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**Dealing with past: memory work and the Jews of Poland.
The case of Mszana Dolna.**

by

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Abstract

This research contributes to the understanding of the process of reconstructing the memory of Jews in contemporary Poland. Focusing on a case study of a town in southern Poland, Mszana Dolna, the study analyses how Jewish/non-Jewish relations and the history of the Jews of the town are remembered by the current inhabitants of Mszana, as well as by Holocaust survivors and their families. The research is based on an interdisciplinary approach to the subject of memory, using in depth oral history interviews, archival and other written materials, as well as participant observation as sources of analysed data.

The study concentrates on the memory of the life in Mszana before, during and after the war in terms of the coexistence of two communities, Jewish and non-Jewish ones. Focusing mainly on the annual commemoration of the shooting of the Jews of Mszana in August 1942 by non-Jewish members of the community and their participation in the educational programmes, the research elucidates the process of regaining the Jewish heritage of the town by non-Jewish inhabitants and incorporating it into the past of the community of Mszana.

Identifying the variety of levels of interactions between Jews and non-Jews before the war, it argues that the interrupted coexistence of both groups in Mszana resulted in the void which remained after the destroyed Jewish community. The memory of Jews found its place in the oral history for several decades. Through examining the forms of remembrance of the Jews in Mszana, this study attempts to illustrate the transition of the memory of Jews from private sphere of life to the public discourse on the Jewish inheritance of the town.

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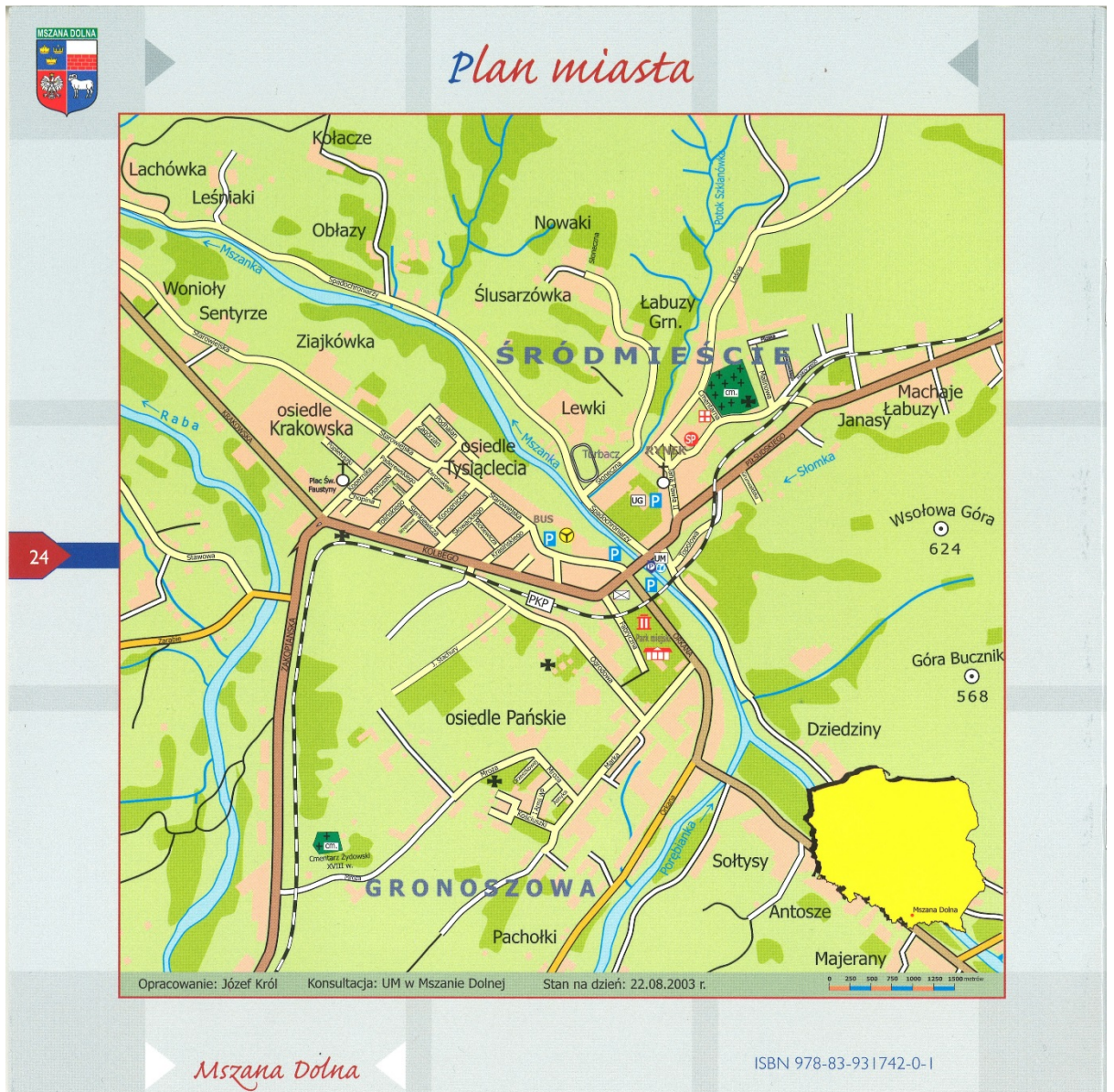
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Map of Mszana Dolna (courtesy of the mayor's office).

Introduction

Out of three million Jews living in Poland before the war there are now just several thousand present. Despite their absence from the everyday life of Poland, traces of their long history remained in the memory of non-Jews. Not everybody wants to cherish this memory - some have troubles with acknowledging its very existence. The centuries-long entanglement of Jews and non-Jews in Poland, however, cannot be easily ignored. The reappearance of the memory of Jews in Poland was one of the elements of reconstructing Polish identity after the collapse of communism in early 1990s. Although the subject of Jewish/non-Jewish relations remains a divisive topic in Polish society, the transformation of attitudes towards the Jewish heritage in Poland was indisputable. Among the many forms of the revival of the memory of Jews, it was the involvement of non-Jewish communities in cultural initiatives, educational programmes, and preservation of local Jewish sites, as well as the commemoration of Jewish victims that are of particular interest for this study.

This research explores the topic of the rediscovery of Jewish heritage in Poland by non-Jewish communities. Based on a case study of a small town in southern Poland, Mszana Dolna, it examines the forms in which the memory work is happening and the importance of the memory of Jews for the inhabitants of the town. It analyses what place the Jews hold in the collective memory of the town and how the local people deal with recollection of their former Jewish neighbours. It shows how the memories are gradually embodied in the wider memory of the town. Through analysis of oral history of the community, as well as available written documents, the study is an attempt to recognise the entanglement between memory and history and the importance of treating both fields as reliable sources for the research. Finally, the study also analyses whether the memory of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Mszana differs between non-Jews and the Holocaust survivors and their families.

The subject of the revival of the memory of Jews in Poland has been tackled by scholars in length, but this study broadens the analysis of the topic in three areas. Firstly, the research concentrates on various aspects of memory work, showing the complexity of the matter. It analyses the personal relations of Jews and non-Jews, the representation of the memory of Jews in the landscape of the town, the engagement of the local population in the commemoration of the Jewish victims, as well as the development of the educational programmes in the schools of Mszana. The fact that the town is a relatively small community provides the opportunity to detailed examination of all these elements of the memory work, without being overwhelmed by the variety and quantity of data.

Secondly, unlike other studies on Jewish/non-Jewish relations which focuses mainly on one period of time, this project takes into consideration the history of Jews and non-Jews in Mszana before, during and after the war. The attempt is to show the memory of the relations as a process throughout the history of the town. This process concerns the current inhabitants of the town, as well as the Holocaust survivors from Mszana and their families.

Finally, the intension is to use in this research a wide range of sources, such as interviews, video and written testimonies, extensive archival materials, unpublished memoirs, personal correspondence, postcard and photographs, as well as direct observation. Moreover, the attempt is to show a multidisciplinary approach to the subject of memory and Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Poland. The approach and methods used in this research vary across disciplines such as history, sociology and anthropology. It is believed that this variety of sources and approaches allows the topic to be perceived as a multi-layered and the one which has to be considered in various dimensions.

To understand the complex relationships between Jews and non-Jews in Poland, it is important to grasp the wider historical context of the Jewish life in Poland. Here special attention should be given to Galicia, the

region Mszana Dolna is a part of. Furthermore, to explore the memory of Jews in Mszana, a theoretical background on the concept of memory is required, with close regard to memory work in contemporary Poland.

Jews of Poland – short overview

The bond of Poles and Jews is almost as old as Polish history. The earliest reference to Jews in Poland in documents comes from 1085.¹ However, the history of Polish Jews started probably in the tenth century when the first Jewish merchants arrived in Poland.² It continued through the following centuries with an influx of Jews from neighbouring countries, mainly from the territory of today's Germany. The Jews who came to Poland in the twelve century were not only merchants, but also scholars and people learned in religion.³ The migration of Jews from Western Europe intensified in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and was caused by the persecution of Jewish people, as well as by overpopulation in Western Europe as well as political, economic and social changes in Germany, Czech Lands and Hungary. The wave of Ashkenazi Jews brought to Poland a well-developed culture, Yiddish language and *kehilot*, the administrative structure of Jewish communities. By the end of fourteenth century, Jewish communities were established in Silesia and the main cities of Poland, with further concentration of Jews in Eastern Galicia.⁴ In the fifteenth century there were around a few thousand Jews in Poland, which means they constituted only about one per cent of population on Polish territory. From twelve main settlements of Jewish communities in Poland by the end of fourteenth century, they grew to

¹ Moshe Rosman. 2011. Poland: Poland before 1795. YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe.

http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Poland/Poland_before_1795 (accessed June 16, 2013); Israel M.Ta-Shma, "On the History of the Jews in twelfth and thirteen Century Poland," POLIN. Jews in early modern Poland. 10 (1997): 287.

² Bernard D. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1800*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973), 19-22.

³ Ta-Shma, "On the History," 288-289.

⁴ This area currently known rather as Eastern Galicia, was previously called Red Ruthenia.

over one hundred a century later.⁵ With Jewish people migrating to Poland, there was a need to regulate their social and legal status so they would be encouraged to settle. Jews brought their skills in finance and often their wealth, therefore it was profitable to create environment which would guarantee their safety and freedom of practicing their religion. In 1264 the Duke of Greater Poland Boleslaus the Pious issued the Statute of Kalisz which granted Jews legal rights and liberties.⁶ The statute was later ratified by subsequent Polish kings. The Statute of Kalisz granted Jews their autonomy in terms of jurisdiction and religion, as well as permission to trade and to practice moneylending. It regulated the rules of trading with Christians and equalized Jewish rights as traders with those which Christians already had. The statute guaranteed the freedom of belief and punishment to those who would desecrate Jewish cemeteries or synagogues. It also forbade accusing Jews of ritual murder, which could have echoed the Pope Innocent IV's denunciation of this matter.⁷ The migration of Jews to the East of Europe intensified throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth century which was caused mainly by further expulsions from German cities. There is no clear data on how many Jewish people exactly were living on the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in sixteenth century, but it was already the biggest concentration of Ashkenazi Jews in Europe. They lived mainly in towns which belonged to the king and nobilities, as they were interested in income which Jewish trade and craft brought, as well as in protection that would be offered to them. There were no Jews in towns owned by the Catholic Church and they were not welcome by the middle class, as they were seen as competition in trade. As a result of this opposition, several towns obtained the *privilegia de non tolerandis Judaeis*, which forbade Jewish people to settle within their boundaries, to own properties on the territory of towns, or even enter them, with the exception of certain days (mainly market days). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the

⁵ *Atlas historii Żydów polskich* (Warszawa: Demart, 2010), 34.

⁶ Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia* (Oxford, Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 41-42.

⁷ In 1247 Innocent IV condemned accusation of the ritual murder of Christian children by Jews.

number of Jewish artisans on Polish territory raised significantly, as did the variety of their trades. Jewish traders became a serious competition for non-Jewish ones. It was ineligible for Jews to join non-Jewish guilds, hence they operated as non-professionals and they were obliged to sell their goods at the lowest possible price. Despite discrimination of Jewish traders by non-Jewish guilds, their goods sold well mainly because of their competitive prices.

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Poland became the European country with the biggest Jewish population, as well as the centre of Jewish religious, cultural and intellectual life. From 25,000 in 1500, the Jewish population expanded to around 150,000 in the seventeenth century.⁸ Jews created their own space with identifiable aspects of life such as communal institutions, law, calendar, religious rituals including dietary restrictions, Yiddish language and Jewish material culture. Religious schools, *yeshivot*, became the most respected centres for Talmudic studies in Europe, where rabbinic scholarship flourished. With the influence of Sabbatai Zevi' messianism, new religious movements emerged in Poland: Frankism and Hasidism. The latter, founded by rabbi Israel Ben Eliezen, often called Ba'al Shem Tov, remained an influential religious tendency among Polish Jews.⁹ The period between 1500 and 1650 is often called the golden age for Polish Jewry. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a land of ethnic and religious diversity, with decentralized, but stable authorities and religious tolerance guaranteed by the Confederation of Warsaw of 1573.¹⁰ Although beneficial for both sides, the coalition between Jews and the nobility was based mainly on economic income brought to the owners of the cities. Jews were not welcome in cities where their presence was not profitable as occurred in Mikołajów, where the mayor banned Jewish

⁸ Polonsky, *Jews in Poland*, 8.

⁹ On Jewish mysticism in eighteenth century see: Gershon D. Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century. A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).; Polonsky. *Jews in Poland*, 114-157.

¹⁰ Michael C. Steinlauf, *Pamięć nieprzyswojona* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Cyklady, 2001), 16.

people from living and trading in the city, arguing that their presence brought more loss than profit.¹¹

Jews were also perceived as a religious threat to Polish Catholicism by the Church. The great flow of Jews into the Polish territory from other European countries alarmed the authorities of the Catholic Church who were afraid of a possible influence of Judaism among believers. Numerous decisions against Jews were made by the synods or expressed in pastoral letters issued by bishops. They mainly considered restrictions in living and trading among Christians, erecting synagogues, employing Christian servants by Jews or respecting Catholic holidays.¹² Negative sentiments towards religious minorities intensified at the end of sixteenth centuries when the Counter-Reformation increased its influence in Poland-Lithuania.

The decline of the towns since the end of the seventeenth century was perceived as the key weakness of the Commonwealth.¹³ Jews were settled mainly in cities and towns, so intended reforms were to influence the lives of Jewish communities as well. Under the inspiration of the philosophy of Enlightenment, there was a tendency in Europe to try to integrate Jews into civil society. Similarly, in the last years of the existence of the Commonwealth, the attempt of the Four Year Parliament was made to transform Polish Jews into 'useful' subjects.¹⁴

The political disintegration of the country resulted in the first partition of Poland-Lithuania in 1772 by three powerful neighbours: Prussia, Austria and Russia. Two further partitions followed in 1793 and 1795 which resulted in the disappearance of Poland from the map of Europe. Austria took the southern region of Poland (Galicia) and Prussia annexed the western areas. Russia incorporated into its borders the biggest part of Poland, including most of the eastern territory. The economic decline of

¹¹ *Atlas*, 99.

¹² Anna Michałowska-Mycielska, Anna, "Wśród Chrześcijan," *Polityka. Historia Żydów Polskich. Pomocnik Historyczny* (2013): 35-36.

¹³ Polonsky, *Jews in Poland*, 211.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 183 – 184.

Polish-Lithuanian cities in western Poland, as well as increasing number of the Jewish population, forced Jews to move into the East of the Commonwealth. By the end of the eighteenth century two-thirds of Jews were settled in eastern regions of Poland.¹⁵ Therefore, after the third partition the majority of Polish Jews fell under the Russian and Austrian authority.

The situation of the Polish Jews under partitions depended on which territory they lived in. It is useful for the purpose of this research to take a closer look at the territory under Austrian partition, the historic region in east central Europe known as Galicia which Mszana was a part of.

Galicia under Habsburg rule embodied a territory of almost 80,000 square kilometres with people of mixed ethnicity, religions and various sense of nationality. The population of Galicia from 2.5 million at the time of the partition rose to over 8 million by the beginning of the First World War.¹⁶ The statistics on percentage of each ethnic group in Galicia are very imprecise, especially when it comes to the early period of the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁷ Then, Poles and Ukrainians accounted for the vast majority of the whole population of Galicia. Jews were the third largest group. West Galicia was occupied predominantly by Poles (7.8 per cent), then Ukrainians (13.2 per cent), Jews (almost 7.6 per cent), Germans (0.3 per cent). In the East Galicia Ukrainians were the biggest ethnic group (64.5 per cent), followed by Poles (21 per cent), Jews (13.7 per cent) and Germans (0.3 per cent). There were other groups which inhabited Galicia, among them were: Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Armenians and Roma.¹⁸

¹⁵ Weinryb, *Jews of Poland*, 117-118.

¹⁶ Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora, Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17.

¹⁷ John-Paul Himka, *Religion and nationality in Western Ukraine: The Greek Catholic Church and the Ruthenian National Movement in Galicia, 1867-1900* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 26-28.

¹⁸ Piotr Eberhardt, *Ethnic Groups and Population Changes in Twentieth-Century Central-Eastern Europe. History, Data and Analysis* (New York, London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 92-93.

The most powerful nationality of all in Galicia, economically, politically as well as in terms of numbers of people, were Poles. They lived largely in big cities and towns and were owners of the vast majority of the estates. Due to feudal conditions in towns and villages of Galicia, Poles were almost a self-contained group with the financial ability to acquire property. Polish landowners were the group with political and social power in the region. Although some of the peasants in Western Galicia were Polish, this social class was represented largely by Ukrainians. The landlord-serf relationship between Poles and Ukrainians caused antagonism between the two nationalities. Feudal obligations of the peasants resulted in significant socio-economic differences among social groups. The industrial backwardness of the region made Galicia the poorest province of the Habsburg Empire.¹⁹

Galicia had one of the largest Jewish communities in the world before the First World War. Ten percent of the whole population of Galicia was Jewish.²⁰ The concentration of Jews was disproportionately high in the eastern part of the region, mainly in big cities and town. Jews constituted over a quarter of inhabitants of the region's two biggest cities, Kraków and Lwów.²¹ Since the thirteenth century Jews were encouraged to settle in lands owned by Polish nobility, as they had an important role in developing and managing the estates. Many served as moneylenders and tax collectors, they leased mills, breweries, stills and sawmills. In this respect, Poles and Jews had common interests, Polish nobles needed Jews to manage their estates and Jews acquired protection in order to manage businesses without being set upon by other groups. Jews were given rights to practice their religion and received protection from the landowners.²² The Jewish community of Galicia kept expanding, despite

¹⁹ Rosa Lehmann, *Symbiosis & Ambivalence Poles & Jews in Small Galician Town* (Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books Ltd., 2001), 32-33.

²⁰ Bohdan Wasiutyński, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w wiekach XIX i XX. Studium statystyczne* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Kasy im. Mianowskiego Instytutu Popierania Nauki, 1930), 90.

²¹ Shanes, *Diaspora, Nationalism*, 17.

²² Israel Bartal and Antony Polonsky, *POLIN. Galicia: Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians, 1772-1918* (Oxford, Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 12, 1999), 4.

pogroms, Cossacks wars and the downfall of the Polish Kingdom in the eighteenth century. By 1880 Jews in Eastern Galicia constituted 45.6 per cent of the city dwellers and 48.1 per cent of the town residents. In the west, the percentage was lower, but still high and rising – 34 per cent and 32.2 per cent respectively.²³ The imbalance of Jewish population between eastern and western part of Galicia was the result of the history of private towns in Poland. In the east, Jews were welcomed in settlements belonged to noblemen, granted privileges and received protection. Many towns in the west still maintain the privilege of *de non tolerandis Judaeis*.

Galician Jews under Austrian control had yet another national group to adapt to. The history of Jews under Habsburg monarchy can be divided into two periods. The first one commenced with the annexation in 1772 and lasted until the Spring of Nations in 1848. The Jewish population was subjected to Austrian bureaucratic restrictions, which tried to stop rapidly increasing numbers of Jews. The second period improved the situation of the Jews of Galicia, culminating in receiving full political rights in 1867. This period ended with the beginning of the First World War.

With the first partition of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century, Austria incorporated territory which was socially, politically and economically different from the rest of the monarchy. It also absorbed Galician Jews which doubled the number of Austrian Jews to about one million in total.²⁴ Such a big Jewish community, especially with their own administrative and judicial independence, was a new phenomenon to the Habsburg monarchy. Austrian authorities applied certain laws to stop the growth of the Jewish population and to take control over the community. Empress Maria Theresa, despite her antisemitism, certainly did not neglect the economic potential of wealthy Jews. In order to balance the numbers of impoverished and rich Jews, the Empress introduced a new legislation allowing Jewish people to emigrate to Poland without any obstacles, but forbidding Polish Jews to migrate to the Austrian territory.

²³ Shanes, *Diaspora, Nationalism*, 18.

²⁴ Stanisław Grodziski, *Historia ustroju społeczno politycznego Galicji, 1772-1848*. (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1971), 62.

However, this law did not apply to wealthy merchants who could afford the high immigration tax and were welcomed in the Habsburg Empire.²⁵ Further attempts were made in 1773 in order to reduce the number of poor Jews of Galicia. In theory, the aim of the newly issued regulation was to expel Jewish beggars to the Polish territory. In practice, this law affected all poor Jews who failed to pay the tax for their families for three consecutive years. Another legislation which discriminated Jews was the prohibition of couples getting married without the authorities' permission and making a payment of yet another tax.²⁶ However, Jews managed to bypass the ban by entering into ritual marriages, which were not under Austrian control. This fact made the authorities acknowledge the main rules of Jewish marriage law and to relax the policy.

Further regulations towards Jews of Galicia were carried out through the reign of Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II. Reducing poor Jewish population and submitting their administration, education and finances to the Austrian control were important goals of the Habsburg's policy. Jewish *kahals* were about to lose administration and judicial autonomy which they were granted under the Polish rule. Furthermore, the aim was also to eliminate religious and ethnic differences, and above all, to finally Germanize the Jews of Galicia. The Jewish population, with their separate language, customs and religion was perceived as a burden to the monarchy. A community with doubtful nationality, co-existing with Poles and Ukrainians, had to be changed into subordinate subjects of the Habsburg monarchy and to integrate into the Habsburg state. The intentions of Joseph II's legislations regarding Jews seemed not to be dictated by antisemitism, but more by an attempt to make Galician Jewry a useful part of the state. His idea was to make the Jews abandon their 'Jewishness' which not only excluded them to become a part of the state, but also was holding the Jews back from progress and improvement.²⁷

²⁵ Grodziski, *Historia ustroju*, 100-101.

²⁶ Shanes, *Diaspora, Nationalism*, 20.

²⁷ William O. McCagg, *A history of Habsburg Jews, 1670-1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 29.

In order to eliminate cultural and ethnic differences and to Germanize Galician Jews, several laws were established to change Jewish names, language, traditions and even the way they dressed. Jews were obliged to give up their Jewish names and take German ones, abandon Polish-style clothes and use German language in schools and administration. From 1788 using Jewish traditional names was punished with arrest and fines and a German school was to be established by each Jewish community. Even so, the process of Germanization of Galician Jews succeeded only partially. Jews remained culturally and religiously distinctive. Instead of Jews blending into the society of Austria, the fact of imposing German language and names on Jews, in effect, distanced them from their Slavic neighbours even more. In the same year, the emperor decided to recruit Jews to the army. Enlisting Jewish men was the act of making them 'fellow-citizens' of the Empire but it made it difficult for religious Jews, who once in the army, were unable to observe their faith.²⁸

The legislations introduced by Maria Theresa and continued by her son Joseph II although inconsistent, changed the status of Galician Jews. Their situation under the Polish rule was far from ideal, but Jews had their autonomy and lived under protection of noblemen. As a part of the Habsburg Empire, Jewish privileges were limited. The monarchy interfered into Jewish legal status, religious practices and aspects of private life. Economically, the situation of Jews deteriorated as well. The authority raised taxes and made leasing distilleries and mills impossible for Jews. As the consequence, many Galician Jews moved to cities and bigger towns, as they refused to take up agriculture.²⁹

The restrictions imposed by the Austrian authority did not meet strong opposition from the Galician Jews. The Jewish population remained indifferent to struggle for better living conditions and equal rights, concentrating on avoiding discriminatory laws. Secular movements which tried to improve the status of Jews in Galicia started their activities in

²⁸ Shanes, *Diaspora, Nationalism*, 23-24.

²⁹ Grodziski, *Historia ustroju*, 58.

Lwów and Kraków in the mid nineteenth century, but it was only with the Spring of Nations when Jews began their political struggle for emancipation. In 1848 many countries in Europe tried to free themselves from authoritarian rulers. The first attempt to fight for Jewish rights took place in 1846, when an insurrection broke out in Kraków. The revolution on Polish territory concentrated on the struggle for reunited, independent Poland, but it also embraced the abolition of serfdom and emancipation of Polish Jews. Some Jews actively joined the fight; others did not support the struggle for independence. The uprising quickly collapsed and Jews had to wait twenty years for their emancipation. Although there was no revolution in Galicia at that time, petitions were sent by Polish and Ukrainian groups to the Austrian ruler to demand rights and social reforms. As a result, all serfs of Galicia were freed and people of Galicia were granted freedom of association and religion.³⁰ Some taxes were lifted, which included abolition of all special Jewish taxes in Galicia. However, in 1851 most of the revolutionary reforms were cancelled by the imperial edict and the Jewish status returned to the one from before 1846.

Jewish emancipation was finally completed in 1867 after Austria was defeated in the war with Prussia and the dualist Austro-Hungarian Empire was established. The Emperor Franz Joseph II issued a series of laws, which established constitutional monarchy. The 'constitution' guaranteed equal treatment and rights to all nationalities of the Empire, included the freedom of religion.³¹

Among national languages recognized by the 'constitution', Yiddish was not included. However, this fact did not restrain Galician Jews from developing literary and journalistic activities, especially in Kraków and Lwów. Weeklies and monthlies in Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish, dedicated to literature and Jewish studies, were published in both cities.³² Freedom of association, as well as antisemitism of political elite served as encouragement for emancipated Jews to form political and social

³⁰ Bartal and Polonsky, *POLIN.Galicia*, 16-17.

³¹ *Atlas*, 182-188.

³² *Meged yerahim* and *Hamevaser*, to mention but a few.

movements. Most of the Jewish organisations were leaning towards Austrian identity, rather than Polish.³³ In contrast, the majority of Jews in Kraków remained pro-Polish and *Agudas Ahim* association can be an example of it. The pro-German course of Jewish political movements was the result of antisemitism rising among the Polish political elite and its opposition to grant Jewish political organisations their independence.

In spite of Kraków and Lwów being Jewish cultural centres, with flourishing theatres, literature and modern schools and libraries, most of rural Galicia remained poor and undeveloped. The region was mostly agrarian with industrial inefficiency. In the mid-nineteenth century, the problem of poverty of the people of Galician was shared by all its inhabitants, Jews and Christians. Emigration became a solution to many people's every day struggle. Most emigrants' destinations were the New World or Vienna.³⁴ Mszana can serve as a good example of a Galician village in this period. Most people were either farmers, or shop keepers and poverty was equally distributed.

Despite considerable emigration, the number of Galician Jews was growing in the years before the First World War. By 1910 Jews constituted 27.5% of the population and were third largest ethnic group after Poles and Ukrainians.³⁵ It was a period of political crisis in Austria and the awakening of national sentiments among Ukrainians and intensifications of them among Poles. Polish political movements were now more diverse. New parties, which concentrated more on social and national issues, were established, such as the Polish Social-Democracy, Polish Peasant Party and Polish National Democracy.³⁶ At the same time, Galician Ukrainians who were emancipated in 1848 and entered the parliament in the 1860s, were gaining their national awareness. The demographic structure, as well as the socioeconomic factor influenced Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Galicia. Jews were caught between Polish

³³ McCagg, *A history*, 120-121.

³⁴ Klaus Hödl, "Galician Jewish Migration to Vienna," *POLIN. Galicia: Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians, 1772-1918* 12 (1999): 152.

³⁵ Alexander V. Prusin, *Nationalizing a borderland: war, ethnicity, and anti-Jewish violence in east Galicia, 1914-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 2.

³⁶ McCagg, *A history*, 182.

and Ukrainian interests, with each group trying to make Jewish people their allies and both treating Jews as harmful elements. The situation on Mszana was less complicated, as there was no Ukrainian minority living in the town.

The situation of Galician Jews deteriorated further after the First World War. Galician territory was a battlefield between Russia and Austria and when the war ended in 1918, the region was left impoverished and plundered by Russian army. Jews were again trapped between Poles who soon won their independence and Ukrainians. Galician Jews were now mostly a part of the re-established Poland. They soon could no longer enjoy their emancipation and their well-established relations with Poles had changed. Jews were banned from government posts, their economic situation worsened due to newly introduced taxation policy and completion of Polish and Ukrainians co-operatives. Jews of the Polish Second Republic belonged to different classes and had various social statuses. Galicia remained a poor region, with limited industries and control of the right to emigrate.³⁷ However, it was the period of Galician Jews organising themselves in associations and political movements. They were establishing economic and welfare support institutions which provided aid for Jewish merchants and artisans. Hebrew schools were organised by movements such as *Tarbut* and *Agudas Yisroel*.

The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century was a period of polemics on the nature of Polish identity and the emergence of new political movements. The discussion embraced questions on whether or not Polish identity should include peasants, women, non-Roman Catholics and ethnic minorities. The place of Jews in the nature of Polishness was one of the matters raised. Two main ideologies, which dominated Polish political life in the twentieth century, emerged from the debate: nationalism and socialism. The first saw the Germans as the

³⁷Issac Lewin and Nathan M. Gelber, *A history of Polish Jewry during the revival of Poland*. (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1990), 229-230.

main enemies of Poles, the latter claimed the Russians were the biggest threat to independent Poland.

Nationalism, represented by the National Democratic Movement (*Narodowa Demokracja*, also known as *Endecja*), undermined the idea represented by the Positivists a generation before, that Jewish integration was possible and necessary for the efficiency of Polish society and future independence. The leader of the movement, Roman Dmowski, believed that to reach these two goals, Poland has to abandon the ideology of international brotherhood and instead, Poles should concentrate on national egotism. There was no place for Jews, or any other minorities, in this exclusive vision of Polishness.³⁸ Dmowski made antisemitism an important part of his politics. He blamed Jews for preventing formation of Polish middle class and doubted that Jews could ever become 'genuinely' Polish.

The opposition movement of socialists was represented by the Polish Socialist Party (*PPS*) with Józef Piłsudski as the founder and the leader of the party. Piłsudski's ideology combined the idea of social justice with the ethos of Polish nobility and presented a vision of an independent Poland which would embrace minorities, as long as they considered themselves patriots.³⁹ Not surprisingly, PPS gained supporters among Jews.

Alongside the emergence of political ideologies in the Kingdom of Poland, there was an unexpected development of Jewish culture. Hebrew literature remained accessible only for elites and it was not very popular in the Kingdom. Warsaw became the centre of literature in Yiddish, with Mendele Moykher-Sforim (1836 – 1917) as the father of Yiddish literature. Other writers like Sholem Aleichem (1859 – 1916) and Yitskhok Leybush Peretz (1852 – 1915) emerged. Apart from literature, several newspapers in Yiddish were published. Among them *Der Moment* (1910 – 1939), *Varshoyer Yudishe Tsaytung* (1867 - 1868), *Der Fraynd* (1903 - 1912)

³⁸ Polonsky, *Jews in Poland*, 96-98.

³⁹ Steinlauf, *Pamięć*, 26.

and *Hajnt* (1908 - 1939). At the same time, the Yiddish theatre was flourishing with Ester Rachel Kamińska as the leading star.⁴⁰

The outbreak of the First World War put the three empires which partitioned Poland in conflict with each other. Polish Jews and non-Jewish Poles, as well as several other nations were fighting on both sides. The defeat of Germany in November 1918 was not the end of the conflict. The civil war between Red and White Army finished in 1921 with the victory of the Bolsheviks. All three empires collapsed, Austria and Germany defeated in the war, Russia destroyed by the revolution. Poland re-emerged in 1918, after over a century of partitions. Its independence was confirmed in June 1919 by the Treaty of Versailles and until 1921 Poland was still fighting for some territories on its eastern border. The Second Polish Republic was finally recognised in 1923. Poland between the wars was a mixture of ethnicities. One third of the population was Ukrainian, Jewish, Belorussian and German. The Jewish population of the Second Republic was not homogenous, the communities varied depending on the part of Poland they lived in. In Prussian Poland the percentage of Jews was small, they constituted less than one per cent of the population.⁴¹ Most of the already Germanized Jews moved to big cities before the First World War, others followed after the independence of Poland. Ten per cent of Galicia's population was Jewish, with a fairly large group of learned professionals, but also with a poor economic situation of its Jewish communities.⁴² The territory previously under Russian partition had the highest percentage of Jews. About twelve per cent of population was Jewish and their economic and social situation varied depending on whether they lived in the Kingdom of Poland or the Pale of Settlement.⁴³ Jews in the Kingdom had almost full autonomy since 1861; those who lived in the territory incorporated into Russia had to wait for such rights until 1931.

⁴⁰ For more information on the history of Yiddish literature see: Leo Wiener, *The history of Yiddish Literature in the nineteenth century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899); Accessed September 10, 2014.

<http://www.archive.org/stream/cu31924026882229#page/n5/mode/2up>

⁴¹ Polonsky, *Jews in Poland*, 60.

⁴² *Ibid*, 61.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 61-62.

The discussion among historians on whether the period between two wars was for the Polish Jews a positive or negative time is still ongoing and lively. Some, like Joseph Marcus, Norman Davies and many Polish scholars, claim that inter-war Poland created a good environment for Polish Jewry to develop economically and socially. For others, among them Celia Heller and Paweł Korzec, the situation between the wars is seen as destructive for the Polish Jewry and as a prelude to the tragedy of the Holocaust.⁴⁴ The evaluation of this period in history is more complex than these two extreme views. As Polonsky underlines, the twenty one years between the wars were not homogenous in terms of social and political conditions.⁴⁵ The 1920s were still full of hope for democracy and economic development in the newly re-established Poland. In contrast, the 1930s was the time of political turmoil, with economic instability and rising antisemitism. The rivalry between the National Democrats and Socialists, which already started before the First World War, intensified in independent Poland. Two different visions of the country clashed even more during the Polish-Soviet war in 1920. The place of minorities, especially the Jewish one, in social and political life of Poland was one of the issues which divided these two parties. It remained so even after the May Coup in 1925 when Piłsudski took over the power.

Almost half of all Jews of the Second Republic lived in cities and towns. They constituted ten per cent of the whole population of the country. The census from 1931 shows three million three hundred thousand people of the Mosaic denomination.⁴⁶ Although the majority of Jews was still shopkeepers and craftsmen, they now had access to other professions. They were vastly overrepresented in commerce, among doctors and lawyers. By 1931, half of the doctors, one-third of lawyers and sixty per cent of those in commerce were Jewish.⁴⁷ They were also present as land owners, bankers and owners of large factories. As a result of the

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 54-56.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 58.

⁴⁶ *Atlas*, 247.

⁴⁷ Steinlauf, *Pamięć*, 28.

process of emancipation, Jews belonged now to various social classes. The diversity of social groups to which Jews belonged was noticeable in the community of Mszana which will be explored in further sections.

The declaration of independence of Poland in 1918 and following three years struggle for Poland's frontiers were particularly difficult for Jews. As a result of anti-Jewish violence, which was caused by identifying Jews with Soviets, between 350 and 500 Jews were killed.⁴⁸ For the same reason Jews were accused of disloyalty to Poland during the Polish-Soviet conflict in 1920. It was in the 1930s when anti-Jewish sentiments intensified. But it was a period of economic decline and the eruption of social conflicts, for which Jews were partially blamed. As an effect of growing antisemitism, Jewish shopkeepers were boycotted, young people of Jewish origin had difficulties in entering schools and Universities and those who gained professional qualifications abroad were refused recognition. It is worth noticing that the change of attitude towards the Jews in Poland in the 1930s was mentioned by some of the inhabitants of Mszana, as explained in later sections of the study. The goal of the 'cold pogrom' was to make Jews to emigrate. Although the violence against the Jews in Poland had its strong opponents among socialists and some of the intelligentsia, antisemitism and the 'Jewish question' on the eve of the Second World War were public facts.

When Nazi Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, the country did not stand a chance to defeat the enemy. Poland was a newly re-established independence with a small, unequipped army. On 17 September the Soviet Union crossed the eastern borderlands of Poland. The country was now divided between two powerful aggressors. The situation of Polish Jews in two occupation zones was very different. Under the Nazi rule, Jews were concentrated in ghettos, persecuted and gradually exterminated. The Soviets, despite cancelling all Jewish parties and social organisations, abolished anti-Jewish laws and supported

⁴⁸ Polonsky, *Jews in Poland*, 44-45.

participation of the Jews in the new order.⁴⁹ For Poles the Soviets and the Nazis were equal enemies and the fact that Jews did not perceive it in the same way had tragic consequences in the Jewish/non-Jewish relations during and after the war.

The Nazis divided Poland into two parts: the Reich and the General Government. The latter consisted of one-third of pre-war territory of Poland, with Warsaw, Kraków and half the population of Poland. Unlike in other conquered countries, the Nazis did not seek political collaborators in Poland. The population was to be exploited as labour force for the needs of the German army. All Poles above fourteen years of age had to work; about a million of them were sent to work in Germany. In order to make Polish people obedient slaves, the Nazis destroyed Polish elites. Thousands of teachers, military officers, professors, priests and landowners were arrested and murdered.⁵⁰ Furthermore, universities and secondary schools were closed and most cultural events banned. As a response to the Nazi terror, Poland created a large and effective resistant movement, with the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) as the governing organization which had around 350 000 members. The Home Army operated on the territory of Mszana, with members of the movement hiding in the surrounding forests.

The attitude of the German occupier towards the Jews was a consequence of the Nazi Jewish policy which considered the 'Jewish question' to be the ultimate problem of Europe.⁵¹ After the invasion of Poland Jews were expelled from the area incorporated into Germany and within the General Government their freedom of movement was severely restricted. They were also obligated to wear a Star of David on an armband or attached to their clothes. From the very beginning of the war Jews had to leave their homes and move to ghettos where high mortality was caused by poor conditions of living, overpopulation and slave labour. At this stage the Nazis did not yet plan the mass murder of the Jews, but

⁴⁹ Ibid, 362.

⁵⁰ Steinlauf, *Pamięć*, 39.

⁵¹ Christopher Browning, *The origins of the Final Solution. The evolution of the Nazi Jewish policy 1939-1942* (London: Arrow Books, 2005), 10.

to concentrate, exploit and rob them. It changed after the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. The new order which Hitler planned to bring was determined to eliminate Jews and pave the way for the 'racially pure' future territory of the Germans. The implementation of the Nazis' policy of mass murder began with mobile special operations units (*Einsatzgruppen*). The killing squads were acting behind the front lines murdering the Jews in the eastern part of Poland by shooting and later gassing them in vans. Between July and December 1941 about one million Jews were killed in this way.⁵² This method was abandoned for the reasons of poor efficiency and destructive effect of the soldiers' morale. In 1942, death camps started operating, equipped in gas chambers and using carbon monoxide and later Zyklon B. Jews from all over Europe were deported to the death camps, situated in Poland, where the Nazis could freely pursue their plan of the final solution for the European Jewry. From early 1942 Jews were delivered by trains to the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The camps at Treblinka, Bełżec, Chełmno, Majdanek and Sobibór operated from late 1941 and early 1942. Although on smaller scale, mass shootings of Jews continued, as in case of the Jews of Mszana in August 1942. The total number of Jews murdered during all stages of the genocide is estimated at six million, of whom about half were Polish Jews.

The persecution of Jews happened mainly on the territory of Poland and with non-Jewish Poles witnessing the process from the start to the very end. Polish responses to the genocide varied. On one hand there were people risking their lives to save Jews and helped them to survive outside the ghettos, mostly in hiding. Under the auspices of the Polish Government in exile the Polish Council to Aid Jews, called *Żegota* was established. It was created in 1942 with the purpose of helping Jews to find places of safety outside the ghettos. It is estimated that about half of the Jews who survived the Holocaust were in some way helped by the

⁵² Polonsky, *Jews in Poland*, 417-418.

organization.⁵³ On the other, there was also a big group of bystanders who were indifferent to the fate of Jews. Moreover, there were those who not only profited from the persecution of Jews, but also participated in it. In the cities and small towns, non-Jews were involved in smuggling goods and food from and to the ghettos, blackmailing and informing on Jews. Jewish workshops, houses, merchandise and land were taken over by non-Jewish owners quickly after the death or deportation of Jews.⁵⁴

The anti-Jewish violence mainly happened in the provinces, especially in the eastern part of Poland, where the territories were occupied by Germans and later by the Soviets. There were around sixty six massacres conducted on Jews by the local population in this region.⁵⁵ The main reason for the violent acts against Jews was the convictions that they collaborated with the Soviets and took part in the Soviet security forces NKWD. This was the case of massacres in Jedwabne and Radziłów.⁵⁶ Jewish collaboration with the Soviet regime was based mainly on stereotypes of Jews leaning towards communism and plotting against Poland. In reality, only around eight per cent of the communist government members were Jewish.⁵⁷

Those Poles who saved Jews came from different social classes and were risking their life and the lives of their family, as hiding Jews was punishable by death. However, in occupied Poland this was not the only action for which Poles could be killed and yet, it did not stop them from participating in the resistance or attending clandestine universities. Helping Jews was an action which not only was against the occupant's

⁵³ Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Secret city. The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940-1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 53.

⁵⁴ Dariusz Stola, "The Polish debate on the Holocaust and the restitution of property" in: *Robbery and Restitution. The conflict over Jewish Property in Europe*, ed Martin Dean et al. (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 241-242.

⁵⁵ Polonsky, *Jews in Poland*, 421.

⁵⁶ The massacre of Jedwabne become the subject of Jan Gross' work: Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton University Press, 2000). The book will be discussed later.

⁵⁷ Jan J. Milewski, "Polacy i Żydzi w Jedwabnem i okolicy przed 22 czerwca 1941 roku," in *Wokół Jedwabnego*, ed. Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, vol 1, 2002), 79.

law, but in some cases also against social norms which did not accept Jews as 'us', but as 'others'.

Remembering and forgetting – memory of Jews in post-war Poland

Nearly seventy years after the end of the Second World War, Poland is still struggling to come to terms with the memory of Polish Jews. Indeed, the subject of Jewish/non-Jewish relations remains a complex one in Polish society and politics. Although the history of Jews in Poland as noted, reaches as far as the tenth century, it is the Holocaust and the events which followed after the war, on which Polish-Jewish relations more recently focuses. The complexity of these relations derives from historical and geographical factors. Poland in 1939 had the biggest Jewish community in Europe, with its history and culture rooted in Poland for nearly a thousand years. With the outbreak of the war, Polish territory became the main region for the Nazis' plan to extermination the Jews. It was logistically convenient to organise from here the vast majority of ghettos and to build extermination camps for the European Jewry. Railways routes from all over Europe transported Jewish people to the early extermination camps, such as Belżec, Chełmno, Sobibor, Treblinka and then Auschwitz, all located on Polish soil. Poland became the scene for the Nazis' final solution and Polish society witnessed the event from its beginning to the very end.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, those bystanders who saw the annihilation of the Polish Jewry were not a homogenous mass. Polish sociologist, Antonina Kłoskowska, when analysing Polish attitudes towards the Holocaust during the war, pointed out that some of the witnesses not only looked at the atrocities towards Jews with fear and horror, but also empathised with the victims. There were others, though, who saw the destruction of the Polish Jews as a relief and the solution of their own prejudices and antisemitic sentiments.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Steinlauf, *Pamięć*, 11.

⁵⁹ Antonina Kłoskowska, "Polacy wobec zagłady Żydów polskich. Próba typologii postaw," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 32,4 (1988), 111.

