¹ This official Polish communist narrative clashed with the nationalist collective memories that had begun to coalesce in the 1946-1948 period, which regarded Jewish communists as the enemy of the people.⁵²

During the decades of communist rule in Poland, the Holocaust became incorporated into the “national” collective memory: the death toll of Polish Jews was added to the number of non-Jewish Poles killed, so it became a popular belief that “six million Poles died during the war.” This, of course, further strengthened the idea that Poles endured more suffering than other countries under German occupation. The Holocaust became “somehow parallel to the ethnic Polish tragedy of the war.”⁵³ Understanding how the blurring of the distinction between these two victim groups occurred makes it more obvious why Poles would coin the term “anti-Polonism” to describe the focus on Jewish, rather than Polish, victimhood. Ultimately, any attempt to understand or study the “negative aspects” of Polish history was perceived by Polish collective memory as fundamentally “anti-Polish.”⁵⁴

The communist period in Poland also witnessed the neutralization of Poland’s “dark past” through public silence. When Polish perpetration or collaboration was mentioned, it was a “marginal social problem” that only manifested in a “small and unrepresentative group,” which was no different than those who collaborated in other countries under occupation.⁵⁵ Ultimately, the war was represented as the “embodiment of Polish collective martyrdom and

⁵⁰ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 6.

⁵¹ Peter-Klaus Friedrich, “Collaboration in a ‘Land without a Quisling’: Patterns of Cooperation with the Nazi German Occupation Regime in Poland during World War II,” *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (Winter, 2006): 714.

⁵² Friedrich, “Collaboration in a ‘Land without a Quisling’,” 724.

⁵³ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 6.

⁵⁴ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 36.

⁵⁵ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 7.

heroism,” which left no room to confront less pleasant realities.⁵⁶ Confrontation with the contemporary, rampant Polish antisemitism in Claude Lanzmann’s movie *Shoah* when it was released in 1985 was deeply upsetting to the Polish population who viewed it. Lanzmann interviewed Polish peasants who lived near the death camps and still gave voice to “crude antisemitic stereotypes.”⁵⁷ Polish commentators on the film rejected Lanzmann’s portrayal of Poles not as victims but as bystanders and collaborators.

With the fall of the Eastern bloc and as the history of the Holocaust became a global history and increasingly synonymous with the collective memory of the Third Reich and the Second World War, Polish suffering at the hands of the Nazis became less widely acknowledged.⁵⁸ For a brief period after the end of the communist regime in Poland, in fact, it appeared like the Polish narrative of the Second World War was also undergoing revision in step with these broader trends. Freedom from strict communist memory politics allowed for a re-exploration of Polish identity and collective memory. Indeed, the proliferation of Holocaust survivor testimony coincided with the end of communism in Poland, and given the platform to speak, formerly Polish Jews began to discuss the ways in which their Polish gentile neighbors had collaborated with Germans and helped to perpetrate the Holocaust. Polish Jewish survivors’ testimony, and the new access to archives in previously communist Poland, in turn sparked an effort to study the history of Polish-Jewish relations.⁵⁹ One historian who began to study this topic in the 1990s was Jan Gross, who went on to write the famous (and, in Poland at least, infamous) book *Neighbors*. Published in 2001, *Neighbors* documents the mass killing of a rural Jewish population by the Polish townspeople. It is

⁵⁶ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 38.

⁵⁷ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 14.

⁵⁸ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 804.

⁵⁹ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 21.

considered by historians to be one of the most groundbreaking books on the “general question of mass murder [...] and the reaction of some segments of Polish society.”⁶⁰

Neighbors sparked much anger and denial in Poland and marked the turning of large and influential segments of Polish society away from the global history of the Holocaust. *Neighbors* was deeply upsetting to Poles because it represented a “counter-memory” to the traditional Polish understanding of Poles and Jews as both victims – and Poles as neglected and misunderstood victims at that.⁶¹ Moreover, *Neighbors* provided a concrete and detailed example of Polish perpetration (rather than just collaboration) of the Holocaust.⁶² In Poland, Gross’ book has been called a “Jewish [...] conspiracy against Poland and as confirmation of the ‘truth’ that ‘the Jew’ always wants to harm ‘the Pole.’” Polish critics of Gross’ work argue that Jews are ungrateful towards Poles who did offer assistance.⁶³ These criticisms are groundless, yet they reflect a consistent Polish belief in the unfair treatment of the Poles.

Even before 1939, Polish collective memory functioned on a “pre-existing, deeply entrenched” belief of eternal victimization, founded upon the Polish nationalist struggles of the 1700s.⁶⁴ After the war, many Poles would argue that the oppressive conditions of German occupation meant there was little more Poles could have done to save the Jews, even if they had wanted to. Since the publication of Gross’ book and especially since the Polish nationalist party came to power in Poland in 2004, Poles have suggested that Jews have brought “anti-Polonism” to the West and have downplayed the extent of “Polish martyrdom.” Poles have felt that by focusing on Jewish victimhood, Polish suffering has been “devalue[ed].”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 26.

⁶¹ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 30.

⁶² Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 31.

⁶³ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 37.

⁶⁴ Langenbacher and Shain, *Power and the Past*, 4.

⁶⁵ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 9, 36.

All historians studying Polish Jewish relations are fundamentally concerned with the proper response to the past, and more specifically, how to “deal with a shared but divisive memory.”⁶⁶ Some historians argue that it is the “popular Jewish perceptions” of Poles as antisemitic collaborators that have pushed Poles towards claims of anti-Polonism.⁶⁷ The more anyone attempts to enforce the collective memory of Poles or Jews as superseding the other, the more polarized and extreme the language and emotion surrounding the debate. Despite the overwhelming documentation, testimony, and historical evidence, many nationalist Polish institutions (such as the Polish Institute of National Remembrance) offer apologetic accounts of any evidence of collaboration, or of widespread antisemitic violence during the years of unrest that followed German occupation.⁶⁸ While this introduction has attempted to yield some understanding of Polish collective memory and how it functions, this thesis is overall concerned with *Jewish* collective memory and how it has changed in relation to Polish Memory, among other factors.

Methodology

In order to track shifts in Jewish understanding of Polish-Jewish relations over time and in Jewish testimony, this thesis examines two major collections of Holocaust testimony: David Boder’s 1946 *Voices of the Holocaust* Project and the 1990s Visual History Archive at the Shoah Foundation.

In July 1946, American psychologist David Boder set out on a two-month trip to Europe, with the intent to record audio testimony of Jewish DP (displaced persons) camp members. Boder intended to record testimony “for psychological as well as historical reasons.” He explained further: “it appears of the utmost importance that the impressions still

⁶⁶ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 15.

⁶⁷ Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*, 42.

⁶⁸ Friedrich, “Collaboration in a ‘Land without a Quisling,’” 745.

alive in the memories of displaced persons of their sufferings in concentration camps and during their subsequent wanderings, be recorded directly not only in their own language but their own voices.”⁶⁹ Boder’s project was significant in many respects; first, it is one of few cases of testimony audio-recorded (rather than transcribed) in the immediate postwar period. It is also unique that Boder had the ability to interview survivors in their own languages; Boder himself was born to a Jewish family in 1886 in Russia (now Latvia). After being educated in Moscow, Boder moved first to Mexico and then the United States in 1926. By the time he returned in 1946 to interview DPs, he spoke English, Spanish, French, German, Yiddish, Russian, and Polish. He died in 1961, a respected psychologist at the Illinois Institute of Technology, as well as a retired researcher from UCLA.⁷⁰

Boder sensed intuitively that it was crucial to interview survivors when “the memories were fresh.” In doing so, he created a collection of testimonies of survivors caught between their past lives and future homes.⁷¹ Boder’s timing is additionally significant in Polish-Jewish history: he arrived in Europe just weeks after the worst act of antisemitic violence in Poland since the end of the Second World War, that is, the July 1946 Kielce pogrom in which forty-one Jews were killed by their Polish neighbors. Numbers of how many Jews left Poland in the wake of the pogrom fluctuate significantly, but some estimates figure that up to seventy thousand Jews left in the three subsequent months.⁷² Given the fact that the Polish Jews he interviewed were fleeing violence (or perceived violence) in their homeland, much of their testimony focused on the destruction of Jewish communities after, and not only during, the war. Boder was also uniquely positioned – on account of his own émigré status and his

⁶⁹ Jürgen Matthäus, *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimony and its Transformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 51.

⁷⁰ Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), viii.

⁷¹ Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices*, 8.

⁷² Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland: A Portrait Based on Jewish Community Records 1944-1947* (New York: Sharpe, 1994), 10.

knowledge of most of the languages spoken by European Jews – to interview survivors. As Alan Rosen has pointed out, Boder himself “straddled [...] disparate cultures – pre-World War I Eastern European Jewish, on the one hand, and post-World War II American, on the other.”⁷³ Like Boder, the DP camps themselves were a sort of “middle ground.” Located across Western and Central Europe, in Italy, France, Austria, as well as British and American Occupied Germany, DP camps quartered thousands of European Jews as they attempted to emigrate, most often to either the United States or Palestine. This sense of “in-between,” argues Rosen, gave Boder an unprecedented opportunity to interview DPs as they waited to begin their “normal” lives somewhere new.⁷⁴

While later academics would argue that interviews conducted in secondary languages allowed survivors a degree of separation and “neutrality” from their traumas, Boder himself envisioned interviewing survivors “still at home in their native language and milieu.”⁷⁵ Indeed, survivors shifted from language to language depending on the story they were telling. In the case of one of the DPs he interviewed, Boder theorized that he used his native tongue – Yiddish – when he felt more emotional, and his learned tongue – German – to communicate dates and more factual information.⁷⁶ Boder’s testimony collection is of further significance for his free-flowing interview style; he rarely asked the same question twice across his interviews. Moreover, interviewees often had a lack of general knowledge of basic events that had occurred and “frequently mixed up dates and numbers, failed to recall names, or conflated personal experience, hearsay, and postwar information.”⁷⁷ While survivors felt, and continued to feel in the 1990s, that it was important to mention names, dates and places (knowing that they may be the only witnesses alive to give that information), survivors also

⁷³ Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices*, 18.

⁷⁴ Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices*, 16.

⁷⁵ Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices*, 20, citing ideas from: James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

⁷⁶ Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices*, 202.

⁷⁷ Matthaüs, *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor*, 53.

lacked the “big picture” of the conflict that would have allowed them to situate their own experiences in the tapestry of Holocaust experience.⁷⁸ In 1946, there was simply no “vocabulary” to explain the experience of survival.⁷⁹

The testimonies Boder recorded are remarkable, yet it is important to note the limitations of Boder’s archive. Boder was not aiming to have an equal distribution of survivors in terms of their “age, experiences and place.” Nor was he particularly interested in the “exceptional” stories of survival.⁸⁰ Boder did not treat his interviewees with the respect and delicacy typical in later interviews. He would question the accuracy of survivors’ stories told them not to talk about certain experiences, and pushed them instead to talk about others; he even cut them off if they took too long to respond. Boder was deeply patriotic; he wanted DPs to emigrate to the United States and likewise wanted Americans to accept these refugees with open arms. His project was “distinctly American” – despite his birthplace and knowledge of native tongues, the interviewees themselves treated Boder as a foreigner, and were occasionally hesitant to express political views that they felt an American might disapprove.⁸¹ Specifically, Boder was skeptical of Zionism, and would frequently ask DPs why they were not emigrating to America rather than Palestine. Therefore, Boder’s testimonies are not and cannot be treated as a true “collective” narrative of Jewish experience during the Holocaust.⁸²

Using the Boder testimonies as a basis for comparison is possible, however, in order to examine what disappears entirely between early and later interviews, and to determine what was not originally present in early interviews and becomes common later on. This thesis examines the general absence or presence of certain recurring themes between the two bodies

⁷⁸ Cohen, *Testimony & Time*, 33.

⁷⁹ Stein, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 25.

⁸⁰ Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices*, ix.

⁸¹ Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices*, 16.

⁸² Cohen, *Testimony & Time*, 36-37.

of testimony. What is determinable here is how the general collective memory remains consistent and inconsistent over time, and to present some theories as to why testimonies remain so consistent or in fact shift remarkably.⁸³

In its current form, the Boder archive is freely accessible online at voices.iit.edu. All of the interviews have been fully transcribed from the ninety hours of original audio recording and translated into English.⁸⁴ For this thesis, I examined all the testimonies of survivors who were born in Poland, spent a significant period of time in Poland prior to the German occupation, or returned to Poland at any point after 1944. All testimony included from the Boder archive has been translated by the *Voices of the Holocaust* Project staff and not the thesis author. When necessary, any edits or changes to quotations from the Boder testimonies is denoted by brackets, and “[...]” denotes any deletions from a testimony for the sake of shortening quotes and highlighting the most relevant evidence.

The second body of testimony examined in this project is the Visual History Archive (VHA) at the USC Shoah Foundation. Founded in 1994 under the original name, “Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation,” the VHA now holds over 55,000 video testimonies. Accessible on site at USC or at institutions that subscribe to USC, the archive’s thousands of testimonies are readily accessible thanks to a sophisticated digital cataloguing system. Additionally, each testimony in the VHA is tagged with “index terms.” For example, the author could search for the term “Polish-Jewish relations” or “Polish antisemitism” and locate the specific minutes within an interview in which a survivor discussed that topic. The indexing terms allow researchers to amass a large number of interviews that contain pertinent

⁸³ An important note here as well is that some of the Boder interviewees are reinterviewed in the 1980s and 1990s. Originally this thesis intended to accommodate and examine those interviews specifically. Unfortunately, very few of the Boder DPs that were reinterviewed were Polish, and of the four that were Polish, only one actually explicitly mentions experiences with Poles. The single line included is not particularly revealing, and as such a direct comparison of old and new interviews is not particularly fruitful for this project. Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices*, ix.

⁸⁴ Voices of the Holocaust Project, last updated 2009, Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology, voices.iit.edu.

segments of testimony. For the sake of narrowing the search field and creating a more coherent set of sources, all interviews included in this thesis were conducted in English, in the United States, with survivors who have been categorized by the VHA as “Polish” survivors. All quotations from the VHA testimonies that appear in this thesis were transcribed by the author personally.

The VHA is both the product of and a reflection of the changes in American cultural interest in the Holocaust over fifty years. By the mid-1990s, survivor testimony was popularized in the United States as bearing both historical and national focus. Tens of thousands of interviews were conducted over a relatively short period of ten years, signaling a new era in American consciousness of the genocide that had occurred almost fifty years earlier. But much had changed between the end of the Second World War in 1945 and 1994, when Spielberg was producing *Schindler’s List*, in order for such an increased focus on testimony-taking. Other than David Boder’s 1946 project, few Americans attempted to do serious historical work on testimony, at least prior to the 1960s. This began to change in 1961, with the highly publicized (and televised) trial of Adolf Eichmann. The trial, which showcased eye-witness testimony, was further brought to American attention by Hannah Arendt’s work for the *New Yorker* covering the trial – what became her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. All of this began the process of bringing the Holocaust into the “public sphere.” More specifically, testimony was on its way, especially in American culture, to become nationally rather than merely personally or communally relevant.⁸⁵ Yet as this process continued, the perspective of the American public on the Holocaust and that of historians began to diverge.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 55.

⁸⁶ Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 120.

The Shoah Foundation (henceforth referred to as the VHA, or Visual History Archive) specifically guided survivors to such conclusions, ending interviews by inviting the survivor's family to join them on screen and discuss the success of their lives. Asked what they want a viewer of their testimony to remember, survivors gave thanks to their family, to those who saved them, and emphasized how they are "the living proof of the Nazis' failure to exterminate a people." While the goals of the Shoah Foundation have changed over the years, the original intention behind the mass interviewing and archiving was to "preserv[e] memories of Holocaust survivors... [in order] to cultivate tolerance."⁸⁷ Although not the only testimony project of the 1990s, the VHA remains the largest testimony database in existence. Its approach, based as it is on the deeply moralizing *Schindler's List*, has essentially blurred the concepts of "history" and "witnessing." The Holocaust, as documented in the VHA, is a "a global code that no longer needs to be connected to history."⁸⁸ One sociologist even describes this project as "Americanized history with ethics."⁸⁹ Shoah foundation interviewers were trained to use a specific format of segmented interviewing: about one third pre-war, one third war time, and one third postwar. This format intentionally creates a structure of "continuity" and overcoming loss, rather than a specific and narrow focus on the period of 1939-1945.

This format has been critiqued by a number of scholars. For one, it essentially follows the 1990s "cultural penchant for restitution stories."⁹⁰ Another criticism of the VHA in contrast to other archival projects is that it "ask[s] witnesses to compartmentalize the various aspects of that legacy—to separate which aspects of their current life are affected by the Holocaust, rather than to look at the issues as entangled."⁹¹ Indeed, the VHA system

⁸⁷ Daniel Levy, Natan Sznajder, and Assenka Oksiloff, *Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Publishers 2006), 149.

⁸⁸ Levy et al., *Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, 150.

⁸⁹ Levy et al., *Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, 136.

⁹⁰ Stein, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 120.

⁹¹ Noah Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 128.

encourages survivors to overlay their experience with a more black-and-white moral system than is rarely or hardly realistic of their actual experiences. The interview essentially creates a “clearer division between right and wrong, between victims and perpetrators, and offers a more linear view: from obliteration to regeneration, from destruction to redemption, and from destitution to success.”⁹² It is thus important, within an individual testimony, to study the ways in which survivors themselves condemn or praise the actions of others as distinct from the framework of the testimony which attempts to organize survivors’ stories in a predetermined moral storyline.⁹³

When survivors sat down to give testimony in the 1990s, they did not do so “in a vacuum.” Rather they were informed by their “implicit ethical and political goals,” their own expectations about the purpose and nature of their interview, and most obviously through the lens of processing trauma.⁹⁴ The age of survivors is an additional factor. Most survivors interviewed in the 1990s were quite young in the 1940s, and by the time of their interviews they had reached retirement age, reflecting on their lives. Their Holocaust experiences are subsequently filtered through a lens of “passing on” their experiences to a younger generation, which further contributed to the allegorical tint of the 1990s testimonies.⁹⁵

While the rigidity of the interview format has been the object of criticism, the use of this template makes the testimonies useful as primary source material. It is certainly true that survivors were not given the leeway to discuss specific experiences and periods of their lives in great detail. However, the predictable breakdown of interviews and repetition of the same questions allows for a close comparison from interview to interview.⁹⁶ The format is also useful because it prompted survivors to remember certain events or experiences that had been

⁹² Stein, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 121.

⁹³ For a more in-depth comparison of modern Holocaust archives, see Noah Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

⁹⁴ Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing*, 16.

⁹⁵ Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 139.

⁹⁶ Levy et al., *Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, 151.

buried or forgotten. Moreover, when survivors did choose to break through the traditional testimony format to make a particular point, one can be confident in its deep significance for that survivor. In the case of Polish-Jewish relations specifically, survivors often “break” the testimony format by pulling together a number of different stories of Polish antisemitism from a variety of moments in their lives to advance an argument either historically or morally (or both) about how and why Poles were antisemitic.

After almost fifty years, forgetting and the absence of detail is “in many ways, part of the structure of the recollection and narration of trauma.”⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the recollection process rapidly became public in the 1990s – meaning that the popular narrative of the Holocaust became much more influenced by testimony than by secondary sources that examine the history of the Holocaust through a wider lens of how such an operation was completed.⁹⁸ There are, of course, limits to what can be understood from Holocaust testimony; personal experiences are inherently subjective, and fifty years after the fact, they are often “complicated by [...] personal or political interests, changes in their memory, the incorporation of acquired knowledge into one’s personal story, and our preferences and interests as users and recipients.”⁹⁹ It is precisely those changes, in comparison to more “original” testimony, that this thesis intends to examine.

Finally, while it would be satisfying to complement the study of Jewish testimonies with a study of Polish testimonies, it is unfortunately not possible at this time. There is no major oral history database for Polish gentile testimony in the manner of which Jewish Holocaust testimony has been recorded, compiled, researched, and archived. Moreover, since this thesis is primarily concerned with *memory* as a historical phenomenon in its own right, rather than factual “history” as is traditionally understood, I take the approach in this thesis to

⁹⁷ Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 214.

⁹⁸ Levy et al., *Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, 133.

⁹⁹ Matthaüs, *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor*, 121.

examine changes in Jewish testimony over time in terms of Jewish responses to Polish-Jewish relationship.¹⁰⁰

Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into three parts, of which each part has two paired chapters. Part I (chapters one and two) examines how survivors explained the role of Polish antisemitism and postwar violence in their decisions to leave Poland. Part II (chapters three and four) examines the archetypes, themes, and formats of stories survivors told about Polish antisemitism. Finally, part III examines the types of moral reasoning survivors employed when they were asked to explain why Poles were antisemitic or how they felt about the Polish people. Each part contains two chapters, one of which examines the 1946 perspective, the other of which analyzes the 1990s perspective (as well as its similarities and differences from 1946). This framework allows the reader to understand each theme – emigration reasoning, story-telling, and moral reasoning – both individually within a time frame and in comparison, between 1946 and the 1990s. Additionally, this is the framework in which survivors themselves discuss these events: first, what they were immediately experiencing when they were first interviewed (postwar violence), second, stories about their experiences, and finally, their own interpretations of those experiences.

In my eighth-grade history class, we took a field trip into Boston to visit the Holocaust Memorial. Inscribed on the memorial is a famous quote from German Lutheran Pastor, Martin Niemöller:

¹⁰⁰ Alon Confino, *Foundational Pasts: The Holocaust as Historical Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Another benefit of focusing exclusively on Jewish testimony is the ability to maintain high standards of quality along with quantity. In the course of this thesis I have listened to or read over a thousand testimonies. Being able to work with such a large body of sources that discuss Polish-Jewish relations allows for greater confidence in the accuracy of the analysis performed.

“First, they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.”¹⁰¹

When searching for lessons to be gained from the Holocaust, to teach children, and to answer

Anna Ornstein’s question (“what do you expect this to teach them?”) from my 2015

interview with her, it is easy to see how a quote such as Niemöller’s would be a guiding

lesson from the Holocaust. It teaches us that to stand up for your neighbor is to do good. The

reality of the Holocaust, the truth we find in testimony, is no simple lesson. To testify is “to

vow to tell, to promise and produce one’s own speech as material evidence for truth.”¹⁰²

Often the historian will find that truth is messy, unsatisfying, and contradictory– a reality

which is perhaps the true lesson we stand to learn from Holocaust testimony.

¹⁰¹ Lawrence Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 112.

¹⁰² Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing*, 14.

Part I – Chapter 1

“They Want to Run” – 1946 Jewish Narratives of Postwar Antisemitism¹

Prior to the Second World War, three million Jews lived in Poland, making up ten percent of Poland’s pre-war population. By the end of 1946, over ninety percent of Poland’s Jews would be dead. Of the ten percent that survived, the majority had been deported or had fled to the Soviet Union before 1941 and spent the war years in work camps. Between May 1945 and July 1946, the Jewish population in Poland swelled from 42,662 to a total of 240,489 persons.² Despite the number of Polish Jews returning to Poland from the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the Second World War, by mid-1947 these census figures would decline to approximately 89,000 Jews registered as living in Poland, an estimated sixty-three percent drop from the year before.

Although it is impossible to be entirely confident in these population estimates, the trend in the immigration and emigration of Polish Holocaust survivors from 1944-1947 is too prominent to be ignored. The vast majority of Jews who lived in Poland during the postwar period had returned from the Soviet Union, where they had fled or been deported during the Soviet occupation of Poland.³ Given this mass return between 1945 and 1946, it is not immediately evident that an equally significant number of Jews were leaving Poland— at least until July 1946, when the emigration rates sharply increased and far surpassed the numbers of Jewish returnees to Poland.⁴

Why so many Polish Jews decided to first return to and then abandon Poland after the war is a complex question. One precipitating factor was the threat of antisemitic violence and

¹ Bertha Goldwasser, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview by David Boder (August 4, 1946), Paris, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=goldwasserB>.

² Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland: A Portrait Based on Jewish Community Records 1944-1947* (New York: Sharpe, 1994), 10.

³ Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland*, 23.

⁴ I. Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory: the Jew in Contemporary Poland* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publications, 1999), 48.

the perception of the threat of violence. On July 4, 1946, a pogrom occurred in Kielce, Poland, in which forty-two Polish Jews were killed and at least 40 or more were injured, an event which would become an emotionally charged “flashbulb” memory that a number of survivors would later point to as the reason they left Poland. Although another pogrom had occurred a year earlier in Krakow, the Kielce pogrom alone triggered a mass exodus from Poland in the year that followed.⁵ The Kielce Pogrom, as it stands in the Jewish collective memory of the postwar period, was an obvious motivator: the survivors interviewed by David Boder in the second half of 1946, however, painted a much more nuanced picture of what antisemitic experiences personally and generally drove them from their homeland. The perspective of Jewish interviewees in 1946 on the significance of the Kielce pogrom and on antisemitism in Poland more generally was different from the perspective on this phenomenon presented in Jewish collective memory of later 1990s interviews.

David Boder interviewed approximately thirty Polish-Jewish Holocaust survivors throughout the summer and fall of 1946, as they were awaiting emigration in the displaced person (DP) camps of France, Italy, and Austria. Boder arrived at a fortuitous time for interviewing Polish survivors – between February and July 1946, the population of DPs rose from 70,000 to 106,000, many of whom were Polish Jews.⁶ When asked by David Boder why they left Poland, these 1946 Polish-Jewish refugees gave a number of different answers. With no obvious exceptions, the responses given by the survivors fall into one or more of the following categories: (1) specific or general threats from their former neighbors or those occupying their homes; (2) a specific experience of antisemitism beyond their neighbors or those occupying their homes; and (3) the Kielce Pogrom, which made them feel like Jews were not safe in Poland. Some survivors cited all three of these reasons, some only one.

⁵ Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland*, 26.

⁶ Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland*, 4.

Ultimately, there was more of an unmediated emotional truth in what the Boder interviewees impart since they did not yet mediate their experiences through the historical and conceptual vocabulary that would become a means of articulating Holocaust experiences in survivors' later testimonies.

It is important, however, to consider other factors that may have been influencing Polish-Jewish emigration decisions at this time, especially those that survivors chose not to share with an American Jew walking into the DP camps with a tape recorder. First, these survivors would have had no clear way of knowing what, if any, impact their testimony could have on their current status in a DP camp. Survivors would not have wanted to appear threatening in any way; it is logical to assume that they would have hesitated to condemn the Polish government, or any particularly critical views of communism given the new Polish government. Survivors would have been careful not to make any sort of statements that could have sabotaged their immigration plans. Second, and perhaps more importantly, these survivors were only just beginning to discuss their memories and experiences with other survivors. There was no Polish or Jewish collective memory of the past six years on which a survivor could draw or to which they could respond. The "Holocaust" was not a familiar term that connoted a particular sort of survival. The names "Auschwitz" or "Gas Chamber" were not in common parlance, much less synecdochal for the fate of European Jews in World War II. This testimony was very much their own, reflecting their own experiences, which often meant the *historical* accuracy of the interview was questionable. Names, dates, populations, and locations were frequently given with errors in the Boder interviews. Ironically, this factual inaccuracy actually increases confidence in the individuality of the interview— that is, that survivors sharing these experiences were sharing their immediate, unmediated thoughts and feelings.

Polish Antisemitism after the War: General Threats of Violence or Dispossession

When asked why they decided to flee Poland, a large number of the Boder interviewees described the experience of returning to their homes, to search for family, friends, and personal belongings, only to be refused entry to their neighborhoods or houses by their neighbors or the current Polish occupants of their homes. Those occupants and neighbors refused to let the survivor in, threatened their safety if they tried to stay there, or made them feel endangered in another way. Those rejections and threats remained one of the most troubling components of survivor “return stories” as they represented the ways in which survivors could not return to their past lives, physically or emotionally.

Survivors often pointed to the blanket rejection by their Polish peers upon return. One such survivor who experienced this rejection was Bernard Warsager, who was interviewed by David Boder on September 1, 1946, in an Italian DP Camp.⁷ Upon returning from Buchenwald, the camp from which he was liberated, Warsager attempted to enter his old apartment in Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, a town about sixty miles from Warsaw: “I was also on that street on which I had lived. I was also at the flat in which I was raised. I was in the yard. I was not allowed to pick the fruit, to take any fruit which was our own, our property.” Warsager stayed only two and a half weeks in Poland. When Boder asked him why he was not allowed to take any of the fruit, or enter his old home, Warsager explained: “Why? First, because I am a Jew. Any Jew who still owns anything in Poland, then it is better he . . . that he leaves, because if he remains then death threatens him. And it was too painful for me when I saw strange people who have . . . have my property, live in my flat.” Warsager presented antisemitism on the part of Poles in the passive voice: “if [a Jew] remains then

⁷ Bernard Warsager. *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German by David Boder (September 1, 1946), Tradate, Italy, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=warsagerB>. For the remainder of the interview citations in the chapter, I will be putting the citations at the ends of paragraphs. The citation will correspond to the entire paragraph unless otherwise noted. Paragraphs that contain multiple survivor interviews will have each interview cited at the end of the quote rather than all at the end to prevent confusion.

death threatens him.”⁸ While this was likely a form of caution against being too critical of Poles, it also reflected Warsager’s acceptance of antisemitism as knowing no single population – that Germans, Poles, or anyone could restrict the rights of Jews. Warsager also portrayed physical property as the only thing of value that Poles saw in Jews: “any Jew who still owns anything in Poland.” Physical property was one of the first things taken from Jews by Poles, even before the occupation began.⁹ Warsager further reflected on what it was like to experience a general sort of antisemitism even from Poles who saw him on the street: “And the attitude of the Poles toward the Jews was none too friendly either. Any Jew who was on the street . . . when they met him, they said, 'Oh,' in Polish, 'Patrz sie, znowu kot.' That means there is again a cat. Another is already here.” Warsager again distanced himself from the experience, using the phrase “any Jew” and “he/him” to speak in general terms about this experience.¹⁰

Warsager presented Polish antisemitism as a new experience for him that was initiated by the Holocaust, rather than a precipitating cause of the Holocaust in Poland. Polish antisemitism as a product of rather than contributor to the Holocaust was occasionally brought up in the 1946 interviews (although not always), but never seen again in the later interviews. Yet David Boder’s response to Bernard Warsager’s description of returning to Poland also revealed how he, as someone who was not in Europe during the war, was beginning to understand and conceptualize Polish antisemitism as *distinct* from Nazi policy, even if the survivors he was interviewing were not necessarily doing so. Boder confirmed with Warsager: “Oh, that is what the Poles said,” and “they were not at all happy that the Jews returned.” Boder was clarifying that it was the Poles, and no other populations, that

⁸ It is important to note here that the interview was conducted in German, where the use of passive voice is more common than English– although this does not necessarily negate the significance of its use in Warsager’s testimony.

⁹ Jan T. Gross, *Golden Harvest, Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁰ Bernard Warsager, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=warsagerB>.

were preventing Jews from staying in Poland when they returned after the war. As Warsager affirmed Boder's comprehension, he elaborated further, again in the third person, that "the Jew who still had something to be taken away . . . there were very many cases that he was killed." Once again, Warsager highlighted the importance of physical property in Polish antisemitism – that Poles viewed Jews as a source of their obtaining wealth and physical property, a classic antisemitic trope– despite the fact that Warsager continued to phrase this antisemitism as something new after the war. Boder presented Warsager with some important contextual information for Warsager to consider in relation to his own experiences. Boder stated: "The Polish Government says, in the UNRRA and all over, that the Jews now . . . that the Jews now are treated the same as the others, that they have punished the people of [involved in] the Kielce pogrom and all that. What do you know about it?"¹¹ Warsager appeared not to be surprised by this information and stated rather matter-of-factly: "with the punishment it is this way." He continued: "The Jew is now looked upon in Poland as something inferior, and at every opportunity..." Again, Warsager reflected the classic trope of 1946 interviews – implying that the Polish antisemitism he had experienced was new – "the Jew is *now* looked upon" – rather than as preceding it. This distinction is revealing as later interviews do not rely on this assumption. It suggests again that the 1946 interviews, like Warsager's, were drawn almost entirely from unmediated personal memory. Warsager's experience in Poland after the Holocaust was not unique. In fact, many other first-hand accounts include the same sort of phrasing, even noting that some Poles gave Hitler "credit for 'solving [the Pole's] Jewish problem.'"¹² As Jews continued to return, it did not matter that the government, and moreover the world at large, was defending and protecting Jews – in

¹¹ UNRRA is the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, active from 1943 to 1947, which ran supply distribution and refugee support/housing in the aftermath of the war.

¹² Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory*, 48.

fact that sympathy and protection merely exacerbated a pre-existing contempt for the Polish Jew.¹³

While Warsager wove general commentary into his specific experiences, many survivors remained quite vague in their references to the antisemitism they experienced after they returned to Poland. Solomon Horowitz, a thirty-two-year-old rabbi from Galicia who was interviewed by David Boder in Hénonville, France, on September 12, 1946, referenced the “effort” and “danger” entailed in living as a Jew in Warsaw after the war. He explained: “I saw that I am again in great danger, that danger lurks at every pace and step.” Boder continued to pry: “What does it mean, ‘danger’?” Horowitz answered non-specifically: “Danger means...in Warsaw a Jew couldn’t show up on the street. Should he be recognized that he is a Jew...”¹⁴ Horowitz trailed off. Although at this point Boder had interviewed forty or more survivors, he still sought to clarify with Horowitz the time frame of this experience. He asked: “after the Poles had retaken Warsaw? After the liberation of Poland?” Horowitz confirmed: “There are pogroms. Don’t you know that today there are in Poland...” Boder cut him off: “Yes I know.” Horowitz described no specific experience of being threatened, of trying to return home and being told to leave. Yet he was confident – and moreover felt it to be necessary – that Boder understood that Poles were still persecuting Jews. This dialogue, which consisted of a vague reference from the survivor, a clarifying question from Boder, and a general statement about Poland being unsafe to Jews, played out over and over in the Boder transcripts. This sort of conversation indicates how novel this type of analysis was for survivors, as they struggled to describe and define their experiences in the larger context of Polish antisemitism.¹⁵

¹³ Bernard Warsager, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=warsagerB>.

¹⁴ Ellipses included in transcripts will be denoted “...” – ellipses added by the author to cut a quote will be denoted: “[...]”

¹⁵ Solomon Horowitz, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=horowitzS>.

Other survivors speak of Polish antisemitism with the same resigned acceptance and dissociative use of “them” and “the Jews.” Dina Linik, for example, was a Jewish woman born in Poland who spent most of the war in Kiev, Ukraine, interviewed by Boder in Hénonville, France. She eventually left Kiev in 1944 and tried to emigrate to Palestine through Poland, but, as she explained: “in Poland, as one knows, the general situation for the Jews was not very good. It happened that many Jews were killed in Poland while we were there.” This time, Boder pressed for more detail:

Boder: “Did you see it yourself?”

Linik: “One has seen everything. Yes. It happened before me, four Jewish kibbutznik were killed in Lodz.”

Boder: “Yes, why?”

Linik: “For nothing. For being Jewish.”

Boder: “I see.”

Linik: “Nothing else. Only because they have Jewish names. Thus, one could see, that also in Poland there is no life for us; because they don't leave the Jews alone, they don't let them live in Poland.”

Linik had, essentially, the same sentiment as Horowitz. However, she did witness such antisemitic killings first hand (despite using the third person “one has seen everything”).

Linik distanced herself from these experiences, saying “they don't leave the Jews alone” instead of “they don't leave us alone.” Linik, like Horowitz, appeared to have been trying to separate the trauma of return from her own life.¹⁶

Hadassah Marcus was interviewed by David Boder the same day as Dina Linik, and again mentioned the lack of a “peaceful life in Poland.” Like Warsager, she blamed the Germans for instilling this antisemitism. A thirty-two-year-old newlywed, Marcus had spent her entire life in Warsaw, where she tried to return after the war. She explained that: “in spite of all we didn't have a peaceful life in Poland. A Jew couldn't go peacefully out in the street.

¹⁶ Dina Linik, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish and Russian by David Boder (September 13, 1946), Hénonville, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=linikD>.

There had begun again carnages and again slaughters.” In an attempt to understand why, David Boder asked Marcus a key question: “How do you explain it? The Poles wanted to be free of the Germans. They knew that the German was attacking the Jews. How does it come that a Pole should do the same thing?” Like Warsager, Marcus emphasized the role of the Nazis: “He [the German] has left a legacy which, it seems like, will remain in Poland, in spite of the government being strongly against it.” Although Marcus appeared to think positively of the Polish government, she explained that “it isn't strong enough to stand up against the dark masses which still reign and maintain themselves in Poland.”¹⁷

There are two likely reasons that Marcus, Warsager, and other Jewish survivors attributed the continued persecution of Polish Jews to the “dark masses”: the first was the fear they likely had of criticizing the Polish state. Having legally or illegally left Poland quite recently, those interviewees might have been afraid that expressing political opinions could still lead to retribution from the Polish government during their emigration process. The second is what one might call a “coping mechanism.” Nazism, as completely terrible as it was, at least was over. To see Nazism as connected to the ongoing antisemitic acts, and to attribute the underlying cause of such acts as Nazism, meant that Jews could, perhaps, have lived in peace in Poland after the war. The alternative, to understand Polish antisemitism in terms of a continuity in Polish-Jewish history, was far more complicated. It invited survivors to believe that nothing had changed in Poland, despite the almost complete decimation of its Jews.¹⁸

Some survivors expressed confusion as to why the Poles, who themselves were under occupation by the Germans, would be so antisemitic and violent after the war. Thirty-year-old Jacob Schwarzfitter was one of those survivors who raised this question. Born in Poland

¹⁷ Hadassah Marcus, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish by David Boder (September 13, 1946), Hénonville, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=marcusH>.

¹⁸ Hadassah Marcus, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=marcusH>.

near Katowice, he told Boder that returning to “Poland [was] of course, out of the question.” Schwarzfitter noted that only “sixteen months after liberation” the general sympathy for Jews was “feeble.” He emphasized the pogroms as a motivator for Jews fleeing Poland, explaining: “but now we know that large masses of Jews are fleeing on account of the pogroms which now take place in Poland. Everywhere,” he said, “antisemitism is awake, a horror.”

Interestingly, Schwarzfitter does not delineate between the “large masses” and other Poles. Instead he explained how “the same [man] who was yesterday oppressed together with me, the Polish citizen—and today he persecutes us.” Schwarzfitter was bewildered by this, since he viewed Poles as having been equally persecuted and did not see a continuity (or at least does not mention one) between German and Polish antisemitism. Moreover, Schwarzfitter “suffered not only for [himself]” but also for the Polish nation – he would purposely lose nails as he worked to sabotage the war effort, an act of resistance not just for Polish Jews but for Poles in general. This sort of reckoning and confusion exemplified the moral grappling of survivors after the war. They were not yet expressing complicated moral quandaries; rather the survivors themselves were trying to figure out where they could go next, and how the actions of others would limit or help them. They mention antisemitism often in the passive voice or as experienced by “the Jews.” For many of them, the precarious nature of their positions in displaced persons camps required them to determine to whom and in what contexts it was safe to discuss such experiences – and under what circumstances it was wise not to do so.¹⁹

Postwar Pogroms: Kielce and Krakow

¹⁹ Jacob Schwarzfitter, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German by David Boder (August 31, 1946) in Tradate, Italy, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=schwarzfitterJ>.

Years later, the Kielce and Krakow Pogroms would become collective reference points for why Polish Jews left Poland in 1946. Historians have argued that the violence in the postwar period definitively “triggered the massive flight.”²⁰ Jewish collective memory has assimilated the significance of these pogroms in similar terms. While the aftermath of the Krakow Pogrom in 1945 (in which fewer people were killed) also triggered an exodus, it was only from the immediate area surrounding Krakow, and the numbers of those who emigrated only reached a couple thousand.²¹ By contrast, the 1946 “emigrants” spread the knowledge of the Kielce pogrom so that it became “commonplace” in collective Jewish memory.²² By the 1990s when the VHA interviews were conducted, these pogroms ultimately shaped collective “Jewish images of postwar Poland.”²³ While it is difficult to measure, it is important to consider whether the forty-two Jews killed in Kielce on July 4, 1946, was such a shock as to trigger a mass emigration, or if the pogrom was the push needed to get the postwar Jewish aid committees and the Polish government to condone a mass exodus of Jews from Poland. The argument that Jews weren’t safe in Poland was clearly strongest after Kielce.²⁴ Yet the reality of these pogroms was less shocking to Polish Jews in 1946, who had just left Poland, given the level of violence and antisemitism present in Poland in the time.

While many survivors mention hearing of pogroms, or witnessing acts of violence, Mira Milgram was perhaps the only survivor Boder interviewed who actually had first-hand experience of the Kielce pogrom. As such she provided important insight into what story was being passed from survivor to survivor that led to a mass exodus. Specifically, Milgram described the re-emergence of the traditional antisemitic trope of ritual murder (that Jews

²⁰ Dariusz Stola, “Jewish emigration from Communist Poland: the decline of Polish Jewry in the aftermath of the Holocaust,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 47, no. 2/3 (2017): 172.

²¹ Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 235.

²² Zimmerman, *Contested Memories*, 235.

²³ Zimmerman, *Contested Memories*, 276.

²⁴ Zimmerman, *Contested Memories*, 255.

steal Gentile children to make matzah). That myth was much more Polish than German, reflecting the “Polishness” of this crime. It certainly made it harder for survivors to attribute postwar violence to the German influence. Milgram was interviewed only a month after the pogrom, on August 9, 1946, in Paris, France. She explained:

Milgram: “Well, it happened . . . in the town a rumor was spread that eleven children were missing. And that Jews had killed them to get their blood for the . . . Jews from Russia, who do not look well at all . . . And for those they took the blood of the Aryan children.”

Boder: “Yes. Well, it was said they needed the blood for the sick Jews.”

Milgram: “Needed it for the sick Jews from Russia. And there was one boy who claimed that the Jews had held him in the cellar of the Jewish committee for some days. . . . Although it turned out there wasn't even a cellar . . . The boy had already said this to the militia one day before.” (Boder: “Yes.”)

Milgram: “And the next day, from nine in the morning, people started to gather in front of the house of the Jewish community, where the elders lived. . . . And then the militia came, cordoned off the house. Demanded that everybody hand over their, eh. . . weapons.”

Boder: “The Jewish community?”

Milgram. “The Jewish community. Because in town they said that Jews shoot and they didn't want to be guilty eh, let this happen. . . . and when the last Jew had handed over his weapon, they began to shoot the Jews with those weapons, to beat them and so on. They robbed them. My brother, who spoke to them, and asked them to stop. . . . [but] then the military joined them.” (Boder: “Polish military?”)

Milgram: “Yes. [Her brother told the militia] We, the whole world will shout at you: What are you doing here? They shot him then, and he was the only one who was shot, because the rest was murdered in terrible ways. One woman, who was eight months pregnant, they threw from the second floor onto bayonets. And that was. . . .”

Boder: “Where are the soldiers?”

Milgram: “Well, the soldiers stood downstairs. The soldiers afterwards claimed they knew why they were sent there. They found out from there, when they were sent to the house that Jews had taken Aryan children and had . . . murdered them.”

Boder: “Murdered them. Were there no officers?”

Milgram: “There were officers. . . . my brother a ‘Major’ [shot him].”

Milgram ended this testimony by stating: “I left Poland straight away.” This eyewitness account of the pogrom matches fairly well with the twenty-first century understanding of the

events of the pogrom.²⁵ Milgram made it very clear that none of the rumors about the Jews were true, but otherwise did not offer her own commentary on the atrocity – she allowed it to speak for itself.²⁶

While a number of survivors in the Boder testimonies mentioned the pogroms generally, few specifically cited Kielce as the reason they left Poland. Clara Neiman, a Polish-Jewish woman interviewed in France on September 12, 1946, explained how she left Poland after hearing of the pogroms. Initially after liberation, she said, there was “nothing to complain about.” Eventually, however, “they started to kill a lot of Jews.” Boder clarified: “Pogroms?” “Pogroms,” Neiman confirmed, elaborating: “So we first went to Poland, and in Poland we could see already where people are going...” Knowing that mass emigration was occurring, Neiman gathered together the surviving members of her family and left for France. As with others, there is again a matter-of-fact tone to Neiman’s interview. It is difficult to determine if this tone – so prevalent in the Boder testimonies – was a product of how survivors really felt at the time, or if Boder as interviewer played a role in producing such a coldly analytical interview. Neiman, at least, was trying to separate herself from what she experienced. She specifically did not mention her personal experience. She used “Jews” rather than “I/we,” distancing herself from her trauma. Whether this was intentional or not is impossible to determine. Either way, the idea of pogroms was certainly not specific to Kielce, but rather a general threat in her mind to Jews in general.²⁷

Many survivors don’t reference specific acts of antisemitism that happened to them, but rather a generalized sense that they simply could not remain. One such example was Udel Stopnitsky, interviewed in Hénonville, France, on September 12, 1946, who was in Bedzin,

²⁵ Jan Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2007).

²⁶ Mira Milgram, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German by David Boder (August 9, 1946), Paris, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=milgramM>.

²⁷ Clara Neiman, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Russian and Yiddish by David Boder (September 12, 1946), Hénonville, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=neimanC>.

Poland, when the Kielce pogrom occurred, and fled as soon as possible in its aftermath. Stopnitsky explained that after the pogrom, he “saw that it had no purpose [to remain]. And I wanted to get myself a passport, to leave in a legal fashion. But when I saw that the danger was great, I uprooted myself and I went to Cieszyn near Bielsko.”²⁸ Stopnitsky believed that the danger was too large to remain in Poland. The general sense of danger runs through the testimony of almost every Polish Jew interviewed by David Boder in the DP camps.

The threat of pogroms generally and the reality of the Kielce Pogrom specifically had a deep impact on survivor testimony in 1946. In interviews just weeks or months after the Kielce pogrom, survivors were quick to mention Kielce or pogroms generally as a reason to leave Poland. The understanding of the Kielce pogrom as symbolizing the continued danger for Jews in Poland would flourish even more so in Jewish memory in the years after 1946 – ultimately becoming the ultimate evidence of the eternal nature of Polish antisemitism. Yet in 1946, survivors appear to have discussed the Kielce pogrom as the most recent in a number of antisemitic violent attacks, and often because they did not want to share their personal experiences of antisemitic violence. The word “pogrom” and even simply David Boder’s knowledge of the Kielce pogrom made it a straightforward justification and a metonym of the dangers of living in Poland for Jews after the war.

Those Who Stayed

While there were thousands of Jews who left Poland in 1946, there were others who chose to stay. From 1945 to 1946, specifically, most Jews who had formerly lived in Poland attempted to return and “restore Jewish life” in Poland.²⁹ There was a hope that the new

²⁸ Udel Stopnitsky, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish by David Boder (September 12, 1946), Hénonville, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=stopnitskyU>.

²⁹ Stola, “Jewish emigration from Communist Poland,” 169.

Polish government, which provided Jews equal protection under the law, would indeed protect them. Yet the returnees were returning to a world that looked entirely different from the inter-war period, and, as evidenced by the Boder interviewees and other sources of testimony from this time, Polish Jews deeply distrusted Poles.³⁰ After the pogroms, most of the Jews who chose to stay in Poland were communists: they were prioritizing participation in the new government over the potential dangers of remaining as a Jew in Poland.³¹ Even Jews who did not join the government did support it, although “not without many reservations.” If one wanted to remain in Poland after the Kielce pogrom, the postwar Polish government appeared to be “the only force capable of defending Jewish rights and safeguarding Jewish life and property after the war.”³² The exodus of most Jews and the political nature of those who remained make it clearer why the Polish stereotype of Jews as “*zydokumuna*” (meaning Jewish Bolshevik) was so prevalent and remains to this day deeply ingrained in Polish conceptions of Jews.³³ Especially in the second half of 1946, communists and Zionists worked together more than ever before “on the issue of self-defense” – again strengthening the myth of Jewish power conspiracies in Poland.³⁴ Thus, after July 1946, the Jews that remained in Poland were, generally speaking, communists themselves or not opposed to the new Polish government.³⁵ While the Kielce pogrom became a “flashbulb memory” for collective Jewish memory, the political nature of Jews remaining in Poland after 1946 became ingrained in the collective Polish memory.

Jacob Wilf, a survivor interviewed by Boder on August 17, 1946, in Paris France, was a communist Jew who chose to stay in Poland with the hope of rebuilding the Polish-Jewish

³⁰ Aleksander Smolar, “Jews as a Polish Problem”, *Daedalus* 116, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 59.

³¹ Aleksander Smolar, “Jews as a Polish Problem,” 59.

³² Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 50.

³³ Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 52.

³⁴ Zimmerman, *Contested Memories*, 254.

³⁵ Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory*, 49.

community. Wilf was visiting France as the member of the ORT, the Society for Handicraft and Agricultural Work and the Jews of Russia, a group founded in 1880s Russia to aid peasants, which was operating in Poland during the postwar period to aid the (re)establishment of Jewish communities.³⁶ Wilf approached the topic of Jewish political activism in Poland in a manner representing how Jews who remained in Poland approached their decisions to stay. Wilf was involved in the regional Jewish committee for the Katowice area, one of the organizations that helped reunite survivors with their families and promote Jewish interests in Poland. Wilf filtered the experience of Jews in Poland entirely through a pro-communist lens; for example, he stated that he believed the Kielce pogrom was instigated by Polish nationalist agents attempting to rid communism. His views were certainly not representative of all politically active Jews in Poland, yet they do provide some important insights into which types of Jews remained in Poland.³⁷

Wilf was optimistic about the future of Jews in Poland. He reminded Boder that “for the first time in the history of Poland the Jews became citizens with equal rights. In fact, legally and economically.” He continued, however, perhaps a bit too optimistically: “the attempts of the ‘Aktion’ to create a Jewish problem in Poland are being decisively rejected by the whole democratic population of Poland.” Wilf delineated between those who want to “impede the new democratic government of Poland” and those who support a new Poland. He viewed violence against Jews as “one of the methods which is being used by the Reaction, the Fascists.” Boder asked Wilf whether he thinks things will quiet down after the Kielce pogrom. He responded:

The situation already now is such that thanks to the strong hand of the Polish government, which has responded so sharply to the pogrom of Kielce, a firm order [calm] has emerged [all] over the country; more so, since the working masses...have

³⁶ Shaul, Stampfer, “ORT”, *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, accessed 22 March 2019, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/ORT>.

³⁷ Jacob Wilf, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German, Yiddish, and Russian by David Boder (August 17, 1946), Paris, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=wilfJ>.

mobilized the Polish masses for a struggle against the Fascists. The workers...have proved to the Polish people that...the hand of intervention which fights against the Polish government, is provoking such pogroms in order to harm...the Polish people in [the eyes of] foreign countries; and in order to evoke unrest at home. And the effect is that during recent times order was established at all levels.

Wilf appeared to engage in a similar thought process as Poles at this time in terms of Jews being “zydokumuna”– he firmly believed that communist and Jewish interests were linked in Poland– which was logical, since he was in fact a Jewish communist. When Boder commented that many Polish Jews had fled to France in the month following the pogrom, Wilf responded, explaining that “in connection with the pogroms of Kielce a psychosis has come about within the Jewish masses.” While Wilf agreed that there was some immediate danger after the pogrom, he blamed “a number of irresponsible community workers...who have taken advantage of the conditions.” Here Wilf was referencing Zionist groups which were active in encouraging emigration at this time. There is little doubt that groups with emigration agendas emphasized the pogrom, and that this presented challenges to Polish Jews who wanted to reestablish Polish-Jewish life. He further noted the conditions of the DP camps, which he called, a “situation that would enhance the sufferings, the deprivations which are being undergone at present.”³⁸

Given the violence in Poland at this time, Boder asked Wilf an important clarifying question: “would you really take it unto yourself to tell the Polish Jews who now dwell in Germany, or in France, that it is safe for them . . . for them to return to Poland?” Wilf admitted that there were very few cases where Jews decided to stay in Poland, and he acknowledged that many more were leaving given how relatively easy it was to do so in 1946. Yet he maintained that “we, the Jews in Poland.... that [we] should rebuild in time the Jewish life in Poland.” He was one of the few survivors interviewed who used “us” to describe Polish Jews. He explained: “We are endeavoring that this small Jewish community

³⁸ Jacob Wilf, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=wilfJ>.

in Poland should again be a substantial Jewish community.” He was the only survivor interviewed by Boder to suggest that this was possible, or to express interest in involving themselves in that process.³⁹

The Boder testimonies provide a crucial, if occasionally self-contradicting, look into the ways in which Polish-Jewish survivors in 1946 grappled with both what happened and was currently happening to them. While approximately 275,000 Jews had lived in Poland “for some time” between the summer of 1944 and the spring of 1947, only 89,000 remained by mid-1947.⁴⁰ Boder interviewed Jews while they were in flux; they had left Poland but had not yet settled into new lives. They were not “Holocaust survivors” as we understand them to be today. Despite the ways in which survivors tried to distance themselves from antisemitic violence in their language, survivors consistently recounted the experience of feeling unsafe

³⁹ Jacob Wilf, *Voices of the Holocaust*, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=wilfJ>.

Jacob Wilf’s interview is also significant in that it is the first time Boder appears to grasp how significantly diminished the Polish-Jewish population was. He asks Wilf to tell him how many Jews remain in Poland, given that Wilf’s work with the regional Jewish committee gave him more knowledge of these statistics than the traditional DP. Wilf answered: 130,000 to 140,000 Jews. Boder, shocked, responds: “That is all . . . all that has remained of the Jews in Poland?” Wilf clarified that about 100,000 Jews had left by this point. Trying to grasp this, Boder asked: “Now, altogether how many Jews were there in Poland before the war?”:

Wilf: “Before the war there were three and half million Jews in Poland.”

Boder: “And what was the population in Poland?”

Wilf: “The total population of Poland was about thirty million.”

Boder: “So the Jews constituted about twelve percent...alright. And what is the Polish population now, according to new estimates?”

Wilf: “...twenty-two million.”

Boder: “Now then, at present, with a Polish population of twenty-two million ... and about one hundred and fifty thousand Jews . . . the . . . the population of the Jews amounts to less than one percent...That is all that has remained of all the Jews in Poland?”

Wilf: “In total there have remained of the Jews percent-wise, . . . two percent of the former Jewish population of Poland...Ninety-eight percent of the Polish Jews who were there during the occupation have been murdered.”³⁹

Boder paused here long enough for the transcriber to include “a long pause” as a transcript note. Clearly, he was trying to process these troubling statistics. This was the first time Boder heard these numbers, and the first time he appeared truly to process what is happening in Poland. In retrospect, this was only the beginning of the exodus. In mid-June 1945, there were Jewish populations in 204 Polish towns; by March 1947, there were Jews in only 141 towns. In Kielce, only forty-two Jews registered to receive matzah for Passover in the spring of 1947, almost exactly the same number killed the previous year. The Holocaust was not known yet as “the Holocaust”; a concentration camp was called a “lager” and “Auschwitz” had not yet become analogous to “Gas Chambers.” Perhaps this tape has caught Boder beginning to put all the pieces together– the true extent of the extermination of the Polish Jews.

⁴⁰ Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland*, 25.

in Poland and making the difficult decision to leave. They described a number of forms of antisemitism, ranging from refusal of entry to their own homes, threats of violence, to actual mass murder in the case of Kielce. The Boder interviews paint a grim picture of Polish-Jewish relations, even if few of those interviews rush to condemn Polish actions. Rather, interviewees attempted to separate themselves from their experiences, physically and emotionally, by using matter-of-fact language.

The years following the Holocaust were full of “running” for the Polish Jews, first to Poland in 1945 and 1946 and then away from it in 1946 and 1947. These emigres “carr[ied] with them the memories of Jewish life as it once was and the ever more painful memories of suffering.”⁴¹ It would be these experiences that would shape Jewish collective memory going forward. These stories, both general and specific would be shared with family and friends, would be spread amongst the Jewish community at large. By the time that testimony-taking became common practice in the 1990s, survivors themselves had a new perspective, based on their original experiences and influenced by these bodies of collective memory, both Jewish and Polish.

⁴¹ Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory*, 53.

Part I – Chapter 2

“The Poles Enjoyed it”: Collective Memory and Reframing Postwar Antisemitism¹

Much of the Boder testimony analyzed in chapter one demonstrates that many Polish Jews actually had a similar perspective in the aftermath of the war, namely, that the Nazis brought out antisemitism in Poland. Antisemitism may have existed in Poland previously, but they attributed the antisemitism expressed by Poles during and after the war not to Poles themselves, but to the effects of Nazi antisemitism and the German occupation. By the 1990s, however, this belief had become untenable in Jewish collective memory. This chapter examines how and why that became true.

When the very first VHA (Video History Archive) testimony was recorded on April 18, 1994, the “Holocaust” with a capital H as it is known and understood in popular memory had been well established. The terms “Auschwitz,” “Gas Chamber,” and “Arbeit Macht Frei” had global recognition. This shift prompts three major questions: first, in what ways have survivors’ explanations shifted for how and why Polish antisemitism pushed them to leave Poland in the postwar period? Second, what are the similarities and what are the differences between the explanations survivors furnished in their interviews with David Boder in 1946 and those they gave to VHA interviewers in the 1990s? And finally, what has the contribution of Jewish collective memory been to survivors’ shifting appraisals of Polish antisemitism?

Recalling the theory of collective memory introduced in the thesis introduction, core memory –physical and emotional experiences – remains consistent over time, while the narrative memory – the “interpreted, narrative construction of events”– changes based on a

¹ Pinchas Gutter, Interview #54192, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #14.

number of factors, including but not limited to the survivor's personal life experience since the 1940s, the cultural values of the country in which they reside, and the Jewish collective memory both nationally and globally.² In comparing and contrasting 1946 and 1990s articulations of the role of Polish postwar antisemitism in Jewish emigration, the role of collective memory as a framework for interpretation becomes clear.

In doing comparative testimony work, it is important to note what was *not* said. Much of what was significant about these two bodies of testimonies was what material was not included in 1946 and was included in the 1990s, and vice versa. Perhaps the largest discrepancy between the two bodies of testimony on the topic of emigration is the specific articulation of the Kielce Pogrom as a turning point in later testimonies, and the more direct anger and negative emotion directed towards Poles generally. Despite these differences, much of the body of the testimonies did in fact stay consistent. The reaction of Poles to Jews returning to Poland, for example, was consistently described by Jews both in 1946 and the 1990s as a variety of negative emotions, ending in the inevitable question: "what? They're still alive?"³ Yet the reasoning for why Poles had those reactions changed significantly in the fifty years following Jews' emigration from Poland. This chapter is organized in parallel with chapter one in order to reexamine and bring to the fore how survivors' reasoning changed.

One prominent change in the structure of the interviews was the fact that, unlike in the 1946 interviews, survivors in the 1990s were asked to give chronological accounts of their experiences, divided into roughly proportional sections. Thus, survivors describing their experiences of returning to their homes after the war comprised hours of their testimony. This was significant in terms of the relative weight accorded different elements in the testimonial

² Robert N. Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 24.

³ Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 55.

narrative; the tragedy of Polish antisemitism was highlighted in this format, since survivors first discussed at length all sorts of horrors they experienced in camps, only to return home and be denied entry. The VHA format certainly emphasized and favored a particularly negative view of Poles, which is important to consider when watching and reading these testimonies.

Polish Antisemitism after the War: Threats of Violence or Dispossession

The stories survivors told about returning to Poland were remarkably consistent across fifty years, even if the level of detail and the interpretation of those events have shifted. Overall, the 1990s interviews contained much more specific language and incidents regarding Polish antisemitism. Despite this, there were cases where survivors gave vague or blanket statements, some more similar to the 1946 interviews. For example: “we saw the antisemitism in Poland was very big and we decided not to stay in Poland”⁴ or “you know they still had the same antisemitism they always had...you just had the feeling that nothing had changed.”⁵ These general statements are important because they suggest that each Polish-Jewish survivor was not able to pinpoint specific experiences that had made them want to leave. Many just retained a memory of the sense of danger of violence towards survivors that preempted their emigration.

One such “vague” testimony came from Betty Wolf, who was in her teens when she and her mother returned to Poland from a Soviet prison camp.⁶ She explained how they “heard over there...that whenever they see the Jewish people, the Polish people, they say

⁴ Lea Tiefenbach, Interview #54394, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #107. For the remainder of the interview citations in the chapter, I will be putting the citations at the ends of paragraphs. The citation will correspond to the entire paragraph unless otherwise noted. Paragraphs that contain multiple survivor interviews will have each interview cited at the end of the quote rather than all at the end to prevent confusion.

⁵ Dana Kelisky, Interview #52886, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #75.

⁶ Betty Wolf, Interview #54901, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #41.

‘you’re alive? Where did you come from?’ because they saw a ghost, because they lived in their homes, took their businesses over and they felt like [the Jews] shouldn’t be alive. So that was very scary.” Wolf described a “typical” Polish reaction to the return of Jews, yet she didn’t describe that reaction in terms of her personal experience. This was true again and again in the VHA testimony. It was the work of collective memory: Wolf wasn’t lying, rather she was ascribing experiences to a general group rather than referring to herself, to specific personal memories. Wolf also compared her experiences with Poles to those with the Czechs, highlighting her assumptions about Poles. She described Czechoslovakia as “nice,” explaining that the people were waiting for them at the border with milk and bread, and then “they took us to a soap station, and then they searched us and any money we had they took it all away...we were used to that.” Despite the fact that she was met with similar extortionist treatment in Czechoslovakia, Wolf did not lump Czechs together with Poles. Moreover, she did not want to return to Poland as she felt she would “be walking on the blood of my people...I’m happy to be an American.... I hope we have peace and quiet, and that my children and grandchildren can have a normal life.” By inference, it was clear that Wolf did not view such a “normal life” as possible in Poland, even in the 1990s.⁷

In some cases, survivors emphasized certain pieces of their narrative that, either consciously or subconsciously, reflected current cultural symbols. For example, survivor Michael Selinger described the general antipathy of Poles in the context of a “good” German man who saved Jews. Returning to his hometown in Poland after the war, Selinger described having to sleep at the old jail after realizing there was “no place to stay, no place in the inn as they said.” Jews had lived in his town for 500 years, Selinger told his interviewer. Despite this, he explained: “the Polish people, as far as I can tell, didn’t help no one. One exception, was the German Volksdeutsche who employed me in his leather factory.” He also noted

⁷ Betty Wolf, Interview #54901, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #41.

another exception: a neighbor of his who “was helped by a German, not by a Pole, because he was German. . . . nevertheless, he survived. So, we saw what is happening there, so we left.” Selinger’s highlighting of exceptions was important— he noted that it was an ethnic German, not a Pole, who made distinctions and potentially saved people, a story that may come to his mind because of the similar storyline in *Schindler’s List*, in which a German saves Jews by employing them in a factory.⁸

Other survivors explicitly brought up experiences they felt highlighted the poor moral character of the Polish people. Pinchas Gutter, for example, described the specific threat his cousin received from his Polish neighbors. Gutter told this story intentionally to “anticipate what happened after the war.” His cousin: “went to our apartment, knocked on the door, and the woman who opened the door was the wife of the superintendent and told him that her husband had died during the war, and she also told him that she recognized him [...] and because [he] was so nice to work for, she would not kill him now if he left, this was in 1945 after the war, but if he ever stepped foot in the apartment building again, she’ll see to it that he doesn’t come out alive.” Gutter emphasized “this was in 1945 after the war,” a phrase that he reused multiple times throughout his interview. It was extremely important to Gutter that postwar Polish antisemitism is acknowledged. His interviewer attempted to honor this, stating that there “seems to be the general feeling of the Gentile Polish population, during and after the war, but certainly before the war...” but Gutter cut her off: “I can certainly tell you that during the war— after the war, I cannot tell you because I left, I only know what I have heard, but during the war in Poland, I experienced far worse antisemitism from Poles than from Germans, because the feeling that you got, during the war, was that the Germans were doing— I mean it wasn’t human, and they were doing a job...it was like factory machine killing. But the Poles enjoyed it.” Similar to the 1946 interviews, Gutter discussed postwar antisemitism

⁸ Michael Selinger, Interview #20916, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #33.

that he only heard of, not saw. Yet his second comparison, that the Poles were “morally worse” than the Germans, that they enjoyed the killing and wanted it to continue, was a hallmark of the 1990s interviews. Survivors’ emotional expressions of outrage, both explicit and implicit, was also consistent across the interviews that touch on the subject of Polish antisemitism, in comparison to the 1946 interviews which were more matter-of-fact. By the 1990s, the “moral story” had been inlaid into testimony.⁹

Other survivors presented “good” and “bad” Poles in contrast to each other. Ida Gelbart, for example, returned to her house in Poland after the war and described being told by her former caretaker: “you go down and live in the place where I lived, you don’t belong here.” Gelbart recalled that she “looked up at our windows...there were faces in the windows, they didn’t come out to greet us, they just looked out the windows.” Gelbart responded to her former caretaker: “you are in my apartment.” In her testimony, Gelbart acknowledged she “wouldn’t have been safe there anyway.” Despite this, she also noted that a Gentile friend found her in the streets, crying, and took Gelbart back to her home, explaining “before your mother and father left...they gave me a sofa. I still have it; you can have it if you want it.” Gelbart put this act of kindness in concert with the rejection she experienced at her own home.¹⁰ Decades after the fact, the loss of property remained a deeply upsetting reality for Polish-Jewish Holocaust survivors. Both the substance and framework of this testimony paralleled similar stories in the Boder interviews, exemplifying how much of survivor testimony did remain consistent over fifty years, even when the survivor in question is a different person. Despite this, Gelbart’s testimony also represented a 1990s shift to a more intentional placement by survivors of moralized examples of “good” and “bad” behavior.

⁹ Pinchas Gutter, Interview #54192, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #14.

¹⁰ Ida Gelbart, Interview #52326, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #13, 149, 152.

Another similarity between the 1946 and 1990s interviews was the variability survivors described in reception by Polish neighbors. While there was kindness from some individuals after the war, many survivors witnessed the social pressure amongst Poles to reject survivors as they returned. Irene Lenkinski, for example, went to visit a “Polish lady friend” who “couldn’t take me in... because she was married ...to a Jew-hater and he started to shout...she was very embarrassed.” After describing this incident, Lenkinski told the interviewer, as many survivors did in 1990s interviews: “this was what I wanted to tell you also.” She proceeded: “In May there was a demonstration because the Polaks had been big communists and the Jewish people started to be communist...and I stay on this [street] and the Polak says ‘look how many are left here, look how many came back from the ovens,’ this I hear with my own ears and then I start to think about I shouldn’t stay anymore in Poland.” For Lenkinski, it was important for her to emphasize how she heard this “with [her] own ears,” that this is a personal, not collective, memory. She had brought this memory intentionally to the interview, to make a specific point: Poles remained virulently antisemitic after the war. This sort of conscious control over the narrative – selecting stories to tell in order to persuade the interviewer or listener of a certain point about Polish-Jewish relations—was only present in the 1990s rather than 1946 interviews.¹¹

While the content of stories discussed above reflect a consistency across years, the moral outrage expressed by survivors was distinct to 1990s interviews. A survivor who emphasized Polish threats of violence with this “moral outrage” was Annie Glass, who lived with a few survivors in a group home in rural Poland in the months after the war. One day, she said:

We were in a room, all of us together, came in a Polish man, and another man, with a dog, in a trench coat and started to joke with the girls, some were very young pretty girls, saying ‘how did you survive, how come you came back?’ and then he left. And

¹¹ Irene Lenkinski, Interview #54253, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #57, 60.

in the morning, we heard, oy what happened? Two men, one in a trench coat with a dog, killed 5 of the group [of survivors] from the next house. That was in Poland, after liberation, after we were happy to come back. And the Polish people were saying ‘the streets are yours, but the houses are not’ and in fact, I tried to go into my own house, and they said no this is their house.

Like other survivors, Glass emphasized the timeframe in which this occurred: “in Poland, after liberation, after we were happy to come back” – intentionally highlighting the injustice of postwar antisemitism.¹²

The fact that survivor testimony remained so remarkably similar after fifty years in terms of the specific acts of Polish antisemitism described was deeply convincing of the emotional importance of these experiences. The fact that survivors specifically and consciously bring up this experience with “moral outrage” in the 1990s was a significant change from the earlier interviews. By the 1990s, survivors had time both to reinterpret their own experiences and incorporate those of others into their memories of the Holocaust. The more accusatory tone of these interviews was the work of collective memory– as survivors heard and shared their experiences with others, the more they felt that Poles were consistently antisemitic in the postwar period. As such, they returned to and reinterpreted their core memories into new narrative memories that emphasized Polish antisemitism. The details may have remained the same, but the interpretation changed.

Postwar Pogroms: Kielce and Krakow

The Kielce pogrom, as well as the Krakow pogrom albeit to a lesser degree, had a significant and specific impact on Jewish collective memory. The pogroms were frequently cited as “proof” of Polish antisemitism after the war.¹³ Jewish survivors, even those who

¹² Annie Glass, Interview #52303, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #91.

¹³ Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 236.

were not Polish, mentioned the pogroms in their testimonies. Over and over again survivors refer to the Kielce pogrom as an explanation of why they left Poland, and as reflective of Poland's pervasive antisemitism. But what was more interesting was how, as far as I can tell, not a single survivor interviewed for the VHA (which contains 55,000 Holocaust testimonies) was a survivor of the Kielce pogrom. This demonstrates how the pogrom had become fully incorporated into survivors' stories as collective memory, whether they were aware of it or not. One survivor, Richard Rozen, simply stated that "every Jew in Poland knew about [the Kielce pogrom]." ¹⁴ As demonstrated in chapter one, even if survivors did know of the pogrom, it was not the defining traumatic postwar experience that it came to be known as in Jewish collective memory by the 1990s.