However, the complexity of relations between Jews and non-Jewish Poles during the war cannot be reduced to only victim-witness interplay. Undoubtedly, non-Jewish Poles were also the victims of the Nazi politics aimed at the elimination of certain groups, with three million people being killed. Living under German occupation for six years, they experienced immense violence and terror on a national scale. But the self-image of non-Jewish Poles as the *main* victims of the Nazi occupation prevailed in Poland for many decades after the war. The idea presented by Steinlauf, that the trauma of witnessing Jewish extermination could be the reason for excluding Jews from Polish collective memory does not take into account other factors.⁶⁰ Polish memory of the war is based on the victimhood of Polish nation which has its roots in the history of Poland long before the Second World War. Poland situated between Russia and Germany was always threatened by her powerful neighbours. The necessity to preserve Polish identity and to fight for the restoration of independence intensified during three partitions of the country by Russia, Austria and Germany in the eighteenth century. During the occupation, the attempt to regain independence was expressed by several armed rebellions, but none of them brought independence and all were followed by harsh repressions from the occupiers. The depiction of Poles 'suffering for millions' was widely used in Polish literature of the nineteenth century Romanticism.⁶¹ The literature, as well as music of this period was inspired by the themes of patriotism and bravery of the Polish nation.⁶² With the conviction that throughout centuries the Polish nation was oppressed by its enemies, acknowledging Jewish people as the main victimized group during the Second World War was in some way perceived as diminishing the suffering of the non-Jewish Poles. It released a phenomenon which can be called the competition of victimhood. Furthermore, making the

The author classified attitudes of non-Jews in Poland towards the Holocaust during the war into seven different categories.

⁶⁰ Steinlauf, *Pamięć*, 11 – 12.

⁶¹ The expression derives from Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady*, one of the most important work of Polish Romanticism

⁶² Among the most important writers of Romanticism who concentrated their work on the subject of Polish struggle for independence were Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Cyprian Kamil Norwid. Polish composer, Fryderyk Chopin, also took great inspiration from the turbulent Polish history and longing for independence.

discussion on Jewish/non-Jewish relations a public one would mean facing a debate on attitudes which non-Jews represented during the war towards the Holocaust. Being a victim, even a bystander does not evoke a moral evaluation, as much as being a perpetrator. For decades, Polish memory placed emphasis on righteous Poles who saved Jews from the Holocaust.⁶³ Undoubtedly, there were many non-Jewish Poles who took part in rescuing Jews, putting in peril their own lives and often the lives of their families. Nowhere else in occupied Europe was an organisation like Polish *Żegota* created specifically for helping Jews.⁶⁴

Those who took advantage of the situation of Jews, using blackmail and extortion, called *szmalcownicy*, were viewed on the margins and pathology of society. The fact of Polish involvement in the atrocities against Jews during the war was entirely dissembled by Polish society. The discussion in Poland on Polish complicity in the Holocaust emerged rather belatedly and was triggered by the publication of *Neighbors. The destruction of the Jewish community in Jedwabne, Poland* by Jan Gross in 2000.⁶⁵ Gross described the massacre of Jews in Jedwabne, conducted by their Polish neighbours. Poles from the village, with some German incitement, but almost no assistance, gathered the Jews at the marketplace and beat to death some of them with poles and axes. Those who survived, including women, children and elderly people, were forced into a barn and burned. Around six hundred Jews died in flames. Many people in Poland considered reflection on the massacre of the Jews from Jedwabne carried out by their Polish neighbours as an attack on the Polish nation.

Yet, not only the experience of the war had impact on the lack of discussion on the Holocaust after the war. The strong separation of Jewish and non-Jewish victimhood also reflects the division between these two groups before the war. The memory of Jews is a separate one

⁶³ Steinlauf, *Pamięć*, 79-92.

⁶⁴ See: Andrzej Friszke, Władysław Bartoszewski and Andrzej Kunert, "Żegota" Rada Pomocy Żydom, 1942-1945: wybór dokumentów (Warszawa: Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, 2002).

⁶⁵ Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton University Press, 2000)

to the one of non-Jews, the one of 'them', not of 'us'. After the destruction of three million Polish Jews, there was no national mourning or any sense of loss among non-Jews in Poland. Instead, there was silence and lack of public discussion over this sudden and tragic disappearance of almost the entire population of Polish Jews. Kazimierz Brandys, in his diary/novel *Months (Miesiące)* pointed out that after seven hundred years of living together, Polish people did not shed a tear over the Jews turned into ashes.⁶⁶ It is the distance between Jews and non-Jews before the war that authors like Aleksander Hertz see as the main reason for the lack of memory of Jews in post-war Poland.⁶⁷ Hertz indicated that isolation of Jewish population and the perception of Jews as not only different, but as strangers, caused the division in Polish society which could not be overcome during and after the war.⁶⁸ Hertz's conviction is shared by Marcin Kula who indicates that the fact of Jews and non-Jews living before the war side by side, rather than together as one community, resulted in national amnesia after the war on the subject of Polish Jews and the Holocaust.⁶⁹

However, the conviction of Jews and non-Jews living as entirely separated groups does not reflect the whole socio-economic situation of communities in Polish towns. Both groups were living with each other on daily basis, especially in small towns and Mszana, the case study of this research, is an example of these relationships. Main occupations of the Jews who lives in Polish villages and towns were traders, craftsmen and artisans.⁷⁰ They traded and worked with non-Jews, even if not by choice, then by necessity. Furthermore, the relations were not limited to professional ones, but extended to neighbourly contacts, as well as personal. Jews and non-Jews were divided on many levels of life, but as

⁶⁶Kazimierz Brandys, *Miesiące. 1982-1984* (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, t.3, 1994), 54.

⁶⁷ Aleksander Hertz, *Żydzi w kulturze polskiej* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Więzi, 2004), 30.

⁶⁸ Hertz, *Żydzi w kulturze*, 32-35.

⁶⁹ Marcin Kula, "Amnezja - choroba tylko częściowo zawiniona." in *Wobec przeszłości. Pamięć przeszłości jako element kultury współczesnej*, ed. Andrzej Szpociński (Warszawa: Instytut Adama Mickiewicza, 2005), 51-52.

⁷⁰ Teller, Adam. "Trade." YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe 28 October 2010. 11 October 2016 <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Trade>

the example of this research proves, they did not lead separate lives within the same community.

For centuries Poland was a land where Jewish culture and Jewish religious movements developed, a land of Jewish *shtetlach* and Yiddish literature. Jews enjoyed an array of religious and political freedoms, receiving royal grants of legal and social rights. For a long time it was a place of hospitality to Jews, and Poles were known to have acted as gracious hosts on many occasions. However, this spirit of tolerance is often invoked by Polish people to present how Poland was an exceptional haven to Jews, forgetting that the long history of Polish-Jewish relations embodied also social inequality, indifference and hostility towards Jews, often embodied in the teaching of the Catholic Church. These negative sentiments were intensified during the interwar period and Polish attitudes towards Jews were put on trial extensively during the Second World War.

Some of the Jewish survivors left Poland after the end of the war, not being able to stay in the 'mass graveyard'. Others stayed and together with the significant number of Jews returning from the Soviet Union attempted to reconstruct Jewish life in Poland. The new communist regime offered Jews who stayed in Poland an opportunity to integrate into society and a chance to belong to it as equal citizens. These promises were tempting even for those who would not be in favour of Communism in normal circumstances. The fact that some Jews succumbed to the temptation of serving in the government added to a pre-existing prejudice of all Jews being communists and resulted as the widespread stereotype of Judeo-Communism (*Żydokomuna*) and the conviction that the security apparatus *Urząd Bezpieczeństwa* was ruled by Jews.⁷¹ Therefore, Jews were perceived as those responsible for arresting, torturing and

⁷¹ Joanna B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other. The image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 200-206.

convicting patriots of the Polish Home Army as well as for the enslavement of Poland by the Soviet Union.⁷²

Alongside the stereotype of Jews supporting the communist regime there was a wave of violence against Jewish survivors which swept post-war Poland. Between 1944 and 1947 around fifteen thousand Jews were murdered by non-Jewish Poles. They were killed in small groups, individually and in pogroms, with the climax in 1946 when forty two Holocaust survivors were killed in a pogrom in Kielce. The obvious question which appears here is how could such a thing happen in a country which had just witnessed the extermination of its European Jewry? How was this massive outbreak possible in a country which had just experienced violence and terror from the Nazi occupation? There has been much debate about who was responsible for this eruption of anti-Jewish violence. There have been speculations about the role of Soviet provocation in Kielce, but regardless of how the crowd was encouraged to attack the Jews, it acted with great cruelty. The origins of this hostility towards Jews after the war is entangled in political factors, but the violent actions were not only caused by communist propaganda.⁷³ The psychological and social aspects of Jewish/non-Jewish relations were of great importance as well.

With the destruction of the vast majority of Polish Jewry during the Second World War, vanished also were the physical traces of Jewish life in Poland before the war. Their houses now belonged to non-Jewish owners, as did the other property left after Jews' departure. The question of the appropriation of Jewish belongings by non-Jews, as well as restitution of Jewish properties in the post-war period became a subject of a public debate and academic research in the early 2000s, with special attention given to Poland.⁷⁴ With the rise of interest in the subject of

⁷² Paweł Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna. Interpretacje historyczne* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czerwone i Czarne, 2012), 191-192.

⁷³ Feliks Tych, *Długi cień zagłady. Szkice historyczne* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1999), 43.

⁷⁴ See: Martin dean, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jan Grabowski and Dariusz Libionka, *Klucze i kasa. O mieniu żydowskim w Polsce pod okupacją*

seizing Jewish possessions by non-Jews and the socio-political changes in Poland at the end of 1990s which enabled restitution of private properties, the stereotype of Jews taking over 'Polish' houses and shops suddenly surfaced. The fear of former Jewish owners willing to claim their properties was fuelled by the antisemitic rhetoric of right-wing politicians and often had little to do with the facts about restitution in Poland.⁷⁵ As the case study of Mszana will show, this mainly irrational fear of losing houses to the previous Jewish owners can serve as an obstacle in reconstructing Jewish/non-Jewish dialogue.

After the war, not only Jewish houses changed their owners. Jewish places of worship were destroyed or used for other purposes. As Irwin-Zarecka points out, there was even no trace of the victims of the Holocaust, no cemeteries, no memorials to their death, no individual graves, as most of the victims were exterminated in camps or killed somewhere in woods or fields.⁷⁶ During the years following the war, the memory of Jews was deliberately distorted by the state. The main tendency in post-war Poland was to avoid references to the Jewish victims, where the memory of the war was concerned. Instead, they were referred to as 'citizens' or 'people' of Poland. The tendency of denying the victims their Jewish identity was visible in particular in the discussion on the victims of the Auschwitz concentration camp.⁷⁷ The communist regime tried to hijack the memory of the Holocaust and use the commemoration of it as a tool for its propaganda purposes. Auschwitz was presented as a place of suffering for mainly Polish victims, without pointing out that the great majority of them were Jewish. The heritage of Polish Jews was excluded from the national curriculum; the history of the Holocaust was neglected by the public as well as in religious education.

niemiecką i we wczesnych latach powojennych, 1939-1950 (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2004); Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Golden harvest. Events at the periphery of the Holocaust* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷⁵ Stola, "The Polish debate", 250-251.

⁷⁶ Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory. The Jew in Contemporary Poland* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 46-47.

⁷⁷ See: Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003).

This ignorance of the history of Polish Jews, their culture and their experience during the war was supported by already existing prejudices in Polish society about Jews. If Jews were mentioned in public discourse, it was only in the context of centuries of Polish hospitality for those Jews persecuted in other countries, or in terms of the Polish Righteous Among the Nations and the altruistic help offered to Jews during the war. The involvement of some Poles in persecution of Jews was rarely raised; Polish people were presented either as victims or heroic gentiles.⁷⁸

There were exceptions of commemoration of the Jewish victims, but even those cases were used for the communist propaganda. The monument of Warsaw Ghetto Fighters unveiled in 1948 was one of them. The Ghetto Uprising was depicted as an example of the fight for a new communist Poland, hence had nothing to do with remembering and commemorating the victims of the Jewish Holocaust.⁷⁹ It served the communist regime as an example of the fight against the Nazi Germany, where Jews and non-Jews fought together against the same enemy.⁸⁰ Even in those places where Jewish memorials were erected after the war without being used for ideological purposes, the commemoration of the Jewish victims was not a part of the public life of a community. The case of Mszana shows that despite two memorials for the Jewish victims being present in town from the 1960s, the local community did not engage in commemoration of their Jewish neighbours and repressed the memory of Jews from the public discourse until the collapse of the communism.

With the political changes of 1989 Poland experienced an eruption of social collective memory of the communist era as well as the pre-war and post-war periods. Jewish/non-Jewish relations have been a significant part of this phenomenon. The topic almost completely neglected before

⁷⁸ Joanna B. Michlic, "The dark past. Polish-Jewish relations in the shadow of the Holocaust," in *Imaginary Neighbours. Mediating Polish – Jewish Relations after the Holocaust*, ed Dorota Głowacka and Joanna Żylińska, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 22.

⁷⁹ Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, "Melancholic nationalism and the pathologies of commemorating the Holocaust in Poland," in *Imaginary Neighbours. Mediating Polish – Jewish Relations after the Holocaust*, ed Dorota Głowacka and Joanna Żylińska (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 310.

⁸⁰ Steinlauf, *Pamięć*, 87.

the fall of the communism now became a subject of public debate and an element in re-shaping and re-affirming Polish identity. It was Claude Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah* from 1985 and the essay by Jan Błoński *Poor Poles are looking at the ghetto* published in 1987 which first touched on the subject of the indifference of the Poles towards the Holocaust and their engagement in the final solution.⁸¹ Lanzmann's film evoked criticism and defensive reaction from the state and public opinion in Poland.⁸² Błoński criticised Polish indifference towards the Holocaust and lack of memory about the Polish Jews. Although he did not attribute the responsibility for the genocide to Poles, Błoński claimed that the fact of allowing the Holocaust to happen on Polish soil, made Poles responsible for keeping the memory of their Jewish neighbours. Despite the importance of both works for the discussion on Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Poland and the memory of the Holocaust, neither of them provoked confrontation on the national level. In the last decade of the communist regime, there were publications which could indicate a shift in the approach towards the Jewish heritage of Poland. Several memoirs and written testimonies from the Holocaust were published, among them were works of Janina Bauman⁸³, Irena Birnbaum⁸⁴, Jerzy Eisner⁸⁵, Janusz Korczak⁸⁶ and Arnold Mostowicz⁸⁷, to name but a few. Furthermore, poetry written in Polish by Jewish writers were published for the first time. Among them works by Zuzanna Ginczanka⁸⁸ and Władysław Szlengel⁸⁹, both victims of the Holocaust. The memory of the Holocaust and the Jews of Poland was also present as a subject of

⁸¹ Jan Błoński, *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto*. (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008), 8-21.

⁸² Piotr Forecki, *Od Shoah do Strachu. Spory o polsko-żydowską przeszłość i pamięć w debatach publicznych* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010), 116-117.

⁸³ Janina Bauman, *Zima o poranku. Opowieść dziewczynki z warszawskiego getta* (Kraków: Znak, 1989).

⁸⁴ Irena Birnbaum, *Non omnis moriar: pamiętnik z getta warszawskiego* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1982).

⁸⁵ Jack Eisner, *Przeżyłem!* (Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988).

⁸⁶ Janusz Korczak, *Pamiętnik* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1984).

⁸⁷ Arnold Mostowicz, *Żółta gwiazda i czerwony krzyż* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1988).

⁸⁸ Zuzanna Ginczanka, *Wiersze wybrane* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1980).

⁸⁹ Władysław Szlengel, *Co czytałem umarłym* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1979).

discussion in Polish newspapers and journals.⁹⁰ Despite all these attempts in tackling the topic of the Polish Jews and the memory of the Holocaust, it took another decade to bring the subject into wider public domain in Poland.

The major public debate about the attitudes towards the Jewish extermination was prompted by the publication of Gross' *Neighbors*. The discussion which arose around the story of Jedwabne where 'half of the Polish town murdered the other half' showed not only that Polish and Jewish memory about the Holocaust remains in conflict, but also how divisive the nature of memory of Jews within Polish society persists.⁹¹ The debate divided Poles into two main groups. One group advocated the image of Poles as victims and martyrs, hence it rejected Gross' claim. The other group tried to face the details presented in the book and to deal with this new interpretation of Polish history. This polarization within Polish society triggered by *Neighbors* reflects the main tendencies in dealing with the memory of Jews.

There are two general approaches towards the memory of Jews which emerged within contemporary Polish society. On the one hand there is a tendency to reconstruct the Jewish world by non-Jews and often without the participation of Jewish people. On the other hand, there are a lot of places, particularly small towns and villages, where the recollection of Jews and Jewish life is renounced, unacknowledged or hidden. In other words, social collective memory appears in two forms: collective remembering and collective forgetting. Since the early 1990s Poland has been a country of contradictions in terms of dealing with the memory of Jews. Non-Jewish Poles organise Jewish festivals, restore Jewish cemeteries and synagogues, play klezmer music and attend courses concerning Jewish culture.⁹² This approach is by some, Jews in particular, criticised for being false and leaning towards philosemitism, as the

⁹⁰ Forecki, *Od Shoah*, 126-127.

⁹¹ Jerzy Jedlicki, "Zwyczajny powiat," ZNAK 670 (2011): 45-49.

⁹² Steinlauf, *Pamięć*, 146-147; Magdalena Waligórska, *Klezmer's Afterlife. An Ethnography of the Jewish Music Revival in Poland and Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

reconstructed Jewish world often does not include and does not need Jews for its existence.⁹³ Hence, there is a question of its authenticity and moral validity. There is a certain fashion for being Jewish and for idealising everything about Jewish culture and religion. This sentiment, although particularly strong in the 1990s, is still present in Poland to some extent. The popularity of everything what Jewish contributed to commercialisation of the Jewish heritage in Poland, the subject widely discussed by Erica T. Lehrer on an example of Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter in Kraków.⁹⁴ The topic of exploitation of the Jewish culture by non-Jews was also raised by Ruth Gruber⁹⁵ and Magda Waligórska.⁹⁶ The manner in which Jewish heritage is rediscovered and employed and who has the moral right to claim this heritage is an outgoing discussion. The revival of the Jewish culture by non-Jews, as well as intentions of the participants of this phenomenon are not all negative and calculated for profit. It is worth mentioning that all three authors mentioned above acknowledged this fact. As Monika Murzyn-Kupisz stated, Jewish culture in Poland is a subject of interpretation, participation and influence by non-Jews.⁹⁷ To go further, non-Jews use the rediscovery of Jewish heritage to strengthen their identity and to redefine their local heritage. It is particularly visible in small communities, like the one of Mszana, where there are no commercial advantages of including the history of Jews in the local past.

The eagerness of pursuing the history of the Jews who no longer live in a community and to incorporate it into the local memory can also derive

⁹³ See: Magdalena Waligórska, "Fiddler as a Fig Leaf. The Politicisation of Klezmer in Poland," *Osteuropa: Impulses for Europe* 8-10 (2008): 227-238; Angelika Bammer, "Xenophobia, xenophilia, and no place to rest," in *Encountering the Other(s): Studies in Literature, History and Culture*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler, 45-62. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995); Wolfgang Benz, "Jewish existence in Germany from the perspective of the non-Jewish majority," in *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000*, ed. Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes, 101-117 (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

⁹⁴ Erika T. Lehrer, *Jewish Poland revisited. Heritage tourism in unquiet places* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013).

⁹⁵ Ruth E. Gruber, *Virtually Jewish. Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (University of California Press, 2002).

⁹⁶ Waligórska, *Klezmer's Afterlife*.

⁹⁷ Monika Murzyn-Kupisz, „Rediscovering the Jewish Past in the Polish Province,“ in *Jewish Space in contemporary Poland*, ed. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 120.

from nostalgia for multi-ethnic Poland and an attempt to challenge the communist perception of the Polish society as the homogenous one.⁹⁸ Joseph Roach's concept of 'surrogation', as the key mechanism to reproduce collective memory, provides further explanation for the non-Jews engaging in the Jewish culture. Roach did not specifically refer to the Jewish culture, his work concentrated mainly on two urban sites, London and New Orleans. However, his theory suggests that any culture can have its continuity even when its creators and the culture itself disappear. The void created after the departure is filled by other actors who substitute the missing culture. Although the recreation may be perceived as appropriation, it is driven by genuine sentiment for a missing part of memory.⁹⁹ Roach's theory does not resolve the moral question of surrogation of a culture, but it suggests an explanation on the reasons behind recreating the Jewish culture by non-Jews.

The rediscovered Jewish world in Poland exists side by side with collective forgetting, ignorance and denial towards the memory of Jews. The debate which arose after Gross' publication in 2000, reached elites and those who had already been sensitive to the question of Polish-Jewish relations.¹⁰⁰ Despite widespread presence of the discussion in the public life, it had little impact on the 'average' Pole and his/her attitudes towards Jews. Indeed, the extensive discussion triggered by Gross' *Neighbours* has not changed the silence over the memory of Jews among the majority of Poles. This approach based on the ethno-nationalistic vision of the past deliver a very black and white interpretation of Polish history.¹⁰¹ Supporters of this attitude see Polish people as heroes and martyrs and they deny Jews their contribution into Polish culture.

In spite of political and social changes in Poland and accessibility of information about the past, the history of Jews in Poland has not become

⁹⁸ Michlic, "The dark past", 22-23.

⁹⁹ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Rzeczy mgliste* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2004), 191-209.

¹⁰¹ Michlic, "The dark past", 21-22.

a part of the country living memory.¹⁰² Nevertheless, the revival of the Jewish culture in Poland is well underway. Rediscovery of the Jewish heritage may not be the mainstream tendency, but the nostalgia for the multicultural past and the interest in the history of the Polish Jews is present in big cities, as well as smaller communities in the country. The revival of the memory of Jews in Poland resulted in extensive research on the topic. One of the manners to preserve the Jewish past is the attempt to reconstruct and record the history of Jewish population of a particular place. Accounts of Jewish life in Chmielnik, Lelów, Szczekociny and Wadowice are examples of monographs of Jewish communities which seized to exist.¹⁰³ These studies concentrate on the Jewish community only, trying to reconstruct the lost world of the towns and to map the Jewish presence. Interestingly, although these works are a form of memory books which usually are created by Holocaust survivors of the town in question, they are written by non-Jewish authors, with a support of local authorities. Other research focuses on activities of non-Jewish communities in terms of commemoration of the local Jews, as well as rediscovery of the Jewish heritage. They explore educational programmes, commemoration ceremonies, art projects and agencies involved in all these activities. Big cities like Kraków or Szczecin are explored, as well as small communities of towns and villages, like Brzostek, Chmielnik and Łańcut.¹⁰⁴ The vast majority of all these new studies tend to concentrate either on the history of Jewish communities before the war, or the rediscovery of Jewish memory in contemporary Poland by non-Jews. Examining the continuity of Jewish/non-Jewish relations through time, comparison of both perspectives of the relations

¹⁰² Sławomir Kaprlaski, "Amnesia, nostalgia, and reconstruction. Shifting modes of memory in Poland's Jewish Space," in *Jewish Space in contemporary Poland*, ed. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 153.

¹⁰³ Michał Galas and Mirosław Skrzypczyk, *Żydzi w Lelowie. Obecność i ślady* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Austeria, 2006); Michał Galas and Mirosław Skrzypczyk, *Żydzi szczekocińscy. Osoby, miejsca, pamięć* (Kraków, Budapeszt: Wydawnictwo Austeria, 2008); Marek Maciągowski and Piotr Krawczyk, *Żydzi w historii Chmielnika* (Kielce: F.P.H.U., 2006); *Wadoviana*, no 9, 2005.

¹⁰⁴ See: Lehrer, *Jewish Poland revisited*; Erica E. Lehrer and Michael Meng *Jewish Space in contemporary Poland* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015).

and analysis of the collective memory of communities is a vital addition to the discussion on the revival of the Jewish culture in Poland.

Collective memory – theoretical framework

Memory is a mediator between the past and the present, a factor which binds all members of a community. Shared memories help individuals to interpret the present, explore who they are and discover their identities. The concept of memory varies in meaning depending on discipline or the topic of inquiry. The variety of interpretation of the term provides numerous models of memory which gives ideas for understanding and interpreting remembering and forgetting. However, this variety of meaning may also cause confusion. It has been used to describe the memory of people who have personally experienced a certain event as well as to explore it as the phenomenon of postmemory, the shared cultural knowledge passed between generations.¹⁰⁵ It describes recollections shared within different kind of groups such as a nation, a community or a family.¹⁰⁶ The concept also covers the interaction between individual and common memory.¹⁰⁷ Finally, the notion of memory is also used to analyse the physical representation of the past, the 'vehicles of memory' such as memorial places, museums and commemorations.¹⁰⁸ Richard Ned Lebow divides memory into three categories: collective, individual and institutional.¹⁰⁹ All three are social constructions and they overlap in many aspects. However, it is collective memory which is the subject of this research. Collective memory understood as a representation of the

¹⁰⁵ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁶ Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

¹⁰⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *On collective memory* (The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁸ Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor – Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington, 198).

¹⁰⁹ Richard N. Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, Claudio Fogu, *The politics of memory in postwar Europe* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.

past shared by members of a group, in this case, members of the community of a town.¹¹⁰

The term collective memory is a very ambiguous concept; there is no one simple definition of it. To follow Maurice Halbwachs' description of collective memory, it is understood here as a socially constructed notion, in which things are remembered by individuals as members of a group. We can only understand each memory of an individual by locating it within the thought of a group this individual belongs to. According to Halbwachs, each social group in a society represents a different collective memory.¹¹¹ Hence, a group of people sharing their own separate memories constitute a community of memory. It is the membership of a certain group which prompts people to recall events in a particular way, common for the members of a community of memory. Although a community of memory, such as inhabitants of a small town, represents only their own collective memory, they are influenced from outside the group and can accommodate patterns of attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices functioning on a bigger scale.

Although Halbwachs' idea of collective memory acknowledges the role of individuals in creating collective memory, he separates socially framed individual memories from the collective representation of memory. An individual is not able to remember in a coherent manner anything outside the group context. In this regard, although Halbwachs resists Henri Bergson's application of subjective memory and individualistic consciousness, he accepts the inseparable link between an individual and collective memory. He refers to Emile Durkheim's neglect of the role of an individual mind and ability for equal cooperation between subjective and collective memory.¹¹² However, Halbwachs strongly rejects Bergson's understanding of memory as being of spiritual nature and he advocates the idea of memory requiring social, collective support.

¹¹⁰ James V. Wertsch, "The narrative organization of collective memory," *ETHOS* 36, 1 (2008): 120.

¹¹¹ Halbwachs, *On collective*, 55.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 47; for Durkheim's concept of memory see: Emil Durkheim, *The elementary forms of religious life* (New York, London: Free Press, 1995).

Halbwachs' theory shifts memory from the biological perspective to the social one. For him, memory reconstructs the past in the light of the present.¹¹³

If collective memory is what individuals remember in a collective framework, then does memory demonstrate the past? It certainly reflects history, understood as a chronological record of events, but its presentation is of a specific kind. Some scholars have tried to describe memory as a different tool to shape the same material as history does. The attempt of Pierre Nora to historicize memory or Peter Burke's claim that in modern times memory and history represent the same non-objective phenomenon are examples of how close collective memory and history seem to be.¹¹⁴ In the light of this research, to say that history and memory are exactly the same thing would be one step too far. Although both interact and often overlap, they are more like two necessary elements of the same narrative. Together they bring broader potential to the research.

Yet to understand the nature of collective memory it is important to describe how memory presents historical events. Collective memory refers to the past events and uses narratives as a tool to represent the past; it is only 'a conceptualization that expresses a sense of the continual presence of the past'.¹¹⁵ It does not only refer to the past, it is also anchored in the present. What is significant to memory is the meaning of events, not the accuracy in describing them. To paraphrase Arthur Neal, collective memory filters events, blurs and sometimes distorts details.¹¹⁶ It allows selecting events from the past, uses stereotypes and prejudices. But for most, collective memory tells a contemporary story about the community which shares it. It mirrors the

¹¹³ Halbwachs, *On collective*, 34.

¹¹⁴ Pierre Nora, *Realms of memory: rethinking the French past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 123-130; Peter Burke, "History as social memory," in *Memory: history, culture and the mind*, ed. Thomas Butler (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 108.

¹¹⁵ Susan A. Crane, "Writing the individual back into collective memory," *American Historical Review* 102, 5 (1997): 1373.

¹¹⁶ Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 72.

condition of a group and explores the shared identity that unites it. Memory is not about what is remembered but, as the case study of Mszana will prove, rather how and for what reasons. As Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson pointed out, when we listen now to a life story, the manner of its telling seems to us as important as what is told.¹¹⁷ Finally, memory does not necessarily change in the light of the discovery of new evidence. Collective memory does not detect the truth about the past, but it traces the meaning of it. Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond factual account of events and to refer to the emotional and moral engagement of the actors.

In order to access memory based on conversation between past and presence, emotional and factual, it is helpful to employ oral evidence. It is crucial, especially in cases such as Mszana where written sources are scarce, to look for information preserved in oral history. This source of data not only delivers evidence from the past, but as mentioned above, what people remember and how they remember gives more insight into the life of a community than does written history. This research is based on an assumption that to fully understand a community, we need to explore history and memory in equal measure and oral history is the source which links them both. Oral history is a source of data facilitating relationship between symbolic and analytic, memory and history.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, analysing oral history poses challenges to the research. What people remember is selective, influenced by stereotypes and other experience in life. It is important to approach personal accounts critically, to see them as evidence of the past, as well as reflection of the past in the present.¹¹⁹ The study of the community in Mszana engages a critical approach to oral history, reinforced by using variety of sources and, when possible, by confronting written evidence with memory preserved by the individuals involved.

¹¹⁷ Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, *The myths we live by* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), 2.

¹¹⁸ Luisa Passerini, "Mythbiography in oral history," in *The myths we live by*, ed. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), 49.

¹¹⁹ Samuel and Thompson, *The myths*, 20.

Furthermore, to realise how collective memory presents facts from the past is only one step in comprehending the construction of memory. There are aspects of memory which have to be distinguished: collective remembering and collective forgetting. Members of a community of memory are bonded by events they recall and incorporate into their identity, but what they forget and repress as a group unifies them as well and it is as meaningful as what they remember. These two tendencies within a community of memory may refer to the same subject of memory.

The theory of collective memory, however, has also its critics who query the very notion of the concept. The lack of one unanimous definition of collective memory serves as a mean of critique of the concept and it helps to undermine the differences between collective and individual memory.¹²⁰ Furthermore, distinction between collective memory and history is seen by some academics as poorly defined. Kansteiner claims that the line between two disciplines is so fine that it can lead researchers to confusion.¹²¹ The inability to clearly differentiate collective memory and history and the fact that both disciplines use similar methods and objectives can be seen as the indicator that there is no difference between the two fields.¹²² Collective memory and history are indeed inextricably intertwined and they can share a common purpose. However, history does not depend on collective memory. Historians are able to reconstruct neglected events, even if they do not have access to eyewitnesses' testimonies. They can do this by critical analysis of written sources.¹²³ Furthermore, collective memory brings a different perspective to the relationship between past and present. Through memory, various aspects of perception of historical events, such as reinterpretations, omissions and displacements, can be observed.¹²⁴ Following Novick's distinction between these two approaches towards the past, collective

¹²⁰ Susannah Radstone, "Working with Memory: An Introductio,.." in *Memory and Methodology*, ed. Susannah Radstone (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 2-4.

¹²¹ Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding meaning in memory: a methodological critique of collective memory studies," *History and Theory* 41, 2 (2002): 180-181.

¹²² Kansteiner, "Finding meaning", 196.

¹²³ Paul Connerton, *How societies remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14.

¹²⁴ Samuel and Thompson, *The myths*, 5.

memory is not just historical knowledge shared by a group. Unlike history, collective memory has no sense of passage of time but instead expresses some truth about the group which shares it.¹²⁵ The group involved in the process of remembering is as important as the memory itself. In the case of the following research, the group involved in the memory of the Holocaust and Jewish/non-Jewish relations is not homogeneous. Although the commitment to memory is shared by Jews and non-Jews, their motivations differ between and within these groups. For the purpose of this study, two are of particular interests: children of the Holocaust survivors (the second generation) and the grandchildren of those non-Jews who experienced the war.¹²⁶ Children of the Holocaust survivors belong to the group which from the early 2000s started searching for traces of their ancestors in Poland. At the same time, the young generation of non-Jews began their discovery of the Jewish heritage in their towns and villages.

Members of the second generation, although they did not personally experience the atrocities of the Holocaust, have their own memory of the event. These memories, often transmitted unconsciously from survivors to their children (and grandchildren), became a part of the second generation's identity. Postmemory, a term introduced by Marianne Hirsch, characterises a traumatic experience, in this case the Holocaust, which is passed on by parents, or grandparents, but which is different from remembering.¹²⁷ Instead, it is memory through powerful emotions with connection to the past. This is how Hoffman explains the connection of the second generation to postmemory:

The guardianship of the Holocaust is being passed on to us. The second generation is the hinge generation in which received, transferred knowledge of events is transmuted

¹²⁵ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory. The American experience* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 3-4.

¹²⁶ The 'second generation' as a group was introduced by Helen Epstein. See: Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (London: Penguin Books, 1979).

¹²⁷ Hirsch, *Family Frames*.

into history, or into myth. It is also the generation in which we can think about certain questions arising from the Shoah with a sense of living connection.¹²⁸

There are others, however, who denies the second generation any personal connection to the traumatic experience of their parents. Alain Finkelkraut used the term *imaginary Jew* to describe representatives of his own generation of the children of the Holocaust survivors. He claims that they live their fictional lives with stolen identities of their parents who were truly persecuted.¹²⁹ Finkelkraut insists that the Holocaust must be remembered, but at the same time he condemns the exploitation and trivialisation of the memory of the Holocaust by his own generation. He recalls himself taking advantage of the suffering of his Polish-Jewish relatives:

Others had suffered and I, because I was their descendant, harvested all the moral advantage. The allotment was inescapable: for them, utter abandonment and anonymous death, and for their spokesperson, sympathy and honor. Since the actors had been annihilated, it was left to their narrator, their heir, their offspring to appropriate the reaction of their audience. At the end of the play, he alone came front-stage to bow before the applause.¹³⁰

For the second generation the Holocaust might feel like an unknown past, but as Hoffman explains, at the same time it is a deeply internalized event.¹³¹ The example of the children of the Holocaust survivors from Mszana show that despite the silence over their parents' experience from the war, they perceive it as a part of their personal history. Engaging in relations with the town and its current inhabitants is an important element of defining who they are. These relations have also an important impact on the people from Mszana and their perception of the memory of the past. Non-Jewish memory was not challenged during the communist era. Without Jews being present, the past was left solely to the non-Jewish interpretation. As James E Young noted:

¹²⁸ Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge* (London: Secker&Warburg, 2004), xv.

¹²⁹ Alain Finkelkraut, *The Imaginary Jew* (Lincoln&London: University of Nebraska Press, 1980).

¹³⁰ Finkelkraut, *Imaginary*, 11.

¹³¹ Hoffman, *After*, 6.

(...) all remaining memory of this past was left in Polish hands and thus reflected characteristically Polish grasp of events, Polish ambivalence, and eventually even a Polish need for a Jewish past.¹³²

While the Holocaust is recognised by the second generation mostly as a historical legacy, its inheritance has not been easily internalised by the young generation of non-Jews. Concentrating on the Polish example, emergence of the memory of the Holocaust and the Jews has been a long and turbulent journey. This process encompassed oblivion, neglect and ignorance during the post-war communist era and signs of rediscovery of the Jewish past in the democratic Poland.¹³³ One of the aspects of relating to Jewish heritage by the contemporary non-Jewish Poles is commemoration of Jews and the return of their heritage into public space in Poland.

The presence of the memory of Jews and the Holocaust in Polish popular culture in contemporary Poland is prominent. The list of books, films and art projects is long, it is worth mentioning the most significant once. Films like *In Darkness (W ciemności)* by Agnieszka Holland from 2011, or *The Aftermath (Pokłosie)* by Władysław Pasikowski from 2012, as well as novels *The Boarding House (Pensjonat)* by Piotr Paziński, or *Night of the living Jews (Noc żywych Żydów)* by Igor Ostachowicz not only reference the Holocaust, but also raise questions of unsettled Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Poland. They tackle the subject of Polish non-Jews being involved in the persecution of the Jews, the moral dilemma which they experienced during the war and the lack of memory for the Jews who once were their neighbours. The lack of Jewish presence in Polish memory and the encouragement to confront with the Jewish tradition and heritage were addressed in two spectacular art projects. The first one is the video trilogy *And Europe Will Be Stunned* by an Israeli artist Yael

¹³² James E. Young, *The texture of memory. Holocaust memorials and meaning* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 116.

¹³³ Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, "Re-presenting the Shoah in Poland," in *Re-presenting the Shoah for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Ronit Lentin (London: Berghahn Books, 2004), 179-194.

Bartana. The films, *Nightmares (Mary koszmary)*, *Wall and Tower (Mur i wieża)* and *Assassination (Zamach)*, were made in Poland in cooperation with *Krytyka Polityczna*, a Polish journal gathering young left-wing intellectuals. The starting point of Bartana's video installations is the appeal of non-Jewish Poles to three million Polish Jews to return to Poland. The symbolic return of the Jews to Poland is a controversial appeal for the memory of Polish Jews to be re-installed in Poland. Bartana's work was widely discussed in Poland and her video trilogy represented Poland at Venice Biennale in 2011.

Another art project which was extensively debated in Polish media was *I Miss You, Jew! (Tęsknię za tobą, Żydzie!)* by Rafał Betlejewski which was launched in 2010 and still continues. The slogan was written on different city walls and the artist waited for the public's response. The campaign was quickly picked up by media and soon the project had number of followers in the whole country. The slogan was written on the building which belonged to Jewish families before the war and it addressed the victims of the Holocaust, as well as those Jews who left the country in 1968 after being forced out by the government. Betlejewski was criticised for trivialising the subject of the memory of Jews. In his defence, he described his project as a platform for people to express their longing for Jews who once lived in Poland.¹³⁴ The project had a spectacular response from the public and gradually developed into a bigger one where people who wanted to tell stories about the Jews they knew were photographed and their stories recorded.

The revival of the memory of Jews in Poland manifests itself also through smaller, local initiatives. The opening of the POLIN Museum of the History of the Polish Jews in 2013 was certainly a significant event on a country-wise scale. There were, however, although less spectacular, earlier initiatives which signified the progressing change in the attitude

¹³⁴ Agnieszka Kowalska, "Akcja "Tęsknię za tobą, Żydzie!" *Gazeta Wyborcza*. January 19, 2010. Accessed December 10, 2015. http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/1,34889,7468949,Akcja_Tesknie_za_toba_Zydzie_.html?disableRedirects=true.

towards the memory of Polish Jews. In 2004 the Galicia Jewish Museum was opened in the historic Jewish district of Kazimierz in Kraków. It is a photo exhibition documenting traces of Jews in Galicia. The museum also holds temporary exhibitions, lectures and concerts. Local museums, often organised in synagogues emerged in places like Płock, Tykocin, and Oświęcim. All of them, beyond describing the history of the Jews from their regions, serve also as educational centres.¹³⁵ Another activity connected with places of Jewish memory is taking responsibility of non-Jewish communities for Jewish cemeteries and memorials in their towns and villages. These actions are organised by schools, local authorities, or by private groups of people or individuals.¹³⁶ Mszana is one of the examples of a community involved in these kind of initiatives. The case study provides an inside to local engagement into maintaining Jewish memorials and cemetery, as well as participating in educational programmes on Jewish culture.

Local communities not only engage in tidying up Jewish memorials and cemeteries, but they engage in commemorations of the local Jews on an annual basis. This tendency to include the memory of the local Jews and the Holocaust has been slowly manifested among Polish communities since the late 1990s. Although the groups involved in commemorations are relatively small, the question remains what prompts them to engage in this activity. Wollaston emphasises that building memorials serves to provide a focus of mourning for individuals and communities.¹³⁷ If the same claim applies to those who participate in the commemoration, despite not being involved in the erection of the memorials, the need of acknowledging the loss of the Jews is what drives the non-Jewish Poles to become a part of the remembering Polish Jews. By engaging in

¹³⁵ See an example: *Muzeum w Tykocinie*. Oddział Muzeum Podlaskiego w Białymstoku. Accessed December 11, 2015. <http://www.muzeum.bialystok.pl/s.muzeum-w-tykocinie,47.html>.

¹³⁶ Krzysztof Bielawski, "Kilka słów o restauracji cmentarzy żydowskich." *Cmentarze Żydowskie w Polsce*. Accessed December 11, 2015. <http://www.kirkuty.xip.pl/zalecenia.html>.

¹³⁷ Isabel Wollaston, *A war against memory? The future of Holocaust remembrance* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1996), 36

memorialization, participants claim a piece of their landscape, namely a memorial, or cemetery, which they believe should not be neglected, or forgotten. The case study of this research, Mszana Dolna, is one of the examples how the memory of the Jews is incorporated into the collective memory of the town.¹³⁸

The question of space, place and memory

We can consider Mszana as a geographical place, a physical territory, or a town on the map of Poland. However, as Thomas F. Gieryn indicates, there is more into a place than its geographical location.¹³⁹ A place has also its material form, objects, tangible and visible things which create this particular place and through which social processes happen. The most interesting feature of the definition of a place from the perspective of this study is the meaning and value which is given to it. A spot in the universe with its physical elements of the landscape becomes a place only when it is given an interpretation, identity and memory. To follow Edward Soja's definition of a place, it comes to be when it is narrated, understood and imagined.¹⁴⁰ Those three elements defining a place – location, material form and meaningfulness - are inextricable and mutually dependent. Gieryn states that “[a] place has a plenitude, a completeness, such that the phenomenon is analytically and substantively destroyed if the three become unravelled or one of them forgotten”.¹⁴¹ Therefore, a place is more than a geographical space. Each place is unique; it is a community with a distinct character: physical, economic and cultural. The distinction between place and space is a refined one. To follow Edward Relph's vision of both phenomena, they

¹³⁸ The Jewish heritage revival, although particularly intense in Poland, is not specific solely to one country in Eastern Europe. For the Belarusian example see: Magdalena Waligórska, “Jewish Heritage and the New Belarusian National Identity Project,” *East European Politics and Societies and Culture* XX, X (2015): 1-28.

¹³⁹ Thomas F. Gieryn, “A space for place in sociology,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 464-465.

¹⁴⁰ Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 14-15.

¹⁴¹ Gieryn, “A space for place”, 466.

cannot be presented as separate concepts.¹⁴² Their meanings, as understood in this thesis, overlap on many levels, with space, however, being more abstract than place.

Doreen Massey's reflection on the meaning of places bounds its identity with histories which are told of them.¹⁴³ She indicates the importance of connection made between places' past, presence and future. Places are notions situated in space, as well as time. What create an identity of a place are stories told about it by the members of a community, the manner in which they are told and the hierarchy of importance of these histories. Massey noted that both, the past and the present of a place, can be read in various manners. Often, the way the past is interpreted influences the present understanding of a place.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, this is a two-way process; the present affects the weight people give to the past. In the context of the memory of Jews in Poland, the renaissance of interest in Jewish life shapes the new Polish identity, but also changes the perspective on the heritage of Polish Jews and their position in Polish history. In places like Mszana, rediscovery of the Jewish past of the town contributes to the continuity of local identity in time and space. The restored memory of Jews becomes the recollection which binds the past with what the community represents in present.¹⁴⁵

The sense of continuity between the past and the present is conveyed in a space-time experience of nostalgia. People remember with nostalgia places they come from and see as home. Nostalgia idealise the place people left, the place of birth and childhood. When people come back to the place after being away for a while, they feel lost and homeless in space and time. The notion of nostalgia overlooks all changes which happened while they were away and ignores the time which passed. It idealises the image of the place kept in the memory. The space-time experience of the place, as people remember it, creates an inheritance of

¹⁴² Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Sage, 2008), 44.

¹⁴³ Doreen Massey, "Places and their past," *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995): 186.

¹⁴⁴ Massey, "Places", 184-185.

¹⁴⁵ James E. Young, *The texture of memory. Holocaust memorials and meaning* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993): 117.

cultural roots, geographical background and social networks.¹⁴⁶ It becomes Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* of people who left their place of origin.¹⁴⁷ *Habitus* understood as a system of dispositions carried with those who migrate, embodied in their consciousness.¹⁴⁸ It gives them a sense of their place in the world, the sense of identity. The concept of an idealised Jewish town, *shtetl*, can serve as an example of a Bourdieu's *habitus*. Although the concept of a *shtetl* preserved in the memory of those who left it long time ago, is far from reality, it does not change the fact that it gives the Holocaust survivors the sense of belonging and historical facts, or empirical evidence are of no use in that matter. However, *habitus* also stays unchanged despite transformations which the place is exposed to. When 'migrants' come back after a while to the abandoned place of childhood or youth, they may find themselves homeless in space and time. The loss of place has serious implication for individual identity, but also for collective one, memory and history.¹⁴⁹ As we will see, the nostalgia for a place where people grew up and were happy is a common emotion among the Holocaust survivors. They not only idealise the place they lost, but at the same time they feel estranged from the same place when they come back after years of absence. Those who leave, normally creates an empty space in a place, a feeling of abandonment. Therefore, in order to mend the collective identity, the part of a community which remains in a place needs to fill the void left by those who left. The revival of the Jewish past of Mszana by non-Jewish members of the community is an example of the attempt to fill this void. However, the feeling of loss by the absence of Jews is not necessarily shared by the whole community.