Annie Glass, a survivor who described a vicious assault by Polish nationalist partisans in her town after the war, also mentioned the Kielce pogrom as "proof" of Polish antisemitism despite not having personally experiencing the pogrom. After the killing of some Jews in the town where she was staying, Glass explained that she "ran away to a bigger city in Lodz, and there they killed off people, and a few days later that same group, they killed 43 in the next town, in Kielce, and you can see in the books, in the history. In fact, there was just a movie about it too." This was factually inaccurate. It was not the same group that killed people in Kielce. But for Glass, one could argue, it was the "same group" since they were all antisemitic Poles. Glass additionally felt it was important to emphasize that "you can see in the books, in the history"—she wanted it to be acknowledged that this *happened*. Beyond collective memory, Glass's own historical reading had influenced her personal memory. Finally, Glass was bewildered about the pogroms because the Jews "didn't have any possessions" and were just "killed off." This was reminiscent of the Boder interviews, where loss of property was also frequently mentioned. Polish antisemitism after

¹⁴ Richard Rozen, Interview #20684, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #17.

the war remained confusing to survivors over time, after the war, because there wasn't any particular reason to kill Jews. Glass did not have any more answers than the Boder interviewees did, despite her historical knowledge and time to reflect on personal experience.¹⁵

A particular pattern of interview that arises in the 1990s interview relating to the pogroms is what one could term the “shock response.” For example, in Toby Reinstein’s interview, she explained how there was a pogrom in Krakow while she was living there in 1945: “you know what [the Poles] did, they demolished all the houses to look for goods, when they knew wealthy people lived there [...] and I just came to Krakow, and there was a pogrom—” Here the interviewer cut her off, clarifying: “what year was this?” Reinstein smiled sadly: “that was in 1945, right after I came back. I experienced a pogrom in Krakow. They killed people left and right [...] there was a second pogrom, in another city, and my dear friend escaped, with her life, and she never wanted to be in Poland any more, and she went away. That was the city, oh it was a big pogrom at the time.” The interviewer interjected, asking if the “big” pogrom was the Kielce Pogrom, to which Reinstein responded “yes”. This sort of give and take between interviewer and interviewee was staged over and over in the 1990s. Even if the interviewer wasn’t surprised by the postwar pogroms because he or she knew about them, he or she “mimics” surprise and the appropriate moral condemnation for those Poles who carried out pogroms after the Nazis were defeated.¹⁶

¹⁵ Annie Glass, Interview #52303, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #91.

¹⁶ Toby Reinstein, Interview #54343, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #81. Another example: Melvin Tilles, Interview #824, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #86.

MT: “There was a pogrom, already rolling, they started out from the [synagogue].”

INT: “That was after the war?”

MT: “Yeah, that was in 1945, July, in Krakow, that was going on till about 6 o’clock, we saw how they killed a Jewish girl...”

INT: “Who was doing the killing?”

MT: “The Polish people. Yeah.”

Survivors used more emotional arguments in the VHA interviews when discussing the pogroms. Sam Blumenfeld expressed outright anger, disbelief, and indignation at the fact that pogroms occurred after the war. Blumenfeld was present for the Krakow Pogrom. He stated: “incredible as it may sound, we experienced a pogrom! In Poland, by the Polish people. After three million people were murdered, you come back to Poland, thinking oh, you still have some roots here, you might find something, instead, I found a pogrom.” Like many survivors interviewed in the 1990s, and especially unlike the matter-of-fact presentation of pogroms by survivors interviewed in 1946, Blumenfeld expressed deep anger at this injustice. He continued: “all of a sudden, you know, stupid people...maybe I shouldn’t say stupid but you know, all they had to say, somebody Polish, was ‘a Jewish person went and killed a child to make matzah’ [...] no reason necessary, and they came into our apartments, searching, yelling, saying that we were killers.” While some 1946 interviews mentioned the blood libel (the killing of a child to make matzah), it is only in the 1990s that survivors were aware of the moral judgement they did or did not want to impose upon the behavior of the Poles. Blumenfeld knew he was supposed to reserve judgement – “I shouldn’t say stupid” – but he also understood that the weight of his testimony, beyond a traditional historical narrative, came from articulating his emotions. Such emotional judgements were inevitably a product of survivors sharing their experiences with each other and knowing that they were not alone, deepening their convictions that it was morally reprehensible that Polish Jews were treated in this manner.¹⁷

Some survivors referenced the Kielce pogrom to “supplement” their own stories of less well-known pogroms. Henrietta Kelly did this in her testimony: “now during that summer there were various pogroms on Jews coming back to Poland as you probably know. One was a famous one, which you probably know.” Kelly made sure the interviewer was

¹⁷ Sam Blumenfeld, Interview #18894, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #138.

familiar with the Kielce pogrom, likely to make sure the interviewer was conjuring up an image of that pogrom when Kelly described her own experience: “there was a pogrom on my uncle’s house [...] they surrounded this little block of apartments, a peasant crowd with scythes and knives and sticks, and they shouted, ‘death to the Jews,’ ‘Jews go back to Hitler,’ and ‘Hitler was right’. The entrance to this building was round the back, and my mother and I went around the back and slipped away [...] after that my mother made plans to leave Poland.” Here, Kelly evoked scenes of the Kielce pogrom in her own experiences. It is unclear if this was intentional or not, but the collective identification with the fear derived from Kielce is clear.¹⁸

Irma Broclawski was one of the few survivors who noted the change in emphasis on Kielce over the years. She explained how at the time she “heard about Kielce, about the pogrom in Kielce. But it was not in Krakow, I heard not too much about it, I heard more when we emigrated, in Poland, and now they are talking more how it was.” Broclawski, ironically, did not appear to realize that a pogrom also happened in Krakow just one year previously. Moreover, when her interviewer asked her if she was afraid to be Jewish in Krakow, she explained that there were a “few antisemites in Krakow...but I didn’t have too much to do with them.” Broclawski was correct in noting the uptick in discussion of the Kielce Pogrom. It appeared to have grown in collective memory both as evidence of Polish antisemitism and to account for why Jews left Poland.¹⁹

The Kielce Pogrom emerged over a long period of time as the pre-eminent event of Jewish collective memory that represented the eternal antisemitic nature of the Poles. Survivors returned to it because it was an extremely evocative example of how antisemitism – and distinctly Polish “blood libel” antisemitism at that – did not disappear at the end of the

¹⁸ Henrietta Kelly, Interview #30189, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #85.

¹⁹ Irma Broclawski, Interview #53082, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #366, 369.

war, and moreover how it was not a product of the German occupation but that of Poles themselves, rooted in historical practices of antisemitism and pogroms. Moreover, the fact that it became such a representative example allowed survivors to reinterpret their own core memories into narrative memories that specifically highlighted Polish postwar violence.

The Question of Return

Many survivors interviewed by the VHA were asked an intriguing question: “would you visit Poland today?” This was significant especially in the 1990s given that Poland was a newly formed democracy at that time and American tourists were able to visit Poland freely for the first time in almost fifty years. Most survivors did not want to return and had not done so. The few who did revealed how they felt that the antisemitism they had experienced immediately after the war was still present today. By the 1990s, even with increased contact with Poland, survivors generally refused to initiate contact with Polish people. Betty Wolf, for example, was asked if she would visit Poland, and explained how doing so would be “walking on the blood of my people.”²⁰ The absence of Jewish life in Poland certainly made visiting unappealing for survivors. Another survivor, Dana Kelisky, had a similarly negative view of Poland, although she expanded her criticism to Polish Americans as well. Kelisky told her interviewer about a Polish American woman, who was too young to have witnessed the Holocaust, who asked Kelisky if Jews still used the blood of children to make matzah. Kelisky stated: “the Poles were the most antisemitic people you’ll ever meet...nothing has changed.” Kelisky did in fact visit Poland and explained how “they could tell I was Jewish [...] I will never go back there again. It was very unpleasant. And a lot of people feel like I

²⁰ Betty Wolf, Interview #54901, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #41.

do.”²¹ Kelisky was correct that many Jews did feel the way she did, although interestingly, when asked if she had antisemitic experiences with Poles as a child, Kelisky said that during the Holocaust she rarely interacted with Poles. All the evidence she referenced in her testimony of Polish antisemitism are stories about after the war, in America.

A second survivor who chose to visit Poland but was similarly unimpressed was Maurice Markheim, who visited Poland in 1981. Despite electing to visit, Markheim told his interviewer that in terms of Polish antisemitism, “nothing’s changed.” In his testimony, shrugging his shoulders, Markheim continued: “I don't believe they ever will change. They got the lessons, too, don't get me wrong. But you know with— it's like a— that antisemitism, that hate for the Jews, the jealousy. Why? It's only plain jealousy. I— think when— the mother feed the baby through the milk, the anti- antisemitism go into the baby.”²² This expression, “Poles suck antisemitism with their mother’s milk” was popularized by former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in 1989. Although it was used previously, no Boder interviewee references it in 1946. Certainly, it reflected a more recent attitude towards Poles, both past and present.

Those Who Stayed

Some survivors did remain in Poland after the war. Those survivors had distinct stories from both their 1990s counterparts who had left Poland in 1945 and 1946, since they had time to build a rapport with Poles after the war. Those reconstituted social relations gave

²¹ Dana Kelisky, Interview #52886, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #85, 140.

²² Maurice Markheim, Interview #471, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #92.

them a distinct perspective on Polish-Jewish relations. Felix Pierson, one such survivor, described a dinner party he was invited to at the home of a “very righteous Pole”:

He knew– I never hid the fact from everyone that I'm Jewish [...] he said, Mr. Felix ...tell me, is it true that the Jewish people use gentile children as blood for masses? My cheeks turn red immediately. So, I said to him, of course, that they do. Look at my red cheeks. You will see. You know very well, I said, every time I come for dinner, before I eat anything, you have to give me a glass of gentile children's blood.

Pierson’s story was rare, because he remained in Poland through the 1980s (this dinner party took place in 1978). Few survivors interviewed by the VHA in America had such face-to-face confrontations with Poles, or the chance to address such antisemitism head on.²³

Another survivor who stayed for many years in Poland was Tema Ratafia, who left after the 1968 antisemitic riots. She explained that leaving Poland was ultimately “the best thing I ever did for myself [...] I wanted a better life for my kids, you know they had the pogrom of Kielce at that time, and you know I told my daughter, I suffered so much, you can’t admit you’re a Jew here. It’s very bad if you admit you’re a Jew.”²⁴ Ratafia jumped from her discussion of leaving after the antisemitic riots of 1968 back to the Kielce Pogrom, linking events that occurred over twenty years apart. She made an argument that begins and ends in acts of well-documented (and well-remembered) violence. The reality of antisemitism for Jews who stayed merely bolstered pre-existing anti-Polish sentiments in Jewish communities world-wide, widening the chasm between Polish and Jewish collective memory.²⁵

²³ Felix Pierson, Interview #2581, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #102.

²⁴ Tema Ratafia, Interview #26360, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #23.

²⁵ Irma Broclawski, Interview #53082, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #366, 369.

The manner in which survivors discussed and interpreted Polish postwar antisemitism and its contribution to Jewish emigration from Poland after the war was entirely different in the 1990s than in 1946, even when the substance of the type of antisemitism remained consistent across fifty years. The incorporation of the Kielce Pogrom as the symbol of Polish antisemitism into Jewish collective memory likely motivated survivors, consciously or subconsciously, to reinterpret their own postwar experiences into a larger framework of Polish antisemitism. While a number of factors made survivors more likely to have a generally negative viewpoint about Poles, the violence Jews encountered after the defeat of the Germans certainly had a lasting impact on how Jewish survivors framed the discussion of their former neighbors. Ultimately, the survivors interviewed in the 1990s attributed their decisions to leave Poland more specifically to the Kielce Pogrom, on account of the establishment of the Kielce pogrom in Jewish collective memory, rather than the general antisemitic violence as more commonly discussed in the Boder interviews.

Part II – Chapter 3

Denunciation, Collaboration, Salvation: Storytelling in 1946

The power of testimony is its humanity. Therefore, the most central component of Holocaust testimonies are the stories survivors tell. A story is more than simply what happened— stories can turn “historical fact” into a “compelling narrative,” a document of history into a relatable and engaging tale.¹ By examining the stories that survivors told, both to David Boder in 1946 and to various interviewers in the 1990s, one can analyze how and why the types of stories –and points of emphasis within similar sorts of stories – have either changed drastically or remained consistent across fifty years.

The foundation of testimony, unlike traditional “history” is the senses: what did a survivor see, feel, and hear? Those basic senses make up the “core memory.” Survivors interpret those basic memories into a narrative, producing what is called “episodic testimony” or “narrative memory.”² By taking the experiences within “core” memory and shaping them into episodic testimony, a story emerges.³ This sort of individual storytelling is often the most compelling piece of testimony. After I finished a year of interviewing survivors during high school, I could rarely recall what concentration camp a survivor was in, but I could easily remember the “accordion story” or the “gentile secretary story.” Storytelling is important for forming episodic testimony from core memory, and for creating narratives that are engaging and relevant for those who hear them.

Much has been written about how and why survivors tell their stories the way they do.⁴ A number of factors are at work when a survivor chooses, both consciously and

¹ Robert N. Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 9.

² Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*, 17.

³ Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*, 26.

⁴ See Carolyn Dean, *Aversion and Erasure: The Fate of the Victim after the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); and Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Survivors: Beyond Testimony* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2010).

unconsciously, to tell their story a certain way. Putting aside the trauma and deep weight of their narratives for a moment, there is also the issue of how they craft stories in a manner that engages people. Storytelling is not one-sided; the listener is giving feedback (such as nodding, eye-contact, or other sorts of engagement) to demonstrate their interest or lack thereof. Over time, as survivors tell these stories, they will inevitably begin to emphasize some parts of their story over others. For example, I once went to interview a survivor who had some family members in the room. When the conversation began to dwindle, his wife poked him and said: “tell her the accordion story!” His eyes lit up, and we all leaned in to listen to a story worthy of its own movie: a narrow escape from Yugoslavia involving a very expensive accordion, a fishing boat, and Nazis running across the frozen river to catch them. It’s not that this didn’t happen, simply that it has been told over and over to become family lore. In the process, such a story begins to lose key aspects of reality.

What is notable about the stories told by the Boder interviewees is that they were being told in the face of a cumulative lack of listener feedback. In 1946, these individuals had rarely – if at all – shared their stories previously. The stories they told were in a “natural” form as a result; they lacked any predetermined plot. David Boder was likely the first, or one of the very first persons, to have asked them about their experiences who had not also lived through the events. Boder was scrupulous with detail, and in particular he would always clarify with his interviewee whether a person featured in a story was Jewish, Polish, or German. Boder appeared to have been attempting to understand which type of person was involved in what type of action, even if the survivor he was interviewing did not have a sense of the larger roles of Jews, Poles, and Germans.

Over time, these stories have expanded, becoming more dramatic, and shifting emphasis in relation to their previous forms. This expansion allowed survivors to discuss the roles of various groups in both saving and harming others. Later interviews, for example,

emphasize Polish antisemitism, and Poles' general "indifference to the fate of European Jewry" much more than survivors originally did in 1946.⁵ That is, experiences of giving testimony, outside influences of collective memory, and other factors have shaped Jewish survivors' perceptions of their experiences during the war, changing how they shared their stories and even what types of stories they choose to share.

This chapter will examine three core narratives that resound in the Boder testimonies: stories of denunciation, of collaboration, and of the "good Poles" who saved their neighbors. Chapter four will examine the same three narratives as told in the 1990s testimonies and will analyze the differences that emerged in such narratives decades later.

"Jude": Stories of Denunciation

One common story told by Boder survivors was the story of denunciation. What made these narratives particularly chilling was the use of the word "Jude" – as survivors were turned in to the Germans, they were often denounced using the German word for Jew. Some survivors were denounced in bread lines, some while simply walking down the street. Some were denounced for incentives– the Germans would occasionally reward Poles with extra rations if they called out the Jews. Some were denounced for no reward at all. The prevalence of this experience in Poland, given that it was mentioned in almost every Polish Boder interviewee's story, suggests that this was the societal norm under occupation. Moreover, many survivors noted that the Germans couldn't tell apart Polish Jews and Gentiles. Thus, the denunciation process, and Polish collaboration in general, was "necessary" for the Germans

⁵ Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 1.

to conduct their extermination operation.⁶ Survivors also emphasized the shock and betrayal such denunciations constituted for the Jews that witnessed or experienced them.

Denunciation occurred in a variety of forms, such as turning in a hidden Jewish family, or small acts, such as tattling to the Germans when a Jew attempted to do something “illegal.” One survivor that reported to Boder about the latter experience was Nechama Epstein-Kozlowski, a young newlywed living in an Italian DP camp, who was denounced in a public square while waiting in a bread line. As Epstein-Kozlowski explained, she saw that the Germans had arrived in the square but she “wanted to get a piece of bread for the children. So, at that instant there a Christian was standing, and he said that I am a Jew. So, I was immediately chased away.” Boder clarified: “A Pole.” Epstein-Kozlowski agreed: “A Pole”:

So, I was immediately chased away. So, I went farther. There arrived peasants with potatoes. So, I went...for five Zlotys one could buy there potatoes. I went over to buy potatoes. I already had the potatoes in the sack. I was very happy. So again, someone arrived and said this is a Jew. So, the Germans came over and grabbed me, and he grabbed me. He spilled the potatoes, gave [me] a few kicks and a few slaps, and threw [me] aside.

First, Epstein-Kozlowski was interviewed in Yiddish, rather than German, but she still made a point to quote her denouncer: “this is a Jew.” The phrasing is specific, and remained specific from 1946 to the 1990s, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Second, it was unclear if the “someone” who denounced Epstein-Kozlowski the second time was the same person as the “Christian” who did so previously, but both the repetition of this experience in a short period of time, and Boder’s specific interest in whether a Polish person did the denouncing suggests that it was a significant event from both their perspectives. It is important to note in Epstein-Kozlowski’s story how, at that (likely earlier) time in the war,

⁶ Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

she was able to purchase the potatoes despite being Jewish. It was only when the Germans were drawn over by another Pole that she was harassed for a second time. Moreover, Epstein-Kozlowski's story, like many Boder interview stories, lacked the drama that future testimonies will have. She did not analyze or interpret her testimony— for example, when the Germans hit her, she didn't provide any commentary on her emotions, what she did next, what her family thought, et cetera— all context provided in later interviews. It is not the specific content (core memory) but the emphasis and the organization of plot that become more nuanced in later interviews (episodic testimony).⁷

Other survivors discussed denunciation in a more general sense in the Boder testimonies, often encouraged by Boder's clear interest in the subject. For example, Boder asked Mendel Herskovitz, a former shopkeeper born and raised in Lodz: "how did the Poles behave themselves towards the Jews?" Herskovitz answered: "this already depended on the person...but especially good, no. If they could...if they could betray a Jew so that he should fall into a German hand, they did it gladly... if they could snitch on him, they did it gladly." Boder did not respond. So Herskovitz added: "like there have been cases that for a kilo of sugar a Jew was sold. A Jew came to hide himself to a Pole." Boder perked up: "yes?" Encouraged, Herskovitz elaborated: "so the Pole first of all would take away from him all his valuables that he had. When he saw that the Jew doesn't have anything more, he would go to the Gestapo, would report that a Jew is hiding out with him, and the Jew was taken out and shot. The Poles received for it either a kilo...a liter of schnapps or a kilo of sugar." Herskovitz's experience is interesting for two reasons; first, because of the emphasis placed on specifics by Boder (the sort of listener feedback that demonstrated the importance of such

⁷ Nechama Epstein-Kozlowski, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish by David Boder (August 31, 1946), Tradate, Italy, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=epsteinN>. For the remainder of the interview citations in the chapter, I will be putting the citations at the ends of paragraphs. The citation will correspond to the entire paragraph unless otherwise noted. Paragraphs that contain multiple survivor interviews will have each interview cited at the end of the quote rather than all at the end to prevent confusion.

stories), and second, because of its consistency with so many other tales of Polish extortion. In such cases, it appeared that Poles who denounced Jews would first take all of the person's valuables, then hand the person over to the Germans, for which they would occasionally receive a reward.⁸ This order of events remained utterly consistent in survivor testimony from Poland such that it appears to have become fully rooted in Jewish collective memory.⁹

Another survivor who discussed Polish collaboration, Abraham Kimmelman, an eighteen-year-old from Upper Silesia, explicitly tied the “denunciation” process to the word, “Jude.” Kimmelman described, as many others do, waiting in line for bread only to be turned away and revealed to Germans as a Jew. Since, at least according to Jewish testimony, only Poles were able to differentiate Polish Jews from Polish Gentiles, and “since they wanted more bread, they would tell the Germans, ‘yes, this is a Jew’, and with a finger they would point at the Jew.” “Jude” (meaning Jew, singular) was, according to Kimmelman, “the only word they learned to say in German.” The symbolism of the word “Juden” and the outstretched, pointed finger is powerful. Moreover, the idea that Poles only learned the German word “Jude,” while an exaggeration, was symbolic of how Polish Jews both in 1946 and the 1990s viewed the Polish-German relationship. Poles, according to 1946 testimony, only interacted with Germans when they could gain something, and to the Germans, Poles were really only valuable in the context of “outing” Jews. While there are many examples of Poles denouncing Jews for no particular reward, many stories narrated in both 1946 and the 1990s as part of survivor testimony emphasized that Poles received a reward for such behavior.¹⁰

⁸ For more information, see Jan Gross, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁹ Mendel Herskovitz, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish by David Boder (July 31, 1946), Fontenay-aux-Roses, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=herskovitzM>.

¹⁰ Abraham Kimmelman, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German by David Boder (August 27, 1946), Genève, Switzerland, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=kuechlerL>.

Kimmelman is also an important example because he is one of the few Boder interviewees who used the German word, “Jude” in his testimony (since his interview was in German). This is significant because in the

A number of survivors mentioned in their testimonies the Polish “ability” to recognize Jews. This was true in the cases where Poles recognized their neighbors from before the occupation, but it also included Poles who tried to extort money from random people they assumed were Jewish on the basis of a guess about “Jewish features” that relied on stereotypes. Lena Kuechler, for example, was a Polish-Jewish woman from Zakopane who survived the war in Eastern Poland as a nanny for a Gentile family, and who had opened a Polish-Jewish orphanage in Zakopane but encountered significant antisemitism that led her to escape Poland with her charges. In 1946 she and the children were in France; two years later they would make it to the newly-formed state of Israel. Kuechler told a story of denunciation that encompassed two major themes in these types of stories: first, the idea that Poles could recognize Jews based on physical looks, and second, that Poles mostly cared about material benefit and not the life of the person they were denouncing. Kuechler described a man who would stand around in the vicinity of the ghetto in order to spot and extort bribes from people he assumed were Jews on the Aryan side of the Ghetto: “I was returning to my apartment in the city, and there someone accosted me on the street. He was a Pole. He told me I was a Jewess. He did not know that for sure, but by my appearance, and he [allegedly] recognizes me. And he demanded money or else he will, as it is said, report me to the Gestapo.” Kuechler took a risk and stood her ground, threatening to take *him* to the Gestapo for lying. Kuechler described her vulnerability on this score: “I did not quite resemble a Polish woman, but neither did I resemble a Jewess.” It was likely her lack of resemblance to a stereotypical “Jewess” that kept the Polish police officer from believing her extortionist.¹¹

1990s interviews, survivors will break from English to use the German word, “Jude” to describe being denounced.

¹¹ Lena Kuechler, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German, Polish, and Russian by David Boder (September 8, 1946), Bellevue, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=kuechlerL>.

Kuechler related a second account of denunciation, this time about her sister's murder. Unlike many of the other stories recounted by Kuechler and other Boder interviewees, the story of her sister's denunciation reads as more "developed" in emphasis:

There in Lowicz she [her sister] was living with a Polish family. And the husband suspected that she was Jewish. So, he went to the Gestapo and said she is Jewish. And they came from the Gestapo and took her. They shot her seven days before the liberation. This Pole then got two kilos of sugar for her head. That was the Gestapo's reward for the Jewish...for a Jewish...Jewish head.

This story has all the elements of great tragedy. It is not that it didn't happen (there is no reason to doubt Kuechler's testimony), but the specific details of the story – the seven days, the two kilos of sugar– feels more developed and organized than other stories told to Boder in 1946. Kuechler's story both draws the listener in and also makes a point about Polish antisemitism: a Jew was only worth two kilos of sugar to a Pole. One cannot help but feel Kuechler shared this story more than once, even at the time of the Boder interview, or that she exaggerated or changed certain details considering that this story was likely recounted to her by someone else. Kuechler's testimony here is almost more similar to 1990s interviews than those of 1946.¹²

Survivor Roma Tcharnabroda succinctly summarized this phenomenon of Poles denouncing Jews. She explains: "there was an entirely special strata in Polish society which occupied itself with betraying of the Jews, very simple." Denunciation was something separate from other forms of collaboration. The betrayal of Jews trying to conceal their identity is a common theme in Jewish survivors' testimony. Denunciation was especially heinous because it was not necessary. It was an active, rather than passive, sort of antisemitism that yielded some but often only a little reward for the denouncer and caused much harm to the exposed Jew, often resulting in their death. Survivors in 1946 were beginning to share their traumas, and began to create episodic testimonies, yet in comparison

¹² Lena Kuechler, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German, Polish, and Russian by David Boder (September 8, 1946), Bellevue, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=kuechlerL>.

to later interviews, their stories were not entirely fleshed out. Their testimonies were occasionally confusing, unorganized, or even not particularly emotionally engaging. Despite this, the fundamental memory—the fact that Poles denounced Jews – would remain consistent across the years, becoming an even more prominent facet of the narrative in 1990s interviews.¹³

Stories of Collaboration

Collaboration, as it is traditionally understood, reaches farther than simply pointing out Jews to Germans. Rather, collaboration involved working closely with the Germans to deprive, harm and even kill Jews. In the years that followed the war, this sort of collaboration was represented in Polish collective memory as having been committed by those at the fringes of Polish society: a sort of moral aberration on the good name of the Polish people.¹⁴ In reality, Poles did actively collaborate with the Germans, serving in a variety of roles. Some were Kapos, themselves prisoners in concentration or forced labor camps who were chosen by the Germans to guard other prisoners. Others were employed by the Germans as guards. Finally, some hunted down or murdered Jews for the Germans, sometimes at their behest and occasionally out of antisemitism and hate itself, such as in the case of Jedwabne, where the Polish townspeople rounded up and killed their Jewish neighbors.¹⁵ There were a variety of forms of collaboration in Poland. Some guards or Kapos were moderate in comparison to others – for example, if anything, Polish Jews were much more likely, both in 1946 and 1990s testimonies, to note the cruelty of Ukrainian Kapos rather than that of the Polish ones. The following testimonies offer examples of 1946 representations of how Jews discussed

¹³ Roma Tcharnabroda, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German by David Boder (September 24, 1946), München, Germany, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=tcharnabrodaR>.

¹⁴ Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 7.

¹⁵ Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews*, 60.

active Polish collaboration. While in a large number of the Boder testimonies the Poles served as denouncers, in a few cases it was the Poles themselves who were described as stepping into the role of perpetrator. When discussing active collaboration in 1946, survivors did so in a limited fashion and mostly with reference to the Volksdeutsche – registered Poles of “German descent” – or what other non-Jewish prisoners did in the camps.

Even in the cases when Poles themselves were also prisoners, survivors emphasized how the Poles often utilized their positions of power to hurt Jews. Alexander Gertner, a twenty-year-old Romanian interned at Auschwitz-Birkenau, provided a good example of how Polish prisoners took advantage of Jewish prisoners. He explained: “in this block were Poles. Polish gentiles were barrack chiefs and room chiefs. They were frightfully bad [...] and they waited there with brooms. They were screaming in Polish. We didn't understand them. They were screaming. We didn't know what they wanted. All they did was slap.”¹⁶ Adolph Heisler, a Czechoslovakian also interned at Auschwitz-Birkenau, described a similar experience with the Polish civilian foremen who oversaw the Jawiszowice coal mine, near the concentration camp. Heisler explained that the Polish supervisors were “still worse than the Germans themselves”: “they informed on us. They beat [us]. It was terrible the way the Poles treated us there [...] And they beat us, the prisoners, to death.”¹⁷ The theme of “worse than Germans” is the seed of a sort of moral reasoning that becomes even more predominant in 1990s testimonies – that in some senses collaboration of this sort is “even worse” than the behavior of the Nazis.

Survivors discussing Polish violence in 1946 would occasionally point to the Volksdeutsche as an example of the German “infection” of antisemitism. Volksdeutsche

¹⁶ Alexander Gertner, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish by David Boder (August 26, 1946), Genève, Switzerland, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=gertnerA>.

¹⁷ Adolph Heisler, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German by David Boder (August 27, 1946), Genève, Switzerland, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=heislerA>.

referred to Poles who were recognized by the Nazis as ethnically German.¹⁸ Such people were afforded certain social and economic privileges over others. A number of survivors in the 1990s period have been quoted in secondary sources as noting how their neighbors, who had never described themselves as German, appeared to “suddenly hear the call of their German blood.”¹⁹ Volksdeutsche were generally poorer peasants, who often were farmers or day laborers, who often didn’t even know German, but were instead attempting to use the identity for increased rations and other privileges.²⁰ Yet beyond economic incentives, a number of survivors in the Boder testimonies turn to the Volksdeutsche as representative of a broader trend of antisemitism in the region. Some survivors additionally pointed to the “remains of the Nazi influences” when discussing why the Krakow and Kielce pogroms occurred.²¹

Rachel Gurmanova, a native of Warsaw and active communist, provided an example of how Boder’s interviewees discussed Volksdeutsche and their role as active collaborators and perpetrators. Gurmanova described two Poles who as “Volksdeutsche” had permission to enter the Warsaw ghetto. When they did, it was known that “a lot will perish. Every Jew they would encounter they would shoot. Without any reason. . . . I myself saw [one] shooting a Jew. With a revolver. Just came over and shot him.” Boder asked: “Did they have anything to do with work [duties]?” Gurmanova responded: “Absolutely nothing. They were [Volksdeutsche], and that was sufficient.” Collaboration, in its most violent and active form, was most discussed by 1946 survivors in the case of Volksdeutsche violence or camp guards,

¹⁸ Doris L. Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’ and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-1945” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (October 1994): 569-582.

¹⁹ Peter-Klaus Friedrich, “Collaboration in a ‘Land without a Quisling’: Patterns of Cooperation with the Nazi German Occupation Regime in Poland during World War II,” *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (Winter, 2006): 727.

²⁰ Friedrich, “Collaboration in a ‘Land without a Quisling’: Patterns of Cooperation with the Nazi German Occupation Regime in Poland during World War II,” 727.

²¹ Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 223.

rather than non-Volksdeutsche Polish citizens themselves killing Jews, as would become more prevalent in 1990s interviews.²²

The Gentiles: Stories of “Righteous” Poles

While many survivors recounted tales of Jews betrayed by Poles, a number of survivors also recounted experiences with courageous or “good” Poles. What is important to note about these stories is how survivors singled out these Poles for acts of kindness, but they did not appear to note how challenging it was for Poles to go against the antisemitic status quo. For example, Leon Frim, a forty-seven-year-old Polish lawyer, described how his wife escaped the ghetto with the aid of a Polish woman: “after a few days I had a message through that Polish woman that my wife arrived safely in Lemberg—” Boder cut him off, asking: “did you have to pay the Polish woman?” Frim responded: “no, I did not pay the Polish woman at that time, she was a friend of our family.” Despite an understanding of Polish antisemitism at this time, Frim was not surprised that his family friend helped his wife. It is only in later interviews, with a greater understanding of the general Polish attitudes towards Jews, that survivors would themselves begin to transform Poles’ acts of kindness into a form of heroism.²³

In many cases, it was David Boder who was most surprised by Polish acts of kindness. Rachel Gurmanova, the Warsaw native and communist activist previously mentioned, told Boder about the Polish woman who hid her and her family for almost a full year. A Polish friend of the Gurmanova family talked to another Polish woman, asking her to “close up the store a bit earlier, and lock up my Jews.” According to Gurmanova, this was

²² Rachel Gurmanova, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish and German by David Boder (August 17, 1946), Paris, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=gurmanovaR>.

²³ Dr. Leon Frim, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German by David Boder (September 25, 1946), Wiesbaden, Germany, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=frimL>.

exactly what she did. Boder appeared surprised that a Polish Christian would do this; he clarified over and over: “and she was a Christian?” and “so, also a Christian?” and “a Pole?” Gurmanova explained that yes, all three people in the story were Christian; yes, they were Polish. She also revealed that the Polish owner of the building knew about the hiding place, but “he said nothing during all that time.” When Boder clarified once more: “A Pole?” Gurmanova responds: “A Pole. And in spite of that he kept silent.” Boder’s interruptions emphasize both his confusion that a Pole, or even multiple Poles, would risk their lives to save some Jews. Gurmanova was less surprised— although this is perhaps because of her assimilation into the Warsaw Polish community prior to the war. Armed with a number of political contacts, Gurmanova was perhaps privy to aid that other less assimilated Jews simply could not have accessed.²⁴

Other survivors were sympathetic to Poles, but only in light of their common enemy: the Germans. Itzhak Brin, a Jewish prisoner both witnessed the murders of, and buried, Poles killed by Germans near Lodz, Poland in 1944. It is unclear how Brin came to be involved in the execution of Polish partisans, yet he felt it was important that he told Boder what happened:

Boder: “Who were shot?”

Brin: “Poles were shot [...] This was what the Germans, the Germans did, so that no one would know. They took Gentiles, Poles and buried them in the Jewish . . .”

Boder: “Oh, they shot Poles.”

Brin: “All Poles! Because they shot very few Jews at that time. They were trying to kill the Jews, but they sent them to the crematoria. But the Poles, the Poles [...] it was mostly political [...] things [...] After that, they scattered some earth over them. They were told to gather the brains that had been strewn around the pit. [They] said, “Take this home and you'll have lunch to eat.” [...] That's what the German said, the Gestapo. They were, they were making fun of us. Quickly, quickly we poured on some earth into the pit and they were standing there with weapons until it was done.”

Boder: “Were Jews or Poles shot?”

Brin: “They only shot Poles. We never saw Jews being shot. Just Poles. They say that everyone was being shot, but they were all Christians.”

²⁴ Rachel Gurmanova, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish and German by David Boder (August 17, 1946), Paris, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=gurmanovaR>.

Brin's interview is the only example of Polish Jews in 1946 acknowledging or noting the killings of Poles. He was not overly sympathetic in tone, and the story may have been told more to emphasize the viciousness of the Germans rather than the victimhood of the Poles. Ultimately there was little awareness in Brin's testimony, or in the Boder testimonies in general, that Poles may have felt especially and unfairly victimized, even in light of the Holocaust as a whole.²⁵

The themes of the stories that survivors told David Boder about their Polish neighbors paint a grim picture. Denunciation, collaboration and outright perpetration were common themes in the testimony of survivors, both in 1946 and later, although denunciation is the most commonly mentioned theme in the 1946 interviews compared with later testimonies. The interpretation of those actions, moreover, shifts significantly from 1946 to the 1990s. As the next chapter will explore further, years of life experience, as well as the formation of a collective memory of the Holocaust, become the basis for survivors to give testimony in the 1990s that is built on the same core memory, but interpreted through in a new lens. Whereas survivors told David Boder "what happened," they would have much stronger feelings about and interpretations of those events years later. Over time, the personal testimonies of survivors did not merely present their beliefs and individual experiences but became part of the wider tapestry of identity and memory for a community – in this case the community of Holocaust survivors.²⁶

²⁵ Itzhak Brin, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish and German by David Boder (September 13, 1946), Hénonville, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=brinI>.

²⁶ Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*, 26.

Part II – Chapter 4

Denunciation, Collaboration, Salvation: Storytelling in the 1990s

When one compares the testimonies recorded in the 1990s with those recorded earlier, it becomes clear that while the general content– the discussion of the role of Poles as denunciators and collaborators– remains consistent over time, the ways in which survivors frame their experiences changes significantly. Specifically, survivors in the 1990s began consciously framing their stories as evidence of Polish antisemitism, rather than as one of many experiences that happened to them. Survivors were also in control of their storytelling in a manner of which they were not in 1946.

The process of recounting testimony is itself highly mediated. The stories survivors told in the 1990s began with the same “core memory” as had stories recorded by David Boder in 1946. In both cases, the survivors structured their testimonies on the sensations and emotions the teller felt in the moment the events occurred. But the interpretation of these experiences was a different process entirely by the 1990s.¹ The narrative memory of the events themselves had been altered by personal life experiences since the 1940s, by the emergence in American culture and in American Jewish culture of collective memory and a “Holocaust narrative,” and finally by the fact that in the case of all the interviews transcribed here from the VHA, survivors were speaking in their second or third language. While core memory itself is not in one language, occasionally survivors broke the flow of English to utilize words in other languages that hold significant emotional weight.²

Errors are likely to occur in later testimonies on account of the multiple levels of “mediation,” including physical, emotional, and chronological. Survivors were interviewed in places geographically different than where they experienced the Holocaust, in a different

¹ Robert N. Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust* (London: Praeger, 2002), 18.

² Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*, 20.

language, in a significantly different moment in their lives. Memory theory indicates that what one might call “deep memory” – such as trying to recall traumatic experience – may be only “situationally accessible,” not “verbally accessible”³ Recalling from the thesis introduction, the classic example of memory failure is the survivor described by Dori Laub who misremembered the number of chimney blown up by resistance fighters at Auschwitz. To take a second example, survivors occasionally splice narrative memory– for example someone may describe a notable guard who worked at Ravensbrück when in fact the guard worked at Dachau. Perhaps this would speak to the significance of Dachau in the survivor’s memory. The testimony becomes “an event in its own right.”⁴ Its importance and weight in a survivor’s experiences are different than the weight that a historian might give the same stories. Narrative memory should be analyzed as such, as a narrative– survivors are sharing their stories with specific narrative intentions, goals, and interpretations. Understanding what a survivor is trying to convey is just as important as understanding the story itself.

The Role of Place: 1990s America

In 1993, Steven Spielberg released *Schindler’s List*, a film viewed by twenty-five million people at the time of its release, and by another 65 million viewers in its 1997 NBC broadcast version.⁵ The popularity of *Schindler’s List* reflected the general American interest at that time in the stories of the Holocaust. Survivors themselves recognized the broader public interest in their stories, and felt that it was, in some senses, a duty to “leave a record so that future generations will know.”⁶ Many survivors who had never before recorded their stories were willing to do so for the first time. Other survivors who had previously recorded

³ Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*, 25.

⁴ Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*, 28.

⁵ Tribune News Services, “65 Million Viewers See Schindler’s List,” *The Chicago Tribune*, February 27, 1997, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1997-02-25-9702250168-story.html>.

⁶ Kraft, *Memory Perceived*, xvii.

their stories in some form agreed to have their stories recorded again, given the renewed interest in their experiences.

In her comparison of Lithuanian Jewish testimony in three different locations (Lithuania, Israel, and America), historian Hannah Pollin-Galay examines how place influences a survivor's interpretation of their experiences. Pollin-Galay argues that American testimony generally functions as "monumental testimony," meaning that survivors are attempting to explain the moral wrongness of what happened to them.⁷ Pollin-Galay demonstrates that this trend is not as present in the Lithuanian and Israeli testimonies she analyzed. She goes on to describe the production of "monumental testimony" as an extension of the "American ecology" of the "personal-allegorical" format. In the case of one Lithuanian American survivor, Gita Taitz, Pollin-Galay explains: "it is through individual perception that she offers pictures of prewar life, wartime, and recovery. Her testimony is also openly allegorical in that she enables the distant listener to derive lessons from her memories, applicable anywhere."⁸ Indeed, the Polish-Jewish survivors interviewed in America in the 1990s, consciously and subconsciously, formatted their experiences into narratives with clear moral bents— something new to the 1990s interviews in comparison to the 1946 testimonies. Often (although not always), a part of this allegorical process involved condemning Poles specifically, because they didn't *need* to collaborate. In the eyes of an American, this is in some ways *more* morally reprehensible because, à la *Schindler's List*, American culture holds white Christians to a high standard of sticking up for the downtrodden, one-dimensional Jew that needs saving.⁹ The rise of a collective American "Holocaust narrative" meant that

⁷ Hannah Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing: Language, Place, and Holocaust Testimony* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 155.

⁸ Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing*, 5.

⁹ Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Schindler's List is Not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism and Public Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 22 (No. 2: Winter 1996): 300.

thousands, even tens of thousands, of Holocaust stories were shared and recorded in the seven years following the release of *Schindler's List*.

Survivors essentially provided three different motivations for testifying in the VHA interviews: first, the “fear that time is running out” (by the 1990s, most survivors were quite elderly); second, the goal of sharing pieces of their story they hadn’t told their loved ones; finally, and most relevant to this thesis, the hope of using their personal testimony as evidence “to make it even more difficult to deny the Holocaust.”¹⁰ This final goal is particularly present among Polish-Jewish survivors. As Polish denial and a Polish “counter-narrative” became more dominant in the years after the fall of the Soviet Union, survivors became aware of the rise of the popularity of “rescuer stories” and other narratives of the ‘righteous Gentiles,’ ‘helpers,’ ‘liberators,’ ‘rescuers’ and ‘saviors’.¹¹ Survivors wanted to set the record straight when they felt it was incorrect, and many gave testimony on the most gut-wrenching, morally shameful experiences of betrayal and violence perpetrated by Poles against Jews.

“Juden”: Stories of Denunciation

One of the most common and yet most emotionally distressing stories told by survivors in the 1990s was the story of denunciation. As established in the Boder interviews, Jewish survivors frequently recounted stories about Poles pointing out Jews to Germans when they spotted a Jew’s hiding place or saw them trying to pass as Polish on the street. Yet in 1990s interviews, survivors are much more aware of, and intentional in their use of these denunciation stories to depict Poles as deeply antisemitic. The degree of “moral condemnation” expressed by the survivor in the 1990s interviews often depended on whether

¹⁰ Kraft, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*, 172.

¹¹ Alvin Rosenfeld, *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1995), 27.

the Germans placed a threat of violence against aiding Jews or if there were a reward for turning Jews in. 1990s survivors are quick to point out when neither is the case. Additionally, a number of survivors actually broke from with their use of English to inject the German word for Jew – “Jude” – articulated with a pointed finger, to describe being denounced. While some of the earlier interviews also described the experience of denunciation, in these later interviews the use of finger pointing and German was jarring and emphasized the trauma of the betrayal itself– after all these years, survivors return to the same stories of denunciation, but with more emotion and condemnation of Polish actions.

A typical construction of a “denunciation” narrative in 1990s testimony can be examined through Sol Rosenberg’s testimony, in which he described witnessing multiple denunciations. Rosenberg, who was only thirteen when the war began, explained that the Poles “want our blood.” He continued: “through my young years I witnessed things where a German wouldn’t be able to tell who was or was not a Jew. A Polak used to go ‘Jude. Jude Jude.’”¹² In the moment of emphasis, Rosenberg wags his finger at the camera when pronouncing “Jude.” Another survivor, Celina Fein, who was also a teenager in the 1940s, told a similar tale:

The Polish people, many of them, took upon themselves the job of helping the Germans. As before, when we were standing in line.... they were pointing out Jewish people...later on, if they found a Jewish person in an Aryan area, they would immediately call the Nazis or take that person to the Nazis, and they were compensated for it. So, every step I took, I was in danger.¹³

In the process of transcribing VHA testimonies, I came across hundreds of these stories, told in the same tone, with the same finger pointing, about the same denunciation process. Yet unlike the Boder interviews, in which Boder’s interviewees highlighted these episodes but

¹² Sol Rosenberg, Interview #10098, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #16. For the remainder of the interview citations in the chapter, I will be putting the citations at the ends of paragraphs. The citation will correspond to the entire paragraph unless otherwise noted. The citation will correspond to the entire paragraph unless otherwise noted. Paragraphs that contain multiple survivor interviews will have each interview cited at the end of the quote rather than all at the end to prevent confusion.

¹³ Celina Fein, Interview #14446, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #67.

did not suggest the broader implications of such denunciations, a number of survivors being interviewed for the VHA project supplemented their stories with a “moral” condemnation of Polish actions. Leon Ginsburg, who was a ten-year-old Polish Orthodox Jewish boy in 1942, provided one such typical statement:

I would say thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of Jews in Poland would have survived because the Germans, a lot of times, didn't know who was Jewish and who was not Jewish. But the local population made sure to point out, in case the Germans missed.¹⁴

As will be examined in part three of this thesis, an argument such as Ginsburg's was frequently employed by survivors to underscore the separate and persistent antisemitism of the Poles.

In their interviews, survivors expressed a need both to emphasize these actions on the part of Poles, having identified them as particularly condemnable, but also to recognize the fact that Poles have attempted to undermine that narrative. Survivor Sara Gelender demonstrated this type of awareness in her testimony: “the Poles were working together with the Germans. Unfortunately, that is the truth. Maybe some Polaks will be, wouldn't want to hear this, but this was true, that the Polaks were very much helping.” Gelender used the derogatory term “Polak” to describe Poles behaving in a harmful manner towards Jews, something notable across 1990s testimony. While the word did appear in the Boder interviews, it was much less consistently used than it would be in later interviews.¹⁵

As survivors in the 1990s felt the need to contradict denial and lay moral foundations for better future treatment of minority populations, they responded not just to “what happened” but what others said happened. A second example of this can be found in Mina Rosner's testimony: “and you know, when today you hear or see that they said they had to, no one had to. They volunteered. And you know...the Poles.” In the case of denunciation

¹⁴ Leon Ginsburg, Interview #10406, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #160

¹⁵ Sara Gelender, Interview #53004, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #194.

stories, survivors were not simply expressing the core memory of their senses and experiences; their narrative memory had been deeply informed by their sense that Polish collective memory has downplayed the role of Polish denunciators, collaborators, and by Jewish collective memory which has seared into place the pointing finger and the chant of condemnation, “Jude. Jude. Jude.”¹⁶

In the 1990s testimonies, survivors also tended to connect the moral condemnation of collaboration *during* the war to Polish violence against Jews *after* the war. Boder’s interviewees did not draw that connection, and in the earlier interviews, survivors tended to differentiate between denunciation and collaboration, while in later interviews, denunciation and collaboration tended to blend together under the “collaboration” term. Harriet Solz provided an example of this when she describes returning to Poland after the war: “No, we were free. It was different. So, we went to Poland. And that's where we plan to reunite with our families. So, when we arrived at the station, right away we were greeted by Polaks. Still so many of you are left? That was the greeting to us. We thought they killed you all.” She immediately pivots, to explain how even when “Polaks” did not kill Jews themselves (at least not in most cases), Poles were still “very instrumental helping Germans in killing Jews. Germans didn't recognize a Jew as easily as a Polak. You could have passed, finagled your way to save yourself. But the Poles spotted a Jew immediately. And they helped the Germans a lot. Otherwise, more people would survive. Poles were— played a very big part in it.”¹⁷ Solz constructed her impression of Polish antisemitism on an ideological rather than in the traditional testimony system— she had pulled from her personal experience a number of stories that represented Polish antisemitism, and organized them together to create a coherent narrative of antisemitism, experience during *and* after the war. This sort of “conscious”

¹⁶ Mina Rosner, Interview #53657, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #105.

¹⁷ Harriet Solz, Interview #1491, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #96.

reorganization to emphasize and highlight Polish antisemitism was not present in 1946 interviews.

Survivors in the 1990s tended to emphasize and explicitly link denunciation with active collaboration under German occupation, which survivors in the earlier interviews did not mention. Specifically, survivors noted that the Nazis had a fear of catching “disease” from Jews. This stereotype was not explicitly brought up in early interviews. Ben Sosnowicz, a Bialystok Jew who hid in the forests during the occupation, presented this argument:

The Poles went into the bushes where we were. They caught us. (Interviewer: The Poles, not the Germans?) The Poles. A German wouldn't go into such a place. He was scared to go into a Jewish house. Because he could catch a cold, a disease. He would never go in, no. The Poles went into the forest, and they caught us, and they turned us in right away.