Memory of those who left can be represented by formation of memorial spaces and commemorations. As Maoz Azaryahu indicates, memorial

¹⁴⁶ Young, *The texture*, 27.

¹⁴⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of theory of practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

¹⁴⁸ The concept of Bourdieu's *habitus* can be compared to Anthony Giddens' theory of practical consciousness. See: Anthony Giddens, *The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

¹⁴⁹ Gieryn, "A space for place", 482.

spaces deliver a sense of shared past and refer to the collective identity of a community.¹⁵⁰ They enforce the sense of continuity and tradition in a community and express certain interpretation of history. Memorial spaces and commemorations connect history with geography, landscape with a myth. Given symbolic meaning, they became sacred spaces in modern communities, although losing their association with religion.¹⁵¹ Instead, they signify an important event in history occurred in a certain place and to a specific community. Despite their affiliation to history, commemorations and memorials in present times are specifically bound to space and time.¹⁵² This turn from history to space as the main concern of modern humanity was described by Michael Foucault in 1967, in which he shifted the emphasis from history to spatiality and temporality:

The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis, and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world. The nineteenth century found its essential mythological resources in the second principle of thermodynamics. The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed.¹⁵³

Memorial sites and commemorations of the Jewish world in present Poland are examples of the memory represented in space and time. For decades after the end of the Second World War, space which remained after Polish Jews was neglected. There was little or no interest among Poles to restore Jewish synagogues and cemeteries, or to commemorate Jews who once lived in Poland. In terms of the memory of Jews in Poland, the period between the end of the war and the political changes in 1989 Michael Steinlauf called 'memory repressed' and 'memory expelled'.¹⁵⁴ If the memory of Jews was present in space, it was mainly for the

¹⁵⁰ Maoz Azaryahu, "The spontaneous formation of memorial space. The case of Kikar Rabin, Tel Aviv," *Area* 28, 4 (1996): 502.

¹⁵¹ Azaryahu, "The spontaneous", 502.

¹⁵² Barbara E. Mann, *Space and place in Jewish studies* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 17.

¹⁵³ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984): 46. Accessed January 20, 2012.

<http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>.

¹⁵⁴ Steinlauf, *Pamięć*, 79 and 93.

ideological purposes of the system, not to commemorate the Jews. This was the case of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum during the communist regime, where the Holocaust was used for emphasising the national disaster, pushing the persecution of Jews to the background.¹⁵⁵ Commemorations of Jews, if they took place, were also used as a political statement of the communist party. The annual commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising serves as a key example. The purpose of the ceremony was to underline lack of distinction between Polish and Jewish fate during the war and stress the common fight for equality in the communist country.¹⁵⁶ In some Polish towns and villages, even though memorial spaces were dedicated to Jews, they were often forgotten places, with no commemorative rituals attached to them. They did, however, remained present in space, as a reminder to a community about the responsibility of remembering. No matter how alien Jewish cemeteries, or sites of Jewish memory were to its surrounding, their symbolic meaning was not lost for local communities. Instead, the repressed memory encapsulated in the Jewish memorials in Poland was to be discovered in post-communist Poland. As already mentioned in the previous section, the interest in Jewish past, expressed in exploring Jewish culture, or internalisation of the Jewish heritage, was prompted by the nostalgia for multi-ethnic Poland, as well as by the process of redefining Polish identity. In terms of this thesis, two memorial sites in Mszana Dolna were erected in the 1960s, as an initiative by two Holocaust survivors. Although they were taken care of by a member of the community, the town did not collectively commemorate the Jews of Mszana until recently, as will be explained in the final section of this work. These memorials, together with the Jewish cemetery, however, had their function the town even before the political changes in 1990s. They were physical reminders of the Jews of Mszana and their tragic end in 1942. Despite the fact that the memory of Jews remained for decades very much in the private sphere of the inhabitants, the memorials and the

¹⁵⁵ Jonathan Webber, "Auschwitz: whose history, whose memory?" in *The Holocaust. Voices of scholars*, ed. Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs (Jagiellonian University & Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2009), 135-147; Steinlauf, *Pamięć*, 85.

¹⁵⁶ Steinlauf, *Pamięć*, 87-88.

cemetery were points of reference for the memory of Jews retained in the everyday discourse of the community.

Methodology and Structure

The research is organised into three main sections, all three covering history and memory. These two perspectives are not, however, perceived as entirely separate entities and they overlap on several levels. It is not to claim that they are exactly the same things, but rather that both provide equally useful perspectives for the research. Written evidence are regarded with the same credibility as witness testimonies. Both sources of data are also treated with equal criticism. Memory and history are seen, as Luisa Passerini pointed out, as different levels of understanding.¹⁵⁷ The methodology used for the purpose of this research does not follow Pierre Nora's preference for memory over history, neither does it see Paul Ricoeur's link between recalling/forgetting and past events problematic. Instead, it takes James Young's perspective that the past shapes the present and is shaped by present perceptions.¹⁵⁸ The memory, whether individual or collective, has not merely cognitive role, but also a normative one. To follow Samuel and Thomson claim on oral memory and history:

We do not have to choose one and jettison the other. Oral memory offers a double validity in understanding a past in which, as still today, myth was embedded in real experience: both growing from it, and helping to shape its perception.¹⁵⁹

The exceptional importance of oral memory is realised when, like in the case of this study, written evidence is scarce.

The first section, *The Jews of Mszana – a history of the community*, concentrates on the recollection of the life in Mszana before, during and after the war. The section provides a historical background of the town,

¹⁵⁷ Passerini, "Mythbiography," 50.

¹⁵⁸ James Young, *Writing and rewriting the Holocaust* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 1.

¹⁵⁹ Samuel and Thomson, *The myths*, 6.

with a special attention to the history of the Jewish population and a question whether Mszana could be perceived as a *shtetl*.

The second section titled *Jewish-non-Jewish coexistence in Mszana*, investigates how Jewish/non-Jewish relations are remembered by the current inhabitants of Mszana and by the Holocaust survivors from the town, exploring variations not only between, but within these two groups. The analysis is an attempt to establish the character of cooperation between Jews and non-Jews on daily basis before the war. It claims that coexistence between both groups of the community was extensive and was not only limited to the public sphere of life, namely customer-shop owner interaction. The relations between Jews and non-Jews were multi-layered, they were maintained on a personal level as well. Both groups interacted as friends and neighbours, and in schools, shops and homes. The section also explores the impact which the war had on the relations in town, especially the events of August 1942 when a mass shooting of the Jews of Mszana took place.

In the third section, *Memory work and the Jews of Mszana Dolna*, the study concentrates on the process of regaining the memory of Jews in contemporary Mszana at an individual and collective level. It examines the process of dealing with the disappearance of the Jewish population of the town which the inhabitants of Mszana experienced from the end of the war until present days. The section concentrates on the public activities taken by the members of the community of Mszana to regain the memory of Jews and incorporate it into the history of the town. Two areas of activities are explored in length: educational programmes introduced in local schools and the ceremony of the annual commemoration of the shooting of Jews in Mszana.

Although the first section concerns mainly the time before the war and the second one concentrates predominantly on the contemporary period, the division on the past and present is not the overriding organisational drive of the thesis. Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Mszana and the memory of Jews, once they were no longer a part of the community, is analysed as a

process where the 'then' of the town is strongly entangled with the 'now'. This process is approached from several methodological angles. The insights of this study are greatly enhanced by its multidisciplinary nature, where elements of sociology, history and ethnography are used to explore the variety of layers whereby Jews and non-Jews co-existed.

The main source for this project is in detailed interviews with the current inhabitants of Mszana, as well as with Holocaust survivors from the town and their relatives. Inhabitants of Mszana who took part in the study can be classified into three groups. First, those members of the community who remembered the Jews of Mszana. The second group can be described as those who represent public authority in the town, namely the city hall, the parish and the schools. The last group consisted of those inhabitants who are involved in the process of regaining the memory of Jews either by participating in the annual commemoration of Jewish victims and educational programmes, or by leading those activities. Twenty two individuals in total took part in the research. Some of the interviewees were approached two or three times. Most of the interviews took place between 2010 and 2013, but others were held in 2007 and 2015. The majority of the interviews were conducted face to face in Poland and Israel. Four of them were conducted by skype, one by telephone and one by e-mail. Most of the conversations were recorded and later transcribed.¹⁶⁰

Interviews were conducted either in Polish, or in English. Documents analysed for this research were in Polish, English, German, Hebrew and Yiddish.¹⁶¹

The project was given approval by the University of Southampton Ethic Committee in 2010. Furthermore, the author throughout the project was very much aware of the University of Southampton Ethics Policy. In

¹⁶⁰ Five interviews were not recorded, instead notes were taken by the interviewers. Three of these interviewees did not wish to be recorded, other two were interviewed spontaneously, with no possibility of recording the conversations.

¹⁶¹ All translations from Polish were done by the author, except where it is stated otherwise. Documents written in German were translated by Dr Joerg Zinken and sources in Hebrew and Yiddish were translated by Ms Yonit Naaman.

advance of the interviews, participants were informed about the subject of the research and the form in which their interview would be used in the dissertation. Interviewees were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 1) which was presented either in Polish or English. In the case of interviews conducted by e-mail or telephone, verbal consent was given. Each candidate was informed that the consent could be withdrawn at any point during the research and that there was the possibility of using an alias. In fact, none of the interviewees wished to conceal their identity. There was no designed questionnaire used for the interviews, but areas of interest were identified in advance of the meetings in order to make sure that all relevant topics were covered. The advantage of using in-depth and free form interviews is the ability to obtain a holistic view of the interviewees. The participants were asked open-ended questions e.g. *What do you remember about your Jewish neighbours before the war? What do you know about the shooting of the Jews in August 1942?* which were followed up by probing questions, depending on the direction of the conversation. The interviews had a flexible structure, although the follow up questions were used to make sure that the conversation was kept within the main aim of the research.

The vast majority of the interviews took place in the interviewees' homes, in most cases without the presence of a third party to make the participants feel comfortable and less 'official' than talking about often difficult subjects in a public place. Five of the participants were interviewed on more than one occasion, not all of them for the same reasons. Due to Tali Helen Nantes' busy schedule, for example, it took almost five years to rearrange an interrupted conversation which took place in 2010. The reason for talking to Urszula Antosz-Rekucka and Agnieszka Józefiak twice was their ability to update the research on the progress of educational programmes in the town and the annual commemoration of the shooting of the Jews from Mszana. Two further interviewees, Anna Knapczyk and Henryk Zdanowski, were asked to be interviewed more than once when new questions were raised in the research during archival work. As these two participants had knowledge

of the pre-war period in Mszana, they agreed to be confronted with further facts regarding the past of the town. None of the interviewees contradicted their previous statements and views. Some of the details of their responses were different in the later interviews, especially in Zdanowski's testimony, but they were an outcome of the progressing age of the interviewees and flaws of human memory rather than an attempt to deliberately falsify the testimony.

Apart from the interviews specifically conducted for the research, recorded testimonies of Holocaust survivors by the USC Shoah Foundation were also utilised. Recorded in the 1990s, these testimonies proved to be extremely valuable for the study, as they provide an insight into the Jewish life in Mszana given by the Jews who were from or temporarily resident in the town. However, this material also had its limitations. The testimonies did not concentrate on the interviewees' experience in the town, but their life in general. Some of the testimonies had Mszana mentioned as one of many places the respondents were in transition before or during the war, and as the life in town was not the main subject of the interview. Furthermore, no follow up questions were asked. The interviews conducted by the author for the purpose of this research provide extensive and more detailed knowledge on the history of Mszana, Jewish-non/Jewish relations in the town and the memory of these relations in particular.

There were other types of material used for the purpose of this study. Among them were local sources on history of the town and region such as: unpublished memoirs of the inhabitants of Mszana, personal correspondence, postcards and photographs. Extensive archival documents were also analysed. The archival documents included written testimonies of the Holocaust survivors, records and transcripts of the criminal trial conducted in Bochum between 1965 and 1966, records of a notary public from Mszana, the list of members of the Jewish community of Mszana prepared in 1942 by the Jewish Council, as well as school grade records from primary schools in Mszana.

Finally, the author spent several summers in Mszana, staying with the local people, visiting the memorials and the Jewish cemetery and participating twice in the annual commemoration of the Jews from town as an ethnographer-participant.

It is worth highlighting that archival materials on the pre-war period of Mszana, especially where the history of the Jewish community is concerned, are scarce. Almost all administrative records of the life of the Jewish community in pre-war Mszana were destroyed in the war. The town is mentioned in the reports prepared in 1922 by the representative of the American Joint Distribution Committee in Kraków. However, Mszana is only listed as one of the cities of the West Galicia which were inspected by the Regional Medical Commissioner. There is also correspondence from 1942 between the Jewish Social Aid in Mszana and the office in Kraków. The only list of Jewish inhabitants of Mszana is the document prepared in 1942 by the *Judenrat* on the demand of the German authorities. It was not, however, a complete list of all the Jewish inhabitants of the town – for example, names of young children were not recorded. There were also people on this list who were not originally from Mszana, but were transferred from other towns and villages during the war. The lack of reliable archival documents on the life of the Jewish community poses limitations on the research, in particular the attempt to reconstruct the pre-war history of the Jews from Mszana. Some of the names of the Jewish families and exact houses they lived in can be traced by analysing the records of the notary public from Mszana, but even those documents do not prove a complete picture of the Jewish community. Therefore, what people remembered about the life in town became the main source of data for the research. It is not the attempt of this study to present *the* history of the Jewish-/non-Jewish relations in Mszana. The research is designed to show how history and memory are intertwined, how the past shapes the present and the present interprets the past. The image of Mszana and its Jewish and non-Jewish inhabitants presented in this dissertation is how the town and the people are preserved in the memory of its inhabitants.

Testimonies of the interviewees, as well as the personal memoirs used in this research contain elements of unverified knowledge, especially where the Jewish community is concerned. However, they also provide valuable information which could not be found in the archival materials. They deliver histories of the members of the community, anecdotes and stories of the daily life of the town, as well as the description of people's daily habits, their physical appearances and the landscape of the town and the surroundings.

To the author's knowledge, there are no memoirs written by Jewish authors from the town, nor there is a *yizker-bukh*, a Jewish memorial book written for Mszana. Hundreds of *yizker-bikher* were created after the war by the Holocaust survivors to commemorate their lost communities and to memorialise their Jewish lives in Eastern Europe.¹⁶² All three memoirs which were used as sources for the research were written after the war by non-Jewish members of the community. Each author dedicated a small fragment of the memoir to the history of the Jews of Mszana, but the main purpose of their works was to reconstruct the general story of the town. Unlike Jewish *yizker-bikher* the three memoirs are not devoted to preserve the lost Jewish life in Mszana. The story of the Jews of the town is one of many chapters of the history of Mszana and unlike in *yizker-bikher*, the history of the town does not end *with* the Holocaust. However, the memoirs hold similarities with the memorial books. Both kinds of writing give an interpretation of the past and contribute to the understanding of it. *Yizker-bikher* contribute mainly to the understanding of the Holocaust, while the memoirs concentrate on the wider perspective of the past, but in both cases they provide an insight into how the past is experienced in the present, they are those important as examples of what, to highlight again, Samuel and Thompson have called 'the myths we live by'.

¹⁶² For further description of *yizker-bikher* see: Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, *From a Ruined Garden. The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1983).

Finally, there are several choices of terminology and spelling which were used in this study which needs explanation. The first one is the name of the town. Although the full, official name of it is Mszana Dolna, the second part of the name is omitted in most of the research. This choice was made by the author mainly for better clarity of the text, but also because this is how the town is referred to by its inhabitants and other people in the region. All words in Polish which appear in the text are written using Polish diacritic, to keep the original spelling. Names of all towns, cities and other locations in Poland remains in their original Polish spelling. The only exception is 'Auschwitz', due to its symbolic meaning. The author used translations of the names of Polish institutions and organisations, with an original spelling in the brackets. Furthermore, in order to make a distinction between two groups in the community of Mszana, the research describes them as Jews and non-Jews, rather than commonly used Jews and Poles. The terminology derives from the author's conviction that Jews who lived in the town were also Polish.¹⁶³ Only when distinction between belonging to two different faiths was central to the argument does the terminology changes to Jews and Catholics. Finally, the term 'antisemitism' is consciously spelled as a one word, in opposition to the hyphenated version which misleadingly suggests the existence of a term 'Semitism'.¹⁶⁴

Lastly, before commencing the substance of the thesis, it requires some explanation on the author's personal involvement in the subject of the memory of the Jews in Poland. I belong to the generation of grandchildren of those non-Jews who remember the period shortly before and during the war. I was brought up in Warsaw, in the area of the city which belonged to the Warsaw Ghetto and the presence of the Polish Jews was on my mind from early childhood. I discovered the Jewish past of Warsaw through stories told by my grandparents, as well as by constant presence of unsettling remains from the ghetto whenever there

¹⁶³ However, 'Polish-Jewish relations' are used in the introduction in the context of post-war memory

¹⁶⁴ The usage of unhyphenated form, due to the meaningless term 'Semitism', was endorsed by scholars such as Emil Fackenheim, Yehuda Bauer and Padraic O'Hare

were road works in the vicinity. The workers used to find pieces of glass bottles with the Star of David on them, melted buttons, cutlery, pots and children toys. The local children treated these findings like trophies, without knowing who they belonged to. I can relate to those of my interviewees who had an urge to fill the void left by Polish Jews who they never met in person. This urge could be fulfilled after the changes in the country in 1989. The process of exploring Polish identity in the new political and social order, for some Poles, myself included, embraced the memory of Polish Jews and rediscovery of their heritage. Mszana Dolna, with its traumatic past of the shooting of the local Jews in August 1942 and the memory work done by the present inhabitants of the town drew my attention as an example of dealing with the memory of Jews in Poland. Although I never lived in the town, I know the region well, as a part of my family comes from a town situated fifty kilometres from Mszana. This connection gave me the advantage of not being a total stranger to the local people. Yet, I was an outsider as well. This position of being someone in between an insider and an outsider allowed me to see the town from both perspectives. It also facilitated the relationship I had as an interviewer with the local people. They talked to someone who is familiar with their town and the region, but at the same time someone who is there temporarily and has no direct connection with the people from Mszana.

Section 1:

The Jews of Mszana – a history of the community

There are no detailed records of the history of Jews from Mszana and its surroundings. As noted, the only available sources are memoirs written after the Second World War by Alekander Kalczyński, Franciszek Knapczyk and the chronicles of Mszana written by Olga Illukiewicz. Kalczyński was born in 1912 in Mszana and before the war he owned a restaurant. After the war started he became involved in the activities of the Union of Armed Struggle (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej - ZWZ*), later renamed the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa - AK*). Arrested in September 1941, he was first interrogated at the Gestapo quarter in Nowy Sącz, then later in Tarnów, and he was finally sent to Auschwitz. He survived Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen and came back to Mszana in 1946.¹⁶⁵ Franciszek Knapczyk was born in Mszana in 1913, and owned a grocery shop in town. Like Kalczyński, he co-operated with the ZWZ and later AK. Knapczyk was arrested by the Nazis in September 1943 and sent first to Auschwitz and later to the camp in Mauthausen-Gusen in Austria. He returned to Mszana in 1945.¹⁶⁶ Olga Illukiewicz was born in 1922 in Mszana and worked as a history teacher in the local high school. She started writing the history of Mszana after she retired. She based her chronicles on her own memory, but also on other people's stories about the town. They describe the history of Mszana from early thirteenth century until the 1990s. Illukiewicz dedicated 15 years of her life to write her memoirs.¹⁶⁷

None of these three memoirs were published, as their families did not give their permission for this to happen since certain details had been included about some of their close relatives still living in the town.

Kalczyński's recollection of the history of Jews from Mszana is eleven

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Agnieszka Józefiak, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

¹⁶⁷ *Limanowa In*. "Miasto czeka na kronikę." 2010. Accessed April 5, 2015 <http://malopolska.in/wydarzenia:miasto-czeka-na-kronike.2078.html>.

pages long and a copy of his typed memories was preserved in the town hall. It was, however, subsequently posted online on the *Zagórzanie* website, published by Władysław Maciejczak, a local historian.¹⁶⁸ The only available copy of Illukiewicz's chronicles is held in the reading room of the public library in Mszana. Fragments of Kalczyński's written testimony are also available there. Knapczyk's chronicles are kept by his daughter and there is no general access to this document. Whilst information concerning the history of Jews in the three sources are very similar, they differ in several important details, especially where numbers of Jews in the town are concerned. Unfortunately, no legal documents on the Jewish community have been preserved in Mszana, apart from the grade records from the local school and the list of the Jews living in Mszana in 1942. The list was prepared by the Jewish council in April 1942, following the order of the German authorities. All other contemporary documents concerning the life of the Jewish community in Mszana were destroyed during the war. But one source of information on Jews from Mszana is the oral testimony preserved among the inhabitants and former inhabitants of the town, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Even then, all testimonies, written and oral, almost exclusively concentrate on the account of the events from August 1942 when the majority of Jews of Mszana and surrounding villages were murdered by the Nazis.

For the town itself, the first record of a settlement situated by the river Mschena (today river Mszanka), was in a written document in the thirteenth century. As Mszana, the village was established by Cistercians at the beginning of fourteenth century. From 1345 the village belonged to the Crown and King Casimir the Great, who founded a church on its territory. The King established another settlement, this time by the river Raba, and also named it Mszana. Both settlements joined into one village around 1365 under the name Mszana Dolna. The settlement received city rights in the fourteenth century, only to lose it a century later as a result of

¹⁶⁸ Aleksander Kalczyński. "Wspomnienia z historii Żydów w Mszanie," *Zagórzanie. Mszana Dolna i okolice*. Accessed January 27 and 29, 2010. <http://maciejczak.rmt.pl/p20.html>. (discontinued in late 2010)

administrative reorganisation which was common at that time. It regained its city status in 1952, when it was decided that Mszana fulfilled all conditions of an urban agglomeration.¹⁶⁹

In 1639 the village was granted the privilege to hold a weekly market on Sundays and five fairs in the year. It was an important change for Mszana, allowing improvement of its economic status and attracting merchants from other parts of the region.¹⁷⁰ Mszana was situated between two rivers, the Mszanka and the Raba, and became an important trade route, especially between Poland and Hungary. During the Swedish invasion of Poland in the seventeenth century, however, Mszana was entirely burned down. The reconstruction of the settlement was slow, and Mszana lost its economic importance in the region. After the first partition of Poland in 1772 the village became absorbed into the Habsburg Empire as part of Galicia. In 1801 Austrian authorities sold the rights to lease Mszana's lands to Piotr Wodzicki, who was reputed to be a poor manager of the estate. Several different landowning families consecutively occupied the palace in the centre of the village, and then, at the beginning of twentieth century, Count Henryk Piotr Krasiński took over the declining estate and invested money and resources to enable its reconstruction - the palace having formed a part of the dowry for a Maria Łęcka on her marriage to Count Krasiński. Their daughter, Countess Maria Krasińska, was the last owner of the estate until 1945.¹⁷¹

During the three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795, Mszana remained a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and under Austrian rule, Mszana slowly regained its importance in trade. In 1821 it was connected with other big settlements in the region, Limanowa and Rabka, by a new road, the 'imperial' (*szosa 'cesarska'*).¹⁷² Despite serious damage to the

¹⁶⁹ Olga Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*; available in public library in Mszana Dolna, 253.

¹⁷⁰ Information obtained from the Council Office of Mszana Dolna; also available on: *Urząd Miasta Mszana Dolna*. "Historia Miasta Mszana Dolna." Accessed August 6, 2013. <http://www.mszana-dolna.eu/historia/>.

¹⁷¹ *Mini Forum Mszany Dolnej*. "Historia dworu w Mszanie Dolnej." Accessed August 7, 2013. <http://mszana-dolna.ovh.org/index.php?go=dwor>.

¹⁷² Olga Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*; available in public library in Mszana Dolna, 139.

village which was caused by the peasants' revolt in Galicia in 1846, Mszana experienced a significant development from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The village benefited from the newly created Galician Transversal Railway, which connected the west and east of the region. New businesses, such as the furniture factory 'Ader' and a fertiliser factory, as well as the first sawmill, were established in the village. With the village expanding in the nineteenth century, some Jewish and non-Jewish traders moved to Mszana from surrounding villages.¹⁷³ During the First World War Mszana did not experience major damage and after 1918 continued its growth. However, despite the development of small and medium industries in the region, Mszana was not a wealthy settlement. The unemployment rate during the interwar period was significant not only in the Podhale region, but in the whole country. After 123 years of partition and occupation, Poland finally regained independence was to struggle economically.¹⁷⁴ In spite of the economic difficulties of a newly emerging state, the population of Mszana increased between 1919 and 1931 to approximately 3,000 inhabitants, of whom around 14 per cent was Jewish.¹⁷⁵

In addition to agriculture, trade, craft and small industries, the population of the town also lived off tourism. In the period between the first and second World Wars, Mszana Dolna, as with other small towns in the vicinity, was a popular holiday destination. It was famous for its micro climate, picturesque landscapes and its convenient location among mountains and within the vicinity of fish-filled streams. The town, surrounded by the Beskidy Mountains, with a close reach of the Gorce range and its highest peak Turbacz, was an ideal base for mountain trips. Shlomo Tsur, who was born in Mszana Dolna in 1922 and lived there with his extensive family, remembered the town as being a perfect destination for tourists. In his testimony for the USC Shoah Foundation he recalled:

¹⁷³ Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*, 139.

¹⁷⁴ Krystyna Mlonek, *Bezrobocie w Polsce w XX wieku w świetle badań* (Warszawa: Krajowy Urząd Pracy, 1999), 16.

¹⁷⁵ Jerzy Michalewicz and Wiesław Tyburowki, *Żydowskie okręgi metrykalne i gminy wyznaniowe w Galicji* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 1995), 110.

The town was situated in a mountain area, very beautiful, very green. Resorts surrounding the town. People from Warsaw were coming, mainly Jewish hikers. The town was surrounded by ten mountains.¹⁷⁶

Another inhabitant of Mszana, Cyla Turner, who left the town with her family when the war started, also remembered that Mszana and other towns in the region were popular among tourists:

Rabka is situated near Mszana. There were a lot of Jews there, wealthy Jews. My mother told me that. It was a resort. Mszana less, but as well. The landscape was so beautiful. The climate was very good.¹⁷⁷

Mszana was also a popular holiday destination for organised groups of children (*kolonie*). Mszana, like Rabka, a town situated 10 kilometres from Mszana, due to its favourable climate was perceived as an ideal environment for children's holidays, especially those suffering from chronic chest infections. Brakhah Bergman, who grew up in Radom, remembered that as a child she was sent to Mszana with her friend who was ill. It was expected that the town's micro-climate would be beneficial and the girl would recover.¹⁷⁸ Frieda Lipschitz, born in Chrzanów, attended school in Kraków and she was sent from there to Mszana with other Jewish girls from her school to attend a 'green school' (*zielona szkoła*). The term describes a popular form of trips from schools to a health resort, during which children continued their school curriculum, combined with sport and recreational activities.

I attended a school for teachers, for girls in Kraków. In August 1939 I went with other girls for a 'green school' to Mszana. There were Jewish girls from different countries. I was there when the war started.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Shlomoh Tsur. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Cyla Turner, 28 December 2010, Haifa, Israel.

¹⁷⁸ Brakhah Bergman. Interview 39033. Segments 100-102. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1996. Accessed 16 July 2014.

¹⁷⁹ Frieda Lipschitz. Interview 8256. Segments 20-21. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed 10 September 2014.

Another testimony of a child spending holiday in Mszana can be found on a postcard written in a very young hand to her mother in Lwów (Image 1). The postcard was sent from Mszana by Jancia Sołtysówna in June 1921. The sender's address stated: Summer camp in a school. The girl assured her parent that she was well and having fun. She also asked after her mother's health.¹⁸⁰

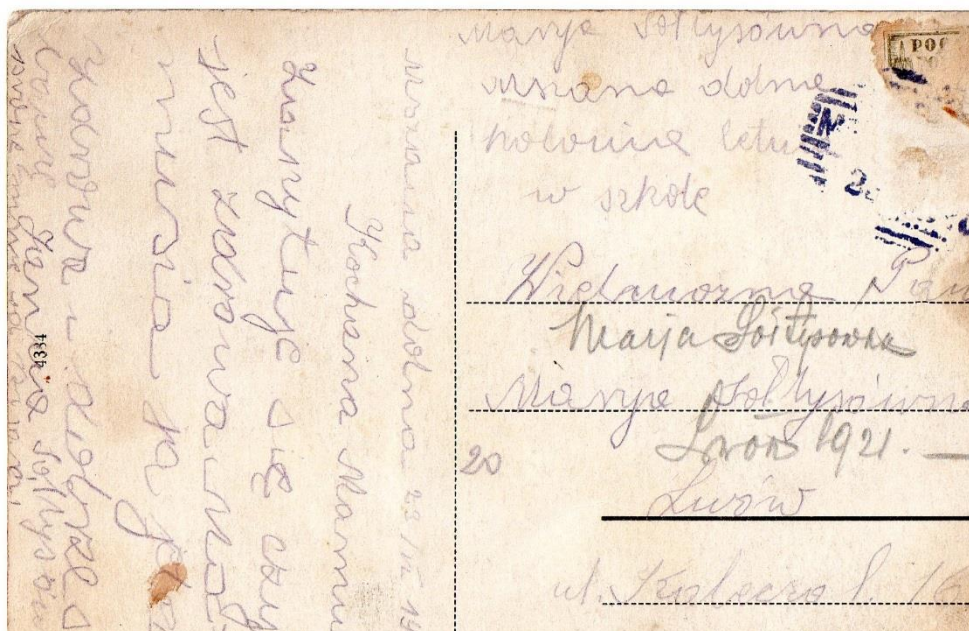


Image 1. The reverse of the postcard sent from Mszana by Jancia Sołtysówna to her mother in Lwów

Mszana was a holiday destination not only for tourists from the principal Polish cities of Kraków, Lwów and Warsaw, but also from abroad. Amongst visitors coming to Mszana were Jewish tourists. Apart from Shlomo Tsur, there was Mordechaj Lustig, who was sent by his parents to the Jewish school in Mszana for half a year during the late 1930s. He also remembered that wealthy Jews were coming to town for the summer holidays.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Full text on the postcard: *From:* Marja Sołtysówna, Mszana Dolna, summer camp in the school. *To:* Mrs Marja Sołtysówna, Lwów, Kalecza Street 16. *Text:* Mszana Dolna, 23 VI 1921, Dearest Mummy, I am asking weather Mummy is well. I am well and I am having fun. Jancia Sołtysówna. I am asking you to write me back.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Mordechaj Lustig, 7 December 2011, Tel Aviv, Israel, interview not recorded.

There are no statistics available on numbers of tourists visiting Mszana. Taking into consideration that the location of Mszana gave opportunity to enjoy warm summers by the river and walks in the mountains, as well as skiing and hiking in the winter, it is very likely that tourism was a major source of income all year long. The town therefore had to ensure an infrastructure for the visitors. People in Mszana provided accommodation and hospitality, as well as entertainment. The most common accommodation was available as rented rooms, or bed and breakfast service in private houses (*kwatery*). As Tsur remembered, there was a number of inns and coffee shops in Mszana, most of them run by Jews, where travellers could take their meals and spend evenings.¹⁸² Non-Jewish visitors were attended by Jewish owners and vice versa. Although the interaction was mainly on the level of customer-business owner, the exchange of service between outsiders and local people did not take place in a social vacuum. On one level there were tourists socialising with the local population, Jewish or non-Jewish. On another, there would have been a co-operation between Jewish and non-Jewish members of the society of Mszana, in order to assure good service for the people visiting the town. Most importantly, tourists from big cities brought new political and social ideas, making Mszana familiar with contemporary ways of thinking and behaving despite being a small town in the mountains.

In the political sphere, the period from the end of the war until 1921 was a time of intense ideological and national conflicts in Eastern Europe. Civil war engulfed the Russian Empire as the Communists and the anti-Communists fought each other, and the Ukrainians and Poles took the opportunity to fight for independence. It was also a period of violence from all these groups against the Jews.¹⁸³ The number of pogroms and their Jewish victims is difficult to estimate, but according to Simon

¹⁸² Shlomoh Tsur. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.

¹⁸³ Peter Kenez, "Pogroms and White ideology in the Russian Civil War," in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish violence in modern Russian History*, ed. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 294-299.

Dubnow, 530 Jewish communities were affected by collective violence between December 1918 and April 1920. There were 887 major pogroms and 349 minor pogroms, which claimed about 60,000 casualties and many more Jews were wounded.¹⁸⁴ Such estimates would make these pogroms far more extensive than those recorded in the pre-1914 last Tsarist era.

The period after Polish independence was regained was also the time of an anti-Jewish outbreak in Mszana. In November 1918 Austrian authorities left the town and the new Polish government had not yet been formed. Illukiewicz and Kalczyński described a group of young people marching through the town at night, singing loudly, breaking into and looting Jewish properties. The mob destroyed a restaurant which belonged to Kleinmanns and broke into Józef Stern's shop. Nobody was hurt, but several buildings were damaged. After a few days, police enforcement was sent from Nowy Sącz to pacify the crowd. Only Illukiewicz called the incident a pogrom, Kalczyński described it as a mob of youngsters, among whom were Jews from the Wygryś family.¹⁸⁵ The outbreak of violence, however, was directed towards the Jewish population, therefore using the word 'pogrom' seems to be appropriate, as it describes any kinds of attacks on Jews based on their 'otherness'.¹⁸⁶ Yet, after the experience of pogroms in Russia and the Ukraine in the 1880s and later between 1903 and 1906 when the wave of violence against Jews resulted in numerous fatalities, the term designated acts of destruction including murders, rapes and looting of properties. It may be that Kalczyński did not perceive the attack as violent as the understanding of pogroms and indeed, in comparison with the general post-1918 outbreak of violence, the event in Mszana was a minor one. Even so, by calling the attack a mischief, the act of violence against Jews

¹⁸⁴ Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews*. Volume V (South Brunswick, New York, London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1973), 844.

¹⁸⁵ Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*, 142; Aleksander Kalczyński, *Memoirs*; a copy obtained from the City Hall in Mszana Dolna, 4.

¹⁸⁶ John D. Klier, "The pogrom paradigm in Russian history," in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish violence in modern Russian History*, ed. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 13.

is diminished and it was clearly more extensive than that. The interwar period was a relatively stable time in the history of Mszana. The town developed as a popular touristic destination which together with small local businesses brought stable income to the population. Mszana's stability was disrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War.

In 1939, the population of Jews in Mszana Dolna had grown to 25 percent of the total. It was estimated that four thousand people lived in Mszana, thus roughly a thousand Jews lived in the town at the start of the war. It might seem to be a relatively small number of people, but Jews constituted a significant part of the population of town and were essential to it. As owners of the majority of shops in Mszana, the Jews were responsible for day to day trading in the town. Jewish shops were concentrated predominantly at the main square, where Jews and non-Jews interacted on a daily basis. Jews in Mszana played an important role in organising daily life in the town, which was a typical feature of many Galician *shtetlach*.

The image of Mszana as a shtetl

Whether or not Mszana could be regarded as a *shtetl*, an Eastern European small Jewish town, brings up a discussion on the meanings of this term. There is no one precise definition of the *shtetl*. Politically and legally the *shtetl* did not exist, there were no laws which established the status of it. What Jews called a *shtetl* could have a status in the local law of a city, a town, or a village.¹⁸⁷ Historically, a *shtetl* originated from Polish private towns in the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Polish nobilities who by the sixteenth century governed private towns invited Jews to settle in and manage the economic growth of their estates. The collaboration between Jews and landlords was advantageous to both sides. The Jews brought their know-how in terms of economic

¹⁸⁷ Samuel Kassow, „Introduction,” in *The shtetl: new evaluations*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 7.

development and in return, they were under protection of the governor of the town they lived in. Leasing system (*arenda*) which developed in *shtetlekh* was an example of effective partnership between nobility and Jews. The main economic roles were leased to a Jewish agent who often encouraged other Jews to settle in the town by sub-leasing them some of these functions.¹⁸⁸ The most important and most lucrative element of the leasing system was the manufacturing and sale of alcohol. Local inns, as well as a market squares in a *shtetl* soon became space where landlords, Jews and peasants interacted economically and culturally. According to John Doyle Klier these interactions, together with the origins of a *shtetl* in a private town, were the only elements which all *shtetlekh* had in common. He claimed that there was no a typical *shtetl* and that each of them had unique features.¹⁸⁹

Whether Mszana can be regarded a *shtetl* is in fact a discussion on the memory about the past of the town preserved by the people who lived there. A *shtetl*, either an imagined construct, or a concept closer to a historical place, is a notion of collective memory and as such, it contributes to the wider portrayal of the life in Mszana. The recollection of the town among the participants of this study represents the conversation between the actual and fictional, present and past. Moreover, the image of a Jewish town held in the memory of the interviewees is also a platform for an encounter between Jews and non-Jews and the social dynamics between these two groups. The image of the *shtetl* Mszana held in the memory of their inhabitants brings an insight of the life in the town and reflects people's personal relations to the place itself. This is why the detailed consideration of what is, and is not, a *shtetl* is so important and more specifically in relationship to the case study of this thesis.

According to Eugenia Prokopówna, not every small town with Jewish community could be described as the *shtetl*, since it was not a physical

¹⁸⁸ Kassow, "Introduction", 3.

¹⁸⁹ John D. Klier, "What exactly was a *shtetl*?" in *The Shtetl: Image and Reality*, ed. Gennady Estraiikh & Mikhail Krutokov (Oxford: Oxford Institute for Yiddish Studies, European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 26-28.

space, but rather a cultural one, a symbol and a synonym of Jewish culture.¹⁹⁰ This definition, however, refers more to its literary perception rather than to the historical reality of the *shtetl*. Described as a state of mind, an exercise in nostalgia and an idyll, the *shtetl* became an elusive concept of literary fiction.¹⁹¹ Particularly with the disappearance of the Jewish world after the war, the life of a Jewish town has been mythologized and its image became very different from the historical reality. As Eva Hoffman points out:

The *shtetl*, in the absence of living actualities, has become a trope, a metaphor frozen in time. In our minds, it tends to be unchanging, filled always with the same Sabbaths, the *dybbuks*, the fear of Cossacks, the family warmth. But although it is true that the *shtetl* changed reluctantly and slowly, it was not exempt from the forces of accident, conflict, and development – in other words, from history.¹⁹²

Indeed, the depiction of the *shtetl* in the Jewish literature before and after the war had little in common with reality. Sholem Aleichem (1859 – 1916), one of the leading writers of modern and especially East European Jewish literature, made small Jewish villages and people living in them the centre of his stories. Although coming from a *shtetl* himself, Aleichem depicted small villages in a manner distant from reality. They were the centres of exclusively Jewish life and Jews seemed to be economically and socially self-sufficient. In fact, *shtetlach* economically and in other ways depended on their non-Jewish population and vice versa. Aleichem's feature of a *shtetl* presented it as a centre of the world, a pleasant and safe place to live. As Lamed Shapiro remarked, a *shtetl* was described almost as a 'Jewish state'.¹⁹³ There was also another aspect of a mythical description of a *shtetl*, less positive and nostalgic. Aleichem's Kasrilevke or Anatevka were backward, haphazard little Jewish towns, with no sense of aesthetics and lack of architectural planning:

¹⁹⁰ Eugenia Prokopówna, "The image of the shtetl in Polish literature," *POLIN: From shtetl to socialism* 4 (1989):129-141.

¹⁹¹ Israel Bartal, "Imagined Geography. The shtetl, myth and reality," in *The shtetl: new evaluations*, ed. Samuel Katz (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 179.

¹⁹² Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl. The history of a small town and an extinguished world* (London: Vintage, 1999), 80.

¹⁹³ Davis G. Roskies, *Against the apocalypse. Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 116.

The town of the small Jews is far away from the world of the Holy One Blessed Be He. In a God-forsaken corner, a place not trodden by human beings, it has been standing there for many years, dreaming its dreams and sunk in its thoughts, forlorn and preoccupied with itself. It seems to have nothing to do with everything in the outside world, ...such as culture, education, progress, and the like... You want to know what Kasrilevke looks like? ...The houses themselves are small mud huts, low and rickety, and look like ancient gravestones in an ancient cemetery...Don't look for streets and marketplaces in Kasirlevke. When the city was built, they did not lay it out with a builder's rule or sketch it with a compass, or leave any space between the houses. Why should any empty or desolate space stand idle, when you can build a house there?¹⁹⁴

Another mythical depiction of the *shtetl*, combined with nostalgia for the lost Jewish world can be found in the work of Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902-1991). Singer left Poland for America in 1930s and spent most of his life in the United States. Although he never went back to the country of his birth, the vast majority of his books described the life of Jews in small towns and villages of Eastern Europe. Even in America, he kept writing and publishing in Yiddish, the language of the characters of his books. Singer's stories portrayed the world of *shtetlach*, which had ceased to exist a long time ago. His depiction of the *shtetl*, like Aleichem's Kasrilevka, was also stylised, but it was not a peaceful and innocent Jewish place. Singer's prose introduces the *shtetl* as a timeless, mystical place, full of ghosts and eroticism. However, it is again an impoverished and forgotten Jewish place, with almost no sign of Gentiles.

I came here from Lublin. Tishevitz is a godforsaken village; Adam didn't even stop to pee there. It's so small that a wagon goes through town and the horse is in the marketplace just as the rear wheels reach the toll gate. There is mud in Tishevitz from Sukkoth until Tishe b'Av. The goats of the town don't need to lift their beards to chew at the thatched roofs of the cottages. Hens roost in the middle of the streets. Birds build nests in the women's bonnets. In the tailor's synagogue a billy goat is the tenth in the quorum.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Sholem Aleichem, *The town of the small people*. Collected Works, vol 7. (New York, 1944), 10-15.

¹⁹⁵ Issac B. Singer, *The Last Demon* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), 1-2.

Indeed, more generally there is a tendency in Jewish literature to see the *shtetl* as a place inhabited exclusively by Jews with no physical space assigned to non-Jews. In reality, even those *shtetlach* which were in majority Jewish were also inhabited by Christians. Both groups lived in close proximity and although Jews and Christians belonged to two different communities, they interacted on a daily basis. The Jewish residential areas were not segregated from the Christian households; there were no parts of *shtetl* assigned strictly to one group. The co-existence of both groups was also reflected in the town's topography. Unlike in literary fiction, synagogues and Jewish praying houses were erected in close vicinity of Christian churches, schools and the city hall. As Israel Bartal states, in the literary *shtetl*, the centre is all-Jewish and Christians live on the outskirts, while in the historical town Jewish and Christians houses and institutions were situated next to each other.¹⁹⁶

The lack of planning and sense of aesthetics present in the mythical town is far from the real geography of it. The literary version - a dirty and chaotic town - was in fact a well-planned one with streets running in straight lines, with the marketplace in the centre and a church and a synagogue on its sides. Even so, the church would always dominate the landscape, either by its size, or simply by being situated above the synagogue. The Jewish school, the *heder*, was based in a teacher house, or near the synagogue. Christian cemeteries were in general located in the churchyard, while Jews buried their dead outside a village, or on its outskirts. But for both groups, Jews and Christians, the most important topographical feature of the town was the marketplace, a 'neutral' space where everyday life was concentrated. Taking the geography of Mszana into consideration, the town was far from the literary stereotype of a *shtetl*. Well planned, with sensible layout of the streets and wooden and concrete houses, rather than miserable huts, Mszana did not resemble Aleichem's Kasrilevke. Its landscape, however, was reminiscent of many other small towns in Poland where Jews were a significant part of the

¹⁹⁶ Bartal. "Imagined Geography", 189-190.

population. Sławomir Kaprański, describing different patterns of spatial layout of the *shtetlach*, noted:

A synagogue was usually built in the center of a town or close to it, but at a certain distance from the local church, being, as a rule, separated from the church by the market place. It was also a rule that a synagogue building must not be bigger and higher than the local church.¹⁹⁷

This description could easily be Mszana, where the Catholic church and the synagogue were indeed situated on two sides of the market square. The church clearly dominated over the whole town, not only because of its location on a hill, but also because of its great size. The church as the predominant element of the landscape of Mszana can be seen on the drawing on the postcard sent by Jancia Sołtysówna in 1921 (Image 2) and on a photo of Mszana possibly taken in the same period of time (Image 3). Both images represent the view of the church and other buildings around the market square, including the synagogue. On the postcard, the church is a long building in the middle of the picture, with a round window. Both pictures show a neat and well organised space, where the church is a predominant part of the landscape. Unlike the literary *shtetl*, the presence of non-Jews in Mszana is visible and unquestionable. The striking image of the church is a reminder of where the domineering power in the town was located. It was the non-Jewish part of the population, represented by the Catholic church, local administration and the nobility who resided in the palace, situated on the opposite side of Mszana than the market square. Despite the dominant image of the church in town, the Jewish presence in Mszana was evident and visible as well, as most of the Jewish families lived and worked in the town centre. Mszana, therefore, was neither a literary image of a Chagall-like looking *shtetl* inhabited solely by Jewish characters, nor a purely non-Jewish dominated town, where Jews were treated with contempt and barbarism by local peasants. Both groups co-operated with each other on many levels of social life even if the dominant group was the non-Jews.

¹⁹⁷ Sławomir Kaprański, "Battlefields of memory. Landscape and Identity in Polish-Jewish Relations," *History & Memory* 13, 2 (2001): 39.

They acted in various capacities on a daily basis: as customers/shop owners, neighbours, teachers/pupils, employers/employees and many others. As Hoffman concludes, a *shtetl* was a social formation where two groups participated in daily rituals:

It should not be forgotten, however, that 'shtetl' refers not only to a specifically Jewish phenomenon, but to places where Jews lived side by side with the local population. Polish shtetls were usually made up of two poor, traditionalist, and fairly incongruous subcultures: Orthodox Jews and premodern peasants. Morally and spiritually, the two societies remained resolutely separate, by choice on both sides. Yet they lived in close physical proximity and, willy-nilly, familiarity. In the shtetl, pluralism was experienced not as ideology, but as ordinary life.¹⁹⁸

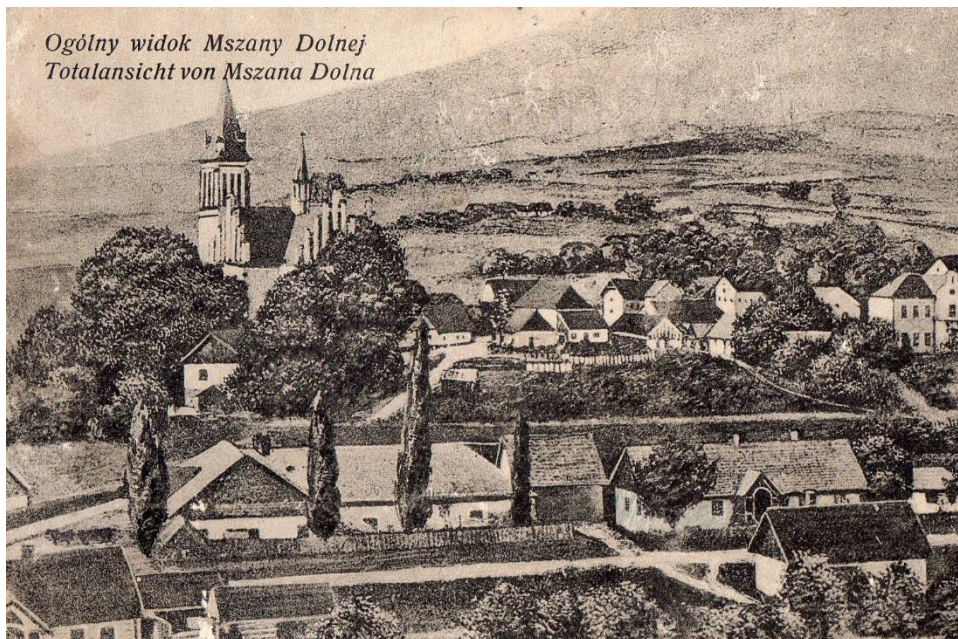


Image 2 The landscape of Mszana (drawing) on the front of the postcard sent by Jancia Sołtysówna to her mother in Lwów

¹⁹⁸ Hoffman, *Shtetl*, 12.



Image 3 A picture of the landscape of Mszana

The image of the *shtetl* preserved in the literary fiction found its place also in the Jewish collective memory. Once the world of the *shtetl* was destroyed in the Holocaust, the real town was replaced by a nostalgic idealization of it. The *shtetl* became a symbol of the lost Jewish life, with all attribution of the literary depiction of an idyllic place. The nostalgic perspective introduces a competition between the past and the present, in which the past always wins. It is this kind of nostalgia for the peaceful world from the past that exists in the memories of the Holocaust survivors. Kaja Kaźmierska, when analysing biographies and memory of Polish Jews, noticed that Jewish nostalgia for a happy and ideal life in a *shtetl* before the war can also transformed into a sorrow after losing this world in the Holocaust.¹⁹⁹ In other words, nostalgia is either what David Lowenthal described as ‘memory with the pain removed’, or becomes the core of the loss.²⁰⁰ Likewise, the image of life in Mszana varies among the Jewish interviewees.

Dora Appel, who lived in Mszana with her family until 1941, remembers the years of her childhood and young age in town as time of happiness and safety. She recalls the beauty of the landscape, and the carefree environment where she had friends and family around her and she felt

¹⁹⁹ Kaja Kaźmierska, *Biografia i pamięć. Na przykładzie pokoleniowego doświadczenia ocalonych z Zagłady* (Kraków: NOMOS, 2008), 204-205.

²⁰⁰ David Lowenthal, *The past if a foreign country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 8.

there as safe as never afterwards.²⁰¹ Shlomo Tsur also remembers Mszana of his childhood as a peaceful and friendly place where the Jewish community led a humble, but honest life.²⁰² In both testimonies, Mszana is remembered as a place where Jews and non-Jews coexisted on a daily basis. Therefore, even if the memory of the town was idealised, it was not a depiction of a purely Jewish *shtetl* without the presence of non-Jews. Moreover, there were other Jewish interviewees whose recollections of Mszana represented quite a different image of the town. Cyla Turner when asked about her memory of the life in town, stated that Jews were afraid of non-Jews and that they 'always knew that the Poles were antisemites'.²⁰³ Rachelle Blavat's memory of life in Mszana revealed an even more extreme scenario. She recalled:

We were always afraid of the Poles. On Mondays and Thursdays they had different pogroms, things like that. They never liked the Jews. We haven't been free like the children are here now [in the US].²⁰⁴

These disparate recollections of what Mszana was characterise the contrasted place of *shtetl* in the memory of its inhabitants. Hoffman pointed out that the image of Eastern European *shtetl* oscillates between utopia and dystopia, although in reality it was neither.²⁰⁵ It is rather unlikely that life in a community was deprived of any conflicts between Jews and non-Jews. Similarly, pogroms conducted regularly twice a week is equally fantastic. It is possible that the memory of Mszana from before the war is to some extent a matter of choice. People chose what and how to remember and what to forget and in this way they decided what was important for them. The way in which people recall the life in Mszana does not necessary reflect the history of the town, but tells more about the individuals who remember. Rachelle Blavat when asked whether she felt free as a child said that she believed so back then. It was only after

²⁰¹ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

²⁰² Shlomoh Tsur. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.

²⁰³ Interview with Cyla Turner, 28 December 2010, Haifa, Israel.

²⁰⁴ Rachelle Blavat. Interview 2737. Segments 1-8. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed 16 July 2014.

²⁰⁵ Hoffman, *Shtetl*, 12.

many years that she realised that 'she had not been a free Jewish child when she lived in Mszana'.²⁰⁶ She explained that as a Jew, she could not do everything she wanted to as a child and that she was exposed to antisemitism. Although she could not recall any particular antisemitic incidents from her childhood, Blavat claimed that there must have been some, but she could not recall them because of the amount of years which had passed. Turner's and Blavat's construction of a negative experience of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Mszana, as well as Tsur's and Appel's idealised vision of two communities' coexistence, were certainly based on their impression of life in Mszana. Their memories, though, have been also influenced by their life experience *after* they left Mszana. Blavat realised that as a Jewish child, she was not permitted to do what she wished to, reflecting her life after experiences in America, whereas Appel contrasted her feeling of safety and carefree life in Mszana with her experience of anxiety in the USA. Cyla Turner, who escaped from Europe to Israel soon after the war, supported her views of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Mszana with the knowledge of the relations in Poland. After portraying non-Jews in Mszana as antisemites, Turner added:

Here in Israel we always knew Poles are antisemites. They always have been, even their children and grandchildren.²⁰⁷

These discrepancies in recollections of the town as either antisemitic, or a safe haven for the Jewish population reflect the diversity of visions of what a *shtetl* was.

If a *shtetl* is considered an underdeveloped and backward place, than Mszana in the interwar period did not fit this description. The population, Jewish and non-Jewish, was indeed mostly religiously traditional and impoverished. It was not, however, deprived of knowledge of news from political and cultural spheres. Mszana, as a popular holiday destination,

²⁰⁶ Rachele Blavat. Interview 2737. Segments 1-8. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed 16 July 2014.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Cyla Turner, 28 December 2010, Haifa, Israel.

had, as noted, access to new ideas brought by visitors from other cities in Poland and from abroad. Apart from Polish tourists there were also people from other countries visiting, especially the nearest one, Austria. The exchange of information also took place through correspondence between the inhabitants of Mszana and their relatives and friends abroad. Emigration from the region at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century resulted in many people having someone from the family living abroad. Although the vast majority of Jews from Mszana was religious and traditional, and Zionism was not a popular movement among the local population, there were families whose members emigrated to Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁰⁸ Jakub Weissberger's brother, Lotek, moved there, but kept in touch with his family. Henryk Zdanowski, one of the few remaining people who remembers the Jews of Mszana from his childhood, recalled that Lotek Weissberger came to visit Mszana in the summer before the war and apart from elegant clothes, he brought stories about life in Palestine.²⁰⁹ Members of Shlomo Tsur's family emigrated to the USA and his paternal grandfather lived in Belgium. Tsur remembered that they all corresponded with his father for many years.²¹⁰ Kalczyński recalled being friendly with his neighbours, including the Adlers' cousin Edi from Vienna who every year visited Mszana.

The Adlers used to be close with their relatives from Vienna. They often came to Mszana. In particular, we were friendly with their cousin Edi, who was our age. He used to come to Mszana every year to walk in the mountains with us. [...] We liked him, he was a good friend. While we were walking, he was telling us about interesting current political events in Europe.²¹¹

Another testimony revealing the exchange of information between members of Jewish community of Mszana and their acquaintances and

²⁰⁸ Shlomoh Tsur. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.; Tsur stated that Zionism was as unpopular among the Jews from Mszana as it is among *haredi* Jews in modern Israel.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²¹⁰ Shlomoh Tsur. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.

²¹¹ Kalczyński, *Memoirs*, 7.

family abroad is a collection of twelve letters from 1930s. They were written by a person named Schullehrer who moved to Antwerp and they are addressed to Salomon Bittersfeld from Mszana.²¹² Unfortunately, there is no other record available of this person. The name is not on the list of the victims from 1942, so possibly the family left Mszana before the war. The letters mainly describe everyday lives of both people, including details mainly of their work, but also family life and their relations with other people in their communities. It is not certain whether both people were related, or if they were work associates or friends. The person based in Antwerp was a diamond seller and considered opening a shop in Mszana. He wanted to borrow some money from the addressee, which suggests that Bittersfeld must have been a man of means. In his letter, Bittersfeld mentioned people who came to Mszana and visited him, such as Goldrajch with his fiancée. He also described arguments he had with his associate Fiszl, who lived outside Mszana and was, he alleged, an unreliable person.²¹³ All the letters contain names of members of two families, work associates and friends. None of them refers to non-Jewish names, but this fact does not mean that they did not have any contact with non-Jews. The lack of presence of non-Jews from the correspondence may suggest that the closest circle of people for both writers was Jewish. Although the letters mainly concerned issues related to work, they were also very personal, describing problems which the writers encountered in their jobs and complicated family affairs.²¹⁴ The correspondence exhibits the variety of people the Jews from Mszana collaborated with on professional and personal level. The letters mentioned Jewish members of the community of Mszana and those who lived near the town, as well, as abroad. We can assume that these contacts were not limited exclusively to Jewish people.

Many non-Jewish members of the population in Mszana also had regular contact with their relatives who lived abroad, mostly in the USA, Canada

²¹² National Archives in Spytkowice, Poland; file: *Listy żydowskie z Mszany Dolnej*, file no 31/1018/1.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

and Austria.²¹⁵ Mszana, therefore, was certainly not an insular place without any knowledge of the outside world. Although traditional in many ways, the community of town was acquainted with new social and political ideas not only in Poland, but also abroad. Tourists, as well as friends and family members who lived in other countries systematically delivered noteworthy information. In this regard, Mszana did not fit the description of a remote and rather primitive community. It experienced constant inward and outward migration.

Bringing this specific discussion to a close, is it legitimate for us to describe Mszana as a *shtetl*? If we consider the *shtetl* being a mythical place from the past, the space of harmony and peace with picturesque landscape, then Mszana *is* a *shtetl*. Equally, if a *shtetl* is described as a place where Jews are not fully safe and being threatened by antisemitic peasants, Mszana can be called a *shtetl*. These two images though, exist only in the memories of the Jews of the town who survived the war. It can also be described as the *shtetl* if we take into consideration the topography of the town. With the Catholic church and the synagogue placed on two sides of the market square, Jewish and Catholic shops situated along the main street of the town, and Catholic and Jewish households built in the vicinity of each other, Mszana fits the classic description of the Eastern European *shtetl*. The Jewish cemetery is situated on the outskirts of the town, while the Catholic one is located by the church, in the centre. The *heder*, although the building does not exist anymore, once stood next to the synagogue, which was also destroyed. Yet, unlike a *shtetl*, Mszana was a rather cosmopolitan small town, with the railway bringing in people from other Polish cities and from abroad. The population was mostly traditional, but also aware of new political and cultural movements introduced by visitors and relatives who lived abroad.

Thus, Mszana can be regarded as a *shtetl*, but it needs to be remembered that the term has multi-layered and different meanings,

²¹⁵ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Hanna Knapczyk, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

depending on different perspectives of time, place and author. The picture of Mszana preserved in the memories of its inhabitants was diverse, sometimes even contradictory within individual narratives. The difference in remembering the town occurred not only between Jews and non-Jews, but it varied within these groups as well. Although most of the interviewees called Mszana a *shtetl*, there is no universal image of the town which could be described as the most definitive one. Each depiction given by the interviewees reflect the author's personal memories of life in Mszana, as much as later experience of life elsewhere. The uneven image of Mszana and the entanglement of historical and idealised version of the *shtetl* proves how challenging the distinction between history and memory can be. Although not all the interviewees used the word '*shtetl*' in their accounts, elements of the concept of it were present in all the interviews and testimonies of the Jews from the town. There were many different versions of Mszana as the *shtetl*, from a nostalgic vision of a peaceful place of ones childhood to the despised past in a backward town. Some of the interviewees absorbed stereotypical characteristics of a Jewish town from Yiddish literature, although historically they were very unlikely to be true. The idea of pogroms which were carried out twice a week on the same days can serve as an example of it. Likewise, Mszana presented as the idyllic and spiritual place of Jewish life is not a historical portrayal of the town. It is important to stress that information of historical value are embedded in the image of Mszana as a Jewish town. It is, however, the memory of it and how this memory varies among the Jews of Mszana which is the main focus of this study. Similar to historical and literary depiction of a *shtetl*, memories of Mszana diverged and finding the one, 'true' image of it is ultimately futile. Instead, a detailed history of the Jewish presence in the town is required.

Jewish life in pre-war Mszana

The first Jews settled in Mszana in sixteenth century after being granted permission for leasing several inns from the landlord.²¹⁶ In the whole country Jews were prominent in leasing monopoly rights from the crown or the nobility. This activity was regarded as similar to money lending, and thus as sinful by Christians. Aleksander Kalczyński, a local activist and a member of the Home Army, in his chronicles of Mszana, named seven inns located in and near the town which belonged to Jewish families. As Kalczyński points out, some inns were more popular than others. The two most popular ones were the inn on the border of Mszana and Kasinka, and the one situated in the part of Mszana called *Przymiarki* was run by the Zollmans. The author did not make any major comments on the owners of the inns, apart from the Zollmans. According to Kalczyński, they often had 'problems with the police; they allegedly forged money'. The Zollman family was perceived as wealthy, as in addition to the inn they also financed several Jewish shops in the part of Mszana known as *Słomka*.²¹⁷ Illukiewicz shared the opinion of the family as being wealthy (albeit that she knew them as the Zellmanns). She stated that the family used to lend money to other, less well-off, Jewish families.²¹⁸ Apart from the Zellmanns, Illukiewicz wrote about other Jewish owners of inns in Mszana. She mentioned the Zesslers who run an inn in the Main Square and the Fabers's in Olszyny. An inn which was run by Sztern and Weinberger was also mentioned. Illukiewicz, like Kalczyński, made a reference to the inn on the border of Mszana and Kasinka which was run by Schmidt.²¹⁹ This particular inn was remembered by three of the non-Jewish interviewees as a particularly popular place among inhabitants of Mszana.²²⁰ One of the interviewees, Hanna Knapczyk, keeps a framed old photo of one of the inns on the wall in her living room (Image 4). It

²¹⁶ Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*, 139.

²¹⁷ Kalczyński, *Memoirs*, 1-2.

²¹⁸ Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*, 139.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 139.

²²⁰ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland ; Interview with Hanna Knapczyk, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

was placed there, among other pictures and photographs, some of them of Mszana, as a reminder of the past. The picture of a Jewish inn served in her home as a topographical reference point in the history of the town. Some of the inns, the one run by Schmidt in particular, were mentioned in several interviews as a meaningful place in the town's topography.



Image 4 A picture of one of the inns in Mszana

With the influx of people from the region in the nineteenth century, the number of Jews in Mszana also increased. With a rising Jewish presence, the community decided to build a synagogue, a bathhouse (*mikvah*) and to organise a Jewish school. The synagogue was erected by the main square and was there until the Second World War when it was destroyed by the Nazis. The Jewish school was situated near the synagogue.

The majority of Jewish members of the community of Mszana were traders and shopkeepers. Most of the shops were situated on Rynek, the main square (today Piłsudskiego Street and Kolbego Street) and on Leśna Street. Illukiewicz mentioned Jewish families with their occupations and addresses. She stated in her memoirs that at 25 Rynek there was a wooden house which was used as a prayer house and a part of it was given over as a grocery shop. The Jewish families who lived in the buildings on 17, 19 and 21 Leśna Street sold textiles, mainly at the

markets. The Zins and the Grinbergs had a bakery and a grocery shop near 14 Rynek and a Jew named Josek owned a butchers shop at number 11. Next to this house, and close to the synagogue, was a building which the rabbi Holender rented from a non-Jewish family, the Mitans. Behind it there was another wooden house, owned by a Jewish glazier, the only one in Mszana. The Seslers who traded beer, grain and sparkling water lived at 5 Rynek. Across Rynek, the main square, there were Jewish shops delivering grocery shopping, fresh fish, textiles and all kinds of craftsmen services. Weissberger was owner of the biggest ironmongery, the Turner family had a big grocery shop and Szamberger had a butcher shop. A lawyer Streimer owned the building on 8 Kolbego Street and a woman named Feuerstein had the biggest textile shop on 19 Kolbego Street. *Olszyny*, a part of Mszana near Orkana Street had several Jewish shops, including a grocery shop owned by Gietz and candy shop run by Izaak Widawski. The type of sweets Widawski had in his shop was called *sztolwerki* by the local people.²²¹ Henryk Zdanowski, a person who as a child worked in a Jewish shop owned by the Weissbergers, recalled that *sztolwerki* were a part of his childhood, as they were for many other children from Mszana.²²²

Illukiewicz's description of the topography of the town, as well as Kalczyński's account, indicated that the vast majority of trade in Mszana belonged to Jewish families. Small factories in the town also had Jewish owners. The Aders owned the furniture factory on what at present is Ogrodowa Street. The Langsams produced fertilizers and provided agricultural machinery. The local sawmill belonged to the Countess Krasieńska, but it was leased by a Jewish family, the Feuersteins. Unpopulated areas on the outskirts of Mszana were used as timber worksites and from there wood was transported to many cities around the country.²²³ Rachele Blavat, nee Feuerstein, whose father was in charge of the sawmill in Mszana, recalled that timber supply was a significant

²²¹ Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*,141-142.

²²² Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²²³ Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*,141-142.

business in Mszana.²²⁴ Non-Jews were mainly farmers, with only a minority being in trade. Jewish shop keepers were organised in the Jewish guild for tradesman and craftsmen, the Jewish Association (*Związek Żydowski*), which provided religious and social services for its members. Unlike Christian guilds, Jewish ones were supervised by *kahal*, the local Jewish governing body. This rule also applied to the Jewish Association in Mszana. Non-Jewish tradesmen in the town belonged to the competitive guild, the Merchant Congregation (*Kongregacja Kupiecka*). The existence of separate guilds for Jews and Christians was a common practice in Poland. The first merchants' guilds were established in Poland by immigrants from Germany in thirteenth century following the example of Western Europe, and Jews were not admitted to the newly created guilds.²²⁵ Instead, Jews were granted permits from Polish guilds, for which they had to pay. Gradually, Jewish merchants started establishing their own organisations which gathered only Jewish traders and protected their members from the competition of Christian municipal guilds, as well as from Jewish traders who applied what was perceived as unfairly low prices.²²⁶

The Jewish community in Mszana also organised the town's only library, under the direction of Dawid (Dudek) Langsam, whose father was a wealthy owner of a shop and factory at *Olszyny*. It was a large collection of books, mainly in Polish, with some in Yiddish.²²⁷ Books were available to all members of the community. After the war, the majority of books were taken over by the local library, while others were kept in private collections by the inhabitants of Mszana. There was also a collection of religious Jewish books, possibly kept in the *heder*, near the synagogue building. At the beginning of the war, they were all collected by the Nazis and stored in a big pile. The store room was kept open and local children

²²⁴ Rachele, Blavat. Interview 2737. Segments 1-8. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed 16 July 2014.

²²⁵ Adam Teller. 2010. Trade. YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Trade> (accessed October 11, 2015).

²²⁶ Ela Bauer. 2011. Guilds. YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Guilds> (accessed March 13, 2014).

²²⁷ Interview with Hanna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

played there after school. One of the interviewees recalled that she used to jump from the pile of books and use the leather covers to slide from a snowy hill.

There was another big library. There were books in Hebrew or Yiddish, and all in leather covers. They moved these books into the building where sparkling water was made, it was a Jewish building. We were so stupid. After school, which was near that building, we used to go there and walk and jump on it. And we used the leather covers to slide on our bottoms from a steep. Jesus, one was such an idiot! If we had taken these books, it would have been a fortune now [...] The books were destroyed later. Children walked on them, there was such a big pile of these books there. We used to climb on the top and jump from them. The rest was burned later on.²²⁸

The main concern of the interviewee was that books, which could be valuable at present, were destroyed. The fact that they were at the heart of the religious and cultural life of the town's Jews was not a concern in her account of the library's destruction. The collection of religious books in Mszana was of impressive size and quality for a small town.²²⁹ The books were used in the *heder* which was popular among Jewish people in the region. Boys from surrounding towns and villages were often sent to study in the religious school in Mszana.²³⁰

The majority of Jews in Mszana were *Hasidim* of Bobowa, with a minority of progressive and emancipated Jews.²³¹ Established at the end of the nineteenth century by Shelomoh Halberstam (1847–1905), the dynasty from Bobowa was one of the most influential Hasidic groups in pre-war Poland. Shelomoh's only son, Ben-Tsiyon Halberstam (1874–1941), who succeeded him as a *tsadik* (righteous), was famous for founding around

²²⁸ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²²⁹ Shlomoh Tsur. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.

²³⁰ Interviews with Mordechai Lustig, 7 December 2011, Tel Aviv, Israel, interview not recorded.

²³¹ Kalczyński, Aleksander. "Wspomnienia z historii Żydów w Mszanie," *Zagórzanie. Mszana Dolna i okolice*. Accessed January 27 and 29, 2010. <http://maciejczak.rmt.pl/p20.html>. (discontinued in late 2010)

fifty yeshivas in Poland.²³² Both Illukiewicz and Kalczyński described Halberstam's visits to Mszana before the war. All the Jewish shops were closed on this day. The Jews wore their best clothes, which were usually used on the Sabbath. Kalczyński recalled that men wore long black coats (*chałat, bekishe*), black fur hats (*shtreimel*) and white stockings.²³³ The *tsadik* arrived by train from Bobowa and the Jews of Mszana greeted him at the station. Then, he was taken through the town to the synagogue. On the way, the Jews tried to touch the horse carriage which was carrying the holy man.²³⁴ Although the majority of Jews in Mszana was religious, even those who were more liberal, like the Ader family, the Lillentals and the family of the lawyer Streiner, had their shops or offices closed on Shabbat.²³⁵ As Shlomoh Tsur, whose mother had a shop in Mszana before the war, remembered, none of the Jewish families in Mszana dared opening their shops on Saturdays. In his testimony, Tsur suggested that some of the progressive Jews, like the lawyer Streiner, would have worked on Shabbat if they had lived in a less traditional place than Mszana.²³⁶ Tsur's father, a big sympathiser of the Zionist movement, used to take his son to the synagogue every Saturday. Tsur recalled that, despite some of the Jews in the town being liberal and progressive, Zionism was not accepted among Jewish people in Mszana. His father's beliefs had an impact on Tsur himself, as well as on his siblings.

My grandfather was very religious. My dad was far from being religious. He was in trouble, because he was very much into Zionism. We had problems because of that. Our neighbours didn't like it. Eretz Israel in Mszana was not acceptable. More or less, like among *haredi* Jews in Israel at present. We, the children, suffered because of father's convictions.[...] The only thing which people had against my dad was that he brought Zionism into town. His conviction would have been treated differently somewhere else, but not in Mszana.²³⁷

²³² Assaf, David. 2010. Sandz Hasidic Dynasty. YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Sandz_Hasidic_Dynasty (accessed April 19, 2015).

²³³ Kalczyński, *Memoirs*, 3.

²³⁴ Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*, 142.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, 142.

²³⁶ Tsur, Shlomoh. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.

²³⁷ *Ibid*.

Kalczyński claimed that the majority of Jews were religious *Hasidim*, but younger generations and Jewish intelligentsia had more left-wing convictions with tendencies towards Trotskyism. However, on *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), the holiest day of the year for the Jews, all of the Jews of Mszana went to the synagogue.²³⁸ The author made the statement about young Jews being supporters of the extreme left-wing movements, without further explanation of the phenomenon. In fact, there is no evidence of a strong support of the communism among Jews in Mszana. It is unlikely that the Jewish community which was largely devotedly Hasidic, would have welcomed communist ideology. Its supporters, if present in Mszana, would have been recruited from the liberal Jewish circle and would certainly have been marginal. It may be that Kalczyński's remark about young Jews' inclination towards communism reflects the stereotype of Jewish people as supporters of this ideology. The stereotype of *Żydokomuna* (Judeo-Communism), the conviction that Jews were collaborators of the Soviets and they attempt to implement communism in Poland, was a widespread belief in the pre-war and wartime Poland. It remained popular in the post-war period. Historian and sociologist Paweł Śpiewak indicated that one of the main accusations against Jews made by the nationalistic movement, as well as by some of the representatives of the Catholic Church in the pre-war Poland, was their support of communism.²³⁹ Polish fear of Bolshevism was so strong that the antisemitic claim of Jews being agents of Moscow made them enemies of the Polish sovereignty. The image of a Polish Jew plotting against Polish state and threatening its independence was widely used by right-wing and Catholic journalists.²⁴⁰ Newspapers and magazines which published anti-Jewish articles, such as the Catholic *Mały Dziennik* (Little Daily) and *Rycerz Niepokalanej* (Knight of the Immaculate), or the weekly of the right-wing party *Narodowa Demokracja* (National Democracy which was also called *Endecja*), *Rola*, were available across the country and people in Mszana had access to these publications. None of the

²³⁸ Kalczyński, *Memoirs*, 4.

²³⁹ Paweł Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna. Interpretacje historyczne* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czerwone i Czarne, 2012), 25.

²⁴⁰ Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, 26-27.

interviewees, however, expressed any direct correlation between Jews and the communist ideology. Kalczyński's comment might have echoed the stereotype of Judeo-Communism, but this particular antisemitic conviction did not translate into a common belief among non-Jewish inhabitants of Mszana. In general, Jews were perceived by non-Jews as the people of a different religion, but not a threatening or hostile one. Until the beginning of the war, the Jewish community was able to practice their faith freely. Although the non-Jews in Mszana did not comprehend the nature of Judaism, they never tried to prevent the Jews from practicing their faith. It is fair to say that until 1939, the Jewish population of Mszana was able to practice their religion and run their businesses without major obstacles from the non-Jewish part of inhabitants. Their fate drastically changed with the outbreak of the Second World War.

The persecution of the Jews of Mszana during the war

The persecution of the Jews of Mszana Dolna began soon after the Nazi invasion in 1939. The Jews there were made to live in an open ghetto - there were no walls, or fences around the territory inhabited by Jews. Although a formal Jewish ghetto did not exist in Mszana, people were restricted from leaving the town. As noted, at the beginning of the war, one quarter of the population of Mszana Dolna was Jewish.²⁴¹ According to the correspondence from 1942 between a branch of the Jewish Social Aid in Mszana and its headquarters in Kraków, there was 782 Jews in Mszana before the war. The number rose to 1064 in 1942, of which there were 600 Jews from outside Mszana.²⁴² From the beginning of the war, Jewish people from other towns and cities were relocated to Mszana and housed with local Jewish families. The refugees came from Kraków, Łódź, Dobra, Krynica, Muszyna, Skrzydlina, and Zembrzyce.²⁴³ The largest group of 160 people came at the beginning of 1940 from Łódź. By

²⁴¹ Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*, 139.

²⁴² Korespondencja Prezydium Ż.S.S. z Radą Żydowską i Delegaturą Ż.S.S. w Mszanie Dolnej 5 I 1942 – 7 VIII 1942. File 211/710. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

²⁴³ *Ibid*

October 1940, only 40 refugees from Łódź remained in Mszana.²⁴⁴ Unfortunately, no information on what happened to the remaining Jews from Łódź is available. It can be assumed that either they were transferred to another town, or died within 10 months of their arrival to Mszana. The situation of those Jews relocated to Mszana was worse than of those who had lived there before the war. They came with few possessions; often they did not know anyone in Mszana and were lodged in strangers' houses. In order to survive, Jews had to find a source of food and other necessary goods. The only way was trading with non-Jewish neighbours, which was more difficult when they were not known by them. The chances of survival for strangers were certainly smaller. All Jews between the age of 15 and 65 were ordered to report for forced labour every morning. They were mainly assigned to physically difficult jobs.

People were forced to work, it was hard work, you had to march there for five kilometres every morning. All Jewish population between 15 and 65 years old was forced to work. They were assigned to building roads or breaking stones, there was a norm to be accomplished. Young children between six and ten years old had to collect herbs and nettles in the summertime.²⁴⁵

About 50 people worked at the labour camp situated in Poręba Wielka, near Mszana, where they did some farming and gardening. The camp was closed and guarded for six days per week. Only on Sundays were the prisoners allowed to go back to Mszana. Married workers alone were entitled to some wages for their work, although even that was very little.²⁴⁶

Joseph Greenbaum, who was transferred to the camp from Piotrków Trybunalski ghetto and spent seven months there, recalls that the prisoners worked very hard building roads. Food rations were limited to a

²⁴⁴ Korespondencja Prezydium Ż.S.S. z Radą Żydowską i Delegaturą Ż.S.S. w Mszanie Dolnej 22 VII 1940 – 22 XII 1941. File 211/709. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

²⁴⁵ Abraham Borger. File 301/1715. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

²⁴⁶ Korespondencja Prezydium Ż.S.S. z Radą Żydowską i Delegaturą Ż.S.S. w Mszanie Dolnej 22 VII 1940 – 22 XII 1941. File 211/709. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

bowl of soup and a slice of bread per day.²⁴⁷ Germans also used Jewish labour for building roads in Mszana Dolna and villages in vicinity. A further 50 people worked for the German company *Klee und Jäger* in a junkyard in Raba Niżna, a village near Mszana. There were also 80 Jews from Mszana who worked in Limanowa, although it is not certain what kind of work they were forced to do.²⁴⁸

In November 1939, *volksdeutsche* Władysław Gelb was nominated by the German authority to be mayor of the town. He moved to Mszana shortly before the war, probably from the Eastern part of Poland, although his origins are uncertain. Before the war he was a merchant, a person who was not very much respected or appreciated by the local population.²⁴⁹ His cruelty toward Jews and non-Jews during the war was notorious in the whole region.²⁵⁰ Kalczyński described Gelb's routine of arranging 'morning exercises' for Jews, before they left for work. People were forced to jump, squat and roll. Water was poured over those who were unable to continue due to exhaustion.²⁵¹ Gelb conducted other forms of abuse, such as public humiliation of religious Jews by cutting their beards and side locks, or by forcing elderly Jews to dance and sing in front of him and his people. Gelb called the latter a 'Jewish theatre'.²⁵² The mayor was also personally engaged in shooting several Jews. As Henryk Zdanowski remembers:

My father saw it personally. He worked as what is now a security guard in the city hall. There were two Jewish girls, they were hiding in Słomka, two sisters were hiding them in their house. And someone must have reported it. Anyway, these two girls, very young girls, children, they were brought to Gelb. He took them to the yard of the city hall, it was then in the other building, so there is a garden. So took them there and he personally

²⁴⁷ Joseph Greenbaum. Interview 14690. Segments 5-6. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1996. Accessed 10 September 2014.

²⁴⁸ Transcripts from the trial of Heinrich Hamann (and others), no. 8914.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²⁵⁰ Artur Franczak and Łukasz Połomski, "Getta w rejonie sądeckim," *Sądeczanin*, VII (2012): 75.

²⁵¹ Kalczyński, *Memoirs*, 9.

²⁵² Michał Rapta, Wojciech Tupta and Grzegorz Moskal, *Mroczne sekrety willi 'Tereska' 1939-1945* (Wadowice: Grafikon, 2009), 241.

shot them there. They were buried in the garden. My father came home and he was shaking the whole evening.²⁵³

Special payments, called ransoms or taxes, were systematically demanded from the Jewish population. They were introduced by the Jewish council in Mszana, its head Dawid (Dudek) Langsam and two other members, Aron Traurig and Samuel Weissberger, who were responsible for collecting demanded goods or requested sums of money. Members of the council were elected by the Jewish population and included the most respected members of the community. This model of selecting representatives by the local Jewish population rather than being imposed by the Nazis was a common practice in the majority of the ghettos.²⁵⁴ A special unit called the Jewish Guard (*Warta Żydowska*) was created in order to force payments from the community. The members might have been former members of the Polish army, although this fact is uncertain.²⁵⁵ Towards the end of 1941, those demands intensified and deadlines for delivering ransoms were given with extremely short notice. In December 1941 Jews were ordered to relinquish, with immediate effect, winter clothes for both adults and children, including furs, jumpers, boots, hats and scarfs, as well as blankets and rugs.²⁵⁶ Also money and valuables were to be handed over to the German authorities.

An incident during this action was described by a witness, Abraham Borger, who later testified in a year 1965/6 trial against Heinrich Hamann and other 15 members of the Gestapo who operated in the district of Nowy Sącz.²⁵⁷ A Jewish woman named Henblum, who owned some money and fur coats which she inherited from her parents, decided to give her possessions to other Jews, so the Germans could not find them. One of the fur coats was given to another Jewish woman from the Herzog family. Both women were taken by the head of the Gestapo in Nowy Sącz,

²⁵³ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²⁵⁴ Raul Hilberg, "The Judenrat: Conscious or Unconscious 'Tool'," *The Nazi Holocaust* 6,1 (1989): 162-164.

²⁵⁵ Rapta et al., *Mroczne sekrety*, 243.

²⁵⁶ Abraham Borger. File 301/1715. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

²⁵⁷ The trial took place in Bochum, Germany, between October 1965 and July 1966.

Heinrich Hamann and Gelb to the city hall and killed with a shot to the back of the head in the yard of the building. Although it is not certain who shot them (either Gelb or Hamann), it was Hamann who was accused of these murders during his trial in 1966.²⁵⁸

The demand to hand in all the warm clothes and boots worsened the condition of the Jewish community, depriving the people warm clothes during the severe winter. Jews were not allowed to buy anything in shops, or trade any goods with non-Jews. In reality, however, they did exchange or buy commodities from other people in Mszana, as this was the only way of surviving.

The enforced poverty of the Jews in Mszana during the war, especially of those who were relocated from different towns and villages, was one of the subjects of the correspondence between the Jewish authorities in town and the main office of Jewish Social Aid in Kraków. There were several requests for financial help for the community in Mszana in order to buy food, coal and clothing. The most urgent issue was lack of food which prevented the soup kitchen (*kuchnia ludowa*) established in November 1940 from functioning. The kitchen had provided free daily breakfasts for one hundred children and one hundred lunches for elderly people. In their letter, the Jewish Social Aid in Mszana expressed concerns that without financial help from Kraków there was a strong possibility of starvation.²⁵⁹ The community had received some funds from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a worldwide Jewish relief organisation, but the money covered only 20 % of the required resources.²⁶⁰ Financial help was also delivered by the Gemilas Chesed Organisation, established in Poland after the First World War in order to support financially impoverished Jewish craftsmen. The organisation was active in Mszana long before 1939, supporting local tradesmen.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Transcripts from the trial of Heinrich Hamann (and others), no. 8915.

²⁵⁹ Korespondencja Prezydium Ż.S.S. z Radą Żydowską i Delegaturą Ż.S.S. w Mszanie Dolnej 22 VII 1940 – 22 XII 1941. File 211/709. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

The Jewish Social Aid in Mszana made attempts to receive financial support for a club (*światlica*) organised for Jewish children while their parents were at work. The club was open from Monday until Friday, between 8.00am until 1.00pm. In March 1942 there were 125 children in the age between 4 and 12 years old.²⁶² The club was closed at weekend due to the restrictions of movement for Jews, who were forbidden to walk on the main streets on Saturdays and Sundays. In a letter, dated 21 March 1942, addressed to the Jewish Social Aid in Kraków, the Jewish authorities in Mszana wrote that there was deficiency of clothes and shoes for children which prevented some of them from attending the club. They also reported the lack of funding to feed the attendees.²⁶³

Apart from the poor living conditions and hard labour, which caused diseases and deaths among the Jewish population in Mszana, Jews were decimated by random killings by the Nazis. Some of these killings were described by the perpetrators or witnesses during Hamann's and his fifteenth subordinate's trial which took place between 1965 and 1966 in Bochum. In mid-1941 on the order of Heinrich Hamann, houses in Mszana Dolna were searched in order to find unregistered Jews and non-Jews fit for work. Some of these people were sent for forced labour. From those who were found, Hamann decided to kill a group of about twenty Jews. Together with two of his subordinates, Egbert Brock and Günter Labitzke, they made the people lie down on the ground in rows; Brock and Labitzke killed each member of the group with a shot in the neck.²⁶⁴ Hamann and his people were also accused of other random crimes committed on the Jews from Mszana. At the end of 1941, or the beginning of 1942, Hamann arrested Dawid Scharf and shot him in the Catholic cemetery in town. During Yom Kippur 1942 Yitzhak Rosengarten was shot by Bruno Baunack while working in Mszana's rose garden. He was buried by Moses Aftergut who survived the Holocaust and testified

²⁶² Korespondencja Prezydium Ż.S.S. z Radą Żydowską i Delegaturą Ż.S.S. w Mszanie Dolnej 5 I 1942 – 7 VIII 1942. File 211/710. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Transcripts from the trial of Heinrich Hamann (and others), no. 8915.

during the trial. The same perpetrator in 1942 shot a man, Friedlich, who worked at the junkyard near Mszana.²⁶⁵

At the end of April 1942 the German authorities requisitioned a written list of Jewish women and men in Mszana who were fit for work.²⁶⁶ Those who did not report to be recorded on the list were arrested, taken to the brickyard outside Mszana and shot. The execution took place most probably on 1 May 1941 at the brick factory at Leszczyna. 24 people were murdered - 22 men and 2 women.²⁶⁷ Abraham Berger in his testimony from 1946 mentioned some of the victims' names: Mania Ginsberg (25 years old) from Zembrzyce, Wanda Gutter (21) from Kraków, Aron Schwitzer (32) from Zembrzyce, Dagobert Machauf (36) from Kraków, Weber (15) from Mszana Dolna, Schlachet (40) from Dobra, and, Moses Aron Turner (40) from Mszana.²⁶⁸ One of the interviewees, Dora Appel, whose family lived in Mszana, believed that her father Arie Zins was also among the Jews killed at Leszczyna. Most of the victims were members of the Jewish Guard which was suspected of gathering arms.²⁶⁹ Executions intensified in 1942. Berger testified about some of the killings. Two women, Houblum (30 years old) from Kraków and Hertz from Mszana Dolna, were shot on the street and buried by Berger in the park. He also described the killing of the Laupams family and the shooting of Dawid Scharf (35) at the cemetery.²⁷⁰

In July 1942 there was another ransom requested by Heinrich Hamann. The head of the *Judenrat* in Mszana Ascher Schmidt was ordered to gather within quarter of an hour supplies for the German soldiers: food, alcohol, shoes and material for clothes.²⁷¹ The Jewish community managed to deliver the requested goods, this time with some help from

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ The final version of the list was delivered on 15 June 1942.

²⁶⁷ Abraham Borger. File 301/1715. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid; Alekander Kalczyński's memoirs, p. 10

²⁷⁰ Abraham Borger. File 301/1715. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

²⁷¹ Rapta et al., *Mroczne sekrety*, 244.

the non-Jewish population.²⁷² Another demand for goods followed very shortly after and this time it could not be fulfilled. The decision was made by the Nazis authority to kill the Jews who were living at the time in Mszana. Despite well-developed railway connections with Mszana, Hamann was aware, following the liquidation of the ghetto in the nearby town of Limanowa, of how difficult and laborious it would be to transport around one thousand exhausted Jews to bigger cities in the vicinity - on 18 August 1942 the vast majority of Jews from Limanowa had been transported to Nowy Sącz and from there to Bełżec. Hamann shared his concerns with SS Lieutenant Max Grosskopf, SD for District Kraków, who advised him to liquidate the Jews in the territory of Mszana.²⁷³

At dawn on 19 August 1942 the Jews were gathered at the square at Olszyny on the outskirts of the town. The Jews were told that they will be relocated to the east, to Wołyń (territory of Ukraine at present). Each family received some bread and marmalade and was asked to bring the keys to their houses with a note stating the name and address attached to it. The same note was to be left in the house and the third one attached to the front door.²⁷⁴ There were about 1100 people gathered at the square. Over one hundred young and fit men were separated and later sent for work. About ten people were selected, as they later found out, for sorting out clothes and other belongings of the victims. The rest of the Jews were led to the meadows at Pańskie where, a day before, local non-Jewish men were ordered to dig a ditch. They were digging all night and some of the morning of 19 August, guarded by the Nazis.²⁷⁵

The number of German soldiers present during the execution is not certain. Jakub Weissberger, who was among those who were spared from killing on that day, spoke of about six soldiers. Hamann and Gelb

²⁷² Abraham Borger. File 301/1715. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

²⁷³ Transcripts from the trial of Heinrich Hamann (and others), no. 8915.

²⁷⁴ Józef Friedmann and Hirsch Mastbaum. File 301/4731. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

were also present.²⁷⁶ Some interviewees claimed that there were at least twenty Germans.²⁷⁷ However, it is unlikely that more than ten soldiers were delegated to such a local action. All the Jews had to strip and stand on the edge of the ditch. One by one they were killed with a shot in the head. Hirsch Mastbaum, who witnessed the massacre, reported that only two soldiers were shooting. The first one killed about 700 Jews, then the second one took over and shot a further 200. Almost 900 people were killed on this day.²⁷⁸ People were called by their names from the list prepared earlier by the Jewish authorities. The execution took eight hours and finished around 2 p.m.

The following events of 19 April 1942 were described by Kazimierz Romański in his letter of 10 November 1998 to the Holocaust Centre in Melbourne, sent together with the list of the victims:

There were only six S.S. men in the 'Action'. The police kept things in 'order'. Some tables were placed nearby with food and drink for the executioners. Plenty of Vodka and sausages. Two S.S. men sat and read out the names of those sentenced. The victims stood at the edge of the trench. Two S.S. men kept shooting the people together. Another two S.S. men had to bring the waiting victims for the shooters. The bulk of the Jews stood naked, waiting about fifty metres away. From time to time the S.S. men rotated their duties. The 'Action' lasted from 6 a.m. till 2 p.m. (1400). When their task was completed they were so drunk, that they had to be carted away on horse-carts. ²⁷⁹

The majority of people did not resist, but at least four people made an attempt to fight back. The two Weissberger sisters, as well as a woman called Inka and a man called Frei, all from Mszana, struggled against the soldiers. All were shot instantly.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Kuba Weissberger, a copy of a letter to Mieczysław Daszkiewicz, July 14 1996, (a copy in author's possession).