There is not a lot of evidence to corroborate this claim, yet it appeared consistently in 1990s testimony. One could theorize that it was not really that Germans feared entering a Jewish house (since it is clear this did happen with relative frequency, in Poland and elsewhere), but perhaps that Sosnowicz, and other survivors had added this explanation to account for why Poles were ready and willing to search for and capture hiding Jews. Ultimately, survivors discussed Polish denunciation as a form of “active” collaboration, unlike how they did previously, which bolstered the argument that the Polish attitude towards the Jews remained consistent during and after the war.¹⁸

Survivors were more emotional about betrayal and violence by Poles against Jews in the 1990s interviews. While this may be more a commentary on Boder's “dry” interview style – he cut survivors off when he wanted and occasionally sounded bored– it also says something about how charged the issue of Polish antisemitism became by the 1990s. Another reason for this was the significant changes of emotional states for survivors between the

¹⁸ Ben Sosnowicz, Interview #53646, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #28 #48.

1940s and the 1990s. Survivors had emigrated, settled in new lands, built new families, and dealt with their traumas in a variety of ways. In some cases, this actually made the issue of Polish antisemitism *more* rather than less emotional, because Polish collective memory denies such complicity in the Holocaust.¹⁹ One such interviewee, Hershel Taichman, becomes visibly frustrated when he described the instance of Poles killing a Jewish boy:

Taichman: “Soon as they ran out, the Poles were waiting behind the wall. They caught a boy, and they killed him.”

Interviewer: “Why?”

Taichman: “I’m asking you. Why?”

Interviewer: “Why? Because they worked for the Germans?”

Taichman: “No! This was right after the Germans left the camp! No!”

Interviewer: “So why?”

Although Taichman claimed not to know why a Pole would kill a Jewish boy after the Germans fled the camp, in reality he knew exactly why. He was trying to get the interviewer himself to acknowledge the presence and persistence of Polish antisemitism even in the absence of the Germans. Yet it appears that Taichman did not want to be the one to say it. He was teaching his interviewer something he can pass on to others.²⁰

Stories of Extortion

While mentioned in the Boder interviews, stories of extortion were discussed more explicitly and frequently in the VHA archives to warrant its own analysis. One aspect of the tension between Jews and Poles that has persisted throughout the postwar years is the interpretation of the relative financial security of Jews and the “jealousy” of their Polish

¹⁹ See the recent legislative attempts by the Law and Justice Party of Poland to “combat anti-Polonism”: “Polish Law on Holocaust Draws Attention to Anti-Semitism in Poland’s Past and Present,” last modified March 3, 2018, accessed April 9, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/03/03/even-poland-never-enforces-new-holocaust-law-lot-damage-already-done/>.

“Holocaust Memorial Ceremony Cancelled After Poland Censors Israeli Speech,” last modified March 19, 2018, accessed April 9, 2018, www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Holocaust-memorial-ceremony-canceled-after-Poland-censors-Israeli-speech-545479.

For more information on the details of Polish Holocaust Law: www.time.com/5128341/poland-holocaust-law/

²⁰ Hershel Taichman, Interview #55229, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #219

neighbors. While not mentioned in the 1946 testimonies, by the 1990s survivors felt it to be important that they emphasized how common Polish extortion was, even in the context of German persecution. It was important to these survivors that their listeners knew that there was a common stereotype in Poland that Jews were significantly wealthier than their counterparts—indeed, many Poles took the German occupation as a chance to take possession of Jewish homes or to extort Jews for money and possessions in exchange for aiding their escape or providing food and other goods. Often, extortionists would take the money or possessions and then turn the Jews in to the Germans. In other cases, they would simply steal the belongings, knowing that there was absolutely nothing the Jews could do to stop them.²¹ Elizabeth Grotch described such an experience of extortion, when her nanny attempted to smuggle her out of the ghetto:

The ghetto was guarded by [...] German, Polish and Jewish guards. And we were caught by a very young man, a Polish guard, all dressed in black, he was just a kid really. Who took us into the attic, and I recall he...and my mom and aunt, they had given our nanny their diamonds and pearls, and he took it all and he was dangling it, and I recall he had a girlfriend, he had her come over and see, 'oh would you like that?' would have got in trouble if Germans knew he stole the stuff so he ran away.

Grotch's story well demonstrated the complicated relationships between the Germans, Poles, and Jews. The Jews had significant reason to fear the Poles and the Germans. The Poles have pre-existing antagonisms towards the Jews, feared and resented the Germans, but occasionally worked with and for the Germans to persecute Jews. The Germans viewed both the Poles and the Jews as ethnically inferior, but the Jews more so to the point of perpetrating the extermination of Jews during the war itself. In Grotch's story, all three groups interact—the Pole commits a crime that Grotch's nanny cannot report because she is aiding a Jewish child, and yet the Pole also cannot flaunt his extortion prizes for fear of the Germans as well. The issue of extortion, as well as the stories that relate to it, demonstrated the complicated

²¹ Martin Dean, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Part II.

social relations of Poland under occupation, and moreover, how reflective of Polish attitudes survivors in the 1990s felt these stories were.²²

In the VHA archives, survivors felt it important to emphasize the role of Poles as black-market mediators, who would help, or harm Jews based on finances. Survivors highlighted this because they wanted to make it clear that many “good deeds” done by Poles for Jews had financial rather than moral dimensions. Leo Silberman, who was a young teenager hidden by his family to escape deportation, explained the process: if someone had money, the Polish people used to bring some bread.” But he clarified: “when they brought us the food it was for the money, not because they were good hearted people[...].whatever we had we gave it to them.”²³ Another survivor, Roza Kent, described Poles as “greedy and jealous, because they took over Jewish money and Jewish homes and Jewish furniture, and they didn’t want the Jews to come back.”²⁴ In the minds of survivors who share such testimony, the extortion that occurred during the war was directly tied to the fervent antisemitism of the postwar period.

A number of Poles were actively employed by the Germans, as ghetto guards, concentration camp overseers, and occasionally as hunters of “runaway” Jews. Survivors are quick to condemn such employment in 1990s testimony, although Poles did not volunteer as guards and overseers, and only in certain regions chose to actively volunteer hunt down Jews.²⁵ Yet survivors in the 1990s made sweeping claims about the nature of Poles employed by the Germans. As one survivor, Aron Toll, put it, they were recruited to do “some of the dirty work.” Toll is not entirely correct in this statement, although it was accurate in reflecting his views, if not those of 1990s American Jewish survivors as a whole. Some

²² Elizabeth Groch, Interview #26284, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #9.

²³ Leo Silberman, Interview #24285, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #5

²⁴ Roza Kent, Interview #52671, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #78.

²⁵ Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 5.

guards were Polish – others were Ukrainian, Czech, or a variety of other nationalities, known for an equally severe, and in some cases more extreme and brutal antisemitism.²⁶ It was not just Poles were hired for the “dirty work.” Another survivor, Harry Kaminsky, made a similar comment to Toll’s: “We were working with Polaks. They were not there to teach us; they were just there to beat the hell out of us...we don’t say anything what’s happen...this was the death camp...the Poles and the Ukrainians...I hate them more than the Germans.”²⁷ As evidenced by his use of the word “Polak,” Kaminsky was, like many Jewish survivors in the 1990s, prejudiced against Poles. While the descriptions of survivors’ experiences with Poles remained similar in content, the interpretation became particularly prejudiced as survivors aged. Kaminsky’s testimony was just one of many examples of this.

The guards were ultimately not easily categorized as especially kind or unkind– as one survivor, Ben Schreibman, put it, the treatment Jews received simply “depended on the human being.” Yet most survivors interviewed in the 1990s did single out the Polish police as being particularly prone to violence. They could be bribed – although it was never particularly clear if they would actually follow through and provide the supplies that the prisoners were paying them for. Schreibman continues, explaining that he had just written an article for the *Baltimore Jewish Times* about the importance of forgiving Poles. That said, Schreibman explained to his VHA interviewer that he cannot forgive them for starting pogroms after the war: “in my own hometown four more were killed, in other towns they created such a panic, that everyone had to run from the country.” While many survivors do attest to the severity of Polish guards and come to their own conclusions about how “unmoral” such employment was, what is interesting is that occasionally these interviewees cannot support their generalizations with personal experience., much like in part I when

²⁶ Aron Toll, Interview #44696, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #67.

²⁷ Harry Kaminsky, Interview #52313, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #15.

survivors used “vague” descriptions of the Kielce pogrom despite their lack of personal experience with it. For example, Schreibman was asked the following: “are there any particular instances that you witnessed yourself between the Polish policemen and the Jewish population?” Schreibman responded: “I wouldn’t know very much, I was a young boy, but I know there were some hardships, there were a lot of hardships.” Where did he get this impression, then? From the sharing of experience after the war. In turn it had shaped his impression and judgment of Polish actions during the war. Poland was not unique in having had civilians employed as guards and workers by the Germans. What is significant is how survivors linked that, and moreover liberal use of violence and extortion, to their postwar experiences of antisemitism in Poland, something that did not feature in the Boder testimonies.²⁸

The Gentiles – Stories of “Righteous” Poles

A number of survivors did share glowing stories about Poles who risked everything to save them. No story of escape or survival would be complete without a hero. Certainly, *Schindler’s List* established an important role for the Gentile savior, Oskar Schindler, who put himself in danger to do what he knew was right. This is not to say that there are no righteous Polish Gentiles: there are 6,683 who are honored at Yad Vashem.²⁹ Rather it is to suggest that in 1990s American Holocaust culture, rescuers received a more prominent place in the Washington, DC Holocaust Museum and at other monuments. There were other factors pushing Jews to emphasize Polish heroism, however, such as the fall of the communist regime making travel into and out of Poland significantly easier, especially for those that were originally from Poland. This increased the amount of interaction between Jews and

²⁸ Ben Schreibman, Interview #55213, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #14.

²⁹ “Righteous Among Nations: Poland,” Yad Vashem Righteous Among Nations Department, updated January 1, 2018, <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/pdf-drupal/poland.pdf>.

Poles and led to greater understanding of Polish history and culture, and a sense of why Poles may have interpreted Jews as a threat during and after the war.³⁰ All of these factors combined made Jews more likely to discuss positive experiences they had with Poles.

There are two types of hero stories told in the 1990s by Jews about Poles: Poles protecting Jews from other Poles, and Poles protecting Jews from Germans (and occasionally both). Musia Schwartz, for example, described the former. After returning to her hometown after the war, she was almost killed by an antisemite. Hidden up in a house, she recalled:

There was banging on the door and there were gunshots, and he said, ‘give me the Jew.’ This is after the war. I survived the war, but I remember that [...] I remember the simple peasant, with the clay floors and the spittoons said ‘ok kid, get out the back door while I’m talking to him, I’ll keep him here, and run...in this direction...get on the train and get out.

Schwartz continued her testimony, saying that she has “difficulties with the categorical stereotypes ‘Poles are like this’”. This one Pole who came after the war, and what did this one kid bother you, he wanted to shoot me, and here is this peasant who helped me escape.” She countered her own statement, however, by going on to describe a Polish officer who attempted to rape her.³¹ Schwartz clearly struggled to sort through the mix of experiences she had when she returned to Poland, of “good” Poles and “bad” Poles. She was hesitant to disregard either experience, and so she brought both to the table.³²

Survivors emphasized Poles who went against orders or the status quo, either in a German camp or Polish community setting. Cila Drucker, for example, was saved by a Polish guard. In a camp in Kezmarok, Czechoslovakia, Drucker would sing Jewish songs for the guard. When the guard was told to shoot her, he instead told her that the next morning, “at 5am the doors would open, and we could go...he said we must let him sleep, because of

³⁰ Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 7.

³¹ Musia Schwartz, Interview #2581, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #102.

³² Musia Schwartz, Interview #2581, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #102.

course we wouldn't sleep, but if he didn't sleep, he might change his mind and not let us out. So next morning at 5 o'clock he opened the door."³³

What is ever present in these stories, however, was that each action of a “good” Pole was situated as counter to the norm – counter to the rampant antisemitism. Amalia Mesner, for example, described how: “not everyone had this antisemitic attitude. There were some people that were normal, that had a normal attitude, normal feelings and attitude to others.” Mesner presented this argument of “normality” as counter to the majority. Other survivors talk about Poles who aided their escapes, only for the “small” price of all the person’s possessions and money. There is no question that there were righteous Polish Gentiles, who risked their own lives to save Jews. But if one listens carefully to Polish-Jewish survivor testimony, the good is always emphasized and honored as brave—as the exception—in the context of categorical Polish antisemitism and violence.³⁴

Much remained consistent across the 1946 and 1990s testimonies, yet much also changed in terms of how survivors contextualized and interpreted their stories. The prevalence of the word “Polak,” as well as a general prejudice and unmasked dislike of Poles was not as manifest in 1946. This seeped into survivors’ narrative memories through the sharing of stories and experiences more broadly— as well as through emigration from Poland. After all, these were survivors who became American citizens. They feel a distance from Poland in the 1990s that they did not feel in 1946.

A common question asked by interviewers in the VHA interviews was “would you return to Poland today?” This question almost always brought up fear, anger, and frustration for survivors. Some said their children have visited, curious about their homeland. Others

³³ Cila Drucker, Interview #54138, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #97.

³⁴ Amalia Mesner, Interview #54046, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #95, #120.

said they had visited but felt the familiar sense of antisemitism with which they grew up.

Henry Ellen, for example, tied the denunciation process in with his refusal to return to

Poland:

Ellen: “The Poles didn’t help. If they did, there were so few that they didn’t even know until after the war. I believe they found a few people, who hid a few Jews and saved them. But most of them wouldn’t, if they saw you around, they’d go to a German and say ‘Juden’, they’d report you.”

Interviewer: “Do you trust the Poles today?”

Ellen: “No.”

Interviewer: “Will you never?”

Ellen: ‘No. No. That’s why I gave up my Polish citizenship. My Polish passport.’”

Ellen’s sentiment here was quite typical— no, he did not trust Poles, he explained, as he pointed his finger and broke into German: “Jude.” In many senses, it does not matter at all, to Poles or Jews, exactly how many Poles aided Jews, or how many Poles denounced them. Holocaust survivors blamed and mistrusted Poles based on their actions during and immediately after the war— because, as one historian has explained, of the “words [survivors] heard and remember, words of satisfaction at Hitler’s solution to Poland’s ‘Jewish Question’, words of sudden praise for Jews who decided to die fighting, words of total indifference.” “Juden” is seared into Jewish survivors’ Holocaust memory as a memory of Polish, rather than German, denunciators. The pointed finger was just as visually present in the 1990s testimonies as it was in the 1946 ones. The survivors “remember fear, fear not directly of the German but of any Poles approaching them on the street or in the forests, fear they could not contain from their eyes, fear that so often betrayed them.”³⁵ One must also remember that these are the stories of the Jews that survived. Perhaps betrayal, denunciation and collaboration would be even more relevant in the testimony of those that were murdered, if they too could share their stories.³⁶

³⁵ I. Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory: the Jew in Contemporary Poland* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publications, 1999), 45.

³⁶ Henry Ellen, Interview #31828, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #17.

Chapter 5

Why did they do it? Moral Reasoning in 1946

After months of transcribing testimony from the Video History Archive at USC, I found myself repeatedly referring to “moral reasoning” to describe how survivors discussed Poles in the 1990s. Survivors made moral judgements – positive, neutral, or negative – about Polish actions both during and after the war. After noting these trends in the 1990s interviews, I returned to the Boder archives to see what I could find there in terms of moral reasoning. What I noticed initially was a lack of “moral reasoning” similar to what I had found in the 1990s interviews. Upon closer inspection, however, a series of assumptions and similarities in how survivors in the Boder interviews approached moral commentary on Polish-Jewish relations became clear.

The 1946 interviews rarely invoked any sort of obvious or direct moral reasoning. There are a few reasons for this. First, survivors were not yet bound by the duty of “passing forward” their experiences onto a future generation. David Boder did not ask the people he interviewed to create meaning out of their hardships. Second, where moral reasoning did appear in the Boder interviews, it appeared in the form of explanations of the causes of Polish antisemitism, if they gave any explanation at all. In this case, survivors often described Polish antisemitism as a product of German antisemitism. The 1946 moral reasoning, therefore, was the assumption that the German occupation awakened a “dark side” of some Poles, prompting them to act in antisemitic ways. The 1946 interviews rarely invoked the obvious and direct sort of reasoning that one would traditionally associate with a survivor testimony—the type that will be discussed in chapter six with the 1990s interviews. While those interviews would be oriented towards the future, the 1946 interviews were much more concerned with the immediate past and its impact on contemporary Polish antisemitism.

The “Poison of Hitlerism”¹

The moral reasoning of the Boder interviewees, when there was any, focused on what one survivor termed “the Poison of Hitlerism.” The survivor who employed this term was Rabbi Solomon Horowitz, who explained to Boder that after the war ended:

There remained in Poland the poison of Hitlerism. There it did more damage than any place else. There Hitlerism took such deep roots that Hitlerism exists there today like an epidemic. It is not possible to notice that anything has changed there, whether Hitlerism has fallen. It is not possible to observe in the Polish regions that anything had happened. It looks like Hitlerism. [...] The extermination of Jews is still advocated, and they are doing. [...] I saw how in Warsaw with every step I take outside I am in danger. I caught slaps. I was beaten. And I had to walk. Every step I had to walk. I couldn't ride on a streetcar. I had to shave. I shaved off the beard, concealed it with the kerchief. Thus, I saw that it is impossible for me to carry out my Jewish life.

In his interview, Horowitz did not mention previous experiences of Polish antisemitism prior to the war. He believed that it was Hitler, and the Nazi occupation, which had instilled this antisemitism. One could consider this to be a coping mechanism – a steadfast refusal to believe that his neighbors and other fellow Poles would be so violent and antisemitic.²

Survivors who mentioned the influence of the Nazis explained that German antisemitism “infected” the Polish masses and made them violent and antisemitic. Another survivor, Mira Milgram, summarized this belief well: “Hitler has worked [in Poland] too long. It is a wordless anti-Semitism.”³ Boder’s interviewees who suggested that Polish antisemitism was an outgrowth of Nazi antisemitism had an additional motivation for doing

¹ Solomon Horowitz, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish by David Boder (September 8, 1946), Bellevue, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=horowitzS>.

² Solomon Horowitz, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish by David Boder (September 8, 1946), Bellevue, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=horowitzS>.

For the remainder of the interview citations in the chapter, I will be putting the citations at the ends of paragraphs. The citation will correspond to the entire paragraph unless otherwise noted. The citation will correspond to the entire paragraph unless otherwise noted. Paragraphs that contain multiple survivor interviews will have each interview cited at the end of the quote rather than all at the end to prevent confusion.

³ Mira Milgram, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German by David Boder (August 9, 1946), Paris, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=milgramM>.

so in 1946: the contemporary political climate in Europe at the time. Some who espoused these views were in Paris for a socialist conference and planned to return to Poland shortly thereafter. Thus, it would have been highly unlikely that they would have made any particularly disparaging comments about Polish antisemitism considering that they still planned to reconstruct their lives in Poland, and it was mostly the active communists that mention the Germans' influence (although Horowitz himself was not active in the Polish communist party in the postwar period). As a result of the rise of communism in Poland, some of these survivors were sympathetic to the Polish government at that time. Pragmatically speaking, that government had looked the other way in the face of Jewish emigration from Poland in 1946-1947 and was granting legal protections for Jews that remained (however little they attempted to enforce them). More obviously in the case of Polish Jews who were only visiting Paris as part of a socialist conference when Boder interviewed them, they put the "blame" of antisemitism on the Germans than the Poles. This was the turbulent political background behind the moral reasoning that surfaced in these 1946 interviews.

While Solomon Horowitz used the phrase "the Poison of Hitlerism," to describe the root of Polish antisemitism, another survivor, Hadassah Marcus, described those who perpetrated postwar antisemitism as "the dark masses." These "dark masses" were, according to 1946 interviewees, distinct from the larger Polish population. As Hadassah Marcus described the "carnages and [...] slaughters" of postwar Poland, Boder interrupted her to ask: "how do you explain it? The Poles wanted to be free of the Germans. They knew that the German was attacking the Jews. How does it come that a Pole should do the same thing?" Marcus responded: "[the German] has left a legacy which, it seems like, will remain in Poland, in spite of the government being strongly against it. But it isn't strong enough to stand up against the dark masses which still reign and maintain themselves in Poland." Like

Horowitz, Marcus attributed the origins of Polish violence against Jews to the Germans. But she further emphasized that these “dark masses” are opposed by the Polish government. In doing so, she carefully situated her argument of Polish antisemitism to be as non-critical of the communist regime as possible. Living in Lodz after the war, Marcus was a prominent Zionist who faced criticism from Jewish communists in the government, who wanted Jews to remain in the country. By the time Marcus was interviewed by Boder, she was in transit to Palestine, yet remained at least slightly optimistic, or at least pretended to, in the face of Polish antisemitism that the Polish communist state would help protect the Polish-Jewish Community.⁴

The “poison of Hitlerism” theory was almost always tied to a positive attitude towards the Polish government. Joseph Ferber, who fled Poland with Lena Kuechler and her orphans, was questioned by Boder about the attitude of the Polish Government:

The government was and is to this day a very good one. It is a loyal...it is liberal government and a truly democratic one, but, unfortunately, many elements, wild elements, of the people, who are infected by the antisemitic disciples of Hitler’s school [...] who are supported, as it had been proven with documents by [General] Anders and by the so called government...Polish government in London, these are carrying out to this day an ugly, [...] loathsome action [against] the Jews. [They] attack, make pogroms, kill Jews so that barely a day passes in Poland when there is not a Jewish burnt offering. This is, alas the ugly spot on the body of the new democratic Poland. Naturally the Polish government fights against them, but it is too weak to control these wild beasts.

Ferber claimed that the Polish resistance fighters led by the wartime Polish government based in London, were to blame for the remaining antisemitic violence. By linking “good” Poles to the communist government and “bad” Poles to the nationalist cause, Ferber created a compelling narrative for international support for the communist regime.⁵

⁴ Hadassah Marcus, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish by David Boder (September 13, 1946), Hénonville, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=marcusH>.

⁵ Joseph Ferber, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish by David Boder (September 8, 1946), Bellevue, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=ferberN>.

Some survivors advocated for return of Jews to Poland, despite the danger of antisemitic violence. One particular survivor, Jacob Wilf, was only in Paris for an ORT conference before returning to Poland as part of an attempt to reinvigorate the Jewish communist community. Beyond his own personal support for the communist regime, as vice-chairman of the Regional Committee of Upper Silesia, Wilf had sought to rebuild the Jewish community in Poland. As such, Wilf downplayed the danger of antisemitism in Poland at the time. Wilf spent some time in his interview emphasizing the financial support given by the Polish government to Jewish Regional Committees in order to protect and aid returning Polish Jews. Describing his work for the Jewish Regional committee both at the time of his interview and the year prior, Wilf was enthusiastic:

Wilf: “And so the committees form the only organization which endeavors to return the Jewish masses to productivity. They endeavor that every Jew wherever he may live, should depend on his specialty, on his qualifications, that he may take his part in the reconstruction of the country and do his part in productive labors. That is what the committees which render material assistance are for [. . .] the exclusive help which the committees have received were the funds which they got from the Polish government.”

Boder: “From the Polish government?”

Wilf: “Exclusively from the Polish government.”