²⁷⁷ Interview with Maria Figura, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²⁷⁸ Józef Friedmann and Hirsch Mastbaum. File 301/4731. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

²⁷⁹ Kazimierz Romański, a copy of a letter to Ursula Flicker, Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne, November 10 1998. (a copy in author's possession).

²⁸⁰ Józef Friedmann and Hirsch Mastbaum. File 301/4731. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

All clothes and belongings were sorted by a group of ten Jews who were spared from the execution. One of them, 18 years old Józef Goldberger, found among the remaining clothes a list of Jews which was ordered by the Germans. There were 1029 names on the list, of which 881 were confirmed as the victims of the shooting (hence the assumption that this is the number of Jews who were killed on 19 August 1942) after the war by Jakub Weissberger and another survivor.²⁸¹ Goldberger perished later during the war, but he passed the list to Eugeniusz Furdyna who then sent it to Kazimierz Romański.

On Wednesday 19 August 1942, within several hours, a thousand of its inhabitants rooted into the history of Mszana, were murdered, and most of the non-Jewish members of the community witnessed that process. The sudden and violent disappearance of Jews of Mszana traumatically interrupted the continuity of the town's history. This fact raises the question of the memory of Jews in Mszana. Has the *physical* absence of Jews been compensated by the *memory* of them? Did the fact of Jews and non-Jews living together as one community for centuries remain in the collective identity of the town? Moreover, how was Jewish – non-Jewish coexistence remembered by contemporary inhabitants of Mszana and is this memory different from the memory of the Jews from the town who survived the Holocaust?

²⁸¹ Kuba Weissberger, a copy of a letter to Mieczysław Daszkiewicz, July 14 1996. (a copy in author's possession).

Section 2:

Jewish/non-Jewish coexistence in Mszana

Although Jews lived in Mszana as far back as the sixteenth century, the period described by the interviewees as ‘the time before the war’ referred only to several years prior to 1939. It is an understandable chronological framework. This is the time of their living memory. In other words, their personal memory would reach as far as a decade before the beginning of the war. However, the non-Jewish interviewees expressed their knowledge of the longer history of Jewish community in Mszana. It was conveyed by statements such as: ‘the family owned the bakery for many generations’,²⁸² ‘even my great grandfather was working with this Jewish family’²⁸³ or that ‘they [one of the Jewish families] lived in Mszana for so many years that nobody knew where they came from’.²⁸⁴ Nevertheless, based *only* on the interviews, it would be impossible to attempt to reconstruct centuries of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Mszana. Therefore, the focus of the research was to look closely at the decade before the war started.

Significantly, all non-Jewish interviewees have a perception of the Polish-Jewish relations before the war as positive and friendly. Their first response to the question about the quality of Jewish/non-Jewish co-existence was that it was ‘very good’.²⁸⁵ The relations were described as positive in terms of Non-Jewish responses towards Jews, as well as Jewish attitudes towards non-Jews. This picture of an ideal co-existence however, was not always reflected in further conversation with the respondents, as they developed and expanded upon their life stories.

²⁸² Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²⁸³ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 11 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Maria Figura, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

Jews and non-Jews in shop owner-customer relations

The general description of life in Mszana in the period preceding the war creates a picture of a small town where all inhabitants led a peaceful life, working together and helping each other where necessary. All respondents agree that most of the shops in Mszana were run by the Jews and trade was the main occupation of Jewish inhabitants. This statement was expressed without any negative sentiment: it was rather an expression of an obvious fact: non-Jews were mainly farmers, Jews were shopkeepers and traders. The quality of service provided by Jewish tradesmen was praised by all interviewees who either remember this fact or heard about it from members of their families. The Jewish bakery is remembered as the best place for getting good bread and cakes and where the owner was always honest. One of the interviewees mentioned that 'all knew that if you want to get good bread, you must go to the Beldegrins for the round one, or to Zins' bakery, at the main square, to get the long one'.²⁸⁶ Another respondent refers to her mother's memories regarding Jewish shops:

My mother always says that people from other towns and villages used to come to the Jewish bakery here, the bread was the best and nobody tried to cheat you. The Jewish butcher also was very good. The meat was always fresh.²⁸⁷

The belief that Jewish shops were very popular among non-Jewish customers was shared by Jewish respondents. The granddaughter of the local baker remembers that her grandfather's bakery was always crowded with customers, not only because of the quality of its products, but also because the owner was known for being honest with his customers.

...we had a bakery there for 50 years. My grandfather owned it. People used to come to us, because everybody knew, that everything was in order. My grandfather always taught us, and I always say the same thing to my children that you need to give to

²⁸⁶ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²⁸⁷ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

people what they deserve, so there is nothing missing. If you are supposed to give them a half of loaf of bread, there must be a half. Everything was as it should have been.²⁸⁸

It is interesting that the fact of Jewish people being owners of the majority of the shops in town was seen by all respondents as a positive aspect of life before the war. None of the interviewees expressed the widely subscribed conviction of Jews keeping all trades in their hands and using that power against Christian members of a community. This prejudice, widely spread in the eighteenth century and adopted by Polish antisemites of the twentieth century, accused Jews of unfair trading, cunningness and profiting from unjust treatment of their Christian customers.²⁸⁹ All those accusations were expressed by members of parliament, as well as the representatives of Christian merchants and clergy during the deliberation of the Four Year Parliament between 1788 and 1792. The concept of Jewish tradesmen acting against and exploiting Christian customers was continued in the nineteenth century, represented by the weekly newspaper *Rola* edited by Jan Jeleński.²⁹⁰ Although Jeleński was not much respected among Polish journalists, his newspaper had its supporters within the middle class. Soon, some other conservative papers, *Niwa* among them, adopted Jeleński's antisemitic rhetoric.²⁹¹ The stereotype of a Jewish shopkeeper acting against the economic welfare of the independent Poland was intensified by the right wing supporters of the National Democracy (*Narodowa Democracja, Endecja*) before the Second World War.²⁹² Yet, accusations against Jews claiming unfair competition in trade and threatening Christian customers dishonestly were absent from the interviewees' responses. They were all described as decent shopkeepers, delivering good quality service and products. This clear memory of all Jewish shop keepers being nothing but ideal traders, the memory free of prejudices against Jews, might suggest

²⁸⁸ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

²⁸⁹ Artur Eisenbach, Jerzy Michalski, Emanuel Rostworowski, and Janusz Woliński. *Materiały do dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego* (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, vol 6, 1969), 8 and 467-468.

²⁹⁰ *Rola* was published between 1883-1913.

²⁹¹ Alina Cała, *Żyd - wróg odwieczny? Antysemityzm w Polsce i jego źródła* (Warszawa: Nisza, 2012), 270-271.

²⁹² Cała, *Żyd - wróg odwieczny?*, 325-418.

an element of idealising the pre-war life in Mszana, which is regarded in general better and easier than during and after the war. Yet, it is possible simply that the customer-seller relations in town were mostly positive and the fact that most of shops were run by the Jews was a part of everyday reality. In a small community like Mszana, where everybody knew each other, the shop keepers had to make sure that the customers were satisfied and the buyers needed the products provided by the traders. The shopkeeper-customer relation was at heart an economic association, in which both sides needed something from each other and the fact that the sellers were in majority Jewish, was a secondary factor.

The situation was more complex when trader-to-trader relations were discussed. There were no negative comments about Jewish shop owners made by those non-Jewish interviewees whose families ran shops themselves. The Knapczyk family opened a small grocery shop in 1938 and owned it until 1943 when the German authorities took it over. Anna Knapczyk, the daughter of Franciszek Knapczyk who was the author of the unpublished memoirs, describes it as thus:

Over there, where there is a shop Jedrus today, my parents had a shop. They opened a grocery shop in 1938. Jewish competition? Listen, who cared about that? They had shops, we had our shop and all of us had customers. There was no unfair business going on here.²⁹³

Elżbieta Chudzikiewicz' father, Franciszek Jania, rented a butchers shop from a Jewish owner before the war. He worked as a butcher after the war for over thirty years. His daughter remembered that in the 1930s there were Jewish and non-Jewish butcher shops in Mszana and they functioned without any major conflicts.

My daddy was working in the butchers shop before the war. They came to Mszana with my mother in 1935 and rented a flat and a shop from Mr Steiner. Mrs Steiner and the children survived the war. My daddy always said that there were Jewish butcher shops as well, they had kosher meat there. But he never said a single bad word about them.

²⁹³ Interview with Stefania Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

Polish people used to buy in the Jewish shop as well. It was always better to buy in Jewish shops, because they sold goods on credit.²⁹⁴

Nevertheless, Chudzikiewicz recalled that her father told the family several times that another non-Jewish butcher named Michorczyk was complaining about Jewish shops being too cheap and creating competition. Jania claimed that Michorczyk was not a hardworking person and he complained about many things. He was the main competition for Jania.

My daddy said that he never had any fights with the Jewish butcher. However, Michorczyk, a non-Jew, he always gave my daddy a hard time. He was such a nuisance.²⁹⁵

Despite the fact that this particular case of Michorczyk complaining about Jewish and non-Jewish competition might be an example of simply a dishonest, lazy trader, negative sentiments against Jewish shopkeepers in Mszana were also likely to be present here. Political and economic changes in Poland and broader in Europe at the beginning of the 1930s intensified ethnic tensions and antisemitic convictions in the whole country. Like many other small towns, Mszana, although far from big politics, was not separated from the ideas of big cities, including the anti-Jewish atmosphere developing in the 1930s inspired inside and outside Poland. As mentioned earlier, the town was a holiday and weekend destination for many people from Kraków, as well as from Warsaw and other cities. The exchange of information, tendencies and political news was very much taking place. One of the Holocaust survivors, Shlomo Tsur, whose mother ran a small greengrocer's in Mszana, recollected in his testimony recorded for the Shoah Foundation in 1997 changes in the attitudes towards the Jewish trade in Mszana.

Before the war, I am not sure how long before it, antisemitism increased. It was probably when Hitler came into power in Germany. There was a group of *volksdeutsche* in Mszana. They started some actions, made the atmosphere tainted inside the town. They were the German minority. This popular slogan: the streets are yours, the buildings ours.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Elżbieta Chudzikiewicz, 16 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

Mszana was an example of it. Most shops were owned by Jews. The prime minister declared that trade should be in Polish hands. The priest was very antisemitic. He preached on Sundays that people should make an effort to take over trade. Some people who came from outside invested money and opened shops. This created competition. The atmosphere became unpleasant.²⁹⁶

In fact, there is no record of a German minority in Mszana before the war. It can be assumed that the person was referring to a group of people who supported the government idea of taking control over trade by non-Jewish Poles. By calling these people German, the interviewee denied the involvement of local people in anti-Jewish activities. Germans were 'the others', 'strangers' and they represented perpetrators.

Similar actions were indeed initiated in small towns and villages across the country. A testimony of one of the inhabitants of Słonim, a small Polish town in Eastern Poland (currently a part of Belarussia), can serve as an example of similar practices towards Jewish shop owners.

In 1936, 1937 a movement among Poles began, that it was necessary to make the towns in Kresy free of Jews in terms of trade. Indeed, it has begun on a big scale in Słonim. It upset Jews a lot. The Kosmoscy came with capital, with good products. They opened a big shop. I know my parents had been buying from Mr Meszel. They used to get some sort of discount. My mum wanted to support Polish trade. Therefore, she went, with great regret and some sort of shame, to Mrs Meszel, and she said: Mrs Meszel, I need to go...She was crying terribly, but she said she understands.²⁹⁷

In this regard, Mszana would not have been any different than towns and villages in the central and Eastern Poland, where the percentage of Jewish inhabitants was usually much higher than in the Podhale region. The Jews of Mszana, although constituting only one quarter of the inhabitants, controlled the large majority of trade in the town. The fact that people could buy goods on credit only in Jewish shops could also be a stimulant for some tensions between non-Jewish and Jewish shopkeepers. Most of the population of Mszana lived in poverty and

²⁹⁶ Shlomoh Tsur. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.

²⁹⁷ Po-lin. Okruchy pamięci. Directed by Jolanta Dylewska. 2008.

shopping on credit was a useful opportunity to get necessary goods. Indeed, a significant part of the population, Jewish and non-Jewish, were accustomed to buying goods on credit.²⁹⁸ There is, however, no record, neither in the interviews, nor in the memoirs, of boycotting Jewish shops in Mszana. Those slogans supporting the economic boycott of Jewish business, whose purpose was to eliminate Jews from trade, had been a feature of Stanisław Stojałowski's publications at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁹⁹ Following the depression, anti-Jewish agitation intensified in 1930s, blaming the Jews for the economic difficulties and rising unemployment.³⁰⁰ The antisemitic rhetoric was the domain of the right wing political and social movements such as *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny (ONR)*, *Związek Młodych Narodowców*, or *Ruch Narodowo-Radykalny*, to name a few. All of them were more or less ideologically connected to the nationalistic party National Democracy (*Endecja*). Towards the end of the 1930s there was a rising number of antisemitic activities in forms of picketing in front of Jewish shops and stalls, vandalising them or even physical violence towards Jewish traders and their customers. In some places, those activities turned into pogroms, as in a distant Brześć in central Poland in May 1937 or in Częstochowa, a town located in the same region as Mszana, in June the same year.³⁰¹ Although the Polish government promised in 1935 and in 1936 to deal with the brutality against Jewish merchants, one of the people who made this promise, Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski, subsequently officially approved of anti-Jewish boycotts in 1937. He gave consent to economic boycott, while disapproving at the same time of violence against Jews. It is estimated that as the outcome of the anti-Jewish economic violence between 1935 and 1937 around two thousand Jews were injured and twenty five to thirty people were killed.³⁰² Most of the

²⁹⁸ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

²⁹⁹ His articles were published in two journals for farmers: *Wieniec* and *Pszczółka*, of which priest Stojałowski was an editor between 1875 and 1911; in 1895 both publications were officially criticised by the Catholic Church.

³⁰⁰ Cała, *Żyd - wróg odwieczny?*, 337-358.

³⁰¹ Cała, *Żyd - wróg odwieczny?*, 372.

³⁰² Jolanta Żyndul, *Zajścia antyżydowskie w Polsce w latach 1935-1937* (Warszawa: Fundacja im. K. Kelles-Krauza, 1994), 52-53.

incidents happened in central and eastern Poland, far from Mszana. Two of the biggest pogroms took place in Brześć and Przytyk.

The majority of Jews mentioned in the interviews were the shops' owners, petty traders and those in charge of the local inns. There were two exceptions: the family of the lawyer Steiner and engineer Rozenstock who was married to a Catholic woman and converted to Catholicism. There was a group of Jews which was perceived as fairly wealthy. Kalczyński in his memoirs describes a group of families which lived further from the main market square, in the part of Mszana called Olszyny. All of them 'wore European clothes', they were better off and not particularly liked by the other, more religious and poorer Jews who lived at the market square. Among the non-religious families were the owners of several shops, the Langsams, who were described by Kalczyński as millionaires.³⁰³ Other families at Olszyny were the Weissbergers who had a hardware shop, the Feursteins who rented a sawmill from the Countess Krasińska and the family of Izaak Widawski who produced confectionary. Further, there was Ader family, the owners of the furniture factory. These four families were described by Kalczyński, as well as by two interviewees, as people of knowledge, intelligence and culture.³⁰⁴ Weissberger was seen as an elegant man, an excellent chess player and a person with great knowledge of literature and politics. The Langsams, especially Dawid (Dudek) Langsam was interested in world literature and the Aders had contacts with intellectuals from Vienna. Finally, the Straimers, as the family of the local lawyers, were regarded as well-educated professionals. All these attributes mentioned by the interviewees were considered worthy of respect and admiration. Hanna Kadłubek stated that these families were the elite of Mszana.³⁰⁵ Henryk

³⁰³ Kalczyński, *Memoirs*, 7.

³⁰⁴ Ibid; Interviews with: Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Stefania Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁰⁵ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

Zdanowski said that they were not only wealthy, but also well-respected.³⁰⁶

None of the interviewees described Jewish wealth as a result of dishonesty or cunningness, qualities which were associated with Jewish traders by antisemitic rhetoric of the pre-war period.³⁰⁷ The Weissberger family was given as an example of wealthy Jews who were helping other Jews, as well as non-Jews when they were in need of borrowing money. Among people who borrowed money from Weissberger was Zdanowski's father who worked as a security guard. Whenever he was in financial troubles, he was 'looking for a rescue' at Weissberger's.³⁰⁸ The interviewee who was describing this action, Henryk Zdanowski, stressed that a shop owner, Weissberger, was lending money without any interest rate. Although it could have been the case with Zdanowski's father, as he was in close neighbour relations with the Weissbergers, it was not necessarily true with other borrowers. The person who was also mentioned in regard with borrowing money from Weissberger was the local priest Józef Stabrawa.

Both groups of respondents, non-Jewish and Jewish, presented a picture of honest and amicable customer-shop keeper relations between Jews and Christians. This image is so ideal that it appears unrealistic. The depiction of the relation is deprived of ambivalence towards Jewish traders, which Aleksander Hertz depicted as a common sentiment towards Jews in Polish folk culture.³⁰⁹ Hertz talked about a mixture of respect and resentment which non-Jews felt towards Jews, both deriving from the same reason which was the economic function of Jews. Jews were praised for the ability to run a successful business and at the same time they were disliked for engaging in 'trade', and associated with cunningness and dishonesty. In addition, occupations which were

³⁰⁶ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁰⁷ See: Zygmunt Wasilewski, *O życiu i katastrofach cywilizacji narodowej* (Warszawa: Perzyński, 1921).

³⁰⁸ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁰⁹ Hertz, *Żydzi w kulturze*, 261-263.

assigned specifically to Jews, such as that of money lender, or inn owner, were perceived as sinful and deceitful.³¹⁰

Eva Hoffman, in a wider context, also mentioned ambivalence as the paradox of the Polish stereotypes of Jews. When talking about characteristics of a *shtetl*, she indicated that 'this was where both prejudices and bonds were most palpably enacted – where a Polish peasant might develop a genuine affection for his Jewish neighbour despite negative stereotypes and, conversely, where an act of unfairness or betrayal could be most wounding because it came from a familiar'.³¹¹

The positive relation on shopkeeper-customer level was further explored by one of the non-Jewish interviewees who, as a young boy, worked in one of the Jewish shops. Henryk Zdanowski was employed at the hardware shop of the Weissbergers. The owner had a license to sell tobacco and as Weissberger knew Henryk's father well, he employed the boy to work there on Saturdays. The interviewee remembered the family as 'wealthy and yet very decent' people.³¹² His employer always treated him fairly; he was always paid on time and generously. Moreover, the wife of the owner treated him with homemade cakes.

They had another employee, but he could not count money on Saturdays, so he was checking everything and I was taking money and giving cigarettes to customers. It was a very respectful family. Furthermore, I was sitting outside in the sun, Mrs Weissberger always had a cake for me. She baked wonderful cakes, I still remember their taste. We had cakes at home only on special occasions, so it was a treat for me.³¹³

Another respondent, this time a Jewish woman, Cyla Turner, who was born in Mszana and left the place with her family when the war started, talked about non-Jews helping in her father's shop as well.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 263.

³¹¹ Hoffman, *Shtetl*, 13.

³¹² Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³¹³ Ibid.

My grandfather had a butcher shop, so non-Jews could not touch the meat, but we had some young boys helping in my father's shop. Only on Saturdays. It was a good arrangement for everyone. This is how it was back then.³¹⁴

Cyla Turner highlighted how relations between her family and the non-Jewish employees were always amicable and neither of the sides ever complained. She added that among her father's shop customers were Jews and non-Jews.

Jews and non-Jews also traded at open markets which took place every second Tuesday on the outskirts of Mszana. People used to sell produce, livestock, and items necessary for farming and in households. One of the Jewish interviewees, Dora Appel, when asked about trades between Jews and non-Jews before the war, recalled:

Very well, I tell this to my children so often, unbelievable [Jewish/non-Jewish relations before the war]. We had a shop, a bakery. Nobody was rich, but we were trading one with another. Every second Tuesday there was a market. People were bringing hens, eggs. You could sell this and that. It was very good, very good. I always say this, when you wanted to buy a...how do you say this? Calves. It never happened that someone came back beaten up, or that someone robbed someone. Here in America they don't believe it. Everyone knew that a person has some money in the pocket, because he wants to buy something. But I never heard that a person was robbed, mugged or beaten up. I always say that to my children...³¹⁵

Jews and non-Jews in personal relations – friends, neighbours, foes

Apart from the shopkeeper-customer association, another level of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Mszana became apparent from the interviews. The interviewees talked about interpersonal relationships between Jewish and Catholic populations. Both groups admitted that friendship was common between children and young people. All the children from Mszana, Jewish and non-Jewish, attended the same public

³¹⁴ Interview with Cyla Turner, 28 December 2010, Haifa, Israel.

³¹⁵ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

schools. The school in Mszana was divided into two separate ones in 1920 and since then there was a male school and another one for girls. The school for girls remained in the very building at the main square of Mszana, opposite the synagogue. For some time, boys studied in several different locations in the town. Eventually a school was permanently established in the building on Kolbego Street. Despite the schools being separate institutions, boys and girls had many chances to meet each other during school performances which they prepared together, or in after school activity clubs. After the war, the school for boys was destroyed and the building of the school for girls was re-built and transformed into the co-educational school number 2, which exists until present time. In 1966 another co-educational public school was built in Mszana, school number 1.³¹⁶ Before the war broke out, there was also a Jewish school in Mszana and Jewish children studied there in the afternoon. It was situated in the synagogue and, as Tsur recalled, there was a separate room for the *Torah* studies. The building had also a large library for liturgical books.³¹⁷



³¹⁶ Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*, 127.

³¹⁷ Shlomoh Tsur. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.

Image 5. A group of pupils from the public school for girls performing at the square in front of the school. The white building in the background is the synagogue.

The majority of the interviewees, Jewish and non-Jewish, had positive memories about childhood friendships between two groups, as well as their time spent in the public schools in Mszana. According to the decree from 1919 on compulsory education in Poland, all children between 7 and fourteen years old were obliged to attend public schools. It included ethnic and religious minorities.³¹⁸ The fiat of the Minister of Religions and Public Education (*Minister Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego*) from February 1923 guaranteed Jewish schools to be able to teach on Sundays and to have breaks on Jewish holidays and Sabbaths. In the case of Jewish children attending public schools for pupils of all faiths, Jews were obliged to be present at school on Saturdays. They could not, however, be forced to do so, if they decided not to.³¹⁹ Jewish children from Mszana attended public schools, together with non-Jews. They did not go to school on Saturdays, or on Jewish holidays. Appel recalled that her non-Jewish friends used to give her material which was taught on Saturdays.³²⁰ Zdanowski also remembered that Jewish pupils got assignments for Mondays from their non-Jewish classmates.³²¹ In her chronicles, Illukiewicz adduced after the *Chronicles of the School no 2 (Kronika Szkoły Podstawowej nr 2)* from 1929/30 and 1936/37 that not only Catholic religion was taught in the public schools, but also Jewish pupils were able to have their religion taught at public schools. Those classes were given six times a week by Abraham Arbeit, a teacher who lived in Maków Podhalański, a town located fifty kilometres from Mszana. The teacher did not have a permanent contract, but was paid by the hour.³²² The awareness of Jewish children belonging to a different religion at school was not mentioned by any of the interviewees. However,

³¹⁸ Jolanta Szablicka-Żak, *Szkolnictwo i oświata w pracach Sejmu Ustawodawczego II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 1997), 135.

³¹⁹ Stanisław Mauersberg, *Szkolnictwo powszechne dla mniejszości narodowych w Polsce w latach 1918-1939* (Wrocław –Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1968), 162.

³²⁰ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

³²¹ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³²² Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*, 128.

the possibility existed for organising classes for Jewish pupils in public schools, which was guaranteed by the legislation inherited by Galician territory from the time of the Austrian partition. Although Jewish *heders* and *yeshivas* were not treated as schools, but ‘public institutions’ (*zakłady publiczne*), Jewish children were given certain rights concerning their faith. They had to attend public schools with non-Jewish pupils, but they were allowed to pray and have their religion classes at school.³²³ It is, therefore, very probable that Jewish children in Mszana attended religion class at school. It might not have been perceived by them as important for their Jewish identity, as going to *heder* would have been. Meetings with a teacher at the synagogue must have given the children a sense of belonging to their community and, as Rachel Blavat who was one of the Jewish pupils pointed out, made them remember who they were.³²⁴

Shlomo Tsur mentioned that all the Jewish children attended the Polish school, then *heder* in the afternoon. He remembered that he liked going to school and had friends there among Jewish and non-Jewish pupils. Tsur remarked that he did not remember any antisemitic incidents from teachers or pupils, apart from one. A teacher, who came to Mszana from Poznań, a city in western-central Poland, made an antisemitic comment. Tsur’s father went to school to complain. The interviewee did not know what had been said at school by his father, but the teacher never made any antisemitic remarks again.³²⁵ Tsur’s positive memories from the public school were shared by Dora Appel. She still remembered some of her teachers and two girlfriends who were not Jewish:

I remember the headmaster, Garlacz. Piwońska as well, she was a very good teacher. And Jordanówna. I had friends there, you know. Two best girlfriends (...). I was not in school on Saturdays, so I used to go to one of them, I always had some cake with me, and she would help me with the assignment for Monday. I had two very good girlfriends.³²⁶

³²³ Mauersberg, *Szkolnictwo*, 160.

³²⁴ Rachelle Blavat. Interview 2737. Segments 1-8. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed 16 July 2014.

³²⁵ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³²⁶ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

Appel recalled that there were a lot of non-Jews among her friends and they often spent time in a group and walked in the mountains together.³²⁷

Another Holocaust survivor, Mordechai Lustig, also had positive memories from the public school in Mszana. Lustig was born and lived in Nowy Sącz, but was sent by his parents to stay with relatives in Mszana for a year. He mainly remembered friends from the *heder*, but he also played with the non-Jewish boys from the public school.³²⁸

Henryk Zdanowski and Hanna Kadłubek recalled that children played with other children who lived nearby and their faith made no difference. It was rather the area of the town they were from than the fact of being or not being Jewish that mattered most. Kadłubek used to play with Jewish and non-Jewish girls who lived on her street, Zdanowski remembered going fishing with the boys from the neighbourhood, some of whom were Jewish. Kadłubek recalled:

Now I can tell you who of my friends were Jewish or not, but who cares about it when you are a child? You play with children you like, that's it. Children are just children, they like other children if they are nice and fun, nothing else. My parents never had anything against me playing with Jewish children.³²⁹

Some of the interviewees' best friends were of different faith. Often they were children they were in a school class with. This was the case of Appel's two best friends from school, both non-Jewish, or Zdanowski's best friend Jurek, the son of the lawyer Streimer. Zdanowski remembered that he was often in Streimer's house and they did homework together, or played games. Zdanowski felt always welcomed there, as the Streimers were kind to him and Jurek's mother always served lunch.³³⁰ Zdanowski also remembered another friend, Józef Synaj, who once took him to the

³²⁷ Dorota Kulig, "W wojnie straciłam wszystkich. Wspomnienia Dory Zins," *Midrasz*, 2 (2014): 54.

³²⁸ Interview with Mordechai Lustig, 7 December 2011, Tel Aviv, Israel, interview not recorded.

³²⁹ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³³⁰ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

Jewish school in Mszana. Synaj's family were fishermen and Zdanowski sometimes assisted him while he was delivering fish to the clients.³³¹

Despite most of the respondents having good memories of the relations between Jewish and non-Jewish children, not everyone remembered being friendly with peers of a different faith. One of the Holocaust survivors from Mszana, Rachelle Blavat, remembered feeling uncomfortable in the public school. She recalled:

I went to the public school and there were gentile children there. But Jews as well. I guess Jews were mainly my friends. (...) I don't remember being hustled at school, any signs of antisemitism, but I guess they occurred. It's difficult to remember after so many years.³³²

Throughout her testimony for the Shoah Foundation, Blavat insisted that her experience with non-Jewish children was nothing but negative and she did not recall having friends among non-Jews. Blavat might not have had many contacts with her non-Jewish colleagues, but it is hard to believe that while attending the public school she did not have any kind of positive encounter with non-Jewish pupils.³³³

There are two extreme memories of the childhood friendships represented in the interviewees' testimonies. On the one hand, there is an image of ideal co-existence between Jewish and non-Jewish children, without a sign of differences between two communities. On the other hand, there is lack of any positive recollection of interaction between children of different faith. None of these memories necessarily reflect the true and only notion of the friendship among children in Mszana, which, as any human relations, had more than one dimension. Such different perceptions, however, exhibit different trends in memories of the respondents. Idealised conception of children's interactions and relations at school reveal the nostalgic attitude towards the time before the war.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Rachelle Blavat. Interview 2737. Segments 1-8. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed 16 July 2014.

³³³ Ibid.

Likewise, the complete negation of any positive aspects of interaction with children of a different faith is a part of rejection of life in the past. In her testimony, Blavat did not find anything positive in her life in Mszana and in her relations with the non-Jewish population of the town. She insisted that only the life after the war in the United States gave her safety and freedom.³³⁴ In contrary, Appel saw her childhood and youth before the war in Mszana as an idyllic picture of safety and happiness.³³⁵ Both attitudes can be seen as two different ways of coping with the same traumatic experience of the Holocaust and the loss of the women's families and everything they knew. As much as Blavat's rejection of the past allowed her to start completely new life after the war, Appel's idealisation of the life before the disaster of the war enabled her to continue with her life. For both women relations, positive and negative, with non-Jewish children were a significant part of the memory of their life in Mszana.

Although the majority of respondents saw the relations between Jews and non-Jews as positive, the same interviewees mentioned antisemitic incidents which occurred in the town. Zdanowski recalled how one of the boys, Jan Michalak, known as Fisiok, had once threw a dead bird through an open window in the synagogue. He did it on a Saturday, while the Jews were praying. As the school was situated near the temple, he was caught and punished by his teacher.³³⁶ Also Knapczyk and Kadłubek remembered that young boys threw stones at the synagogue, or drunkards broke shop windows in Jewish shops. Nobody was ever hurt in these incidents, but the fact is that Jewish buildings were attacked and although there is no record of people being assaulted as such, Jews were affected by these events. The non-Jewish interviewees presented anti-Jewish behaviours as pranks, or hooligans' activities, rather than antisemitic outbursts. Kadłubek described the atmosphere in the town as follows:

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

³³⁶ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

I know that there were boys who threw stones at the synagogue. No matter what we say now, there was antisemitism before the war. Before the war people mocked the Jews a little bit. There were a lot of Jews, most of them, who we lived very well with, but there were also a little bit of *szmonces*, and some Jews were ignored.³³⁷

The respondent used the Yiddish word, *szmonces*, which literally means 'nonsense', or 'silliness'. The term describes a genre of sketch comedy which includes Jewish humour, mainly mocking negative Jewish stereotypes. This form of sketch comedy was very popular in pre-war theatres in Poland and it was written and performed by Jews, as well as non-Jewish artists. Kadłubek admitted that antisemitism existed among the people of Mszana, but it was exhibited by mockery and by treating some of the Jewish people with disrespect. Using the term *szmonces* to describe actions taken against Jews indicates that they were not serious incidents and were perceived as jokes. Anti-Jewish behaviours were mentioned by all non-Jewish interviewees and all of them trivialised these occurrences. Neither verbal abuse, nor throwing stones at Jewish building, or dead birds into the temple were regarded as acts of disturbing violence. These incidents were rare, every single of them were remembered by the interviewees. It is confident to say that they were not a standard occurrence in Mszana. Furthermore, there was no physical violence against Jewish people *per se*. However, the frequency of the assaults, or the fact that they were directed at properties, not people, does not change the fact that they had an antisemitic character. They were aimed specifically at the Jewish members of the community. By trivialising anti-Jewish behaviours the interviewees knowingly or unwittingly undermine the importance of the incidents, which did not serve the people of Mszana well. Even so, they recognised the presence of antisemitism in Mszana, but at the same time, they protected, not necessary consciously, the reputation of the community by downplaying of antisemitic acts.

³³⁷ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

More generally, friendships between Jews and non-Jews in Mszana were more common among children and young people. However, all people lived next to each other and shared the space in town. Jewish and non-Jewish inhabitants functioned on daily basis as neighbours. Most of the houses at the main square were occupied by Jewish families, but there was no geographical Jewish/non-Jewish division in Mszana. As one of the interviewees pointed out, 'almost every second house was Jewish, Jewish and Catholic households were very much mixed'.³³⁸ Even so, none of the interviewees remembered Jewish and non-Jewish families having close social relationships and sharing friendships. Yet, neighbourly relations portrayed in all interviews revealed an image of an amiable co-existence of two populations. Both groups lived, sometimes for generations, in close proximity, meeting their neighbours and helping each other on daily basis. The majority of families in Mszana were not wealthy and Zdanowski's family and his Jewish neighbours, the Repuns, were among them. Wasting food, which was scarce, was unthinkable, therefore the families helped each other when they could. Zdanowski remembered that his Jewish neighbours used to bring them eggs, if they, after being broken, turned out to be fertilized, hence not *kosher*. His mother took these eggs in exchange for fresh ones. The interviewee also mentioned that his mother had an arrangement with some of the shop keepers to pay for goods with milk, because of lack of money. He remembered that his mother could take what she needed from a Jewish textile shop run by Wikcia Scharf, who would later take milk as payment. The Turners, who had a small butcher stand at the main square, always put some cheap scraps of meat on a side for Zdanowski's mother. She provided the Turners with milk every day and in exchange, they kept for her meat that she could afford.³³⁹

Those were examples of favours neighbours exchanged in order to make their lives easier, as lots of the families, Jewish and non-Jewish, struggled with hardship of a life in poverty. There were also other acts of

³³⁸ Interview with Stefania Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³³⁹ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

neighbourly kindness mentioned in the interviews, which would indicate genuine, if not friendship, then at least mutual attachment and dependence between Jews and non-Jews. Kadłubek recalled the relation her family had with the Gliksman, a Jewish family which lived next door.

We lived next to the Gliksman, he was a furrier. We were good friends with them, like neighbours are. They had two children. We were devastated when they took them. Zosia, I remember, she used to make us the best gefilte fish. Whenever my mum bought some carp, Zosia prepared it for us. Well, we were friends. They had two daughters. One of them, Danusia, she was so pretty, I played with her. It was heart breaking when they were taken.³⁴⁰

Before Shabbat, the Gliksmans used to bring their food to their neighbours to keep it warm in the oven until Saturday. This was a common practice in mixed communities, not only villages and towns, but also in big cities. As cooking on Shabbat is for Jews forbidden, Jewish women prepared the food the day before and left it in their non-Jewish neighbours' kitchen to keep it warm until the next day. At times, a non-Jew acted as a *Shabbes goy*, a person who performed certain type of work in a Jewish household, which a Jew was restrained to do by religious law. It could be someone who was paid to do this job, but also non-Jewish neighbours fulfilled this duty. Cyla Turner remembered that there was a *Shabbes goy* in her household, but in the winter, it was a boy from the neighbourhood. His mother sent him every week to light the stove in Cyla's home. The interviewee did not remember the name of the neighbours, but she recalled that the boy's mother was very friendly with her own mother, hence the favour.³⁴¹ Zdanowski remembered assisting in Jewish households on Shabbat as well. Occasionally, he was paid for his work with small amount of money, some cake, or a piece of sweet bread.³⁴²

³⁴⁰ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁴¹ Interview with Cyla Turner, 28 December 2010, Haifa, Israel.

³⁴² Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

Even though the interviewees did not acknowledge close bonds between Jews and non-Jews, there were people in both groups who socialised on many occasions. It might not have been a norm for all the people in Mszana, but apart from beneficial neighbourly contacts, Jews and non-Jews maintained friendships and social connections. Kuba Wiessberger's family had close relations with the Daszkiewicz family. They knew each other well and were often guests in each other homes. Wiessberger corresponded with his best friend, Mieczysław Daszkiewicz, long after the war until Kuba's death in early 2000s.³⁴³ In his letters, Weissberger often asked after the health and wellbeing of his friend's family. He reminisced of the time before the war when both families were in close relation. In her testimony, Kadłubek spoke about her grandmother's friendship with Mrs Kleinman; they often had tea together on Sundays. The Kleinmans lived on the way to and from church and Kadłubek's grandmother would visit the family after she had attended mass.

On Sundays, after the mass, my grandmother visited Mrs Kleinman. They always had tea with cream and there was brandy involved as well. The Kleinmans were elegant and respectful people. They were at my mother's wedding.³⁴⁴

The relationships described are clearly more than appropriate behaviour of families living next to each other. There were social interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish families which were based on friendships. Although not always described by the interviewees as friendships, these connections were selfless bonds which often involved several generations and lasted for years. However, while some of them survived during the war, other friendships, or help of the neighbours did not.

All the Jewish interviewees underlined how the attitude of non-Jewish people changed during the war. Shlomo Tsur indicated that the

³⁴³ Kuba Weissberger, a copy of a letter to Mieczysław Daszkiewicz, July 14 1996. (a copy in author's possession).

³⁴⁴ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

atmosphere had already changed in Mszana by the 1930s. He associated the change mainly with the economic crisis in the country and the influence of the rising power of the Nazi party in Germany.³⁴⁵ Indeed, this was a period of growing antisemitism among supporters of the right wing party (*Endecja*) and rising anti-Jewish attacks initiated by the Polish nationalists. At the beginning of 1930s, there were attempts to limit numbers of Jewish students at the universities and to boycott Jewish shops. Nevertheless, the campaign to introduce the official *numerus clausus* for Jews was disregarded by Józef Piłsudski's government which successfully restrained right wing tendencies in Poland. After Piłsudski's death in 1935, however, antisemitic currents in Poland rose, enforced by the economic troubles in the country and the Nazis' propaganda from Germany.³⁴⁶

Although Mszana did not experience violent attacks on the Jewish population, the antisemitic climate against Jewish shop owners in Mszana was mentioned by the interviewees. Shlomo Tsur spoke about a 'group of *Volksdeutsche* from German minority' started spreading antisemitic slogans.³⁴⁷ No physical action, however, was taken against Jewish shopkeepers. As suggested, the fact that Tsur described this group as Germans, not Poles, indicates that he saw them as strangers, people who did not belong to the population of Mszana, someone from *outside* of the community. Cyla Turner also recalled that there were 'negative sentiments towards Jewish traders', but no violence was involved.³⁴⁸ Zdanowski remembered that 'people were not happy about all the shops belonging to the Jews', but he also mentioned that 'it was only talk, nothing else'.³⁴⁹ In fact, no deterioration in personal relations between Jews and non-Jews before the war was mentioned by any of the

³⁴⁵ Shlomoh Tsur. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.

³⁴⁶ Antony Polonsky, *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce i Rosji* (Warszawa: Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2014), 325-326.

³⁴⁷ Shlomoh Tsur. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.

³⁴⁸ Interview with Cyla Turner, 28 December 2010, Haifa, Israel.

³⁴⁹ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

interviewees. Despite unavoidable tensions which antisemitic propaganda and its supporters must have caused in the town, Dora Appel remembered that she 'still felt that she belonged to the community of Mszana'.³⁵⁰ It was the war period and the experience of Jewish fate under the Nazi occupation which transformed some of the personal relations between Jews and non-Jews in Mszana.

Dora Appel was probably the most critical of all the respondents. Her recollection of the flawless life in Mszana before the war changed dramatically when she was asked about the war period. She claimed that the behaviour of non-Jewish population changed significantly for the worse. Appel mentioned young boys quickly learned how to recognise a Jew and to point out where a Jew was hiding. This memory, however, is more likely to be from the time she spent in Kraków and later in the Kraków-Płaszów concentration camp. Appel left Mszana in late 1939 and moved with her uncle's family in Kraków. With help of a bus driver, she was regularly sending money, food and medications to her family in Mszana. During the time she spent in Mszana after the outbreak of the war, Jews were *not* in hiding. In fact, there were Jewish families moving to Mszana from bigger cities, as mentioned by some of the interviewees.³⁵¹ Kadłubek recalled that at the beginning of the war Jewish families which moved to Mszana thought that they had more chances of survival in small towns than in big cities:

For example at the Znachoscy, there was a Polish family upstairs, my family and the Gliksman downstairs. They were renting, like us. (...) In big cities there were mass executions, they were catching people, you know. So the Jews thought it will be easier to sit quiet in a small town and some of them moved to Mszana. From Kraków and other cities.³⁵²

However, Appel's comment on young boys denouncing Jews to the Nazis for the purpose of entertainment and out of mischief was a

³⁵⁰ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

³⁵¹ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Stefania Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁵² Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

comment present in several Jewish testimonies from the war.³⁵³ It was more common in big cities where people had bigger chance to remain anonymous, unlike small towns where everybody knew everybody else. Appel could have encountered the described behaviour, but it is unlikely that it happened to her in Mszana.

During the interview, Appel underlined that 'although all her family was from Mszana, it was not easy for her to talk about the place, as there was nothing positive to say about the town and its people during the war'.³⁵⁴

When asked whether she returned to Mszana after the war, she said yes, but promptly added:

Do I need to be there?! It is soaked with Jewish blood, it is not for me! But I went there several times, it was my home once, you know...³⁵⁵

On one hand, Mszana was seen by her as a cemetery where members of her family were brutally murdered. On the other hand, it was also a place where she was happy as a child. Appel's markedly contrasting memories of Mszana from before and during the war reflected the change of perception of Mszana from a peaceful town of happy childhood, to a place of terror and death during the war. This change referred also to non-Jews from the town. While she remembered her non-Jewish friends and neighbours with whom her family and she had positive relations before 1939, she claimed that non-Jews turned against the Jews when the war started. One encounter from after the war, in particular, had the biggest impact on her perception of the people of Mszana's behaviour under occupation: when Appel had returned to Mszana a few years after the war for a visit, she had a conversation with her old neighbour about Appel's sister Nicha, who had made a last request before she was taken to the place of the mass execution. The interviewee recollected:

³⁵³ See: Claude Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah* (1985); Barbara Engelking, "O tym jak z wewnątrz warszawskiego getta patrzono na stronę aryjską," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały* 1 (2005): 230-232.; Alina Margolis, *Tego, co mówili, nie powtórzę*. Wrocław: Siedmiogród, 1999), 20.

³⁵⁴ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

My older sister was 22 years old and she already had a child, a 2 years old boy Jakub. When I went to Poland, it was maybe 5 years after the war, I went with my cousin. So when I went there, our house was destroyed. There was no bakery, there was nothing. (...) I went to see our neighbour, Tosia Proškowa. We lived very well together. And she told me herself. She said that Nicha asked her... Nicha said 'Take my child and keep it until I come back' and she gave her everything: gold, rings, money. Proškowa told me that herself! So she said 'Fine, I will take the child and take care of it.' Then, she told me that she had another thought about it and finally decided not to take the child. She told me all this! I was standing there with my cousin and she was telling me that she took everything from my sister, but did not take the child. So I asked her 'You took everything my sister offered you and told her you were taking the child, but at the last moment you told her to go with the child?' She told me that it was forbidden, complicated. She said that she did not have a place for the child. But she took all the money my sister gave her. Tell me, is this how people should behave? And do you think it is the only story like that? What I would give her for this child!³⁵⁶

Appel said that she could not comprehend how people who were once friends could behave towards their neighbours in such a cruel way. She felt betrayed by Proškowa not only because she did not keep the child, despite taking all the valuables. She was disappointed, because the woman was a friend, a person who was close to her family and who was expected to help when help was required. Moreover, the neighbour did not perceive her actions as wrongdoing. She was not concerned about revealing the story to Appel and she did not feel guilty of any of her decisions regarding taking the child, or keeping the valuables. Proškowa did not comprehend Appel's anger after she heard about the conversation with Nicha. There was no guilt, or remorse expressed by the neighbour.

There was an additional dimension to neighbours' relationships between Jews and non-Jews during the war. Jews were not allowed to enter shops, to purchase or to sell food. The food allowance they received was too low to survive. Therefore, they relied on their non-Jewish neighbours to be willing to trade with them illegally. Food was scarce in Mszana in general, as the town was obliged to provide, monthly, a certain quota of food, livestock and grain. The goods were stored in a warehouse and later

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

shipped to Germany. Farmers were awarded points for delivered goods and they could exchange those points for alcohol. Henryk Zdanowski worked for a while in one of the warehouses. Despite shortage of food, the situation of non-Jews was far less difficult than for the Jews, as the former were still allowed to buy and sell commodities. Zdanowski remembered that despite prohibition to trade with the Jewish population, the ban was not observed. People were exchanging goods and services with the Jews. They were not altruistic activities, as people were trading with each other, but it helped the Jewish community to obtain food to survive. However, there was an element of danger in this activity, as trading with Jews was forbidden by the Nazis. Zdanowski mentioned his mother still selling milk and eggs to her Jewish neighbours. He also exchanged, or sold, food to the Jews.

My mum was still providing them with milk, eggs and cereal. I used to get food rations in the warehouse where I worked. I gladly took beans, because we had our beans in the garden, so I could exchange my rations, or sell to the Jews. It was some kind of help, because it was forbidden. It was not food for free, but it was help anyway.³⁵⁷

The trading was not only about providing food, but also exchanging services. The wife of the local butcher, Helena Jania, remembered that some of the Jewish women were very skilled in darning clothes and Jania used to take her and her husband's clothes to them during the war and paid them to mend them.³⁵⁸ Zdanowski recalled that he bought clothes from Mrs Langsam which had belonged to her son, who was killed earlier by the Nazis. He purchased some shirts and trousers and 'paid her what she wanted'.³⁵⁹ Langsam's three sons were taken by the Gestapo for interrogation in 1941 and they never returned home. The woman was elderly and left on her own. In order to survive she tried to sell her belongings. Zdanowski's mother sometimes brought her some vegetables from her small garden behind the house. Mrs Langsam was remembered as a noble woman by Stafania Knapczyk, who shared a house with her

³⁵⁷ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁵⁸ Interview with Helena Jania, 16 March 2007, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁵⁹ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

during six months before the Jews were killed. The Knapczykowie's house was taken and turned into offices by the Nazis authority. The family with their two small children and with Mrs Knapczyk being in her third pregnancy were relocated to the Langsam's house. Mrs Langsam lived in one room and the Knapczykowie with the children in another one. They all shared the kitchen. One night Mrs Knapczyk, whose husband was away at that time, gave birth to her son and when Mrs Langsam saw a child in the morning, she killed her only chicken and cooked some broth so that the mother could get strength and recover. Stefania Knapczyk recalled:

When it comes to our Jews, I am full of respect for them, because they went through a lot and still were kind to the Poles. To me, in particular, and especially Mrs Langsam. (...) She was so happy that a child was born in that house. None of the Polish women came to see me, they were afraid to come to the Jewish house, but she made broth for me. You know, she did not know me well, she was an elderly woman then and had this only one chicken left. She did not have her boys anymore. I respected her and she was full of respect for me. Not a one bad word about her.³⁶⁰

Despite her difficult situation, Mrs Langsam treated the event of a newly born child as a good sign and a happy moment. Although both women were strangers to each other, they shared food and helped each other with everyday tasks in the household. Mrs Knapczyk said that she never forgot that the help she received that morning from a woman she did not know well.

It is difficult to see the full picture of the relationships between Jews and non-Jews during the war, as the vast majority of the Jewish part of the community of Mszana was killed in August 1942. From available testimonies it seems that the relationships between neighbours during the war varied from help and compassion to indifference and greed towards the Jewish community.

It is important to remember that there was a shortage of food in the town in general, especially because of the quota of goods which had to be

³⁶⁰ Interview with Stefania Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

delivered to the Nazi authority monthly, as well as supplies for the partisans who demanded provisions from the local people. However, the possibilities in obtaining food by the Jewish population were disproportionately harder than for non-Jews. Even though forbidden trading with the Jews was still taking place, the question remains whether or not people were taking advantage of Jewish hardship. Testimonies about non-Jews buying goods from Jewish people for symbolic price, only because for Jews it was the only way of gaining some money and buying food for it, are well documented.³⁶¹ Whether or not this was the case of non-Jews in Mszana, is undocumented, but there were certainly occasions for this kind of vile behaviour. Dora Appel's neighbour was someone whose greed and perhaps fear overcame decency. There were also acts of violence against the Jews as an attempt to wangle money and valuables from them. Stefania Knapczyk recalled that Polish policemen, who worked with the *volksdeutsche* mayor Gelb, came to Mrs Langsam and wanted money from her. The Langsams were a wealthy family and the perpetrators were convinced that she hid the money somewhere in the house. They were violent towards the woman, they beat her up, but finally left the house with nothing. Knapczyk commented that the event was hard to comprehend to her, as although these men cooperated with the Nazis, they were all Polish and some of them grew up in Mszana.³⁶² However, there were also signs of human compassion and personal attachment to the Jews who were taken to be executed in August 1942, even if help was sometimes impossible.

Some of the non-Jewish inhabitants of Mszana who witnessed the events of 19 August 1942 recalled that they were distressed by what was happening to the Jewish community. Zdanowski remembered that there were people who tried to say goodbye to their Jewish friends and neighbours because they were aware that they were not going to meet

³⁶¹ See: Barbara Engelking, *Zagłada i pamięć - doświadczenie Holocaustu i jego konsekwencje opisane na podstawie relacji autobiograficznych* (Warszawa: IFiS PAN, 2001), 20-38; Barbara Engelking, Barbara, *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień... Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942-1945* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011), 11-114.

³⁶² Interview with Stefania Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

them again.³⁶³ Helena Jania remembered that she watched the Jews marching towards the square where all of them were gathered. She said that although people did not know what was going to happen, they all knew that it was something bad. At some point she saw a Jewish girl, a friend of hers. Jania recalled:

I saw her and she saw me. She ran to me and we hugged, very strongly. We both cried really badly. She only said goodbye, nothing else. They all thought they will be taken to the East.³⁶⁴

Anna Knapczyk referred to her father's recollections from August 1942. He also was saying farewell to his neighbours, the Langsams, before they left the house.³⁶⁵ Zdanowski's father, who served as a security guard in the town hall and was assigned to guard the square where the Jews were gathered, met there a neighbour of his, Samuel Weissberger. The man was ill and was taken to the square on a horse cart. Once he saw Zdanowski's father, he threw his watch to him and asked him to take it to remember him. Zdanowski said that the watch was not valuable and his father kept it on the wall of their kitchen for many years. He mentioned that he remembered when his father came back home on 19 August and stayed awake in silence all night.³⁶⁶ People were troubled by the fate of the Jewish community, especially when the shooting started and it was obvious that the Jews were being killed, not transferred to the East. Maria Figura, a retired history teacher from Mszana, admitted that she always knew what happened to the Jewish community of the town and several times visited the place of the killing with her father and siblings. Her father, who was 21 years old in 1942, saw the shooting from a distance. At that time he lived on Zielona Street which is situated on a hill and he could see the massacre. With his sister, who recognised some of her Jewish friends among the victims, they stayed low on the grass and watched some of the execution on the meadow of Pańskie. Figura remembered

³⁶³ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁶⁴ Interview with Helena Jania, 16 March 2007, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁶⁵ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁶⁶ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

that neither of them described the massacre, they did not want to talk about it in details, but her father wanted his children to know that it happened.³⁶⁷

Besides the feeling of anxiety among non-Jews caused by the events of 19 August, fear was another emotion mentioned by all the non-Jewish respondents. People felt that if the Nazis started shooting the Jews, non-Jews were the next group lined up for extermination. Anna Knapczyk mentioned that when the massacre started and people in town could hear the shots, some of the non-Jewish men and boys escaped to the mountains, because 'they were afraid of being taken by the shooting squad after they finish with the Jews'.³⁶⁸ Figura also remembered that her father and his neighbours did not work in fields the following day, but they all stayed at home out of fear.³⁶⁹ When the shooting stopped, there were no people on the streets of Mszana, all the shops were closed and everybody stayed at homes and waited what was going to happen next. The Nazi soldiers who were shooting the Jews were drinking alcohol all day and when the killing ended, they were driving around the town and other villages drunken, shooting at random targets, and finally going to a restaurant in Mszana where they celebrated all night. Heinrich Hamann sent for the members of the Church choir to entertain the soldiers; the singers who refused to come were to be shot.³⁷⁰

If there was concern for the wellbeing of the Jewish neighbours on the day of the shooting, towards the end of the day the feelings of fear and uncertainty took over. The interviewees declared that compassion and sorrow after losing the Jewish part of the society came mainly sometime after 19 August, when the people were convinced that there would be no mass shooting of the non-Jews. Despite expressions of compassion for Jewish neighbours and friends from Mszana, this was not a sentiment which was shared by all the non-Jewish inhabitants. The interviewees

³⁶⁷ Interview with Maria Figura, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁶⁸ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁶⁹ Interview with Maria Figura, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁷⁰ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

mentioned onlookers who watched the Jews waiting at the squares for the whole day. Some of them felt pity for the Jews, others were simply curious what was going to happen. Kadłubek heard that some young boys climbed trees to see the shooting. Nobody indicated whether there were people who were happy that the Jews were being taken away, but presumably there was a group which felt that way. Mention was made, however, of Polish policemen who participated in the shooting.

After invading Poland, the Nazis formed in October 1939 Polish Police of the General Government (*Polnische Polizei im Generalgouvernement*), called the Blue Police (*Policja Granatowa*). The pre-war Polish police forces were ordered by the German authorities to report for duty under German command, or to face the death penalty. High ranking police officers came from the German police.³⁷¹ Mszana was no different from the rest of the occupied Poland; there was a group of the Blue Police which supported the Nazi authorities. These policemen were present at the meadows during the shooting on 19 August 1942. Kuba Weissberger, who survived the shooting in 1942, in his letter from 1996 to his friend Mieczysław Daszkiewicz wrote:

In this action 'only' 6 soldiers of SS took part. Also, there were policemen and others (Poles!). [They] helped, so there was order and everything could happen without any obstacles.³⁷²

The 'others' mentioned in the letter were probably people who were brought to dig the pit. Anna Knapczyk said that she knew the names of the people who were ordered to dig the pit, although none of them after the war admitted that they were asked to do so. They did not want to be accused of helping the Nazis in the killing, despite the fact that they were taken from their homes and forced to prepare the pit and later on to cover

³⁷¹ Marek Getter, "Policja polska w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1939-1945," *Przegląd Policyjny* 1-2 (1999): 1-22

³⁷² Kuba Weissberger, a copy of a letter to Mieczysław Daszkiewicz, July 14 1996. (a copy in author's possession).

the bodies with soil.³⁷³ However, the Blue Police was present at the place of execution in a different capacity. They were there to keep order and to make sure that nobody escaped. The majority of policemen in Mszana during the war were people who grew up in Mszana. Only one of them came during the war from the Silesia region.³⁷⁴ Two names of local policemen were mentioned by two of the interviewees: Łabuz and Pospieski. For some of the members of the Blue Police the Home Army issued death sentences for collaboration with the Nazis. However, the attempt to execute Pospieski was unsuccessful.³⁷⁵ After the war Pospieski was tried, together with Gelb's assistant and lover Genowefa Smyrczakówna. Both were convicted and given short prison sentences.

The role of the Blue Police in Mszana in the persecution of Jews was not explored further by the interviewees. From the interviews, it was clear that none of the members of the Blue Police were particularly popular among the inhabitants of Mszana. They were all perceived as collaborators by those living in the town, as well as the representatives of the Home Army. The assault on Mrs Langsam proved that the policemen abused their authority to obtain valuables. Police activity against the Jewish population and its role in hunting for Jews in hiding and even killing them, is well described in Jan Grabowski's study of the last phase of the Holocaust in Dąbrowa Tarnowska county.³⁷⁶ His research concentrated on a region located a hundred kilometres from Mszana. One of the aspects of Grabowski's study was analysis of deep involvement of the Polish police, together with fire brigades, in tracking and killing hiding Jews. His research mentioned a case in Mszana. Two Jews, brothers Jumka and Jusek Grybel, were denounced by an anonymous person to the Polish police in Mszana that they were hiding at a farm in Skrzydlina. Although the police could not leave the station on that day, the policemen made sure that a fire brigade caught the Jews. Indeed, the group surrounded

³⁷³ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁷⁴ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁷⁵ Ibid and Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁷⁶ Jan Grabowski, *JUDENJAGD. Polowanie na Żydów 1942-1945 Studium dziejów pewnego powiatu* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011).

the farm and seized both Jews.³⁷⁷ Grabowski did not say what happened to the Jews, but it is safe to assume that they did not survive the ambush. Whether or not the brothers were murdered by the Polish police, or the Nazis, does not change the fact that the police was involved in this killing.

The story of the Grybel brothers brings up questions of both assisting Jews in hiding and of denunciation. The interviewees recalled several cases of Jews in hiding after 1942. According to the Yad Vashem's data base for the Righteous Among the Nations, one family from Mszana Dolna received the title. A couple, Józef and Stefania Waclawik, hid Maurycy (Moshe) Jered, in their barn. A Jew from Wadowice, a town near Mszana, Moshe had made his way to Mszana during the war.³⁷⁸

All cases of people hiding Jews in their households concerned families who lived on the outskirts of Mszana, as it was safer to keep them in places far from the centre of town's life, far from Gelb and his helpers. Kadłubek was aware during the war that the Łabuzy family was hiding a Jewish man in their house. She stated that the man survived the war, because he used to send parcels with goods to the family who saved him.³⁷⁹ The butcher, Franciszek Jania, saw a Jewish man hiding at the Olszewscy household at Glisnem, a part of Mszana located higher in the mountains. He was in the neighbourhood and decided to visit Mr Olszewski who lived with his wife and their six children in a house situated deep in the forest. Mr Olszewski got scared and asked Jania not to report him to the Gestapo. Jania assured him that he had nothing to be worried about because he had not seen anything.³⁸⁰ Olszewski's reaction showed that the risk of being reported, even by someone that an individual had known well, was perceived as a real threat. A farmer at whose house the Grybel brothers were hiding, was reported by an anonymous informer, possibly a neighbour. Zdanowski recalled that two

³⁷⁷ Grabowski, *JUDENJAGD*, 79.

³⁷⁸ Yad Vashem. "The Righteous Among The Nations." Accessed January 13, 2014. <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/familyList.html?placeTemp=Mszana+Dolna&resultsby=family&placeFam=Mszana+Dolna&language=en>.

³⁷⁹ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁸⁰ Interview with Eżbieta Chudzikiewicz, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

girls, who were shot by Gelb at the yard of the town hall, were brought from Kasinka, a village near Mszana, They had been hiding in a house which belonged to two sisters and all four were reported by a neighbour. Stefania Knapczyk admitted that there were people in Mszana who reported matters to Gelb for no apparent reason. Sometimes they were rewarded with money, or food, but often it was anonymous information. She stated:

When the war started people should have had more decency, but they were greedy. People did report to Gelb, on Jews, on those who helped the partisans. Gelb did not know local people well, so those reports were useful. Some people had no shame.³⁸¹

In many cases, the denunciator was a jealous neighbour, who after realising that people had Jews hiding in the house, assumed that they brought money and valuables to the helpers. The phenomenon of farmers reporting their neighbours out of resentment and bitterness towards those who in their minds must have got rich by hiding Jews, was the most common reason for denunciation.³⁸² In his memoirs, Franciszek Knapczyk described a tragic story of a Jew from Mszana, who had escaped from the shooting on 19 August 1942 and managed to secure a hiding place for himself at a farm near Mszana. In this case, an envious 'friend' reported his neighbour and as a result the whole family was executed. The Jewish man was chained to a horse cart and dragged to Mszana, where he was tortured to death.³⁸³ Aleksander Kalczyński described in his memoirs a case of Land Wetzler, a Jewish teacher from Kraków who managed to escape from the execution of 24 Jews in May 1941 at the brick factory in Mszana. After a few days, he was caught by the farmers from a village outside Mszana, chained and delivered to the Nazis authorities, whereupon he was shot.³⁸⁴ The author did not elaborate on who exactly the farmers were, but they were people who lived near the town, as it is unlikely that Wetzler managed to travel far.

³⁸¹ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁸² See: Grabowski, *JUDENJAGD*; Engelking, *Jest taki piękny*.

³⁸³ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁸⁴ Kalczyński, *Memoirs*, 10.

There are no comprehensive statistics from Mszana on either the number of people assisting Jews in hiding, or on those who betrayed them and the families which helped them. Cases of the Jews in hiding mentioned during the interviews told the story of people in need who received help from their neighbours. Sadly, they also disclosed numerous exhibitions of greed, and insensitivity to the tragic fate of the Jews. The people who were hiding in Mszana were mostly members of the Jewish community of town. Therefore, a person who betrayed them must have known not only the non-Jewish family which offered help, but also the hiding Jewish neighbour. In other words, all three parties of an event knew each other to some extent.

The jealousy of potential material benefits which someone could gain by helping Jews, was a product of a stereotypical image of a wealthy Jew. In reality, even those Jews who had been doing well before the war had little left by the time they were in hiding. During and long after the war, rescuing Jews was not treated as a noble act of bravery. In fear of being reported by neighbours, the fact of hiding and helping Jews was kept as a secret by rescuers. Under occupation, the less people knew about where Jewish people were hiding, the better it was for them and people who helped them. After the war, this knowledge could be used against rescuers by local people.

In one of the testimonies of the USC Shoah Foundation, Zofia Blitz from Warsaw, who together with her mother spent several months in Mszana towards the end of the war admitted that they did not tell anyone that they were Jews. The women stayed first at the Countess Krasińska estate, together with the people relocated from Warsaw after the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. After the liberation, they stayed for another several months in the house of a widower with six children. Blitz recalled that even then, they decided not to disclose their Jewish identity, as this fact

would be 'an insult for him in front of other people'.³⁸⁵ A similar conviction was shared by a man from Maków Podhalański, a town situated in vicinity of Mszana, who rescued a Jewish family. In an interview, conducted for the purpose of another research, the man admitted:

I did hide them, I did. I am a Christian; it was my responsibility to save life. But to talk about? What for? So people could talk? Gossip, make up stories about me, how rich I am and how much gold I got from these Jews? I don't need that, so I kept quiet.³⁸⁶

The man connected his religious identity to the obligation of saving lives and helping others in need. Catholic religion and church authorities always had significant influence on people in the region where Mszana is situated. As Anna Knapczyk noted 'highlanders from this region were and still are famous for being very religious and listening carefully the Church teaching.'³⁸⁷

Indeed, all non-Jewish interviewees emphasised that the people of Mszana were always devoted to their faith and religion had an important role in the town's life. This was true as well for the Jewish community of the town. For both religious groups in Mszana life revolved around their faiths which were people's lifestyle, rather than only rituals. The church and the synagogue were situated at the town's main square, the central place of town. On Saturdays all Jewish shops were closed and the Jews went to the synagogue. This fact was not contested by non-Jews, they were aware that, as one of the interviewees described it, 'Saturdays were for the Jewish god, like Sundays were for the Christian's one.'³⁸⁸ Many non-Jews watched with admiration procession of Jews on their way to the synagogue. Zdanowski and Stefania Knapczyk recalled how beautiful the Jewish outfits were on Saturdays and how dignified the Jews looked when they walked to the temple. Maria Figura remembered that her parents always talked with admiration about Jews observing the *Shabbat*

³⁸⁵ Zofia Blitz. Interview 40853. Segments 135-142. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1998. Accessed 16 July 2014.

³⁸⁶ Interview with Jan Kowalski (name changed), 6 July 2007, Maków Podhalański.

³⁸⁷ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁸⁸ Interview with Maria Figura, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

by not doing any work, despite difficulties which this prohibition caused in daily routine.³⁸⁹ Zdanowski said that on the Jewish New Year, he used to go with his friends to sit near the synagogue to listen to the sound of *shofar*, traditional horn used as a music instrument at the High Holy Days.³⁹⁰ The fascination by the Jewish religious rituals derived from curiosity of different practices, which non-Jews had little understanding of.

An individual who was mentioned extensively by Jewish and non-Jewish interviewees in the context of relationship between both religions was a local parson Józef Stabrawa. Father Stabrawa was in charge of the parish in Mszana between 1917 and 1942. He was very much involved in the development process of the communities in the region, involving modernization of the local agriculture, aqueducts and architecture, supporting artists, sport clubs and introducing modernization of the legal system in small communities. As a strong opponent of the Nazis occupation during the war, he was first imprisoned, later transferred to Auschwitz-Birkenau, to finally being sent to the camp in Dachau where he died on 17 August 1942. The authority of Father Stabrawa was very strong not only in Mszana, but in the whole region. He was respected by the local population for his dedication to the town and the people of the region. Most of the non-Jewish interviewees highlighted the fact that his relationships with the Jewish community were very positive. Zdanowski who for many years served as an altar boy recalled that he never heard anything negative being said by Stabrawa. In contrary, he saw him several times chatting to the local rabbi, Hollander. Zdanowski also remembered that on occasion he borrowed money from Elias Weissberger and always got a special rate from him.³⁹¹ Stefania Knapczyk, the niece of Stabrawa, admitted that her uncle was a highly respected figure by Jews and non-Jews and himself had high regard for the Jewish community of the town.³⁹²

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Interview with Stefania Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

Even so, opinions of the Jewish interviewees on Father Stabrawa are not unequivocal. Dora Appel could not remember the name of the priest in Mszana before the war, but she remembered that he was a positive figure:

The priest was a very decent man. A Catholic priest. He was a very noble man, this priest. I can't remember his name. He was very tall.³⁹³

Mordechai Lustig, despite spending in Mszana only 6 months, remembered Stabrawa well. He recalled that he was a tall, stately man and had good approach towards the Jews in Mszana.³⁹⁴ Shlomo Tsur, however, had a different memory of the parson. He stated that Stabrawa was an antisemite and his preaching was anti-Jewish.³⁹⁵ Kalczyński in his memoirs stated that before the war Stabrawa had reputation of being antisemitic.³⁹⁶ These two very different judgements of the priest character could be explained by Stabrawa's different approaches to the Jews as a religious group and an economic competition. In his preaching, he underlined that Jewish people should be respected as a religious group from which Christ came from. However, he very strongly advocated non-Jewish attempts to push out the Jews from trading.³⁹⁷ Stabrawa encouraged his parishioners to start their own businesses as competition to the Jewish shops, in order for the Catholic part of the town to become independent from the Jewish shop owners. This conviction, as mentioned before, was in line with the antisemitic rhetoric of the government in the 1930s. Despite seeing Jews as economic opponents of the non-Jewish businesses before the war, Stabrawa preached to help the Jewish population during the war. Kalczyński wrote that because of Father Stabrawa's opposition to Jewish economic preponderance before the war, people expected him to approve the Nazis' policy against the Jewish people. However, he taught his parishioners that it was their duty to help

³⁹³ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

³⁹⁴ Interview with Mordechai Lustig, 7 December 2011, Tel Aviv, Israel, interview not recorded.

³⁹⁵ Shlomo Tsur. Interview 38445. Segments 1-38. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1997. Accessed 16 July 2014.

³⁹⁶ Kalczyński, *Memoirs*, 9.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 10.

the Jews in any ways they can. Kalczyński recalled that Stabrawa himself made a financial contribution towards one of the ransoms which Hamann demanded from the Jewish community in Mszana.³⁹⁸ Anna Knapczyk, who was related to Stabrawa admitted that when she found out about it, she was even surprised.

In church, he told people not to sign *volksdeutsche* list, not to be persuaded by the Nazis and to help the Jews. I was even surprised by that. He said to help their Jewish neighbours.³⁹⁹

Stabrawa's ambivalent attitude towards the Jews was not such an unusual behaviour among some of the Polish intellectuals. The writer Zofia Kossak-Szczucka was a good example of someone who on the one hand saw Polish Jews as political and economic enemies, but on the other hand organised help for them during the war. Kossak-Szczucka was one of the founders of the Provisional Committee to Aid Jews (*Tymczasowy Komitet Pomocy Żydom*), later turned into the Council to Aid Jews (*Rada Pomocy Żydom*), called *Żegota*. In 1942 when the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto began, Kossak-Szczucka published a document titled '*Protest*', in which she described the appalling conditions in which the Jews were living in the ghetto and she criticised the Christian world in not opposing Jewish oppression. For her, to be a good Catholic was to stand up against the Nazis' policy and organise help for the Jews. However, at the same time, she still considered Jewish people an economic threat to the Polish state. She wrote:

We do not stop thinking of them as political, economic and ideological enemies of Poland. But this does not relieve Polish Catholics of their duty to oppose the crimes being committed in their country. We are required by God to protest. God who forbids us to kill. We are required by our Christian consciousness. Every human being has the right to be loved by his fellow men. The blood of the defenceless cries to heaven for revenge. Those who oppose our protest, are not Catholics.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Ibid, 10.

³⁹⁹ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁰⁰ *Biblioteka*. Teksty źródłowe, Polacy i Holocaust. Accessed August 1, 2015. http://www.zydziwpolisce.edu.pl/biblioteka/zrodla/r3_5d.html#r3_5d_a.

Polish scholar Jan Błoński, who analysed the text written by Kossak-Szczucka, claimed that her thinking was typical of Polish society during the war, especially the representative of a significant Catholic intelligentsia.⁴⁰¹ Father Stabrawa embraced this vision in his preaching and his attitude. Nevertheless, he was also remembered as a person who before the war respected Jewish religion and would never allow any signs of disregard from his parishioners towards Jewish faith.⁴⁰² This was particularly difficult, since the Polish Catholic Church on the eve of the Second World War was not free from antisemitic influence.

A good example of antisemitic propaganda promoted by the Church was a calendar, mentioned by Zdanowski, which was distributed via parishes at the end of the 1930s. As an altar boy, one of Zdanowski's responsibilities was to distribute a weekly, Sunday Bell (*Dzwon Niedzielny*). It was a Catholic newspaper edited by the archdiocese in Kraków and it was published between 1924 and 1939. The interviewee remembered that one year there was a calendar which was supposed to be distributed together with the weekly. Zdanowski said that he did not like the content of the calendar, as it was full of antisemitic pictures and slogans. He told his father that the priest who was responsible for publications asked him to sell the calendar together with the Sunday Bell. His father asked Zdanowski to go to Father Stabrawa and to say that he will not be selling the calendar. Zdanowski remembered that at the end, the calendar was not distributed in Mszana. Zdanowski recalled:

It was only in one year, this calendar. I really did not like it, I did not want to be a part of it. It was ugly. They were saying there that Jews are dirty and they spread fleas. Nonsense like that. (...) My dad was very upset. At the end the calendar was not distributed, but I saw it and I didn't like it at all. Filthy lies. But it happened only once.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹ Jan Błoński, "Polish-Catholics and Catholic Poles: The Gospel, National Interest, Civic Solidarity and the Destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto," *Yad Vashem Studies* 25 (1996): 184.

⁴⁰² Interview with Mordechaj Lustig, 7 December 2011, Tel Aviv, Israel, interview not recorded.

⁴⁰³ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

Zdanowski could not remember the year in which the calendar appeared in Mszana and what exactly the title and nature of the publishing it was. It could have been the Great Calendar of the People's Self-Defence (*Wielki Kalendarz Samoobrony Narodu*). People's Self-Defence was an antisemitic paper published by the diocese of Poznań in Western Poland. In the late 1930s it had a circulation of one million copies.⁴⁰⁴ The paper often included antisemitic leaflets and once a year it published a calendar. The paper encouraged people to boycott Jewish shops and included many anti-Jewish slogans and offensive cartoons.⁴⁰⁵ It is very probable that this was the publication which was sent to Mszana for distribution with Sunday Bell.

The parish in Mszana was not free of anti-Jewish sentiments, even if they were limited to the economic aspect of Jewish/non-Jewish relations. However, in terms of practising religion, there was a sense of mutual respect between the authorities of the Catholic Church and the Jewish community. The lives of both religious groups were arranged in accordance with their beliefs. Religiosity was an important barometer of their lifestyles. Nevertheless, before the war Jews and non-Jews were able to coexist and co-operate as one community of Mszana. The relations changed in many respects during the war which had implications on the Jewish/non-Jewish relationship when the war ended.

Memories of life in Mszana before the war is not homogenous. The majority of the interviewees described the Jewish/non-Jewish relations in town as positive. There were those, however, who remembered pre-war Mszana as an unsafe place for Jews. The recollections of the past differed not only between Jewish and non-Jewish members of the community, but also within these groups. The variety of memories

⁴⁰⁴ Joseph Marcus, *Social and political history of the Jews in Poland, 1919-1939* (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: New Babylon, Mouton Publishers, 1983), 362-363.

⁴⁰⁵ YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. YIVO Digital Archives on Jewish Life in Poland. Accessed August 1, 2015.
<http://polishjews.yivoarchives.org/archive/index.php?p=creators/creator&id=7071>.

indicates how selective remembering is and that later life experience influences the way interviewees remember the past. What emerges from the interviewees memories is a town where Jews and non-Jews, although divided by a different faith, had contact with each other on daily basis. They cooperated on a business level, but also as neighbours and friends. Jews and non-Jews attended the same public school, they worked together in the local shops and granted each other neighbourly favours, if this was needed. Although both groups had poor understanding of the other's religion, they respected their mutual traditions and customs. Even so, Mszana was not entirely free of antisemitic sentiments before the war. They were, however, relatively minor, even in the 1930s when antisemitism in Poland got stronger. The resistance to anti-Jewish attitude in Mszana could be explained by the extensive cooperation between Jews and non-Jews which was in no one's interest in destroying. This partly reflected the economic reality of the town. Although in some aspects Mszana resembled a *shtetl*, it did not fit the literary depiction of it. With tourism being one of the biggest source of income in town, Mszana had ongoing contact with new ideas from the big cities in Poland and abroad. The cosmopolitan aspect of contacts with people visiting the town kept the population less prone to prejudices and the need to take care of visitors necessitated everyday collegiality.

Inevitably, the outbreak of the war was remembered by the Jewish interviewees as the decisive moment in Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Mszana. They recalled that the attitude of non-Jews towards Jews became if not hostile, at least ambivalent. There were, however, recollections of neighbourly help during the war, as well as assistance in trading food and goods with the Jews who were forbidden to buy anything. The shooting of the Jews in August 1942 is remembered as a traumatic experience of the town. It remains that for the non-Jewish inhabitants of Mszana the fear of being the next group to be exterminated prevailed and this was one reason why help for the Jews was limited to some exceptional individuals and families. Thereafter, the memory of the events of August 1942, as well as the Jewish heritage of Mszana, were to

remained excluded from the public sphere of the town for several decades after the war.

Section 3:

Memory work and the Jews of Mszana

The community of contemporary Mszana, or at least a part of it, has been engaging in memory work concerning the Jews since early 2000s. This engagement, which involves people across generations, manifests itself through taking part in the annual commemoration of the Jews from the town, as well as educational programmes and general interest in Jewish culture. Furthermore, the post-communist era introduced further opportunities to interact with the Holocaust survivors from Mszana and their families. The community is not, however, free from prejudices and stereotypes which constrain some inhabitants of Mszana from fully engaging in this memory work. The purpose of this section is to explore the many layers of memory work, as well as the obstacles which prevent it.

In the introduction to her *Shtetl. The history of a small town and an extinguished world*, Eva Hoffman wrote:

What remains of the Jews of Poland? Mostly traces, echoes, and a few monuments; and also sorrow, rage, guilt, and denial. There are a few thousand Jews left in Poland today, but the communities they inhabited, their characteristic culture and society, were all destroyed during World War II. Because the extent of the loss was so great – so total – the act of remembering the vanished world has become fraught with painful and still acute emotions.⁴⁰⁶

Indeed, the vast majority of Jewish communities perished during the war. Cities, towns and villages, which often had high percentage of Jews before the war, lost a significant part of their population in a very short period of time. This loss was not only chronologically intense, but also violent and traumatic. Mszana Dolna is one of many places in Poland where the large majority of the local Jewish population, which for centuries was a part of the community, vanished largely in one day. People from Mszana, in one way or another (first hand or through

⁴⁰⁶ Hoffman, *Shtetl*, 1.

accounts of relatives and friends), witnessed the massacre of almost a thousand Jews. The disappearance of such a significant part of the community caused emptiness, a physical absence, as well as creating a rupture in the collective memory of the town. However, Mszana, like many other places in post-war Poland, experienced what Hoffman calls the pathology of silence.⁴⁰⁷ The Jews from Mszana were largely gone and forgotten and their absence was not a matter of public discussion. Jewish houses, shops and other properties were left behind and soon found new owners. For a long time the history of Jewish people from Mszana did not have a place in the memory and history of the town. Yet, the stories of the Jews of Mszana were not entirely forgotten after the war. Not incorporated into the official history of the town, the Jews were still preserved in the folk memory of the members of the community. Excluded from the official education and the heritage and historiography of the town, stories about the Jews were transmitted from generation to generation in some of its non-Jewish families. The Jewish presence in the memory of Mszana became more anecdotal than a part of local history. The only visible signs that Jews once lived in Mszana were monuments commemorating their death. First, there is the eighteenth century Jewish cemetery situated on Zakopiańska Street on the outskirts of the town. Second, there are two memorials erected on the spots where the Jews were shot by the Nazis. On Ogrodowa Street there is a smaller memorial for twenty four Jews shot in May 1941. The bigger memorial, which is located on Pańskie, commemorates the shooting of close to a thousand Jews on 19 August 1942. All these sites will be explored further in this section.

In the last two decades there has been a change in the attitude towards the memory of the Jews of Mszana. Several initiatives were taken to start an annual commemoration of the shooting of the Jews in 1942. In addition, attempts were made to include the history of Jews of Mszana in the educational system and to involve young people in projects concerning the Jewish culture and history. Members of the town also got

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, 3.

involved in co-operation with the Holocaust survivors from Mszana, or their families. Despite the fact that only a small part of the community of Mszana is an active part of all these actions, these changes have had an impact on how Jews are remembered and what position the memory of them has in the life of the town. Even so, remembering Jews and regarding the history of the Jewish community as a part of the local inheritance has been a slow and protracted process.

The events of August 1942 obliterated the Jewish population of Mszana. Those who were spared from the shooting were sent to build roads in neighbouring towns, Limanowa and Tymbark. The vast majority of them were either killed or sent to concentration camps after they finished their work. Dora Appel's younger brother, Naftuli Chaim, was one of the Jewish workers near Tymbark. Once the road was finished at the end of 1942, he was shot, together with all other Jews working with him.⁴⁰⁸

Moses Aftergut, who was born in Przemśl and in 1942 was visiting with his parents and siblings their family in Dobra, a village near Mszana, survived the massacre in 1942. Aftergut's family perished on 19 August 1942, but Moses was among the spared men who then were sent to build roads. His cousin Leon Gatterer was also among people selected for work and he survived the war as well. There are no statistics about how many Jews from Mszana survived the war. Bearing in mind the events of August 1942, the reality is that not many Jewish inhabitants of Mszana remained alive. Nonetheless, of those who did, not a single person came back to live in the town. Some of them returned to see what remained of their houses and other properties, others wanted to check whether anyone from their families survived the war.⁴⁰⁹

There were several reasons for not coming back to live in Mszana. As was the case with many Holocaust survivors from Poland, Jews from Mszana considered the place they lived before and during the war to be a

⁴⁰⁸ Kulig, *"W wojnie straciłam"*, 55.

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone; Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

place 'soaked with Jewish blood',⁴¹⁰ a place connected with traumatic experiences of the Holocaust. It took fifty years for Aftergut to be able to come back to Mszana and to visit the site of the mass grave where his family was buried. Appel admitted that it was difficult for her to go back to Mszana after the war and she never intended to stay there. She only wanted to check if any belongings of her family remained in the town.⁴¹¹

Another reason for the Jews not settling in Mszana after the war was the fact that they were not necessary welcomed there. Kuba Weissberger, who survived the war in the Soviet Union, came to Mszana in 1946 and sold his house to the butcher Michorczyk. A part of the money he got for the house Kuba donated to the memorial on the site of the shooting in August 1942. Weissberger stayed overnight in the house of the Kisiele, a family of the local judge. However, according to some of the interviewees, the following morning, Weissberger found an anonymous note under the door which said that he should leave Mszana as soon as possible, otherwise he would be killed.⁴¹² As Hanna Kadłubek, whose parents were friends with Weissberger and who corresponded with him after the war, pointed out:

Kuba Weissberger came here after the war and sold the house. He stayed with the judge Kisiel. But he left quickly. You know, there was such antisemitism here after the war. He was warned not to stay, to leave as soon as possible. If not, that he will be killed.⁴¹³

The note was not signed, but it could have been written by a member of the community in Mszana. The interviewees who mentioned the written threat received by the survivor, however, could not identify the source of the information about the delivered note. It is possible that what people suspected might have happened to Weissberger became at the end a 'true story' which served in the memory of the community as an explanation of the survivor's prompt departure from the town. The

⁴¹⁰ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, USA.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴¹³ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

absence of the survived Jews in town was explained by the hostile environment of Mszana. In fact, Weissberger himself, during long years of correspondence with two people from Mszana, Hanna Kadłubek, and Mieczysław Daszkiewicz, never mentioned the note in his letters.⁴¹⁴

There are no other surviving sources relating to antisemitic incidents in Mszana after the war. Whether the threat to kill the survivor was real, or mythical, this example of antisemitism fits the bigger picture of violence against the Jews in post war Poland. The country experienced increased hostility towards the Jewish survivors, of which reasons are difficult to explain. Jan Gross in his book *Fear* (2007) offered a theory of the post-war violence against Jews explaining it by Polish guilt for not rescuing the Jews during the war on one hand and for taking over their properties on the other.⁴¹⁵ He claimed that the Jewish survivors who returned to their towns after the war were like previous owners of the properties coming back from their graves and they were living reminders of the sin which non-Jewish Poles committed against the Jews.⁴¹⁶ Whatever its merits, Gross' theory ignores the political and economic situation in Poland after the war. He fails to explain the importance of anti-Communist underground's propaganda, represented by the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) and the nationalistic National Armed Forces (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*), of Jews being main executors of Stalinisation of the country. Gross does not dedicate much attention to the economic trauma and the impoverishment of the population in Poland. These factors, together with the lack of authority of newly established local authorities, resulted in disintegration of social rules and increase of crime, including violence against the Jews.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Jan Gross, *Fear. Anti-semitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An essay in historical interpretation* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁴¹⁶ Gross, *Fear*, 298.

⁴¹⁷ Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 200-229.

The question of Jewish properties and restitution in Mszana

Whether or not Gross' analysis of non-Jewish guilt is fully convincing, the material aspect of Jews returning to Mszana after the war was a significant issue for the non-Jewish part of the community. Weissberger's presence in town raised the unsettling question of Jewish properties which already had new occupants. He was one of few Jews who managed to sell their properties to a non-Jew after the war. Another family who came to Mszana after the war and sold the house was the Streimers, a family of the local lawyer, who survived the war in the Soviet Union. The family of Bracha Zehnwirth, who had a small grocery shop in Mszana attached to the house before the war, managed to sell the building to non-Jews who were interested in the property. Bracha moved to Kraków when the war started and managed to survive the war. Later on she settled in Israel. Shortly after the war, a legal representative of the family came to Mszana and sold the house to a non-Jewish family living in the house. The transaction was recorded in the land registry.⁴¹⁸ Henryk Zdanowski recalled that shortly after the war Pinek Repun, one of several members of the Repun family who survived the war in the Soviet Union, came back to Mszana and was looking for his family's belongings. He also wanted to sell their house. Before the Repun family left for the USA, they lived for a short time in Kraków. Zdanowski's family wanted to buy the house which belonged to the Repuns, so they could, by connecting both, make their own house bigger. Zdanowski's sister went to Kraków to negotiate the price, but the family had not enough money to buy the house. Soon after, the Znachoski family moved into the property and Zdanowski assumed that they managed to pay the price the Repun family wanted.⁴¹⁹

Among the Jews from Mszana who survived the war, there were those who were not interested in returning to the town, even for the purpose of overseeing the ownership of the properties. Cyla Turner's family was one of them. Cyla, together with her parents and siblings, escaped to the

⁴¹⁸ Interview with Agnieszka Józefiak, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴¹⁹ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

Soviet Union in 1939, then emigrated to Palestine in 1946. None of the members of the family ever return to Poland.⁴²⁰ Dora Appel, despite visiting Mszana several times after the war, did not express any interest in claiming back her family's properties. One of the houses which belonged to her family was already demolished, but another house and a bakery were still there.⁴²¹

Although the restitution law in Poland after the war treated Jews and non-Jews in the same way, Jewish survivors were often in a more difficult situation. According to the decree of May 1945, relatives who were entitled to apply for restitution of a property were limited to the closest members of the family - namely, a spouse, siblings, children, grandchildren, grandparents and parents. The same rule was retained in the decree of March 1946.⁴²² For Jewish survivors, who were often the sole person alive from their extended family, it was legally impossible to obtain the right to properties which before the war belonged to their more distant family members, like cousins or uncles. The fact that such a survivor was the only person from the whole family who was alive had no legal bearing on the application for restitution.

The property law after the war distinguished two types of properties: abandoned (*porzucone*) and deserted (*opuszczone*). The first category related to the properties which belonged to the German state, German organisations and citizens, together with those who collaborated with the Nazis. Those properties which were taken away from Polish citizens by the Germans were described as deserted. Such properties, Jewish and non-Jewish, were temporarily owned by the Polish state.⁴²³ In the case of the majority of Jewish properties in Mszana, there were no legal owners of them alive after the war, but they had new occupants. After the events

⁴²⁰ Interview with Cyla Turner, 28 December 2010, Haifa, Israel.

⁴²¹ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

⁴²² Łukasz Krzyżanowski, "Chcielibyśmy, by ten dom nie pozostał w obcych rękach". Sądowa restytucja prywatnego mienia żydowskiego w Polsce na przykładzie Radomia i Kalisza 1945-1948," in *Klucze i kasa. O mieniu żydowskim w Polsce pod okupacją niemiecką i we wczesnych latach powojennych, 1939-1950*, ed. Jan Grabowski and Dariusz Libionka (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2004), 581.

⁴²³ Krzyżanowski, "Chcielibyśmy, by ten dom", 579.

of 19 August 1942, there were no Jewish families officially living in Mszana. Before leaving their houses on that day, all the Jews were instructed to hand over a set of the keys to the house, with the property number attached to it, to the soldiers at the square where they were gathered. After the massacre at Pańskie on 19 August 1942, the group of ten Jews who were spared from the shooting were ordered to gather clothes, shoes and other belongings of the Jewish victims and load them all on the earlier prepared wagons. They were later transported to Nowy Sącz, from where they were taken by train to Germany. The wagons were operated by local farmers who were ordered by Gelb to make them available. The same group of ten Jews was responsible for gathering goods from the Jewish houses and sending some of them to Nowy Sącz as well. However, some of the goods were sold by the Nazis to the non-Jewish members of the community. The houses were emptied of most valuable objects by the Nazis, but there were still some furniture and other objects left.⁴²⁴

Non-Jewish interviewees, when asked about what happened to Jewish houses and other properties after 19 August 1942, underlined that all the Jewish houses were bought by non-Jews from the Jewish owners if they survived the war and came back to Mszana. Henryk Zdanowski assured that 'nobody took anything from the Jews for free in Mszana and all the houses were bought from either the Jewish owners, or from the state after the war'.⁴²⁵ Some of the houses were indeed sold by the Jewish owners, without the local authorities being involved in the transactions. This is what happened with the Streiners', the Repuns', the Weissbergers' and Bracha Zehnwrith's properties. It can be assumed that there were more examples of similar transactions, which involved two private parties. The interviewees claimed that other properties were sold by the state, as the temporary owner of the properties.⁴²⁶ However, the number of Jewish properties which were taken over by the local authorities was much

⁴²⁴ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴²⁵ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴²⁶ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Elżbieta Chudzikiewicz, 16 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

smaller than the total number of the properties left behind by the Jewish populations. As noted, before the war, one quarter of the inhabitants of Mszana was Jewish, which was around one thousand people. Almost all of them ran shops, bakeries, and small factories. Even if not all of them owned the building they lived and worked in, the number of Jewish buildings was high. In 1946 the state took over some of the properties, which were shortly after put up for auction and purchased by the local non-Jewish population. However, this number did not correspond to the amount of all the Jewish properties. Further buildings and plots of land were seized by the local authorities for public use, such as widening the main square in Mszana, building a public school, extending the Catholic cemetery, moving the cattle market to the new place, or for the public library.⁴²⁷ The list of these properties was approved at the meeting of the Communal National Board (*Gminna Rada Narodowa*) on 11 October 1947, including also those abandoned by the Germans.⁴²⁸ The list contained 17 private Jewish properties, another one which belonged to the Jewish community and further one which was owned by the *volksdeutsch*, Mayor Władysław Gelb. Therefore, there were 18 Jewish properties which were owned by the state and used for the modernisation of Mszana.

It is difficult to imagine that in August 1942, when around a thousand people living in the town vanished, that their houses remained empty. Especially, with some non-Jews relocating to Mszana from bigger towns and cities, housing was a problem. There was a big group of people relocated from Poznań which was incorporated into the Third Reich. There were also people moving from Kraków as they thought that life in a small town during the war would be easier than in a big city. In the summer of 1944 there was a big wave of migrants from Warsaw, who had to leave the city after the Uprising. Most of them returned to the capital when the war ended. Some of the inhabitants of Mszana used Jewish properties to improve their living standards. Zdanowski recalled that the

⁴²⁷ Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*, 245.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid*, 245.