For Wilf, it was extremely important that the Jewish reconstruction project in Poland be linked to the new communist regime, and that it was made clear that the government was supporting Polish Jews. Having an understanding of the antisemitic violence occurring in Poland in 1946, Boder asked Wilf about the Kielce pogrom. Wilf responded by emphasizing how quickly the Polish government had brought about justice by putting the key “instigators” on trial almost immediately, meting out harsh sentences, and swiftly carrying out executions. Boder, however, was not satisfied: “So you think that the events of the pogrom will help to quieten things down, that the population will be pacified?” Wilf continued to insist that the “strong hand of the Polish government” was taking control of the situation. Moreover, he was quick to point out the rising “Polish working masses” that were rising against the “Polish

fascists.” He viewed the Kielce pogrom as an attempt by the fascists to “harm the prestige of the Polish people in [the eyes of] foreign countries; and in order to evoke unrest at home.” The Polish government now hired Jewish workers, meaning, according to Wilf, “we now have in the Polish government responsible men of state.” It was crucial, in Wilf’s mind, that the communist government be understood globally as a force of tolerance towards Jews that would eventually take full control of Poland.⁶

The Role of the Church

Surprisingly few Boder interviewees mentioned the influences of religious antisemitism when describing their experiences with Polish violence, especially in light of how many 1990s survivors did in fact mention religion as the root of antisemitic feelings in Poland. One survivor who did mention it, Joseph Ferber, did so in the context of Jewish orphans who he was then helping to care for. Hearing Ferber describe recovering these children from churches and monasteries, Boder asks: “do you think that the monasteries and convents hid children who said they were not Jewish? Do you think that the monasteries would not have hidden Jewish children if they knew it?” Ferber replies: “No. If they would have known that they are Jewish children, perhaps they would not have hidden them.” This offhand comment was the only one of its kind in the 1946 interviews. Much later, survivors would make numerous comments condemning Catholic antisemitism and its role in perpetuating widespread antisemitism in Poland.⁷

⁶ Jacob Wilf, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in German, Yiddish and Russian by David Boder (August 17, 1946), Paris, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=wilfJ>.

⁷ Joseph Ferber, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview in Yiddish by David Boder (September 8, 1946), Bellevue, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=ferberN>.

Examining 1946 moral reasoning is much more an analysis of what was missing rather than what was present in the testimony. The “poison of Hitlerism” argument, ultimately, was less “moral reasoning” as it would be manifest in the 1990s and more a commentary on the contemporary political situation of Poland (the rise of communism). The “poison of Hitlerism” argument disappeared by the 1990s for a number of reasons. First, the communist government fell in 1989, severing the association a survivor may have felt between being pro-communist (and therefore hesitant to condemn all Poles on account of the new government), and arguing that “the poison of Hitlerism” spurred antisemitism. Second, the accumulation of stories like those discussed in chapters one and three about extortion, denunciation, and general violence against Jews by Poles contributed to a wider Jewish collective memory, painting a picture of postwar Polish antisemitism as more continuous with previous acts of Polish antisemitism. It was more clearly evident with years of hindsight that Polish antisemitism in the postwar period (and specifically the prevalence of the “blood libel”) was not entirely a product of the influence of Nazi antisemitism.

The lack of more morally complex arguments about Polish antisemitism, despite Boder occasionally prodding survivors on the topic, speaks to how significant the prevalence and consistency of survivor moral reasoning is in the case of 1990s interviews. It suggests further that the moral reasoning present in later survivor interviews is likely a product of the collective memory of stories, like those described in chapters one and three of this thesis. By sharing these collective experiences, survivors were able to put forth their own judgements about their own personal memories. The interviews given by the 1946 DPs represent an entirely different world view and interpretation of events than the ones given by 1990s survivors, despite the fact that both groups of survivors lived in the same Polish towns and experienced the same antisemitism. While there remain some consistencies from 1946 to 1996 (the core memory), survivors in the 1990s have a much wider, collective view of

history. In the 1990s, survivors did not simply want to share what happened— they wanted to discuss *why*.

Part III – Chapter 6

Why did they do it? Moral Reasoning in the 1990s

As addressed in the introduction to this thesis, much changed in the years between 1946 and the 1990s, both in the lives of survivors themselves and in collective comprehension of the Holocaust both in the United States and elsewhere. As Hannah Pollin-Galay demonstrated in her book, *Ecologies of Witnessing*, the place to which survivors emigrated, or if they decided to remain in their homeland, deeply affected how they gave testimony, and more specifically the framework of moral interpretation that they employed. In examining the VHA testimony of Polish-Jewish survivors that emigrated to the United States, certain trends emerge as to how those survivors interpret the encounters they had with Polish antisemitism and Polish-German collaboration during the war.

Revisiting the Influence of Time and Place on Testimony

For American testimonies, which utilize a *narrative-allegorical* framework, Pollin-Galay found that accusations of guilt, specifically, became more nuanced than those of their Lithuanian or Israeli counterparts. American survivors focus on the “large crisis of values that unites phenomena of persecution in the Holocaust,” and often “treat the topic of smaller-scale, local collaboration more loosely as a precursor to what was to come or as a symptom of a much larger problem.”¹ What emerges in Pollin-Galay’s work is how this focus on local perpetration was not used by survivors to accuse Lithuanian, or in the case of this thesis, Polish people of betrayal, but rather became a means of transforming these experiences into allegorical narratives that teach us a moral lesson.² As Sharon Kangisser Cohen demonstrates

¹ Hannah Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing: Language, Place, and Holocaust Testimony* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 113.

² Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing*, 125.

in her book *Testimony & Time*, in which she compares the testimonies of individual survivors who were reinterviewed, survivors were actually “more moderate” in their later interviews, occasionally even reserving judgment against individuals who harmed them or refused to help them during the war.³ Combining Cohen’s analysis of changes in testimony over time with Pollin-Galay’s analysis of different locations of interviews, it is clear that both physical and temporal distance altered survivors’ moral reasoning, but not their core memory. What emerged in the VHA interviews is how survivors re-emphasized and examined their stories in different manners than they may have originally in the postwar period, with the benefit of hindsight and in the setting of an American tradition of allegory.

Moral Balancing Acts in the 1990s: Reconciling Narrative and Collective Memory

Perhaps the hallmark of 1990s VHA interviews was the act of “moral balancing”: Survivors attempt to reconcile their personal “narrative” memories with what they, consciously or unconsciously, view to be the generally accepted “Jewish” collective memory. Perhaps the most central finding of my thesis, this reconciliation process has produced a trove of interviews in which survivors constructed moral arguments to defend, condemn, or merely contribute to modern understandings of Polish-Jewish relations. Most survivors presented the “good” with the “bad” and often avoided making generalized statements. They used their personal experiences as counter-weights to what they viewed as mischaracterizations of Polish actions, whether in positive or negative senses. Given the framework of these interviews – the setting of 1990s Holocaust testimony practices generally, and the context of the VHA interviews specifically – survivors intentionally addressed the fraught subject of Polish-Jewish relations in order to contribute their personal, specific experiences to the larger

³ Sharon Kangisser Cohen, *Testimony & Time: Holocaust Survivors Remember* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Press, 2014), 229.

body of testimony. I analyze this moral balancing act, first, to see what survivors *think* was the collective memory of Polish-Jewish relations and, second, to see how survivors incorporated, refuted, and presented their own personal memories in relation to their interpretation of the *collective*.

Practically every VHA interview of a Polish-Jewish survivor included some type of monologue in which survivors struggle with the moral categorization of the Polish people. Take Victor Penzer, for example. He said: “there were also Poles that were hiding me, knowing that I was Jewish. Somebody said that Poles were very bad. He only happened to see the bad Poles. There were many good Poles.”⁴ Penzer felt he needed to refute the assumption that “Poles were very bad.” He relied on his personal experience, being hidden by Poles, to draw the conclusion: “there were many good Poles.” Even survivors who have every reason to condemn Poles hesitate to do so. Isadore Goldlist, for example, actually faced the camera during his VHA interview and listed the names of his Polish neighbors who killed his brother and dragged his sister to the Nazis. Yet he still struggled to condemn wholesale all Poles. He explained:

After all, I was saved by Poles, so sometimes, you think what the Poles did, but then the other way, this Polak did save us, he didn't want us, that we should be saved, but somehow, we were saved...personally I'm torn. As you see, I was not in concentration camps. I was not in any camps. I was not hungry. But yet, I think the biggest blame is the Poles, because they didn't have to kill Jews, they had no order to kill Jews, they were killing Jews because maybe they thought their economic situation was gonna be better. Or uh, that's the only reason I can think of.⁵

Goldlist was honest when he told his interviewer: “personally I'm torn.” He put “what the Poles did” in contrast with “this Polak” who saved him, juxtaposing the personal and the collective, as well as juxtaposing a neutral word “Pole” with a derogatory term, “Polak.” He

⁴ Victor Penzer, Interview #15983, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #167. For the remainder of the interview citations in the chapter, I will be putting the citations at the ends of paragraphs. The citation will correspond to the entire paragraph unless otherwise noted. The citation will correspond to the entire paragraph unless otherwise noted. Paragraphs that contain multiple survivor interviews will have each interview cited at the end of the quote rather than all at the end to prevent confusion.

⁵ Isadore Goldlist, Interview #40110, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #24.

nevertheless arrived at a “moral” conclusion, one that was repeated by a number of survivors in their moral balancing; he argued that Poles were not only victims of the Germans, but also agents. They exercised moral agency. When they killed Jews, they did so not because they had to, but because they sought their own financial gain. A number of survivors in the 1990s used this reasoning for why they ultimately condemn Polish behavior. It was, in their minds, about the intent behind the action, and also about their space for agency.

Survivors occasionally pondered out loud why Poles would collaborate with Germans given that they were also so poorly treated by the Germans. This echoed David Boder’s same questions to survivors in 1946, although back then survivors seemed to assume that Polish-German collaboration was logical. In the 1990s, survivors like Paula Adler struggled with that very question. Adler described a pregnant Polish woman she knew who was killed by a German, and how that woman’s husband continued to work for the German police after her murder. She asked: “what mentality was of the Poles, that they were persecuted as well? And yet they cooperated with them, they did, I am certain.” She continued, saying (as many 1990s survivors did), that if it were not for the Poles “a lot of Jews...90 percent of Jews could have survived in Poland.” According to this reasoning, Germans couldn’t figure out who was Jewish and who was Polish: “in the small towns. Jews could have lived there, even as Jews. If they didn’t denounce them...there were Poles who hid Jews. But you could count them, in the millions of Poles, you can count 1, 2, 3, that’s what my husband says.” So, Adler engages in the moral balancing again, comparing the number of Poles who hid Jews versus those that denounced them. Survivors struggled to reconcile the contradictory experiences they had during and immediately after the war, as well as the contradictory information they received later from both Polish and Jewish narratives.⁶

⁶ Paula Adler, Interview #53935, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #103.

Jews Killing Jesus: The Catholic Church and Polish Antisemitism

One particular aspect of Polish collaboration and antisemitism emphasized in the VHA archives and not at all in the Boder testimonies was the role of the Catholic Church in promoting antisemitic tropes. Accusations against the Polish Catholic Church range from priests delivering sermons preaching the “sins” of the Jews, to churchgoers simply ignoring the prevalent religious antisemitism and refusing to combat it, to those Poles who perpetuated violence against Jews in the name of religion. It is worth pointing out that over ten percent of priests in German-occupied Poland registered themselves as Volksdeutsche, a disproportionately high number compared to that of the Polish population more generally.⁷ Regardless of the specific sentiments of the Polish clergy, by the 1990s American Polish-Jewish survivors certainly formed an extremely negative impression of the role of the Catholic Church in sparking antisemitism, a viewpoint not that survivors had not voiced to David Boder in 1946.

There are a number of possible explanations for why American Jewish survivors later felt the impulse to emphasize the role of the Catholic Church. Jewish-Catholic reconciliation took on importance in the intervening decades, particularly after revelations about the silence of the Pope Pius II and Rolf Hochhuth’s play, *The Deputy*, about the conduct of the Vatican in the face of Nazism. Furthermore, freedom from religious persecution is deeply rooted in American culture. Additionally, religious antisemitism is a different sort of antisemitism than that of Nazi German antisemitism, which emphasized a racially-based hierarchy. Discussing the role of religion highlights the distinctly Polish aspect of this antisemitism.

When asked by their interviewers if they experienced Polish antisemitism, survivors consistently noted the role of the Catholic church in fostering the antisemitism they

⁷ Peter-Klaus Friedrich, “Collaboration in a ‘Land without a Quisling’: Patterns of Cooperation with the Nazi German Occupation Regime in Poland during World War II,” 735.

experienced. Marvin Zborowski, for example, explained how a lack of education left Poles vulnerable to the teachings of the Church: “The great part of it that the Polish people had—and I want to have it on record—the only education that the Polish people had is to go to church and to listen what the Church is saying. Therefore, the Church has a big part. Don't blame the Poles, and don't blame anybody.”⁸ Zborowski carefully structured blame—he emphasized the lack of education of the Poles, as a function of Church education, rather than the Polish people itself. Ida Gelbart, another survivor, discussed the issue of Catholic antisemitism with a sort of sadness, explaining: “it was an unfortunate situation.” The “Jews were the enemies” but only as “perpetuated by the people in the Church and [...] carried over to the lay people outside, and the lay people just handled it as they could [...] I can't say everyone was like this, we had many, many nice Polish people.”⁹ Blaming the Church once again appeared as an acceptable way to pass moral judgment. Gelbart was hesitant to make blanket statements, emphasizing that there were “many, many nice Polish people.” But nevertheless, the blame on the Church was significant in that it would be more immediate to blame the Nazis, or the dire economic situation for the amount of Polish antisemitism present. In pointing to the role of the Church, these survivors appeared to be seeking deeper and more longstanding roots for Polish antisemitism.

Another survivor who emphasized the role of the Church, Peretz Rotenberg, broke through the traditional VHA format to make his point about Polish antisemitism. In his interview, Rotenberg went out of his way to divert from the question-and-answer format, explaining: “No, I wanted just to say, it's Polaks, too. I wanted to give you— let the world know something.” Rotenberg felt that it was so important to speak about the Poles that he choose to step out of the traditional framework of the interview. He was not speaking

⁸ Marvin Zborowski, Interview #13690, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #143.

⁹ Ida Gelbart, Interview #52326, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #13.

anecdotally, nor personally but rather generally (and negatively, as he uses the derogatory term “Polak,” twice) when he claimed: “in the Polaks, by the Polish people, there is born antisemites. The Catholic Church— I wanted this to know the world— the Catholic Church especially pushed the Polaks to be antisemit[ic].” What was distinctly “American” about this is the repetition of the phrase: “I want the world to know” – telling or giving testimony in this American framework implies a moral lesson. Rotenberg felt so deeply about this issue that he used his platform as a survivor to emphasize, and perhaps even correct, the record on the issue of Polish antisemitism.¹⁰

More generally, survivors in the 1990s often put forth moral balancing acts where they presented both positive and negative impressions of Poles at the same time. They rarely made extreme statements about Poles. Rather, they tried to place all their knowledge, both personal and learned, into their testimony, and then waded through it, bringing the interviewer with them on their journey. Isadore Goldlist provided a good example of this balancing act. In Goldlist’s challenge to reconcile his personal experience with his general perception of Polish antisemitism, the listener gets a glimpse into the complexity for this survivor of sorting through the religious, moral, and narrative implications of his own experiences:

Maybe they blame the Jews for Jesus, that the Jews killed Jesus, but then if you take an intelligent Pole, he knows that Jesus was a Jew...or the other way, that the Romans killed Jesus. There are three reasons people kill [...] there is religion, there is money, and there is women. Those are the three things that people are killing people for [...] but this Pole did save us, and in a way, he risked his life for us. It’s true he wanted money, it’s true he didn’t think it was going to take that long, and it’s true that he even thought that we going to do who knows what to him or his brothers...but he did save us.

First, Goldlist put forth his own reason for why the church might be antisemitic, but then immediately undermined that theory by discussing why upper-class Poles likely would not

¹⁰ Peretz Rotenberg, Interview #769, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #13

have ascribed to that belief. Goldlist had the vantage point of hindsight, education, and personal experience. He made an overarching claim about why people kill other people, but even within that claim the Holocaust does not appear to fit. Finally, he returned to personal experience: the “Pole did save us.” He qualified this statement with the financial extortion and his Polish rescuer’s fears but returns to what he knows and the undeniable fact: “he did save us.”¹¹

Discussions of Polish antisemitism emerge in VHA interviews in a different context, one that does not reveal moral balancing acts so much as the pervasive and persistent quality of Polish antisemitism. Perhaps the most interesting example of this lies in the accounts of Jews who had the experience, as children, of being entrusted to Catholic families to be hidden during the war. These children provide examples of how pervasive, and how convincing, Polish Catholic stereotypes of Jews were. Here we find that Jewish survivors who as children were raised by Poles absorbed Polish antisemitic stereotypes and, as adults, still struggled to let go of those stereotypes. Most of these children did not know they were Jewish, and many of their adopted parents did not want to know whether or not their adopted children were Jews. Two survivors, Anita Ekstein and Romana Farrington, were interviewed by the VHA about their experiences in hiding as “Poles”. Ekstein explained how she heard stories: “Jews took gentile children's blood to make matzah...and these are the kind of stories I heard! And I didn't know anyone else except my parents...and them I didn't see for four years, so I was afraid of Jews. I wanted to remain a Catholic.” She resisted for years the idea that she was really Jewish.¹²

Romana Farrington, another survivor who was adopted by a Polish family, remained tolerant of negative Polish attitudes towards Jews, much more so than almost any other

¹¹ Isadore Goldlist, Interview #40110, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #24.

¹² Anita Ekstein, Interview #54077, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #53.

survivor whose VHA testimony I viewed. Farrington's experiences provided her with a rare insight into how Polish Catholicism supplied a moral foundation that tightly wound together faith and antisemitism. While Anita Ekstein was older by the time she was hidden (five years old in 1939), Farrington was only born in 1941 and had no memories of her previous life. At the end of the war, her Jewish parents came and took her back— and they remained in Poland for several years. Beyond the trauma of being separated from the only family she had known; Farrington went from being a “normal” Polish Catholic child to a Jewish one:

We're the only Jewish family, once my parents did get me back, my real parents [...] I felt embarrassed. I felt ashamed of having Jewish parents, even though I felt I wasn't a Jew. I was christened. I was baptized, yes. So, I felt that I should not be criticized like that. But at the same time also, I could not understand. The more I got to know my parents, the more I realized that they were very nice people, even though they were Jewish. And no matter how many times I would go to church and pray to God, whatever, I still was very discriminated against. Kids were calling me a dirty Jew anyway. And it wasn't a pleasant atmosphere to live in. It's a very small town. Everybody knows everybody.

For years, Farrington attempted to maintain her Catholic identity, and implicitly her own bias against Jews. At her young age, she did not appear to fully understand the dangers of her identity, but clearly had absorbed Catholic antisemitic stereotypes. She told her interviewer of the time she threw a tantrum because her (Jewish) father wouldn't let her do something she wanted to do:

And I started screaming, the Jew is killing me! The Jew is killing me! Now we lived right in front, as I showed you, right in front of the church. And we were at the entrance, you know, this was a brownstone, which you could enter to your rooms on one little— a few steps. And all of a sudden two guys from outside are coming into the house, running in to help the poor Roman Catholic child. Because the Jew is killing this poor child.

In retrospect, Farrington understood how close she came to getting her father killed. But it took years for some of her most deep-seated misconceptions about Jews to change. It was only when she visited Israel years later that she realized Jews weren't all rich, that Jews were good and bad, and that they worked in all professions. She was “just so delighted to see that they are just normal people like everybody else.” Farrington still used “them” to describe

Jews rather than “us”. Despite being Jewish herself and being harassed by Poles in her town, Farrington remained sympathetic to the Poles: “I can't tolerate the idea when people tell you all Poles are antisemites, all Poles are horrible. Because that's not the case. There are many antisemites, true. But there are some wonderful people too.” Farrington used her personal experience as evidence of “good Poles:” “I wouldn't be alive here, if not these— if not these Roman Catholic people. And I know very, very many people who were very helpful to Jews.” What is notable about Farrington’s experience crossing the Polish-Catholic to Jewish barrier in postwar Poland is how different her understanding of Polish-Jewish relations has remained, given that she herself was a victim of antisemitism for years.¹³

Not mentioned at all in the Boder interviews, the explanation of Polish Catholicism as a source of antisemitism became common in the 1990s testimonies. First, this reflected the disappearance of the “poison of Hitlerism” theory presented in chapter five— survivors in the 1990s tied Polish antisemitism of the war and postwar years to previous instances of Polish antisemitism rather than to the German occupation “instilling” that antisemitism. Second, by the 1990s, historians that study the history of Polish antisemitism attributed much of its prevalence in Poland to the Catholic Church.¹⁴ Survivors could have read or known about this historical analysis. Altogether, according to 1990s testimony, the influence of the Church was a deeply ingrained facet of Polish antisemitism, while it was not so (or at least was not mentioned) according to 1946 testimony.

Collective Memory: Revisions and “Failures”

Recent 1990s Holocaust movies and events, as well as the fifty intervening years of history between 1946 and the 1990s, both obviously and subtly colored survivor testimony.

¹³ Romana Farrington, Interview #16214, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #32.

¹⁴ See: Richard Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933-1939* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Survivors, such as Morris Cweigenberg, intertwined their testimony and knowledge from popular sources, sometimes consciously and sometimes not. Cweigenberg explicitly told his interviewer: “I’m going to point out again. I’m sure you’ve read books, you’ve seen pictures, seen movies, but there are no words, I was telling the story, I don’t have the words to describe it, what was happening...the Poles helped, the Ukrainians helped, as a matter of fact they were worse than the Germans.”¹⁵ Cweigenberg carefully emphasized his discussion of Poles (and Ukrainians) as a crucial piece of his testimony. He viewed his words as contributing to a larger body of work (“I’m sure you’ve read books, you’ve seen pictures...”). Survivors were painfully conscious of the influence of their own words as part of a larger body of cultural references. Yet another VHA survivor-interviewee, Eddie Ilan, struggled to depict his feelings about Poles: “I don’t think I should. I should not categorize it as all of Poland, but most of the Polish people don’t deserve to have me speak their language. But that’s my feeling... So, I learned not to hate. But up to a point, I can’t forgive. And I guess I’ll die with it, that I can’t forgive certain things that shouldn’t have been done to me. I didn’t do anything to them.”¹⁶ Ilan clearly wanted to forgive the Poles. But he couldn’t. He knew that he “should,” and obviously did not want to be on record saying otherwise. Back and forth he went, ending with his personal experience, stating that he was ultimately bitter because: “The Germans didn’t kill my sister. Poles did.” Who was asking him to forgive Poles? Not his interviewer. Once again, a survivor’s perception of what was being asked has invaded the interview.

Over the course of transcribing testimony, I often wished I had access to the “numbers”: exactly how many Poles saved Jews? How many Poles denounced Jews? How many killed Jews? It is difficult to reconcile the conflicting collective memories of Poles and

¹⁵ Morris Cweigenberg, Interview #55086, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #8, 73.

¹⁶ Eddie Ilan, Interview #2230, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #135.