Prosiek family who lived next to the Zins, Dora Appel's family, had a small house which they extended after the war to the land which belonged to the Zins. Dora's house was pulled down in order to build a bigger house for the Prosiek family.⁴²⁹ Furthermore, Jewish shops did not remain empty once their owners were not allowed to work in them. Shortly after the Nazis arrived in Mszana in 1939 Jews were forbidden to trade, therefore they could no longer work in their shops. As nearly all the shops were run by the Jewish members of the community, the daily trade of the whole town depended on them. Once Jews could no longer work in them, non-Jews took control over their businesses. It is impossible now to establish whether any of the non-Jews bought Jewish businesses from their owners, or whether they were taken over without payment. Agnieszka Józefiak who is an employee of the town hall in Mszana as a specialist of the promotion, touristic and cultural information and sport, and who is also a person personally interested in the local history, especially the history of Jews from Mszana, has stated:

Who was working in the Jewish shops when the Jews left? It is hard to say, we might never find out how exactly it worked. Maybe those who were more resourceful? I am not sure.⁴³⁰

The subject of Jewish properties and legal question of their ownership was an issue which some of the interviewees did not wish to elaborate on. The main reason for that was not to upset the neighbours who might live in Jewish houses and not to gossip about them.⁴³¹ The biggest fear in town when foreigners visit Mszana is that Jewish families come to see their houses and will claim them back. Knapczyk explained:

There was such a story here when a Jewish family came to Mszana and they went to the main square and they were looking at a house. Immediately, the rumour spread in town that Jews arrived and they will be taking houses back from us. But this is such primitive thinking. They only want to see where their parents and grandparents were born.⁴³²

⁴²⁹ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴³⁰ Interview with Agnieszka Józefiak, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴³¹ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴³² Ibid.

This fear of the returning Jews coming to Poland to take away a house, or claiming money for family property is not a unique phenomenon of Mszana. Since the beginning of the 1990s when Poland regained democracy, the subject of restitution of private properties which were seized by the Nazis and later nationalised by the Communist regime, has not been legally resolved. This includes the issue of Jewish and non-Jewish properties. Several bills dealing with the restitution of private properties in Poland have been introduced, but the law still requires further adjustments in order to make the process clear and accessible. The claims concerning properties which belonged to Jewish communities, not private owners, are easier to make, as the rules for applications are clearer. However, it is a more complicated process for private owners, as they have to make their claims through civil suits.⁴³³ Due to the complicated and protracted procedures, as well as in some cases the lack of interest of the Jewish heirs to apply for restitution, the number of private Jewish properties being returned to their owners is smaller than expected. There is, however, a strong conviction among Polish society that Jews are still willing to take away people's houses.

In Mszana, the fear of losing properties to their Jewish owners remains a serious social matter. When in 2013, a grandson of the last rabbi of Mszana, Aharon Hollander, contacted local authorities to find out in which house his grandfather had lived, nobody from the inhabitants who could remember this fact decided to point out the house. Agnieszka Józefiak, who was the person the relative of Hollander contacted, despite many conversations with elderly members of the society, was not able to get the necessary information. After checking the land registry she found out that the rabbi did not own a house in Mszana.⁴³⁴ Yet, even the fact that the rabbi in fact rented a house next to the synagogue, not owned it, did not change the inhabitants' attitude. The fear of losing the house, although irrational, seemed still to be real. Another factor which kept the

⁴³³ *Restytucja Mienia w Polsce. Portal Informacyjny.* „Restytucja mienia po roku 1989 (regulacje prawne).” Accessed December 12, 2014. http://propertyrestitution.pl/Restytucja.mienia.po.roku.1989.regulacje.prawne.11.html#nie_ruchomosci_kosciolow.

⁴³⁴ Interview with Agnieszka Józefiak, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

people quiet about the location of the rabbi's house was the worry of being accused of pointing fingers at their neighbours. Anna Knapczyk, who was also contacted by Hollander's relative, explained:

I told this man that I will not tell which house it was, because I want to live here in peace with everybody. People say they don't remember, but even if they do, they will not show where it was. People are afraid. They bought these houses and now, after so many years they are afraid they will be taken away from them. I won't be the one who points a finger at those who live there. I have to live in this town, he does not.⁴³⁵

How difficult the subject of Jewish properties can be in conversation with the local people was described by Stanisław Rząsa. A retired history teacher from Dobra (a village near Mszana), he decided to collect testimonies and documents on the community of Jews there. In his personal project, he interviews elderly members of the community and writes down the history of Jews from the village:

Some of the Jewish houses are still standing in Dobra, exactly the same, but non-Jews live in them now. I can tell you this, it is not an easy conversation about houses. If someone lives there now...I might have asked too much once. I asked where they got this house from. The family said that they bought it from a Jewish family before the war. Well, the Jewish family still lived there in 1941, so... It started being uncomfortable, so I dropped the subject. The saying 'your streets, our houses' still operates among people.⁴³⁶

The saying which Rząsa evokes was a popular portrayal of Jewish people who are property owners, unlike non-Jews to whom only the streets belonged. It implied exploitation of non-Jewish masses by a wealthy Jewish property owner, a landlord and petty capitalist. This stereotypical vision of a Jew still functions in Mszana. The fact that the Jews were the owners of the majority of the shops in town only supports this prejudice. This conviction may be one of the reasons of the fear that Józefiak summarised as 'the worry that the Jews will come to Mszana and will demand something from the inhabitants in return for the houses they

⁴³⁵ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴³⁶ Interview with Stanisław Rząsa, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

left here'.⁴³⁷ Although this is an important factor, however, it is not the whole picture of the property controversy.

Some of the Jewish houses and shops were occupied by non-Jewish members of the community soon after August 1942. As already established, most of these properties did not find their owners when the war was over. New occupiers who moved in during the war, remained there after the war. It is not clear whether non-Jews had to obtain permission from the Nazi authority to occupy Jewish houses, or if they did it spontaneously. There was no separate ghetto in town, Jewish families lived mainly around the main square, but they had non-Jewish neighbours as well. Therefore, after the events of 19 August 1942, the Nazis were not able to separate and close the territory with Jewish properties, as they did in other places.⁴³⁸ In Mszana Jewish houses and shops had non-Jews living next to them. It seems that people moved into the Jewish buildings spontaneously. Zdanowski mentioned that his sister, together with her family, moved into one floor of the Repuns' house and lived there until Pinek Repun came back after the war and sold the house to the other family which also moved into this house after 1942.⁴³⁹ The Knapczyk family, however, was given permission to establish their shop in a building where a Jewish inn and a shop used to be.⁴⁴⁰ The archival records of a notary public from Mszana, Adam Ziemiński, indicated that those inhabitants who took over the Jewish properties applied for re-assignment of the land registry from their Jewish owners to new non-Jewish occupants.⁴⁴¹ The archival file contained applications which were filed between 1944 and 1951. On each of them a note was written next to the name of previous Jewish owners which says 'whereabouts unknown'.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁷ Interview with Agnieszka Józefiak, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴³⁸ Łukasz Krzyżanowski describes the case of Radom, where after the liquidation of the ghetto, the territory was closed and there and access was forbidden for non-Jews.

⁴³⁹ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁴¹ National Archives in Spytkowice, Poland; file: *Akta notariusza Adama Ziemińskiego w Mszanie Dolnej z lat 1926-1951*; file no 31/725.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

Despite changes made in order to legalise the ownership of the properties, and despite the time which has passed since the end of the war, people in the town still fear that ownership of their properties could be disputed. The fact whether or not, under Polish law, the properties could be claimed back, has no impact on the fear of the local people. People's distress about losing their houses in Mszana is based mainly on hearsay, rumours from other towns and villages and assumptions about the intentions of the Jews who visit Mszana. The fear is also supported by stereotypical assumptions of Jews taking houses away from non-Jewish owners in Poland. Józefiak, who almost always accompanies Jewish families visiting Mszana in walks around the town, talked about difficulties the Jewish families encounter.

Even when people only hear English, only this triggers fear. People don't let anyone in to look inside the houses. There is door slamming and very unpleasant atmosphere (...) It's hard to say whether the people took the houses illegally. But if they don't want the Jews even to look inside the house, then maybe there is something wrong from the legal perspective. Mostly though, they are afraid that even after so many years, there might be something wrong from the legal side.⁴⁴³

Since the 1990s, when reclaiming private property became possible in Poland, not a single building in Mszana was claimed either by the Jewish authorities in Poland, or by a private individual. In the country as a whole, the restitution of Jewish public properties which belonged to Jewish communities is taking place. Private claims are rarer.⁴⁴⁴ There are several reasons. First, the legal process for private claims is far more complicated than those for Jewish communities. Second, with so many years after the war it is difficult to establish legal heirs to the properties. Furthermore, in some cases, relatives of Jewish owners are not interested in being involved in long and expensive private suits. The latter argument applied to some of the Holocaust survivors and their families from Mszana. Pnina Yogev, née Turner, whose father was the Holocaust survivor from Mszana, explained:

⁴⁴³ Interview with Agnieszka Józefiak, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁴⁴ Stola, "The Polish debate", 248.

They are our houses, but we can't do anything with them. They don't know that. We wanted just to go inside and have a look. They didn't allow us. (...) It is not so simple to claim it back. The Jewish communities, they can claim back. The Jewish community in Warsaw is very strong and they have money for themselves. They cannot give it to normal people. If I want it back, it would cost me more than the value of the property. It's not worth the hassle.⁴⁴⁵

Moses Aftergut, whose family was killed in Mszana in August 1942, in his conversation with Stanisław Rząsa explained his reasons for not claiming back his family's properties in Dobra, a village near Mszana. He admitted that although he still treated those properties as his, he did not see a reason for claiming them back.⁴⁴⁶ The symbolic ownership of the building which were his family inheritance were more important than factual rights to be the legal owner of these properties. Indeed, none of the Jewish visitors in Mszana gave any reason to believe that they were interested in restitution of their ancestors' belongings.

Nonetheless, rumours of Jewish houses being reclaimed in the neighbourhood are widespread in the town. Anna Knapczyk mentioned that she heard from her cousin that in Limanowa, a town located near Mszana, it is sufficient for Jewish heirs to show in the land registry that a piece of land belonged to their families in the past and current occupiers of this land have to pay compensation immediately.⁴⁴⁷ In reality, no restitution case concerning private properties could be resolved in this way and so promptly. It is because of rumours like the one recalled by Knapczyk, stories often detached from real events that a stereotype of a Jewish landlord waiting to deprive people of their houses are a part of the distorted memory of Jews. The fact that the inhabitants of Mszana fear to face the question of Jewish properties could be, as Józefiak assumed, a sign that there are unresolved queries regarding legality of the ownership of Jewish shops and houses. Certainly, the rights of possessing some of the Jewish properties by their current occupiers could be contested and challenged by legal means. It could happen if there were Jewish owners

⁴⁴⁵ Interview with Pnina Yogev, 31 December 2010, Karmiel, Israel.

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with Stanisław Rząsa, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁴⁷ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

of these properties, or if the Holocaust survivors from Mszana or their families would decide they want to take legal steps to claim their houses back. The trepidation to let Jewish families to look into the houses when they visit Mszana in search for traces of their ancestors is the only serious tension in relations between the current inhabitants and the families of the Jews from Mszana. The fear of the return of the rightful Jewish owners of properties was deeply significant. It puts constraints not only on the relations between the inhabitants of Mszana and the Jews visiting the town, but also puts limits on the relations the people of the town have with their memory of the Jews and the memory of the Holocaust. Indeed, the question of restitution and of former Jewish owners is the issue which the local community is not willing to discuss. The interviewees were willing to discuss the Jewish/non-Jewish relations before and during the war, even the traumatic events of August 1942. However, the subject of properties evoked either silence, or defensive attitudes. It was not the legal status of the properties which was the most problematic aspect, but rather the moral one. The people of Mszana refuse to face this challenge which makes their memory work incomplete. The question of restitution can trigger the awakening of the memory embedded in the properties.⁴⁴⁸ However, it had a reverse effect in Mszana.

Jewish/non-Jewish relations in post-war Mszana

Visits of the Holocaust survivors and, in particular, members of their families intensified in the late 1990s, when Poland re-gained its democracy and become more open to foreigners. Previous to that period, there were few visits of the Jews from Mszana who survived the war. They were only private calls prompted by nostalgia for the place of birth and friends left behind. Dora Appel mentioned three or four visits to

⁴⁴⁸ Constantin Goschler and Philippe Ther, "A history without boundaries. The robbery and restitution of Jewish property in Europe," in *Robbery and Restitution. The conflict over Jewish Property in Europe*, ed. Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler, and Philippe Ther (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 14.

Mszana after the war. Her first trip to Mszana took place shortly after the war and the aim of it was to check if anyone from her distant family survived the war, or whether any objects belonged to her could be found. After the first visit Appel came back to Mszana several times in order to meet with her two non-Jewish best friends. She helped both of them financially, as they lived in poverty.

When I went to America, I had some money, I wanted to help. My girlfriends, I had two. One of them, she always gave me the assignment for Monday, because I was not in school on Saturdays. So this one, I told her that I want to help. I gave her some money, but soon she died. I helped the other friend as well. I sent her money three times. They both had very difficult lives, very difficult. They thought that when Jews disappear, life will be easier, not so miserable. But it wasn't, it was very difficult. They lived in terrible poverty.⁴⁴⁹

Despite her traumatic experience during the war and disappointment with the behaviour of her non-Jewish neighbours, the urge to visit the place of her childhood and to keep in touch with her friends prompted her to visit Mszana. The same nostalgic sentiments brought Kuba Weissberger, who visited Mszana after the war, when he sold his house. He returned several times later on, accompanied by his daughter. During his visits, he mainly spent time with his friends from before the war. Weissberger also corresponded with two of his friends, Hanna Kadłubek and Mieczysław Daszkiewicz, for the rest of his life. The letters were written in Polish and apart from information on his everyday life in Israel, they were saturated with sentimental longing for the place of his birth.⁴⁵⁰ In his letters Weissberger asked Kadłubek whether Mszana looked the same as before the war and explained that the reason why he had settled in Haifa was that it reminded him of Mszana. He wanted to know whether the river was still so clear and fast and if on Grunwald hill there is still a cross 'which holds in its arms his beloved town'.⁴⁵¹ Weissberger in his letters referred on several occasions to the cross on the hill and Mszanka, the river which flows through the town. Both elements of the topography of

⁴⁴⁹ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

⁴⁵⁰ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

Mszana are perceived by the local people as distinctive features of the town. Life of the community concentrated around water and the mountains. Therefore Weissberger related to both elements as recollections of the place he lived in. The river and the cross on the hill could also be seen as symbolic representatives of safe and stable life in Mszana. The river which brings life to town and the cross guarding Mszana from the hill. It is particularly interesting that Weissberger, who was not a Christian, shared the symbolic understanding of the cross. His attachment to Catholicism was expressed during his life in Israel. He actively supported a charity in Karmiel run by a Polish priest. In his letters, he described his involvement in the work of the priest as an important activity in his life and a reminder of the place of his birth.⁴⁵² After the death of the priest Weissberger described him as a great friend of his.

Anna Knapczyk mentioned her neighbour, Mrs Ormanowa, who corresponded with a Jewish friend from Mszana. She could not recall the name of the person, but she remembered that it was a woman who after the war moved to Vienna. Although she never visited Mszana after the war, she kept in touch with her neighbour, Ormanowa. The letters were written in Polish and the ladies corresponded until the death of the friend in Vienna.⁴⁵³ Another friendship which survived the war was one between Maurycy Jered and the farmer who gave him shelter during three years of war, Józef Waclawik. The correspondence lasted until the death of the farmer and it contained emotional statements of friendship from both men.⁴⁵⁴ Jered called Waclawik not only his saviour, but also his best friend. In their letters, both men wrote about everyday troubles, about the life in their towns, Mszana and Ashkelon, as well as about the lives of their children and spouses.⁴⁵⁵

These contacts, although lasting for many years and involving emotional attachments between non-Jews and the Jewish survivors, concerned only a small group of individuals from Mszana and they were not integrated

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁵⁴ *Yad Vashem Archives*, M.31, file number 3355.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

into the collective and public memory of the Jews in town. In contrast, the relationships which were initiated by the families of the Holocaust survivors in the late 1990s, although not always lasting so long, had a broader impact on the life of the town. Like the memory of Jews and the discussion on the Holocaust, events of August 1942 in Mszana in particular, the relations with the Holocaust survivors remained limited to the personal sphere until the late 1990s. Only with political changes in Poland and the possibility of fully engaging in the debate on Jewish/non-Jewish relations, did the contacts with the Jews visiting Mszana become a part of a *public* discussion.

Not many people looked for Jewish traces in Mszana prior to the visits of the Holocaust survivors' families in the late 1990s. Some of the Holocaust survivors from Mszana visited there after the war. Dora Appel came to town several times in the late 1940s and early 1950s. She did not remember how many times exactly she was in Mszana after the war ended, but she said it was no more than two or three.⁴⁵⁶ After her two friends died, she had no contact with Mszana until early 2000s. It was then when her grandson, Chaim Appel, came to town to see the place of his grandmother's birth and to look for any remaining documents from her life in the town. Kuba Weissberger visited the town of his youth several times in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. His daughter Hanka, who was born in Israel, came with him on more than one occasion. She spoke Polish and, unlike her brother, was interested in the history of Mszana and its Jewish community before and during the war.⁴⁵⁷ Each time Weissberger was in Mszana, he met with his childhood friends. Among them were Mieczysław Daszkiewicz, with whom Kuba corresponded for many years and Aleksander Kalczyński, the author of the chronicles on the history of the town. Dora Appel lost contact with the town once the people she knew passed away. She was more attached to people and memories of her life in Mszana than to its physical place. Appel praised the beauty of the landscape from her childhood and the safety of the

⁴⁵⁶ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

⁴⁵⁷ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

environment she grew up in.⁴⁵⁸ The town after the war, however, was a place Appel associated with the extermination of the Jewish population and the tragedy of her family. She saw the place as ‘the big cemetery of Jews she once knew and loved’ and she ‘wanted to start her life far away from there’.⁴⁵⁹

Different to Appel’s approach, Kuba Weissberger’s attachment was not only to people, but to the place itself. While living in Israel, he returned to Mszana on several occasions to see the town and its surroundings. In his correspondence with Daszkiewicz and Kadłubek, Weissberger wrote about how much he missed the town and the surrounding landscape.⁴⁶⁰ Appel and Weissberger dealt with their memory of their life in Mszana in different ways. For Appel, the town was predominantly a reminder of the horrors of the war and the family she lost during the Holocaust. Weissberger considered Mszana to be mainly a recollection of happy life he had in the town before the war started. The majority of the Holocaust survivors shared Appel’s approach. Two of them, Leo Gatterer and Moses Aftergut, people who survived the massacre in 1942 and who funded, together with Weissberger, the two memorials of the Jews in Mszana, visited the town only in the early 2000s.⁴⁶¹ This was also the period in which the relatives of the Jews from Mszana began to take an interest in the history of their ancestors and started visiting the town on regular basis.

The increase in Jewish visitors to Mszana was caused by two main factors. First, it was linked to the age of the Jewish people who started coming to Mszana to search for information and traces of their families. The group which in the 1990s was interested in the history of their Jewish ancestors were the children of the Holocaust survivors. By the 1990s the majority of them were retired, or had already adult children and started discovering the past of their parents and grandparents. Many of the Jews

⁴⁵⁸ Interview with Dora Appel, 1 December 2010, New York, USA, by telephone.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Kuba Weissberger, a copy of a letter to Mieczysław Daszkiewicz, July 14 1996. (a copy in author’s possession).

⁴⁶¹ Interview with Piotr Krupiński, 16 September 2014, Kraków, Poland, by skype, interview not recorded.

who experienced the horror of the Holocaust refused to talk about their life before and during the war. The children of the Holocaust survivors, even if they were interested in the past, could not make their parents talk about it, as the memory of the experience of the war was too traumatic. Tali Helen Nates, who is the director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre and whose relatives from the Turner family lived in Mszana and Nowy Targ, recalled how difficult it was to talk to those who survived the war.

I don't know what your experience is, but they would never say anything about what they went through. My father and my uncle talked about their lives before the war. Even when I asked, there was no answer. It must have been very difficult for them, I can only imagine. But the result is, I don't know much about my family's life in Poland. They only started talking about it towards the end of their lives. My uncle wrote his memoirs. Mostly about the life before the war.⁴⁶²

Tali's cousin, Pnina Yogev, had the same troubles when she tried to talk to her father who grew up in Mszana. He refused to give any information about his life before and during the war. It was as if his life started when he arrived in Israel after the war.⁴⁶³ The grandson of Dora Appel, Chaim Appel, also had difficulties finding out about the history of his grandmother's life from the war period. Although Dora was willing to talk about certain aspects of her life in Poland and later in Germany, she said she could tell her children and grandchildren as much as she chose to say, no more.⁴⁶⁴ Therefore, if members of the younger generations in the Holocaust survivors' families wanted to discover the past of their parents and grandparents, they had to do it by themselves. In most cases, this process involved trips to Poland to the birthplaces of their relatives. Pnina Yogev admitted that it was only when she had her grandchildren herself that she started thinking about the past and decided to go to Poland.⁴⁶⁵ For the same reasons Yehuda Ben Hanan, whose father was from

⁴⁶² Interview with Tali Helen Nates, 30 December 2010, Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa, by skype.

⁴⁶³ Interview with Pnina Yogev (née Turner), 31 December 2010, Karmiel, Israel.

⁴⁶⁴ Chaim Appel, email to author, May 12 2013.

⁴⁶⁵ Interview with Pnina Yogev (née Turner), 31 December 2010, Karmiel, Israel.

Mszana, when he retired decided to look for traces of his father's family and hoped to be able to find his half-brother.⁴⁶⁶

The second reason for more frequent visits to Mszana in order to look for traces of Jewish history was connected to the changes in Poland in 1989, namely the collapse of communism. With its political and social changes at the end of the 1990s Poland became more open to discussion about the past, including the subject of Jewish/non-Jewish relations. After decades of distorted memory by the communist regime, Polish society had to redefine its identity and revise its relationship to the past. One aspect of this revision was the place the memory of Jews had in the national and regional history. Rediscovery and reconstruction of the memory of Polish Jews and local Jewish history was a phenomenon which took place in many communities throughout the country and Mszana was a part of it. Poland in the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s experienced an eruption of interest in Jewish culture, religion and history. The interest manifested itself in festivals of Jewish culture, publications on Jewish religion and history, academic courses on these subjects, the fascination with klezmer music, as well as engagement of local communities in the preservation of Jewish cemeteries and memorials. Good examples of some of these activities are the Jewish Culture Festival in Kraków organised since 1988, the Singer's Warsaw Festival which was created in 2003 and the Warsaw Jewish Film Festival established in 2002.⁴⁶⁷ Institutes and departments concentrated on different aspect of Jewish studies, such as history, literature, religion, and the Holocaust have been established since the late 1990s at the biggest universities in Poland. To mention but a few, there is the Polish Center for Holocaust Research at the Polish Academy of Science in Warsaw, the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, the

⁴⁶⁶ Yehuda Ben Hanan, email to author, October 12 2011.

⁴⁶⁷ *Festiwal Kultury Żydowskiej*. Accessed September 11, 2015.

<http://www.jewishfestival.pl/>; Warszawa Singera. "Festival Program." Accessed September 11, 2015. <http://www.festivalsingera.pl/en/program-festiwalu/>; *Warszawski Festiwal Filmów o Tematyce Żydowskiej*. Accessed September 11, 2015. <http://www.wjff.pl/en/>.

Mordechai Anielewicz Centre for the Study and Teaching of the History and Culture of Jews in Poland at the University of Warsaw and the Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Wrocław.⁴⁶⁸

Some of these activities in terms of the reconstruction of the Jewish world in Poland in the early 1990s were considered controversial and distorted, as the Jewish culture was revived only by non-Jews, without the involvement of Jewish people. Ruth Gruber in her book *Virtually Jewish: reinventing Jewish culture in Europe* (2002) described the phenomenon of the restoration of the Jewish culture, mainly in Eastern and central Europe, where Jewish absence, not presence was at the core of the cultural revival.⁴⁶⁹ Gruber introduced the concept of 'virtual Jewishness' which involved various practices in order to create new Jewish culture which does not requires Jews. She distinguished the phenomenon from the revival of Jewish communities which also was taking place in post-communist Eastern Europe. Although Gruber does not condemn entirely the notion of virtual Jewishness, some of the described practices were driven by dubious intentions. One of such example is the 'Schindler's List' walking tour in Kraków, which offers people to visit the sites where events depicted in Steven Spielberg's film took place. Although tourists are taken to the territory of the former ghetto in Kraków, labour camp in Kraków-Płaszów and the factory where Schindler resided, the tour is concerned more about Spielberg and the Hollywood film than the historical events and 'real' spaces. There is another aspect of virtual Jewishness which is not employed by Gruber directly. It is the exploitation of the Jewish culture and the Jewish memory for purely commercial profit. The Schindler's List tour is a prime example of this tendency.

⁴⁶⁸ *Polish Center for Holocaust Research*. Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Science. Accessed September 11, 2015. <http://www.holocaustresearch.pl/?l=a&lang=en>; *Instytut Judaistyki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*. "Międzywydziałowy Zakład Historii i Kultury Żydów w Polsce (1986-2000)." Accessed September 11, 2015. <http://www.judaistyka.uj.edu.pl/instytut/historia>; *Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego*. "Mordechai Anielewicz Centre for the Study and Teaching of the History and Culture of Jews in Poland." Accessed September 11, 2015. <http://en.ihuw.pl/institute/about/departments/anielewicz-centre>; *Uniwersytet Wrocławski*. Instytut Filologii Polskiej. Accessed September 11, 2015. <http://www.ifp.uni.wroc.pl/zaklad/zaklad-studiow-zydowskich>.

⁴⁶⁹ Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*.

Nevertheless, many of the aspects of reconstructing Jewish history and culture in Poland after 1989, even if they involved Jews only as symbolic figures, derived from the attempt to fill white stains (*białe plamy*) in Polish history and memory. The theory of white stains refers to these parts of history which were distorted, or treated as taboo under the communist era and could be addressed once the political changes occurred. After the dangerous philosemitic sentiments at the beginning of the 1990s, when 'everything Jewish' was considered popular and in fashion, there was also a genuine urge to re-discover the past of the Polish Jews. The increasing interest in Jewish studies on the academic level, growing popularity of the festivals of Jewish culture, the initiatives to preserve Jewish cemeteries and memorial sites, as well as the growing interest in the exhibitions and activities offered by the Museum of the History of Polish Jews opened in Warsaw in 2013, are examples which reflect the need for including the history of Polish Jews in the wider spectrum of the Polish past. The attempt to re-discover the Jewish past happened not only through big festivals and museums, but also on a local level in small towns and villages. Mszana was simply one of many. Children of the Holocaust survivors from Mszana who intended to look for traces of their ancestors in the town travelled to Poland which at the beginning of 2000s was more open for this kind of search than during the communist era. Moreover, there were also inhabitants of Mszana who were interested in the history of the local Jewish community and they were ready to work jointly with the Jewish visitors to re-discover the past of the Jews from Mszana and incorporate it into the wider history of the town.

One of the people who was interested in the local history, with a special interest in the history of the Jewish community was Agnieszka Józefiak. Over the years she became the person of first contact for anyone who looked for information on the Jewish community of Mszana. To some extent because of her interest and knowledge on the history of Jews in the region, partly due to her ability to communicate in English, assisting relatives to look for documents and information became a part of her job.

As she described it herself, it was a natural transformation, required by circumstances:

I am responsible for public relations, tourism and cultural information. But I am the only person here who can speak English quite well, so I am the only person who could help these people. (...) First, I got an e-mail from New York with a request for historical documents. I started looking for answers and sent some information. Then, it was one case after another, after one Jewish family, there was another and more. Now it is not only New York, but Israel, Los Angeles and other places.⁴⁷⁰

Józefiak's research on the history of Jewish families from Mszana is not limited to searching for information in the town hall archives, but she also looks into the archives of the local schools, the church, the archives in surrounding town, as well as in national archives in Kraków. After working already with several families, she is experienced enough to know where to look for required types of documents. Apart from doing research, she is also an intermediary between the Jewish families and the people in town. Józefiak serves as a translator, but she also knows who could be the right person in town to remember certain facts and people. She is well aware of the town's layout from before the war and knows which houses and shops belonged to Jewish owners, therefore the Jewish families can see the properties where their relatives lived and worked before the war.⁴⁷¹

Józefiak's co-operation with the Jewish families has the full support of the town's authorities, as she dedicates some of her working hours to this task. The previous mayor of Mszana, Tadeusz Filipiak (2010-2014), as well as the current one elected in 2014, Józef Kowalczyk, both approved of assistance to the Jewish families which Józefiak provides. Filipiak stated:

I don't know much about the history of the Jews from Mszana, but whenever we have visitors who ask for information, or our help, we provide it. Jewish people lived here once, they were citizens of the town, so whatever we can do, we do it. Agnieszka has already

⁴⁷⁰ Interview with Agnieszka Józefiak, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

some experience where to look for documents, she also speaks English, so she can help. We are always open to Jewish visitors.⁴⁷²

Apart from delegating Józefiak to work with the families of the Holocaust survivors, other town hall resources are used for this purpose. If there is a need of a room to hold meetings between the Jewish families and the local people, they take place at the town hall. The mayor's office also makes a car available if transport for the visitors around the town is required. The main reason, however, why Józefiak took the initiative to help the families in their quest for information, was not her knowledge of English, or the approval of the task by the town hall authorities. She claimed that the decision to engage in this job came out naturally, as a part of her interest in local history, but also her own personal need to discover the history of the Jewish inhabitants of Mszana. Józefiak explained:

My engagement in the Jewish issues comes from the attempt to help people to find out the truth. But it is also my interest, my form of local patriotism. I am interested in what and how Mszana was in the past, so this is my personal need for knowledge as well. One quarter of the town was Jewish and Jews and non-Jews lived together, there is no point in denying it. A big part of the town disappeared in the war and it is important to find out how they lived in Mszana.⁴⁷³

During their visits, the relatives of the Holocaust survivors have contact not only with Józefiak, but with other members of the town's community. Henryk Zdanowski, a person who lived next to his Jewish neighbours, worked in their shops and remembers a lot of Jewish families from Mszana, often meeting their relatives to talk about the past. Pnina Yogev, whose extensive paternal family lived in Mszana, tried to find out from Zdanowski what her grandmother looked like and whether he remembered any other members of her family.⁴⁷⁴ Moses Aftergut, who was born in Przemyśl in 1927 and in August 1942, together with his family, was in Mszana and was spared from the massacre, also meets Zdanowski each time he visits Mszana. It took Aftergut decades to come

⁴⁷² Interview with Tadeusz Filipiak, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland, interview not recorded.

⁴⁷³ Interview with Agnieszka Józefiak, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁷⁴ Interview with Pnina Yogev (née Turner), 31 December 2010, Karmiel, Israel.

to Mszana and visit the memorial marking the place where his family was killed. It was an emotionally difficult decision, but once he decided to do so, he discovered some of the local people were interested in the story he had to tell.⁴⁷⁵ He came to Mszana for the first time at the beginning of 2000s and since then he visits the town almost every year. Aftergut, who together with his cousin Leo Gatterer is one of the two last witnesses of the massacre of Jews in Mszana in August 1942, always dedicates some of his time to talk to people in Mszana. Apart from meeting Zdanowski, he talked to Stanisław Rząsa, as previously noted a retired history teacher from the village Dobra near Mszana, who collects information on the Jewish population from the region and whose project for retirement is to reconstruct the history of the Jewish community of Dobra.

Some other Jewish families who visited Mszana in the early 2000s, come back to town regularly. Pnina Yogev, Chaim Appel and his family are in touch with Mszana and visit the town on regular basis. Often, they come back in August, near the anniversary of the shooting of the Jewish population of Mszana in 1942. Although two memorials for the Jewish victims in Mszana were erected in the 1960s, it was in the early 2000s when the commemoration of both massacres of almost the entire Jewish population of Mszana became a significant event for a group of the inhabitants of Mszana.

Jewish sites and the annual commemoration of the Jews in contemporary Mszana

It is not clear when exactly the memorials were erected. There is no documentation concerning the construction of either in the archives of the town hall in Mszana. The most reliable source of information on the subject is the testimony of Leo Gatterer on whose initiative the memorials were built and his cousin Moses Aftergut, who was involved in planning

⁴⁷⁵ *Urząd Miasta Mszana Dolna*. "Z Nowego Jorku do Mszany Dolnej - Moses Aftergut nad mogiłą swoich najbliższych." 2014. Accessed July 1, 2015. <http://www.mszana-dolna.eu/z-nowego-jorku-do-mszany-dolnej-moses-aftergut-nad-mogila-swoich-najblizszych.html>.

the sites. Neither of them, however, remembered the exact date of the construction.

The main monument was erected on Mroza Street, Pańskie, on the spot where on 19 August 1942 almost the whole Jewish population of Mszana was shot in one day. The memorial was erected in the early 1960s and it was designed by Kuba Weissberger. It was funded by Gatterer and Weissberger, both survivors of the massacre. It is unclear whether the local authorities co-funded the memorial, as there are no documents confirming allocation of official funds for this purpose. It is unlikely that the town hall participated in the building of the sites, as all discussions on the town's budget were recorded and documentation considering this issue was kept in the town hall's archives. However, the construction of the monument had to be approved by the authorities. Hanna Kadłubek mentioned in her testimony that Kuba Weissberger dedicated some of the money he received from selling his house to sponsor the memorial.⁴⁷⁶ This fact was confirmed by Anna Knapczyk and Henryk Zdanowski.⁴⁷⁷ This memorial, however, was built about twenty years after Weissberger sold his property in Mszana, therefore his contribution to the project did not necessarily come directly from the money he obtained for his house.

Whether it was true or not, the fact of building the gravestone for the Jews of Mszana with the funds received for their home became a symbolic gesture for the people of the town. It was as if the monument was the only right purpose for the money which Weissberger was paid for his house. The main plaque of the memorial is written in Hebrew and in Polish (Image 6). The Polish text says: *In memory of murdered 881 Jews from Mszana Dolna and the area. By the Nazi thugs on 19.8.1942 whose last scream of despair is the silence of this place. Homage paid by those who survived the fascist pogrom. Jews.* The Polish text is thus clumsy in terms of grammar, punctuation and colloquialism. The Hebrew inscription is shorter: *Here lie 881 virtuous Jews in this place in Mszana Dolna that*

⁴⁷⁶ Interview with Hanna Kadłubek, 20 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁷⁷ Interview with Stefania Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

were killed and murdered by the Nazis Germans on 19 August 1942. May God avenge their blood. The Hebrew text uses an unusual fashion of writing numbers: eight hundreds and one and eighty. On the side of the monument, there is a plaque in Polish which says: *Designed by Kuba, son of Samuel and brother of Lola and Lusia Weissberger who rest here* (Image 7). The fact that most of the inscription is in Polish suggests that the plaque is addressed mainly to Polish speaking audience. The choice of Polish as the leading language could have been dictated by the fact that people involved in the erection of the monument, Weissberger and Gatterer, used the language as their mother tongue, which was not necessarily true for all the Jewish minority in Poland before the war.



Image 6 The main plaque on the memorial for 881 Jews killed on 19 April 1942. Photo taken in August 2010



Image 7 The second plaque on the side of the memorial. Photo taken in August 2010

For a long time, access to the monument was difficult due to its location. It is situated on the outskirts of the town and surrounded by meadows. The memorial was built on the very spot where the pit in which Jews were buried had been dug. The small mound of earth which was left at the place of the shooting, gradually settled and the monument was erected in a small hollow. The place was fenced few years after it was built and there was a little unpaved path leading to the monument. The fence was added on the initiative of Leo Gatterer at the beginning of the 1970s.

The second, smaller memorial is situated on Ogródowa Street, Leszczyna where on 1 May 1941 the Nazis shot twenty four Jews. They were most likely members of the Jewish Guard, gathering arms and preparing to fight the Nazi authority in town. The monument was erected in the late 1960s, or early 1970s and Leo Gatterer was the initiator of the

memorial. The text on the gravestone is written in Yiddish and Polish (Image 8). Unlike the memorial on Mroza Street, Polish is not the dominant language of the inscription. The text in Yiddish takes up the majority of space on the plaque. It says: *Here lie 22 Jewish men who were killed by the Nazis on 1 May 1941*. It is not clear why the plaque on Mroza Street is written in Hebrew, while the one on Ogródowa Street uses Yiddish. It is possible that the choice of Hebrew was supported by Weissberger, who had strong connection with the 'Promised Land' before the war, as his brother emigrated there in the 1930s. Weissberger himself emigrated to Israel after the war, therefore apart from Polish, Hebrew became his native language. In fact, although there are only twenty two victims mentioned on the plaque on Ogródowa Street, according to the testimony of the witness Abraham Berger there were twenty four people shot there in 1941.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁸ Abraham Berger. File 301/1715. Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.



Image 8 The memorial on Ogrodowa Street. Photo taken in August 2010

The third reminder of the Jewish community which once lived in Mszana is the cemetery from the eighteenth century situated on Zakopiańska Street, Marki (Image 9). The graveyard was destroyed during the war by the Nazis. There are about twenty gravestones remaining at present, the oldest ones from the nineteenth century. Leo Gatterer arranged to fence the cemetery in May 1991.



Image 9 The cemetery on Zakopiańska Street. Photo taken in April 2010

Both memorials remained in the same condition from the moment they were erected until the late 1990s. Neither the local authorities, nor the families of the Holocaust survivors were interested in the restoration of these sites. The cemetery was a forgotten burial ground, unfenced and with broken gravestones, until the reconstruction in 1991. The memorial sites, however, were visited by occasional tourists and by groups of children from the local schools. The school visits were not connected directly to the teaching on the Jewish history in Mszana, but the history of the Second World War and its repercussions on the town. Groups of schoolchildren were taken for tours around Mszana to visit different monuments erected for the victims of the war in town.

There are two monuments constructed shortly after the war, in the late 1940s, by the local authorities. Both are dedicated to a broad spectrum of victims of the First and the Second World war, as well as those who were killed under the Stalinist regime. Both were funded from the money collected from the inhabitants of Mszana, with support of the town hall's

funds.⁴⁷⁹ One of them is located in the park around the former manor house which belonged to the Countess Krasińska and is dedicated to the soldiers and partisans who fought for Poland's independence between 1914 and 1921 and to the victims of the Nazi and Stalinist terror. The second one is situated at the graveyard of the Catholic church in Mszana. On the monument is a plaque with the list of fifty members of the non-Jewish community, mostly partisans, who were killed during the war. The inscription on the monument says: *For those who were killed and were victims of the Nazi and Stalinist terror.* As a part of the school tour of the monuments in Mszana, children visited both memorials of the victims of the Nazi terror, along with the two sites of the shooting of the Jews. The excursion around the town was a part of the school programme for many years, as indicated in the school chronicles in the early 1960s, and was still happening in the 1980s. Agnieszka Józefiak, who was born in 1979, remembered that she was curious about the history of the local Jewish community from an early age. Although she did not hear about the history of the Jews from her grandparents, nor at schools, she remembered being taken to see the Jewish memorial as a part of the course on the history of the Second World War.⁴⁸⁰

There is also evidence of schoolchildren and scouts paying their respects at the main Jewish memorial in Mszana on the occasion of All Saints day, a Catholic holiday celebrated on 1 November. On this day, it is customary to visit graveyards and pay respect to relatives and friends who have passed away. It is regarded as a good deed to bring flowers and vigil lights to graves which are not visited by living relatives. Photographs from the school chronicles from the 1960s show a group of children and adults gathered at the memorial on Mroza Street and laying flowers at the plaque (Image 10). We can assume that those who brought flowers to the memorial were not aware that this is a Christian, rather than a Jewish tradition.

⁴⁷⁹ Town hall's archives in Mszana Dolna; report from a meeting of the Civil Committee for the Building of the Monument for the Victims of the Nazism; 11 October 1947. In: Illukiewicz, *Chronicles*, 244.

⁴⁸⁰ Interview with Agnieszka Józefiak, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.



Image 10 The memorial on Mroza Street. Picture from 1960s

Despite the fact that the Jewish memorials were visited by the local people, mainly schoolchildren, on certain occasions, the memory of the Jews of Mszana was not part of local history. On one hand, Jews were incorporated into the general category of the 'victims of the Nazi terror' and both sites of their execution were visited, along with two other memorials of the non-Jewish members of the town. On the other, when the monuments of the Nazi victims were erected by the local community shortly after the war, the Jews were excluded. The school tours to the Jewish memorials were not followed by teaching about the history of the Jewish community of Mszana, or even about their fate during the war and the events of 19 August 1942. The memory of Jews was passed privately, from some of the members of the community who remembered their Jewish neighbours, to their children and grandchildren. Stefania Knapczyk, who shared a house with a Jewish family during the war, and Henryk Zdanowski revealed that they were telling their children stories

about the Jews from Mszana.⁴⁸¹ Maria Figura, a retired history teacher, whose father was a witness of the shooting on 19 August 1942, claimed that she heard from him about the Jews of Mszana often. Figura remembered that she visited the memorial several times with her father. In addition, her aunt talked on various occasions about her Jewish friends who were killed together with others in August 1942.⁴⁸² Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, who teaches religion in one of the schools in Mszana and who leads educational programmes on Jewish tradition and religion, had some knowledge of the history of Jews from the town passed on by her parents.⁴⁸³

Despite the presence of the memory of Jews in some of the families, the Jews were generally absent from public discourse. Their presence in the town for several centuries prior to the war was not discussed in schools, neither was their tragic death during the war. No space in the collective memory of Mszana was dedicated to its Jewish inhabitants. This attitude changed markedly in the early 2000s. Mszana experienced an eruption of social memory which accompanied political and social transformation of many communities in post-1989 Poland. For some of the inhabitants the Jewish past in Mszana became a territory they needed to explore to make the history of the Jewish population an element of their own. The interest of the relatives of the Jews of Mszana in their families' past and their visits to Mszana facilitated the rediscovery of the memory of Jews by some of the inhabitants. It was, however, the encouragement of certain individuals in the community that prompted changes in attitudes towards the memory of the Jews in Mszana. The public discourse on the history and memory of the town which previously eliminated their Jewish members was now open to investigation of the Jewish presence in the past of Mszana. The most significant and visible form of claiming the Jewish history as part of the common past in Mszana is the annual commemoration of the shooting on 19 August 1942.

⁴⁸¹ Interview with Stefania Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland; Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁸² Interview with Maria Figura, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁸³ Interview with Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

The annual commemoration ceremony became an important event as each year on 19 August inhabitants who want to pay their respect to the Jewish victims killed in 1941 and 1942 gather together and visit two Jewish memorials. The assembly visits first the main memorial on Mroza Street where they light candles, say Jewish prayers and often recall stories about the Jews of Mszana. Then, the gathering moves to the second memorial on Ogradowa Street. The number of participants in the commemoration varies each year, but on average it is about ten to twenty people. Two individuals who organise the group are Agnieszka Józefiak from the town hall and Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, a teacher from the local school. It is interesting that the participants come from different generations, from the eldest members of the community who remember the Jews of Mszana, through the generation of their children, to the pupils of the local schools.

Apart from Józefiak and Antosz-Rekucka, Henryk Zdanowski always joins the group. He is often the person who recalls the stories of the past when Jews were a part of the town's population. Antosz-Rekucka's children, Kuba and Rachela, also accompany their mother. Kuba, who was taught Jewish prayers and religious songs by his mother, says *kaddish* for the dead. Some of Antosz-Rekucka's pupils are always present at the commemoration, together with Stanisław Rząsa, the retired history teacher from Dobra. Those participating every year bring their families, friends and neighbours. Others join the assembly irregularly. Another group which takes part in the commemoration are the representatives of the Jewish families from Mszana. Pnina Turner and Chaim Appel come back with their families regularly, others join on occasion. Each year, the commemoration is reported in the local magazine, *Pod Lubogoszczą*, published by the town hall. Articles, written by Józefiak, describe who attended the ceremony and how the day was commemorated. Photographs taken on the day are also included, as well as a reminder of a fragment of the history of Jews in Mszana. The event is mentioned on local information portals, not only run in Mszana, but also on those for the

whole region.⁴⁸⁴ In some years, representatives of the town hall and the local parish were present at the memorial, especially when it was a significant anniversary.

The seventieth anniversary in 2012 was celebrated on a bigger scale. There were improvements made around the big memorial on Mroza Street in advance of 19 August. The town hall decided to pave the path leading to the memorial and to name it the Alley of the Victims of the Holocaust. The name of the path was a subject of long discussion among the members of the town's council. The first suggestion to name the path the Alley of the Jews of Mszana was finally rejected without a specific explanation. It can be argued that 'victims of the Holocaust' sounded more general and detached from the local reality, while 'the Jews of Mszana' referred to the very specific community and was a description too close to home. It seems that the Holocaust as the subject became less problematic than the matter of the Jewish population of the town.

Further improvement which were made in 2012 included the renovation of the stairs and the fence around the memorial. The changes around the memorial were made in consultation with the Jewish community in Kraków to make sure that no religious rules were broken, revealing a growing awareness of Jewish sensitivities. There was also a plaque placed by the monument which explained the history of both shootings. The plaque is written in Polish and it describes the shooting of 22 Jews in May 1941 and the events of 19 August 1942, from gathering the Jews of Mszana in the square, through leading them to the place of the shooting and to murdering almost the whole Jewish community of the town. The

⁴⁸⁴ *Inne oblicz historii*. "W Mszanie Dolnej odsłonięto tablicę w 70. rocznicę mordu na Żydach." 2012. Accessed September 27, 2015. <http://ioh.pl/ioh-news/w-mszanie-dolnej-odsonito-tablic-w-rocznic-mordu-na-zydach,3054/>; Stanisław Rząsa, "70 rocznica zamordowania przez hitlerowców mieszkańców limanowszczyzny narodowości żydowskiej." 2012. Accessed September 27, 2015. http://www.beskidy.gminadobra.pl/?id=78955&location=f&msg=1&lang_id=PL; *Gorce 24*. "71. rocznica masakry żydów w Mszanie Dolnej." 2012. Accessed September 27, 2015. http://gorce24.pl/informacje/3046/71_rocznica_masakry_zydow_w_Mszanie_Dolnej.

text mentions the participation in the shooting of Gelb, the mayor of Mszana, as well as Hamann, who was in charge of the massacre. It also explains that both memorials were erected after the war on the initiative of the Holocaust survivors from Mszana. Furthermore, a commemorative stone was placed in the alley leading to the place of the shooting.⁴⁸⁵ A plaque on the stone stated that it was erected in the memory of the Jews shot in 1942 from the inhabitants of Mszana Dolna. The ceremony, which took place on 23 August 2012, apart from the usual participants, was attended by the mayor of Mszana Tadeusz Filipiak, the priest from the town parish Tadeusz Mrowiec, the head of the Jewish community in Kraków Tadeusz Jakubowicz with two other members of the community, together with a rabbi. There were also other representatives of the local authorities present, along with heads of the local schools, teachers, pupils and many members of the community of Mszana. After the official part of the ceremony, the guests moved to the nearby meadow where a group of pupils from the local high school gave a performance about the Jews from Mszana.

The show was an account of Jewish life in the town, their interaction with non-Jews, Jewish tradition and religion. The names and occupations of the Jews of Mszana were mentioned, as well as anecdotes from everyday life told by those who remembered Jewish inhabitants.⁴⁸⁶ One of the stories was of Jewish and non-Jewish children catching fish together in the river. Another one recalled freshly baked bread from the bakery which belonged to the Zins. Yet another one told a story of a non-Jewish boy being in love in a Jewish girl who could sing beautifully.⁴⁸⁷ Although the performance presented a romanticised version of the past, it was based on the inhabitants' memories of Mszana before the war and recollection of events and people who were real. The performance also

⁴⁸⁵ *Wirtualny Sztetl.* "70 Rocznica mordu w Mszanie Dolnej". 2012. Accessed September 30, 2015. <http://www.sztetl.org.pl/pl/cms/aktualnosci/2710,70-rocznica-mordu-w-mszanie-dolnej/>.

⁴⁸⁶ Interview with Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

described the events of 19 August 1942, and was directed by Antosz-Rekucka.

The celebration in 2012 was exceptionally solemn and certainly the anniversary of the shooting of the Jews in Mszana is not normally commemorated in this way. The seventieth anniversary, however, was a noteworthy event in the history of the town. It was an official event, with press and authorities' representatives present, but it was a significant commemoration mostly for those people from Mszana who decided to take part in it. The increasing interest in the Jewish past of Mszana encouraged the town to engage in the commemoration. For some people like Zdanowski, or Anna Knapczyk, it was an opportunity to share their own memories of life before the war, or of their parents. As Zdanowski admitted, recollection of shared life with the Jewish inhabitants before the war was always a part of his life and of his own history.⁴⁸⁸ The opportunity to share his memory with other members of the community, especially with younger generations, Zdanowski described as liberating.⁴⁸⁹ The performance presented by the students from the local school after the ceremony was based mostly on Zdanowski's account. The schoolchildren prepared the performance in their spare time as part of a voluntary group exploring the history of Jews of Mszana, led by Antosz-Rekucka. The intention was to stage it in school as a part of the international Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January and later on 19 April when the Holocaust Memorial Day is celebrated in Poland. The group was later invited by the local authorities to take part in the official commemoration on 23 August 2012. However, for the students this performance was more than part of the commemoration. It was an account of local history. One of the students, Anna Kaciczak, said:

We wanted to do this to commemorate the Jews of Mszana. It is the history of the town, the region. Not everybody knows about what happened here, so we wanted to tell the

⁴⁸⁸ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁸⁹ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

story. Also, how the Jews lived here. A bit about their religion, celebration, tradition. Everybody should know about that.⁴⁹⁰

Shaping memory through educational programmes on the Jewish heritage

Unlike the older generation of inhabitants of Mszana, for whom the history of Jews was not a part of a public discourse, but a personal memory, these young people made the history of the local Jewish community an element of their own inheritance. The stories about the Jewish part of the population of Mszana which had been told in private houses, were now brought to light in a public space. The generation of grandchildren of the interviewees who had stories about their Jewish neighbours to tell was liberated from the political and social constraints of their grandparents. For Stefania Knapczyk who lived among Jews in Mszana, it was still unsafe to talk about the events of the war, the past in general. She claimed that those who brought up the past, talked about people who lived in Mszana during the war, about those who fought against the Nazis and about such tragedies as the massacre of the Jews of Mszana, could bring only troubles.⁴⁹¹ This fear, sometimes irrational, often deriving from living under the Nazi occupation and later the communist regime, was *not* shared by the generation born after 1989. For many of the young people in Mszana, the stories about Jews which they heard from their parents and grandparents were an encouragement to explore this part of the history further. Educational programmes which were introduced in the schools at the beginning of 2000s gave them opportunity to do so.

The history of the Holocaust is included in the school curriculum as a part of the wider course on the history of the Second World War. The subject is also briefly discussed in the Polish literature class, when the topic of the literature of the war period is studied. It is a teacher's individual

⁴⁹⁰ Interview with Anna Kaciczak, 13 October 2013, Poręba, Poland, by skype.

⁴⁹¹ Interview with Stefania Knapczyk, 11 August 2010, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

initiative to pursue the subject of the Holocaust in more detailed discussion. The history of Jews in Poland is not incorporated into the history course in primary school, or high school. It again depends on a teacher's choice to what extent, if any, the history of Polish Jews should be taught. As already mentioned, Jewish studies on the academic level are increasingly popular at Polish universities. Although Jewish studies and the Holocaust are not encompassed on a wider scale in the official curriculum of pre-University education, since the early 2000s there has been an increasing number of training for staff at this level of education. There are courses and workshops for teachers organised by different foundations and institutions in Poland and abroad. Among the Jewish organisations in Poland, are the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, and the Association of the Children of the Holocaust in Poland.⁴⁹² Their programmes are organised in collaboration with research institutions, such as the Jewish Historical Institute and government bodies like the Centre of Educational Development. The Museum of the History of Polish Jews opened in Warsaw in 2013, including the Education Centre and the Research and Publication Department, participates in educational programmes for children and training for teachers.⁴⁹³ From 2005 the Jagiellonian University, in collaboration with the Illinois Holocaust Museum and the Education Center in Skokie runs an annual summer school in Kraków on teaching on the Holocaust.⁴⁹⁴ Furthermore, in the last two decades, many publications have become available for teachers who are interested in teaching on the Holocaust, Jewish religion and culture, as well as the history of antisemitism. The International Centre for Education about

⁴⁹² *Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland*. "Projects." Accessed October 1, 2015. <http://fodz.pl/?d=5&l=en>; *Association of Children of the Holocaust in Poland*. "Educational program for 2010/2011." Accessed October 1, 2015. http://www.dzieciholocaustu.org.pl/szab60.php?s=en_educacyjny_2010_2011.php.

⁴⁹³ *POLIN. Museum of the History of Polish Jews*. "Education." Accessed October 1, 2015. <http://www.polin.pl/en/education>; *POLIN. Museum of the History of Polish Jews*. "Research and Publications." Accessed October 1, 2015. <http://www.polin.pl/en/research-and-publications>.

⁴⁹⁴ *Center of Holocaust Studies of the Jagiellonian University*. "X Międzynarodowa Szkoła Letnia 'Nauczanie o Holokauście'." 2015. Accessed September 28, 2015. http://www.holocaust.uj.edu.pl/en/centrum/aktualnosci/-/journal_content/56_INSTANCE_25Bq/5405363/84325578.

Auschwitz and the Holocaust, established in the Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Polish government on the initiative of the former prisoners, not only organises seminars for teachers, but also offers a wide range of publications and other materials on teaching and visits to the memorial sites.⁴⁹⁵ There are, therefore, sources offered to teachers to help in developing additional courses on the history of the Holocaust and Polish Jews. The educational programmes and training courses are accessible, but they require initiative and engagement from teachers, who often give up their free time to prepare and conduct their projects. There were individuals in Mszana who saw the necessity for educational programmes on the history of Jews in schools and who engaged school children and other teachers in the projects.

There are two primary schools and a high school in Mszana. One of the primary schools and the high school were involved in educational programmes on the Holocaust and the history of the local Jewish community. Primary school number 1 (*Zespół Szkół Miejskich nr 1*) on Sienkiewicza Street joined the programme 'To Bring Memory Back' (*Przywróćmy Pamięć*) in 2007 and continued it until 2011. The project was designed in 2005 by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ) whose main goal is to recover, preserve and protect physical remains of Jewish communities in Poland, namely memorial sites, prayer houses and cemeteries. 'To Bring Memory Back' encourages school children to explore and learn the history of the local Jewish community, to engage with its Jewish culture and religion and to look after a Jewish cemetery and memorials in the children's home town. The programme was suspended in 2012 due to shortage of funds. However, it was planned to re-launch it in 2015. FODZ invites primary schools throughout the country to join the programme. Participation is entirely voluntary. The school in Mszana received such an invitation in 2007 and the possibility of joining the programme was presented by the head of school to all the teachers. Maria Figura, at that time a history

⁴⁹⁵ *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*. "Publications." Accessed October 3, 2015. <http://auschwitz.org/en/education/publications>.

teacher in the primary school volunteered to lead the project. She said that she did some research on it on the internet and decided that it could be interesting for the children in Mszana and useful in terms of discovering Jewish local history.⁴⁹⁶ Figura's decision was also driven by her own interest in local history and willingness to explore the past of the Jews of Mszana, of whom her father and aunt talked often. Before starting the programme in Mszana, Figura went to a training course at the Center for Jewish Culture in Kraków. The school received educational materials for the project, but teachers were also encouraged to add their own ideas to the programme.

Every year there were about twenty pupils joining the programme on a voluntary basis. Activities within the project took place outside school hours. It is worth noticing that the participants were interested in particular in Jewish culture and religion. None of them had any knowledge on the subjects and they wanted to find out what the ordinary life of Jewish people looked like. The children wanted to know whether a Jewish wedding is different from a Catholic one, what kind of food Jews eat for Shabbat, or what significance a *kippah*, *tzitzit* and *tallit* have.⁴⁹⁷ The pupils who joined the project had a guided tour of Kraków where they visited Kazimierz, a former Jewish quarter. They had a chance to see inside a synagogue and to visit a Jewish cemetery. The children's interest again concentrated on very practical details, for example they wanted to know why Jewish people put stones on graves, instead of flowers. The group was instructed in the maintenance of a Jewish cemetery, what is allowed and what is not allowed, as one element of the programme was to take care of the Jewish cemetery in Mszana. Since 2007, even after the school had left the programme, the pupils of the primary school looked after the two memorials and the cemetery in Mszana. Figura recalled how the children felt responsible for the sites.

⁴⁹⁶ Interview with Maria Figura, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

The children from the school tidied up the cemetery, they still do it, even after we gave up the project. They knew that they are not allowed to dig there, that they can remove only dead plants. They were very careful not to do something against the Jewish religion. Those who come and take care of the site, they treat it as their inheritance. One cemetery is near the church, another one is Jewish. Both belong to the town.⁴⁹⁸

The children learned about the Jewish community in Mszana, their life before the war and the events during the war. They could familiarise themselves with basic aspects of Judaism and Jewish festivals. Events such as wedding, *bar mitzvah* and the celebration of the *Shabbat* were discussed. The children were interested in particular in similarities and differences between Catholic and Jewish festivals.⁴⁹⁹ The project inspired the participants to explore the history of the Jews from Mszana further. Based on their grandparents' account of the past, the children gathered information about the Jews of Mszana, which was published on the school's website. It included information about the number of Jews in the town before the war, their names and main occupations, as well as accounts of schools trips in which Jewish and non-Jewish children took part and games the children played together.⁵⁰⁰ The pupils also organised a meeting with the granddaughter of Józef and Stafania Waclawik, receivers of the title of the Righteous Among the Nations. The children were very interested in the history of Maurycy Jered, the Jew who lived at the Waclawik family's house and they wanted to see the medal from Yad Vashem.⁵⁰¹

The educational programme 'To Bring Memory Back' engaged in total about one hundred children. Some of the children entered the project with little or no knowledge about Jewish culture and the Jews who once lived in Mszana. Many, however, heard about Jewish inhabitants from their grandparents and wanted to find out more about their life in the town. Maria Duda, who took part in the programme before she moved to high school, remembered that her grandmother spoke about Jewish people in

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

Mszana and her interaction with Jewish neighbours. Duda was curious about these stories and wanted to learn more about Jewish history, therefore she eagerly joined the programme.⁵⁰² The first group which participated in the programme had such impressive results that it was invited to Warsaw to visit the Jewish community and share their experience. Unfortunately, financial obstacles did not allow the group to go. This fact did not discourage the students from pursuing their interest in the Jewish inheritance of Mszana and some of those who completed the course continued to search for further information. Moreover, they claimed the Jewish history as a part of their own. The cemetery and the memorials were taken care of and visited regularly not only by the pupils, but families and friends. An example of how the Jewish sites in Mszana became a visible part of Mszana's landscape was a photograph contest in the school, titled 'My Mszana in the autumn' which was won by a participant who photographed the Jewish cemetery in the rain.⁵⁰³ The final edition of the programme 'To Bring Memory Back' was in 2011 when Maria Figura retired. However, it was also run in the local high school, together with other educational activities on the Jewish culture and religion. Those of the participants who later attended the high school in Mszana, joined these projects.

The high school number 1 (*Zespół Szkół nr 1*) on Matejki Street took part in the project 'To Bring Memory Back' in 2011 and was led by a catechist, Urszula Antosz-Rekucka.⁵⁰⁴ About twenty students joined the group and their activities took place in their free time. Some of the participants had previously taken part in the programme supervised by Maria Figura in the primary school, but most of the students were new to the subject of Jewish culture. Antosz-Rekucka continued exploring the history of the local Jewish community with students from the high school beyond the project organised by the FODZ. For Holocaust Memorial Day in January 2012 the group prepared a performance entitled 'That Mszana no longer

⁵⁰² Interview with Maria Duda, 7 October 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland, by e-mail.

⁵⁰³ Interview with Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁵⁰⁴ There is no exact English equivalent of the Polish word *katecheta/katechetka*. The word could also be translated as a religious study teacher.

exists' (*Tamtej Mszany nie ma już*) which told the story of the Jews from the town. It was performed in the school in January and April 2012, as well as at the seventieth anniversary of the massacre of the Jews in Mszana in August 2012. The school was invited to take the show to the Jewish community in Warsaw where the group performed it for the members of the Association of Children of the Holocaust in Poland. The performance designed by Antosz-Rekucka concentrated on the history of the Jews from Mszana, as well as Jewish religion and customs.

The performance comprised everything we managed to discover about our Jewish community. We said how many Jews were in Mszana, what they did, how they helped to build this town. We talked about specific people, we mentioned names of those who lived here, exact stories about them. We also said about the Holocaust Memorial Day, because this was a bit of history and a bit of education. Then my girls played violins, Jewish songs. And children sang in Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish. There were Jewish folk songs as well. We ended it with the lighting of Shabbat candles and the prayer. My children learned how to play all these melodies by ear.⁵⁰⁵

The goal was not only to portray practices of the Jewish religion, but most of all, to remind the audience about real people living and working in Mszana before the war. Those who participated in the performance collected memories, stories and anecdotes about Jews from Mszana, so the people they talked about had names, professions, skills and habits. The teacher, together with her students put considerable amount of time and effort to explore available sources of information on the Jewish members of the community in Mszana. Those who played and sang in the show explored Jewish music and learned lyrics in Hebrew and Yiddish, others learned how to light Shabbat candles and to pray. Children asked their grandparents about how they remembered their Jewish neighbours, some students brought written testimonies of members of their families who recalled Jews from before the war. Indirectly, the students' families were also involved in the preparation of the performance. Furthermore, the reception of the show by the audience was very positive. Antosz-Rekucka recalled that after the show people

⁵⁰⁵ Interview with Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

from town approached her and thanked for such an emotional experience. Others were appreciative of the presentation of the story of the Jews from Mszana, about which they did not know much. One person said it was the most emotional and beautiful performance she had ever seen.⁵⁰⁶

In 2013 Antosz-Rekucka was approached by the organisers of 'Preserve the memory. The history and culture of the two nations' which from 2005 has been coordinated by the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of Israel. The programme has active partners in Poland and Israel: Yad Vashem Institute, the Centre for Education Development in Poland, the Polish Institute in Tel Aviv, Israel's Ministry of Education and the International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust.⁵⁰⁷ The selection of the school in Mszana for the programme was based on the publication of the activities Antosz-Rekucka undertook to preserve the memory of Jews among the inhabitants of her town, school children in particular. The idea for the project arose from the fact that on the one hand the Israeli teenagers who travel to Poland to visit sites of the Holocaust, associate the country only with the atrocities of the war and with antisemitic attitudes. On the other, Polish school children have no knowledge of the people of Israel and the fact that a lot of their ancestors were born in Poland. The main goal of the programme is to bring Polish and Israeli teenagers closer by showing them both cultures and teaching the history of both nations, so they realise how much they have in common. However, the cooperation of Israeli and Polish groups in Mszana also included exploration of the history of the Jewish community of the town. Before the project started in Mszana, Antosz-Rekucka, together with other Polish teachers taking part in the programme, went for a two-week training course to the Yad Vashem Institute. In order for teenagers from both groups to get to know each other before the meeting in Mszana, the teacher and her students set up

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ *Spotkania Polska-Izrael*. "EN o projekcie Zachować Pamięć." Accessed October 3, 2015. http://www.polska-izrael.edu.pl/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=140&Itemid=428&lang=en.

an internet webpage which they called *Haverim*, which means ‘friends’ in Hebrew. Antosz-Rekucka uploaded information on Jewish and Polish culture and students from both sides could communicate via the website.

The visit of the Israeli school to Mszana took place in October 2014. They spent one day in Mszana where they met students from the high school. The children met in the school where they learned together how to dance Israeli and Polish dances, they had a chance to chat over cake and tea and listened to Jewish and Polish songs performed by a group of teenagers from Mszana. The Polish group presented briefly the history of Jews in Mszana and the events of 19 August 1942. Then, both groups walked together the exact path which the Jews in Mszana took in 1942, from the centre of the town to the meadows where they were shot.⁵⁰⁸ The visit from Israel was short, but the activities which led to the meeting in person, as well as contacts the teenagers from both groups maintained after the visit, brought new perspectives on Jewish-non/Jewish relations into two schools. A visit of another Israeli group to Mszana was scheduled for October 2015.⁵⁰⁹

Apart from educational programmes organised by external institutions, there were other activities in the high school which concerned Jewish history and culture and remembered the Jewish history of Mszana. All these activities were initiated by Urszula Antosz-Rekucka and were conducted either within the religion class, or in students’ spare time. In her classes, apart from the obvious teaching of Catholicism, Antosz-Rekucka includes information on all monotheistic religions, with a special attention to Judaism, as it was the second religion in Mszana before the war. She explains the main aspects of Judaism and how holidays are celebrated by Jews. Students in her class can see and handle *kippah*, *menorah*, *tallit*, elements of Jewish religious life and find out how to

⁵⁰⁸ Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, "Grupa Izraelskiej młodzieży w Mszanie Dolnej," Powiat Limanowski. 2013. Accessed November 27, 2014. <http://www.powiat.limanowa.pl/pl/1631/20334/Grupa-Izraelskiej-m%C5%82odzie%C5%BCy-w-Mszanie-Dolnej.html>.

⁵⁰⁹ *Zespół Szkół nr 1 w Mszanie Dolnej*. "Na drogach dialogu – spotkanie z młodzieżą izraelską." 2015. Accessed November 1, 2015. <http://www.zs1md.pl/?artykul=431>.

celebrate each Jewish holiday. Each year on 17 January, the Day of Judaism celebrated by the Catholic Church, Antosz-Rekucka explains to her students the common roots of Christianity and Judaism, not necessarily a common approach amongst those who teach religion in Poland. Finally, the catechist organises, together with Agnieszka Józefiak, a commemoration of the shooting of the Jews in Mszana on 19 August. Her students are always present at the commemoration, despite the fact that it happens during the summer when many teenagers are on holiday and often are busy helping at their parents' farms.

The engagement of Józefiak, Antosz-Rekucka and others in the Jewish/non-Jewish dialogue and in maintaining the memory of Jews in Mszana does not happen in a social void. Their commitment raises the question of the attitude of other teachers, representatives of the local authorities, clergy and common inhabitants towards the involvement of the community in preserving the Jewish past of the town. Antosz-Rekucka's initiatives at the high school encountered positive reaction from the students. Even those who did not join her additional class, never expressed disapproval. The exchange programme with the Israeli teenagers interested also those children who did not participate in other projects concerning Jewish culture. In general, the young generation was if not engaged, then curious, or at least indifferent. The catechist stated that she never experienced a negative reaction from any of the pupils. She could see that some children were not comfortable with her projects, but participation was voluntary, so these students did not have to join her class. All her students, however, expressed interest learning about other religions.⁵¹⁰ One of the students who was a member of the performing group, Anna Kaciczak, admitted that although she heard negative opinions on the presence of the programmes at school from some of her teachers, she never experience disapproval from her peers.⁵¹¹ Another participant confirmed:

⁵¹⁰ Interview with Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁵¹¹ Interview with Anna Kaciczak, 13 October 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland, by skype.

No, other students never said anything bad about what we do. Some teachers and the priest, yes, but not other students. Some people did not want to join, but they were fine with us taking part in it.⁵¹²

The catechist's students, as well as younger ones who attended the programme in the primary school under the leadership of Maria Figura, joined the extra activities with different levels of knowledge about the Jews in Mszana and Jewish culture in general. Nevertheless, the majority of them were very curious about different religious customs and fascinated by the fact that Jewish people were once a part of the community of Mszana. Figura admitted that she was at times surprised how much the children wanted to know and how detailed their questions about differences and similarities between Jews and non-Jews were.⁵¹³ The schools, however, are not free of antisemitic stereotypes among the students. Rachela Antosz-Rekucka, the catechist's daughter, admitted that while attending *gimnazjum*, a school level between primary school and high school, she heard children calling each other 'a Jew' which was perceived as an offence. She also witnessed students shouting at her 'Jews to the gas'. Although Rachela is not Jewish, it was directed at her, because of her family's involvement in the commemoration and the teaching on Jewish history.⁵¹⁴ When confronted, the culprit of the offensive statement could neither explain the meaning, nor their intension in expressing it.

The involvement of Antosz-Rekucka in various programmes on Jewish history and the teaching on Judaism received mixed reactions from other teachers in the high school. The majority of them had either positive or a neutral attitude, but even those who expressed their support were rather cautious in engaging in the projects and despite their approval, they refrain from helping Antosz-Rekucka in running the programmes. Some teachers, however, tried to contribute to the idea of education on Jewish history. Kaciczak admitted that some teachers started bringing up in their

⁵¹² Interview with Maria Duda, 7 October 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland, by e-mail.

⁵¹³ Interview with Maria Figura, 18 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁵¹⁴ Conversation with Rachela Antosz-Rekucka, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

classes the subject of the Holocaust and the events of 1942 in Mszana.⁵¹⁵ Others helped by letting students go to rehearse for the performance during their classes. As a response to the preparation for the commemoration of the shooting in Mszana in 1942, a history teacher organised an exhibition on the history of the Holocaust. Another person decided to engage the class on the Righteous Among the Nations when the students met with the Waclawik family which was awarded the title. There was also a group of teachers, although in the minority, who disapproved of dealing with 'Jewish topics' in the school. The catechist was told by her students that a sports teacher expressed her disapproval that in the Catholic school children would be meeting Jewish teenagers. What is interesting is the fact that the students tried to explain to her that it would be beneficial for them to meet young Jews and how it was educational for them to find out more about the Jewish culture present in Mszana before the war.⁵¹⁶ It was a case of generational role reversal, when young people took responsibility for educating their teacher. They were convinced that they were right and they were not afraid of standing up for their convictions.

The biggest opponent of any kind of education about Judaism and Jewish history was a priest in the high school. Although after one year in the school he was transferred to a different village, for a year he openly waged a war with Antosz-Rekucka and her projects. He accused the catechist of violating Christian values by claiming that Jesus was a Jew and that Christianity had its roots in Judaism. He claimed that participating in the celebration of *Hanukkah*, a Jewish holiday, was an act of blasphemy. His war against education on Jewish religion and culture seemed not to have great effect on students. Some of them expressed confusion, but they also tried to resolve their doubts arising from the priest's claims and they sought answers from Antosz-Rekucka.⁵¹⁷ However, the priest's opposition to Antosz-Rekucka's teaching

⁵¹⁵ Interview with Anna Kaciczak, 13 October 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland, by skype.

⁵¹⁶ Interview with Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁵¹⁷ Interview with Anna Kaciczak, 13 October 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland, by skype.

significantly influenced the actions of some teachers. The head of school, who at the beginning approved of the participation of the students in the programmes and on engaging them in the commemoration of the Jews of Mszana, advised Antosz-Rekucka not to irritate the priest with her activities and to become 'less visible' with her actions.⁵¹⁸

As a response to the teaching of Antosz-Rekucka, the priest published an article in the local magazine owned by the town hall *Pod Lubogoszczą*.⁵¹⁹ In the article, the priest tried to explain that Christianity had nothing to do with Judaism and the term Judeo-Christianity was fictional. He also expressed satisfaction with the fact that he was perceived as antisemite. Most of the article was plagiarised from an antisemitic publication by two right wing authors Zbigniew Musiał and Bogusław Wolniewicz. The article, which the local parson refused to publish in the parish magazine, found its place in the town hall's magazine. The fact that the article was copied from another publication and was an example of illegal activity, namely plagiarism, was not the most astonishing part of this event. The most extraordinary aspect of this was the fact that strongly antisemitic rhetoric was accepted for publication in the official magazine of the town. It was the same magazine which every year reported on the commemoration of the shooting of the Jews of Mszana, as well as on the progress of the schools educational programmes. The article raised a lot of confusion and questions among the students in Mszana. Some of them expressed their condemnation and disapproval of the article.⁵²⁰ There were others who could not understand why a priest would support these anti-Jewish statements and questioned whether this was the teaching of the Catholic Church.⁵²¹ The priest's views and attitudes were examples of antisemitism and anti-Judaism, still present among Polish Catholic clergymen. Although his statements did not find many supporters and even his supervisor, the local parson, disagreed with his views, there was no visible opposition to his actions. Instead of confronting the priest,

⁵¹⁸ Interview with Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁵¹⁹ *Pod Lubogoszczą* 4, 20 (2012), 17-18.

⁵²⁰ Interview with Anna Kaciczak, 13 October 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland, by skype.

⁵²¹ Interview with Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

which only Antosz-Rekucka had the courage to do, people decided to keep quiet. The head of the school, the parson, even the authorities in the town hall preferred to let him continue his anti-Jewish campaign rather than engage in dispute. The authority which representatives of the Church have among Polish people, in small towns and villages in particular, might explain the community's reluctance to confront the priest. As Antosz-Rekucka commented, it is still a conviction among people that what a priest says must be the truth.⁵²² Nevertheless, it is revealing that there were students who attempted to counter the priest's convictions, rather than accepting his arguments without challenging them.

Forms of resistance to memory work

The young generation in Mszana is open to debate on Jewish/non-Jewish relations and to the discovery and discussion of the history of the town which included the Jewish population. Without the burden of the experience of the war and the communist era, they welcome the idea of a pluralistic civic model of the society which includes the memory of 'others'. They have strong encouragement in the town from educational programmes, as well as from individuals such as Antosz-Rekucka, Józefiak, or Zdanowski, and others who support the idea of preserving the Jewish past of Mszana. Many of the students were prompted by personal narratives on the Jews from Mszana told by older members of their families. These stories, told in private for long time, found their way to the public space of Mszana through the engagement of younger generations in reclaiming the Jewish past of the place they live in. Those people in Mszana who acknowledge that the town's past involves the history of two communities living together, Jewish and non-Jewish, have support of the majority of the town. Even though this majority 'observes with interest' how Jewish history is incorporated into the memory of Mszana, rather than getting involved in the activities, they approve of the

⁵²² Ibid.

change. The local authorities, the parish and teaching staff at schools in general support the idea of rethinking their community's history in public discourse. Consequently, their representatives get involved in the annual commemoration, educational programmes, or collaboration with the families of the Holocaust survivors. Despite how receptive the community of Mszana has become to remembrance and shared memory in the last two decades, there are still stereotypes and prejudices towards Jews who live among the inhabitants of Mszana.

Aside from the case of the priest in the high school, who was a person from outside the community and was transferred to a different place after a year, there are members of the community in Mszana who also have antisemitic convictions. Zdanowski described a continuing argument he was having with one of his friends. The man claimed that Jews who worked in shops in Mszana always tried to cheat non-Jewish customers. This conviction represents the stereotype of a cunning Jew, which grew in strength in Poland especially in the 1930s during the economic crisis in the country. Zdanowski admitted that although the man is one of his best friends, the subject of Jews being a natural adversary for non-Jews is a recurring theme of their disputes.

You know, one people say good things about Jews, others bad things, often nonsense. This friend of mine, he says that there was a Jewish woman in the neighbourhood who always cheated a Catholic. I tell him that this is nonsense, because I used to go with my mum to Jewish shops and they never cheated, ever. My mother was always pleased with their service and I used to get some candies. We were very poor and the shop keepers, Jews, they knew that. So we argue with this friend a lot about it. His argument is that they call as goyim and that this is offensive. He does not know a thing!⁵²³

Another stereotype which was expressed by some of the non-Jewish interviewees was associating Jews with hidden wealth. Some of the families who moved into Jewish houses, or bought them from their previous owners, were suspected of finding Jewish gold buried there. The ability of non-Jewish families to build new house was explained by

⁵²³ Interview with Henryk Zdanowski, 23 August 2011, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

unknown income which could only come from Jewish hidden goods. People who bought a house from the Repun family after the war were suspected of having discovered a treasure buried in the cellar. The concept of goods hidden by the Repuns was supported by the visit of one of the members of the family, Pinek, who after the war asked whether anyone had found anything in the house. It is not certain what he was looking for, it could have been personal items of his family which he wanted to keep.⁵²⁴ Nevertheless, his visit bolstered the idea of hidden treasure. Moreover, after a while the family living in the Repuns' house also bought further piece of land and a cottage, which inflamed the town's gossip. The stereotype of wealthy Jews who hide their riches from the public eye went even further in the case of the Magielscy family, whose house was built near the location of the synagogue.

They built their house on the very spot of the synagogue. People were saying that they found there a golden calf and that is where they had money from. But I don't know whether it was true. There must have been something though, otherwise where would they take this money from.⁵²⁵

In this case, the stereotype of a wealthy Jew was combined with the belief that Jews kept a golden calf hidden in their temples. This theory, which has its supporters among non-Jews in Poland to the present days, indicates not only anti-Jewish prejudice, but also a lack of understanding of the Jewish religion and rituals.

Although in the minority, there were also more violent and visible signs of antisemitism in Mszana which were mentioned by the interviewees. Antosz-Rekucka recalled that when she got involved in the Polish/Israeli groups exchange programme, one of her neighbours shouted 'Jews' at Antosz-Rekucka's children.⁵²⁶ It was meant to be offensive, although neither of the teenagers regarded it in that way. One other indication of anti-Jewish sentiments which became an element of the landscape in

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Interview with Elżbieta Chudzikiewicz, 16 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁵²⁶ Interview with Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

Poland from the 1990s is antisemitic graffiti. The slogans written on walls are often associated with rivalry between football clubs. To call an opposing team 'Jews' is perceived as offensive and in fact it is common practice. In 2013 a big graffiti appeared on one of the buildings in the main square in Mszana. The writing showed a crossed Star of David and a slogan proclaiming that the football club Wisła Kraków was Jewish. The people in town talked about the graffiti, condemning it for different reasons. Some were saying that this was a sign of stupidity.⁵²⁷ Others pointed out that it was antisemitic, especially in the context of the location of the graffiti, as it was written on the building near where the synagogue once stood.⁵²⁸ Despite some of the inhabitants' outrage about the slogan, it remained on the building for several weeks. Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence in Poland, antisemitic writing on walls is not removed promptly. The question remains whether this kind of graffiti bothers people enough to ensure it disappears from the landscape. In the case of Mszana, what is comforting is that it was a single case and the town discussed and condemned it.

Although Mszana after the war was a town without Jews, some of the Holocaust survivors visited the town several times. The attitude of the Jews towards such return to the town differed. Some of survivors kept coming back to meet friends and to see the town they grew up in, others did not want to return to the place where their families were killed. However, the majority of the Holocaust survivors experienced nostalgia for the place of their childhood and the life they had there before the war. The longing was expressed by memories, stories told to the members of the families, or in letters written to their friends in Mszana. These visits which took place for many years did not have a strong impact on the people of Mszana as a whole. They influenced a small number of inhabitants who were friends with the visiting Jews. For the non-Jews who still lived in Mszana after the war the subject of the ownership of Jewish houses and shops remained the main concern of the Jewish visits.

⁵²⁷ Interview with Anna Knapczyk, 17 August 2013, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

⁵²⁸ Interview with Agnieszka Józefiak, 18 August 2015, Mszana Dolna, Poland.

Even after 70 years, the subject of properties and their right owners causes serious fear among the inhabitants. This fear indicates that some of the Jewish properties were not obtained by non-Jews via legal routes. Even so, the dread of losing houses is also fed by a widespread stereotype of a Jews who come back and take back their houses from the new owners.

The revival of the memory of Jews in Mszana took place in the early 2000s when the political and social changes in the country allowed people to explore the past of the town. With the influx of the Jewish visitors searching for traces of their families and the activity of the members of the local community who took initiatives to rediscover the Jewish heritage of Mszana, the attitude towards the past of the town has changed. In recent years there has been a rising interest of inhabitants of different generations in the Jewish history of Mszana. The participation in annual commemoration of the shooting of the Jews of Mszana, as well as being a part of several educational programmes about Jewish history and culture shows that some inhabitants of Mszana, especially the younger generation need to fill the void which the destruction of the Jewish community left in the history of the town.

Conclusion

The study of the memory of Jews in Mszana Dolna is only a small fragment of a bigger picture of how 'bystanders' in Poland, and other European countries, dealt and continue to deal with the annihilation of the European Jews. The case of Mszana might not be unique, as there are many other communities in Polish towns and cities whose approach to the past of their Jewish inhabitants is similar. Indeed, the tendency to rediscover local Jewish history and to make it a part of a wider inheritance has been popular among many communities in post-communist Poland. However, this microhistory of Jewish/non-Jewish relation in Mszana brings a compelling insight of the life of both groups throughout the period from before the war until the present time. The research reflects the coexistence of Jews and non-Jews in Mszana through the memory of the current inhabitants of the town, as well as the recollection of the Holocaust survivors and their families. Although it would be presumptuous to claim that the way Jews are remembered in Mszana can be representative of the attitudes of non-Jews in the whole country, the case study gives some indications of the dominant tendencies in terms of remembrance among Polish society and Jewish/non-Jewish relations.

Both groups, Jewish survivors and their families, as well as the current inhabitants of Mszana, see the period before the Second World War as a time of safety, stability and positive relations between Jews and non-Jews. The recollections of customer-shop owner relations, as well as those between neighbours and school friends were, for example, largely favourable in both groups of interviewees. The idealised memory of the past was influenced by the contrast with the horrors of the war which followed. Furthermore, for most of the interviewees, the pre-war times represented their childhood and youth, associated with serenity and safety. Therefore, this time remained in their memory as a happy one. However, despite the idealisation by the majority of the interviewees of

the pre-war life in Mszana, Jews and non-Jews did co-exist largely peacefully on daily basis. Although not entirely free of antisemitism and animosities between Jews and non-Jews, the relationships between both groups allowed them to function as a cohesive community of Mszana for several centuries. Indeed, they co-operated in the public, as well as in the private sphere. Jews and non-Jews needed each other as traders and customers, but also as neighbours and friends. Despite the past tension between Christianity and Judaism, the strong influence of religion in both groups did not interfere with the mainly successful coexistence of the two faiths in Mszana. Neither Jews nor non-Jews proved to have deep knowledge of the other religion and understanding of rituals associated with them. Nevertheless, there remained a mutual respect for each other's faiths, practises connected with them and the style of life subjected to either of religions. Indeed, religiosity and strong attachment to rituals associated with their faith is one of the strongest memory of Jews among non-Jews.

Since the shooting of the Jewish community of Mszana in 1942 the memory of Jews was continually present among the non-Jewish inhabitants. Until the late 1990s, however, it was expressed mostly in the private sphere and limited to recollection of the Jews being told between families and friends. The generation of the people who lived with Jews in Mszana before and during the war passed the stories about Jewish inhabitants to their children and grandchildren, but this memory did not find its way to the public sphere of the town. It was only with the political and social changes in Poland after 1989 and the fall of communism that the memory of Jews became a part of the public life of Mszana. The possibility of rediscovering the Jewish past in the new post-communist order was reinforced in the early 2000s by some of the inhabitants taking initiative to lead the activities which allowed the memory of Jews being incorporated into the public heritage of Mszana. The annual commemoration of the shooting of the Jews on 19 August 1942 gathered together those people for whom the event was a significant moment within local history. The participants come from various generations and

the event represents different aspects of their memories. Those who had shared the town with the Jews commemorate their friends and neighbours.

For the younger generation it is a gesture of remembering the past of their town and exploring diverse inheritance of the place they live in. The young generation has also a chance to rediscover the Jewish heritage by participating in educational programmes conducted in the local schools under the strong lead of teachers dedicated to the subject. Apart from exploring the Jewish past of the town, the engagement in the commemoration and the educational programmes serves also as a response to the sense of loss of the Jewish part of the community. Even for the young generation which had no encounter with the Jews of Mszana, the involvement in the commemoration is a form of mourning for the Jews of the town. It is also a recognition of the Holocaust as a key element of local history. Through acknowledgement of the events of August 1942 and annual commemoration of the killing of the Jews, people of Mszana engage in memorializing of Holocaust.

All the activities taken by the current inhabitants of Mszana in terms of reconstruction of the memory of Jews of the town are an attempt to fill the void which disappearance of the Jews left behind. Even though the longing for the diverse community and the Jewish presence was never named explicitly as such by the interviewees, the memory of the Jewish/non-Jewish coexistence in the town was present in the collective memory of Mszana throughout the whole post-war period. From the early twenty first century, the recollection of the Jews of Mszana has been taken from the private to the public space. The stories told about Jewish inhabitants which were told at homes gradually became a part of the public inheritance of Mszana. Although the reconstruction of the Jewish past is not shared by the whole community, those who are a part of the process are a dynamic group in the community. What makes them even stronger is the fact that it involves the young generation of the inhabitants and that they have the support of the authorities of the town.

The memory of the Jews in Mszana Dolna is not the only case where the local community is struggling to comprehend the town's relationship to the Jewish past and the longing for broader understanding of its multi-layered heritage. However, this research has shown not only the ways in which the community of the town currently deals with the rediscovering of the memory of Jews, but also how it has reconstructed the history of the Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Mszana from the pre-war period until present time. The origins of the nostalgia for the diverse inheritance of Mszana and regaining the memory of Jews lay in the history of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in the town. Far from ideal, the relations between both groups has allowed for the construction of a past consisting of a well-integrated community which was disrupted during the war. Although after the war non-Jews repressed the memory of the Jewish neighbours and functioned as a homogeneous non-Jewish community, the recollection of Jews remained in oral tradition in the private sphere of families and friends. The moment this memory could be rediscovered and transferred into the public space, there were people who took responsibility for doing so.

Similar to the non-Jewish interviewees, the memory of the pre-war life in the town represented by the Jewish survivors is dominated by nostalgia for a safe and well organised community. Most of the Jews remember the time before the war as a period of stability and positive coexistence with non-Jews. The longing for the place where they were born and raised continue for some of them after the war, when they maintain links to Mszana by visiting the town, or by corresponding with their non-Jewish friends. Not surprisingly, the Jewish survivors see the start of the war as a turning point in their life in Mszana, including the Jewish/non-Jewish relations. It is worth noting that there are divisions in memories on the life in Mszana not only between Jews and non-Jews, but also within these groups. In fact, there is no one hegemonic Jewish, or non-Jewish memory of the town. The recollections, especially in the case of the Jewish survivors, are influenced by the experience of the war and the new life after it. Although in minority, some of the Jewish survivors'

recollections of the pre-war period in Mszana are dominated by the image of hostile environment for the Jewish population, most likely influenced by the trauma of the war years.

The research was not designed to establish the truth about Jews and non-Jews in Mszana, as there is no one, 'authentic' version of the life the two communities led together. Neither was it to define the true character of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Poland. The intention of the study was to deliver more beyond the polarized views on the interaction of Jews and non-Jews that is dominant in memory work, including in the academic sphere. The polemic of the historiography of Jews in Poland is concentrated either on the conviction of a strong and deeply rooted antisemitism of non-Jews, or, alternatively on the idyllic picture of Poland as the safe haven for Jews expelled from other countries in Europe.⁵²⁹

The detailed study of the Jewish/non-Jewish coexistence in Mszana illustrates the complexity of these relations by analysing different aspects of social life in the town throughout the history of the community of Mszana. The approach represented in this study concentrates on Jewish/non-Jewish relations from the perspectives of neighbours, school children, friends and business partners, as well as representatives of two faiths. Furthermore, the research recognises differences of memories represented within the town groups, Jewish and non-Jewish. It contextualises the matter of relations between Jews and non-Jews and situates it in a wider, more refined historical and social context. Moreover, the multidisciplinary approach of the research, using elements of history, ethnography and sociology adds to the complexity of the topic and allows

⁵²⁹ This statement refers to the public discourse on the history of Jews in Poland, rather than academic research. While academia deals with diversity of aspects of the life of Jews in Poland, the polemic beyond academic circles still operates with these two stereotypical approaches towards the Jews of Poland. The debate in Poland after the publication of Gross' *Neighbours*, as well as the narrative which accompany visits of Israeli school children to Poland can serve as an examples of this bipolar discussion. See also: Garton Ash, Timothy. "A small miracle in the tortured history of Polish-Jewish relations." *The Guardian*. 2014. Accessed November 20, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/01/polish-jewish-relations-warsaw-museum-history-polish-jews>.

consideration of Jewish/non-Jewish relations from outside the boundaries of one discipline. This type of research, utilising a careful study of diverse aspects of social life, combining methods and perspectives of different fields could be the answer to better understanding of a complex subject of Jewish/non-Jewish relations, especially in the constant minefield of the Polish example. Furthermore, the research delivers an example of historiography of a diverse community and analyses the complexity of it. It presents the history of Jewish and non-Jewish coexistence based on a large variety of sources and seen from different perspectives and over a long time frame. Moreover, the study provides analysis of the memory and memorialization represented by Jewish and non-Jewish members of one community. It shows the variety of approaches towards remembrance and different ways in which people conceive the past. Finally, the research supports the conviction that the division of memory into the Jewish and non-Jewish sphere is not sufficient, as there are differences in approaches towards the past within these two groups, as well as *between* them.

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CONSENT FORM

Study title: *Dealing with the past – forms of reconstruction of the memory of Jews in Poland.*

Researcher name: MALGORZATA WLOSZYCKA

Ethics reference: 7192

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have been informed about the purpose of this interview and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study

 PY

I agree to my
Name
Age
Occupation

being disclosed in the dissertation.

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study

 PY

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected

 PY

I agree to the interview to be recorded and then transcribed

 PY

Name of participant (print name)..... PNINA YOGEV.....

Signature of participant..... *P. Yogev*.....

Name of Researcher (print name) Malgorzata Wloszycka

Signature of Researcher..... *L. Wloszycka*.....

Date..... *31 December 2010*.....