Jews in the true absence of “numbers,” and even more so difficult for survivors to reconcile their personal experiences with what they view as “collective memory” – whether it be Jewish or Polish. These is a challenge in both cases to reconcile personal feelings and narratives with general sentiments (or one’s sense of general sentiments). Tola Wehrman encapsulated this well when she said: “I know people that were really helped by the Polish people. I know a lot more that perished because of the Polish people.” The same could be said for Jews describing Poles: I transcribed interviews of people who had positive interactions with Poles, but I transcribed many more interviews with Jewish survivors who feel deeply betrayed by the Polish people. This raises the question of what to make of such a phenomenon. It appears that the testimonies confirm the work of historians who have shown the extent to which Polish betrayers of Jews played a role in the “success” of the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” in Poland.¹⁷

However, it is critical to reflect on how testimony *is* history and also *changes* history. Ultimately, survivors appeared to put equal, if not more, weight on their experiences in contrast with the “numbers.” Whether or not the “numbers” reflected the pervasiveness of Polish antisemitism is less relevant to this thesis than the belief survivors had that this is true. Their contributions to Jewish collective memory in the form of testimony, even fifty years after the fact, continued to change what that collective memory was. The more weight survivors placed on the role of Poles in the Holocaust, the more weight it had.

What remained consistent across 1990s American Polish-Jewish testimony was the ease with which survivors accessed and articulated their emotions. Sally Marco, for example, discussed her feelings about the prospect of ever visiting or returning to Poland by saying:

¹⁷ Tola Wehrman, Interview #55051, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #108, 159.

“and to go back there, I could not— I could not give them one [sic] of my hard-earned money to spend in Poland. Because if I am bitter, I'm bitter because it could be different.”¹⁸ Another survivor, Moshe Rojek, expressed similar emotions: “for some reason, we have worse feelings about Poland than about Germany. Because I think we feel that the biggest tragedy—our biggest tragedy was that the Poles were so much helping the Germans.”¹⁹ Perhaps Yetta Posorski explained it best when her interviewer asked her opinion of the Polish people: “some of them were good and, you see, when I was growing up it was depression, it was a coal town, and people worked three days a week and didn't have enough. And Jews were the scapegoats. Prejudice started, from the cradle [...] they used to say don't cry or the Jew will get you! So, we lived together in one building, but we were not together.”²⁰ This was the crux of the pain: “we lived together in one building, but we were not together.” The emotion behind the accusations leveled against Poles by Jews in the 1990s was anchored in the realization that it was their neighbors who proved more willing to follow their antisemitism than to follow the ethics of being a neighbor, yet there was no easy way to put an entire country on trial for not resisting the Germans more aggressively. In many senses, survivors were grasping for ways to articulate how and why Polish-German collaboration, so deeply affected them.

It is this mixture of survivor memory and what survivors thought the collective memory was that defined the VHA Polish-Jewish interviews. In this “age of uncertainty,” the Holocaust has emerged in American culture as a “moral touchstone.”²¹ Survivors are expected to condemn, and indeed do condemn antisemitism, as well as to maintain a balanced perspective of Poles. For survivors, these factors have combined to produce a version of

¹⁸ Sally Marco, Interview #71, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #126.

¹⁹ Moshe Rojek, Interview #9091, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #87.

²⁰ Yetta Posorski, Interview #54245, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #96.

²¹ Daniel Levy, Natan Sznajder, and Assenka Oksiloff, *Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Publishers 2006), 18.

testimony in which past and present, cultural and moral values, as well as personal life experiences, have blended into one sort of moral balancing act. Ultimately, there is an expectation, both generally and for each survivor specifically, that there are “lessons to learn” from the Holocaust.²² These lessons are meant to teach tolerance, to condemn the ways in which the Christian religion can perpetuate violence against minorities, and to instill a “moral compass” to reject immoral leadership. In American culture, survivors were granted a “moral authority” on the basis of their survival, which allowed them greater space to “reveal the right path to follow.”²³ There is a popular adage that says: “those who do not remember history are doomed to repeat it.” In the late twentieth century, the United States tasked survivors with teaching the country’s citizens the moral lessons of history.

²² Michael Marrus, *Lessons of the Holocaust* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 5.

²³ Michael Marrus, *Lessons of the Holocaust*, 9.

Conclusion

On my first search through the Video History Archive at the USC Shoah Foundation, I stumbled upon resistance fighter Arnold Shay's testimony. Shay described his multiple escapes from work camps, making suits for the Auschwitz Nazi officials, as well as his involvement in plans for the Auschwitz revolt. I was fascinated by Shay's gripping tales of rebellion and detailed description of how he managed to make suits for Nazi officials in a concentration camp. What was most surprising to me, however, was when Shay told his interviewer about why he didn't try to escape Auschwitz, even though he had the resources to do so: "I felt more secure under the watchful eye of the Gestapo and the SS, inside the camp, than outside the camp, with my Poles [...] In the camp I knew my enemies. In the camp I knew who to watch out for."¹ I paused the video, and thought to myself: *Is this survivor really saying that Auschwitz was safer than the Polish Countryside?* It appeared that he was, and I knew I had to delve deeper. Thus, my thesis began with this question: what did Jews think about Poles at the time of the Holocaust and what did they think later? With that in mind, I unpaused the video and Shay's testimony rolled on.

This thesis has attempted to lay out for the reader how and why the Jewish collective memory of Polish-Jewish relations during and after the Second World War has changed. Through two major testimony collections – the Boder testimonies from 1946 and the 1990s Video History Archive – I have examined differences over time. The three parts of this thesis have examined the core changes in survivors' explanations of why they originally left Poland, why Poles denounced or extorted Jews, collaborated with Germans, and why Poles perpetrated acts of violence against Jews. In part I, I explored the explanations survivors gave

¹ Arnold Shay, Interview #2014, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Segment #110.

for what had produced postwar Polish antisemitism and the role of Polish antisemitism in their emigration. In part II, the focus was on the three types stories survivors told about Polish-Jewish relations: denunciation, collaboration, and as well as acts of heroism. Finally, in part III, I analyzed the “moral reasoning” survivors engaged in and what that reveals about changes in Holocaust memory. Often the differences between the 1946 testimonies and the 1990s testimonies were subtle; occasionally they were conspicuous. Putting aside specifics for a moment, this thesis has contributed a new argument to the fields of both testimony analysis and Polish-Jewish relations: survivor testimony regarding Polish antisemitism did, indeed, change in significant ways over time. This finding is key because it demonstrates that collective memory changes not only societal perceptions of history, but it can also change the perspectives of the witnesses of history themselves. It demonstrates most fundamentally the power of the present to alter our understanding of the past.

Parts I, II, and III are organized to separate out the key components of testimony about Polish-Jewish relations according to the order in which survivors tended to discuss those events. First, part I dealt with the immediate events that survivors were experiencing in 1946 (leaving Poland). Part II examined the content of the stories survivors chose to share, while part III looks at the types of analysis survivors performed when they critically examined (or failed to critically examine) their own experiences. This order reflected the organization which survivors tended to utilize when discussing memory—beginning with the most immediate event (for the Boder interviewees this is the postwar violence of 1946), then to the stories of prior experiences, and then to the analysis of those experiences.

Part I of this thesis – chapters one and two – examined how survivors explained their decisions to leave Poland, first while they were in transit (1946) and then in the 1990s after fifty or so years in retrospect. Between 1946 and the 1990s, the Kielce pogrom grew in significance for survivors and in Jewish collective memory as a whole. By the 1990s, it had

become *the* primary cause for why survivors had left Poland in the immediate postwar years, whereas in 1946, it had been represented as but one among many examples of prevailing antisemitic attitudes. Additionally, 1946 interviews tended to blame German attitudes for creating the culture of antisemitism that persisted after the occupation in the postwar period, while survivors in the 1990s tended to view Polish antisemitism as something distinct from German antisemitism. The similarities between these two bodies of testimony are as significant as the differences, I argue. While the interpretations underwent changes, the postwar events being described remained consistent: the killing, hurting, threatening and stealing from Jews by Poles, creating an environment that was inhospitable for the majority of Polish Jews who survived the war.

Part II – chapters three and four – reinforced the conclusions reached in Part I: while the core memory (“what happened”) remained the same, the interpretations changed. This section compared three main narrative themes – denunciation, collaboration, and salvation – and what happened to them between 1946 and the 1990s. Chapter four introduced the role of place, and how the 1990s United States became the context for a massive increase in testimony recording and the popularization of survivor testimony. The passage of time between survivors’ wartime trauma and their present lives meant that by the 1990s, the stories survivors told were in many cases more historically “accurate” in their understanding of Polish antisemitism as continuous rather than prompted by Nazi antisemitism. The survivors had new conceptualizations of how their personal experiences fit into a larger Polish-Jewish experience. As survivors became more confident in the historical “truth” of their experiences, they were more likely to reorganize their stories to emphasize Polish-Jewish conflict, occasionally jumping from prewar, wartime, and postwar experiences of Polish antisemitism to pull out examples in order to make a point about the consistency of those experiences over time. Their narratives emphasized the role of Polish antisemitism as

continuous, allowing for fluid movement between time frames, while in 1946 interviews, survivors tended to discuss violence with less regard as to who was doing the harming.

The third and final part of this thesis examined the moral interpretations (what I call moral reasoning) that survivors employed in 1946 and the 1990s to describe why Poles were antisemitic. While parts I and II worked to establish the differences in interpretation (narrative memory) between these two time periods, chapters five and six of Part III delved more into why these interpretations changed, yielding key insights into why Jewish collective memory as a whole had changed since the Second World War. Borrowing a term from Rabbi Solomon Horowitz, 1946 moral reasoning can be summed up by the following: it was the “Poison of Hitlerism” that made Poles so antisemitic.² As discussed in chapter five, this moral reasoning had much more to do with the political changes occurring in Poland in 1946 than any great understanding of why Poles acted the way they did. The culminating chapter of this thesis, chapter six, drew on historian Hannah Pollin-Galay’s theory of American “narrative-allegorical” testimony framework to understand the moral arguments of the 1990s.³ In this period, survivors engaged in a moral balancing act, where they put their personal experiences in concert with what they view as the then-pervasive belief about Polish-Jewish relations, to create a morally weighted system. This system is intended to teach the listener and future generations about tolerance in two respects. Survivors exercised tolerance by restraining themselves from all-out anti-Polish judgment, and they demonstrated the pernicious effects of intolerance by recounting the ways in which some Poles, both actively and passively, aided the murder of Jews.

This argument about collective memory and the discrepancy between Polish and Jewish interpretations of Polish-Jewish relations is not relegated simply to our understanding

² Solomon Horowitz, *Voices of the Holocaust*, Interview by David Boder (September 8, 1946), Bellevue, France, <http://voices.iit.edu/interviewee?doc=horowitzS>.

³ Hannah Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing: Language, Place, and Holocaust Testimony* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 113.

of this history. Rather, the debate continues to have ramifications in the present, causing political rifts between Poland and other countries (specifically Israel and the United States) in the past few years. In 2012, for example, President Barack Obama drew the ire of Poland's government for using the phrase "Polish death camp" while presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Jan Karski (a revered Polish resistance fighter).⁴ The Polish Foreign Minister to the United States referred to Obama's speech as an "outrageous error," and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk demanded an apology from Obama. Polish anger over the use of the term "Polish death camp" has much to do with Polish collective memory of the complexity of the German occupation of Poland, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. The phrase "Polish death camps" – which is, for the record, a historically inaccurate term used as a shorthand to refer to the German extermination camps in Occupied Poland– implies that Poles were entirely or at least partially responsible for mass murder. The moral reasoning implied by oft-used terms such as "Polish death camps," "victims," "collaborator," "bystander," et cetera often belie a bias against Poles, one that the Polish people and government are quick to correct.

In late January 2018, Poland's Senate passed a bill that quickly became known as the "Holocaust law" on the global stage.⁵ Composed by the PiS – the "Law and Justice Party" (the majority party in Poland) – the law was intended to make it illegal to accuse Poles of perpetrating the Holocaust (with exceptions for academic and artistic work). Signed into law by Polish president Andrzej Duda, the law prompted so much international outrage, particularly in Israel and the United States, that by late June 2018 all criminal penalties associated with the law were repealed. Accused of "stifl[ing] free speech" and embarking on

⁴ Mark Landler, "Polish Premier Denounces Obama for Referring to a 'Polish Death Camp,'" *The New York Times*, last modified May 30, 2012, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/31/world/europe/poland-bristles-as-obama-says-polish-death-camps.html>.

⁵ "Poland's Holocaust Law is a Dangerous Threat to Free Speech," *Time*, last modified March 9, 2018, accessed April 9, 2018, www.time.com/5193301/poland-holocaust-law-freedom-speech-amnesty/.

historical revisionism, the Polish government was forced diplomatically to back down.⁶ At the same time, in other, less visible ways, the Polish government and Polish nationalists have continued to take steps to intimidate scholars from conducting research on the Holocaust that shows Poland in an unfavorable light.⁷

In the midst of this dispute about the “Holocaust law,” the news media turned to Holocaust survivors as the moral authority on the subject. In an article entitled “What do Holocaust survivors think of ‘Polish Death Camps?’” a number of survivors interviewed exhibited a similar sort of “moral balancing act” discussed in this thesis. One survivor, Freda Wineman, who emigrated to the United Kingdom, insisted: “you must always remember the Righteous Among the Nations, but that was a minority. Some people I know were hidden by Christians.” While bringing such cases of Polish rescuers to mind, her emphasis remained on Polish betrayal and on the longstanding roots of Polish antisemitism: “the Poles were already antisemitic before the war.” she said. The article ended with survivor Shmuel Atzmon’s statement: “memories have their own laws, and the first rule of memory is to remember what happened – not what we would like to remember.”⁸

Yet this thesis has suggested that perhaps the opposite is true— that memory is *not* what happened, but rather how our interpretations of events change over time based on our life experiences, greater understanding of historical events, and the incorporation of

⁶ Marc Santora, “Poland’s Holocaust Law Weakened After ‘Storm and Consternation,’” *The New York Times*, last modified June 27, 2018, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/27/world/europe/poland-holocaust-law.html>.

⁷ Camille Stromboni, “Un Colloque Sur l’Histoire de la Shoah Perturbe Par des Nationalistes Polonais” *Le Monde*, last modified March 1, 2019, accessed April 2, 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/03/01/un-colloque-sur-l-histoire-de-la-shoah-perturbe-par-des-nationalistes-polonais_5429753_3224.html.

Jonathan Brent, “The War Between Polish Nationalism and Holocaust History,” *Tablet*, last modified April 12, 2019, accessed April 14, 2019, https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/283216/polish-nationalism-and-holocaust-history?fbclid=IwAR0RHe4q7h5vMWad04_72QflotzLolSWHkgcEJe7-zRmytFjrAR-Uai96pE.

⁸ Tamara Zieve, “What do Holocaust Survivors Think of ‘Polish Death Camps?’” *The Jerusalem Post*, last modified February 3, 2018, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/What-do-Holocaust-survivors-think-of-Polish-death-camps-540491>.

collective memory into our own narrative memories. I hope this thesis makes readers question how we construct the past as history *and* memory, and the inherent truths and fallacies of those constructions. Memory is not always fact, but it always contains some truth, revealing much about the person or people who remember it.

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1946 Survivor Glossary

Itzhak Brin

- Interviewed in Yiddish and German by David Boder on September 13, 1946 in Hénonville, France.

Nechama Epstein-Kozłowski

- Interviewed in Yiddish by David Boder on August 31, 1946 in Tradate, Italy.

Joseph Ferber

- Interviewed in Yiddish by David Boder on September 8, 1946 in Bellevue, France.

Leon Frim

- Interviewed in German by David Boder on September 25, 1946 in Wiesbaden, Germany.

Alexander Gertner

- Interviewed in Yiddish by David Boder on August 26, 1946 in Genève, Switzerland.

Bertha Goldwasser

- Interviewed in German by David Boder on August 4, 1946 in Paris, France.

Rachel Gurmanova

- Interviewed in Yiddish and German by David Boder on August 17, 1946 in Paris, France.

Adolph Heisler

- Interviewed in German by David Boder on August 27, 1946 in Genève, Switzerland.

Mendel Herskovitz

- Interviewed Yiddish by David Boder on July 31, 1946 in Fontenay-aux-Roses, France.

Solomon Horowitz

- Interviewed in Yiddish by David Boder on September 12, 1946 in Hénonville, France.

Abraham Kimmelman

- Interviewed in German by David Boder on August 27, 1946 in Genève, Switzerland.

Lena Kuechler

- Interviewed in German, Polish, Russian by David Boder on September 8, 1946 in Bellevue, France.

Dina Linik

- Interviewed in Russian and Yiddish by David Boder on September 13, 1946 in Hénonville, France.

Hadassah Marcus

- Interviewed in Yiddish by David Boder on September 13, 1946 in Hénonville, France.

Mira Milgram

- Interviewed in German by David Boder on August 9, 1946 in Paris, France.

Clara Neiman

- Interviewed in Russian and Yiddish by David Boder on September 12, 1946 in Hénonville, France.

Jacob Schwarzfitter

- Interviewed in German by David Boder on August 31, 1946 in Tradate, Italy.

Roma Tcharnabroda

- Interviewed in German by David Boder on September 24, 1946 in München, Germany.

Jacob Wilf

- Interviewed in German, Yiddish and Russian by David Boder on August 17, 1946 in Paris, France.

1990s Survivor Glossary

Paula Adler

- Interviewed on February 7, 1989 in Toronto, Ontario.
- Born September 9, 1919 in Łódź, Poland.

Shlomo Berger

- Interviewed December 12, 1995 in Los Angeles, California.
- Born October 28, 1919 in Lwów, Poland.

Sam Blumenfeld

- Interviewed on August 22, 1996 in Monticello, New York.
- Born June 12, 1924 in Olkusz, Poland.

Irma Broclawski

- Interviewed on November 14, 1991 in San Francisco, California.
- Born January 26, 1925 in Wisnicz, Poland.

Morris Cweigenberg

- Interviewed on June 9, 1993 in Houston, Texas.
- Born April 9, 1932 in Deblin-Irena, Poland.

Cila Drucker

- Interviewed on August 24, 1992 in Toronto, Ontario.
- Born April 6, 1928 in Mielec, Poland.

Celina Fein

- Interviewed on April 24, 1996 in Houston, Texas.
- Born February 10, 1925 in Warsaw, Poland.

Anita Ekstein

- Interviewed on August 7, 1996 in Toronto, Ontario.
- Born July 18, 1934 in Lwów, Poland.

Henry Ellen

- Interviewed on May 26, 1997 in Harare, Zimbabwe.
- Born August 4, 1928 in Deblin-Irena Poland.

Romana Farrington

- Interviewed on June 10, 1996 in New York, New York.
- Born June 9, 1941 in Krosniewice, Poland.

Ida Gelbart

- Interviewed on December 16, 1993 in California.
- Born June 18, 1925 in Kielce, Poland.

Sara Gelender

- Interviewed on June 25, 1992 in Fairfax, California.
- Born 1927 in Warsaw, Poland.

Leon Ginsburg

- Interviewed December 21, 1995 in Tappan, New York.
- Born June 12, 1932 in Wolyn Poland.

Annie Glass

- Interviewed May 13, 1996 in Los Angeles, California.
- Born June 15, 1924 in Kielce, Poland.

Isadore Goldlist

- Interviewed March 18, 1998 in Willowdale, Ontario.
- Born August 4, 1929 in Kielce, Poland.

Elizabeth Grotch

- Interviewed February 21, 1997 in El Cerrito, California.
- Born May 6, 1938 in Bialystok, Poland.

Pinchas Gutter

- Interviewed January 12, 1995 in Toronto, Ontario.
- Born July 21, 1932 in Lodz, Poland

Eddie Ilan

- Interviewed May 5, 1995 in Los Angeles, California.
- Born July 14, 1928 in Sochaczew, Poland.

Harry Kaminsky

- Interviewed November 10, 1994 in California.
- Born January 5, 1915 in Kielce, Poland.

Dana Kelisky

- Interviewed September 11, 2008 in San Francisco, California.
- Born October 30, 1930 in Warsaw, Poland.

Henrietta Kelly

- Interviewed May 21, 1997 in London, England.
- Born May 29, 1938 in Krakow, Poland.

Roza Kent

- Interviewed September 21, 1989 in Palm Desert, California.
- Born 1921 in Poland.

Irene Lenkinski

- Interviewed December 22, 1987 in Toronto, Ontario.
- Born June 3, 1919 in Lodz, Poland.

Sally Marco

- Interviewed August 22, 1994 in Los Angeles, California.
- Born November, 11, 1923 in Lodz, Poland.

Maurice Markheim

- Interviewed January 4, 1995 in Los Angeles, California.
- Born February 14, 1923 in Krakow, Poland.

Amalia Mesner

- Interviewed February 23, 1994 in Montreal, Quebec .
- Born November 22, 1923 in Tarnopol, Poland.

Felix Pierson

- Interviewed May 16, 1995 in Delray Beach, Florida.
- Born February 17, 1926 in Lask, Poland.

Yetta Posesorski

- Interviewed February 29, 1988 in Toronto, Ontario.
- Born June 15, 1923 in Dabrowa Gornicza, Poland.

Tema Ratafia

- Interviewed February 19, 1997 in Palm Beach, Florida.

- Born November 6, 1925 in Vilna, Poland.
- Toby Reinstein*
 - Interviewed February 2, 1988 in Toronto, Ontario.
 - Born February 16, 1922 in Tarnów, Poland.
- Moshe Rojek*
 - Interviewed November 21, 1995 in Toronto, Ontario.
 - Born July 13, 1933 in Warsaw, Poland.
- Mina Rosner*
 - Interviewed November 23, 1988 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.
 - Born October 8, 1913 in Tarnopol, Poland.
- Sol Rosenberg*
 - Interviewed March 9, 1996 in Monroe, Louisiana.
 - Born November 18, 1926 in Warsaw, Poland.
- Peretz Rotenberg*
 - Interviewed January 31, 1995 in Willowdale, Ontario.
 - Born August 17, 1912 in Ciechanów, Poland.
- Richard Rozen*
 - Interviewed September 26, 1996 in Brighton, Australia.
 - Born April 15, 1935 in Kielce, Poland.
- Ben Schreibman*
 - Interviewed March 10, 1995 in Boca Raton, Florida.
 - Born July 1, 1923 in Kielce, Poland.
- Musia Schwartz*
 - Interviewed December 6, 1994 in Montreal, Quebec.
 - Born September 23, 1930 in Tomaszów Lubelski, Poland.
- Michael Selinger*
 - Interviewed October 10, 1996 in West Hartford, Connecticut.
 - Born December 12, 1926 in Szczakowa, Poland.
- Arnold Shay*
 - Interviewed April 10, 1995 in Boca Raton, Florida.
 - Born February 16, 1922 in Bedzin, Poland.
- Leo Silberman*
 - Interviewed December 18, 1996 in Bloomfield, Connecticut.
 - Born December 13, 1928 in Przemysl, Poland.
- Helen Starkman*
 - Interviewed May 18, 1993 in Toronto, Ontario.
 - Born May 11, 1924 in Tarnobezeg, Poland.
- Harriet Solz*
 - Interviewed March 14, 1995 in Forest Hills, New York.
 - Born May 1, 1929 in Krakow, Poland.
- Ben Sosnowicz*
 - Interviewed April 15, 1988 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.
 - Born March 23, 1914 in Zambrów, Poland.
- Hershel Taichman*
 - Interviewed January 14, 1992 in Montreal, Quebec.
 - Born April 24, 1922 in Lublin, Poland.
- Lea Tiefenbach*
 - Interviewed June 12, 1990 in Toronto, Canada.
 - Born December 21, 1920 in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Poland.
- Aron Toll*

- Interviewed September 4, 1998 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Born June 6, 1924 in Osowa Wyszka, Poland.

Tola Wehrman

- Interviewed June 22, 1998 in Montreal, Quebec.
- Born October 26, 1925 in Krakow, Poland.

Betty Wolf

- Interviewed June 25, 1995 in Houston, Texas.
- Born March 31, 1928 in Pultusk, Poland.

Marvin Zborowski

- Interviewed March 27, 1996 in Jamaica Estates, New York.
- Born June 4, 1928 in Kielce, Poland.