ZESZYTY NAUKOWE UNIWERSYTETU JAGIELLOŃSKIEGO
Prace Historyczne 151, z. 4 (2024), s. 717–743
https://doi.org/10.4467/20844069PH.24.042.21582
www.ejournals.eu/Prace-Historyczne

BLACKMAILERS AND *SHMALTZOVNIKS* UNDER THE LAW IN OCCUPIED CRACOW*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to analyze blackmail in occupied Cracow based on the criminal cases from 1939–1946 and the witness accounts. The article discusses the specific nature of crime in occupied Cracow and the activities of blackmailers based on selected stories of blackmailers who heard the charge of blackmailing Jews during World War II and were brought to justice by the occupation judiciary. These surviving cases are a unique historical feature and need to be discussed. These are the stories of: Maria Jawułowa, Helena Loho and Władysław Urbańczyk, Tadeusz Pawlus, Zdzisław Pohorecki, Feliks Kowalski and Aleksandr Radwan, whom the author deliberately mentions by name. The author also looks at the different techniques used by blackmailers, depending on whether they acted alone or in a group, in a planned or spontaneous manner. The premise of the article is to present the attitudes of blackmailers, their victims and occupation law enforcers.

Keywords: blackmailing, denunciation, crime, justice, Second World War, Holocaust, Cracow.

> Anyone who uses coercion or unlawful threat to force another person to act, desist or endure a situation is liable to imprisonment or detention of up to two years.
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> The criminal act may constitute of either the use or threat of physical coercion, that is use of force or other violent action that the person under duress is unable to stop or resist, or the use of psychological coercion, that is an unlawful threat.

* This work was supported by National Center of Science (Sonata 16), no. 2020/39/D/HS3/00331.

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> The purpose of using both violence and threat under this act is to force another person to act, desist, or endure a situation. The mere use of violence or threats shall not be considered offence under this Article.
>
> Art. 251, the Criminal Code of 1932, Crimes against freedom

Blackmail is an act of a complex nature and has a complicated subjective side. It is committed for various reasons: personal, financial, ideological, political, although it is most often motivated by desire for profit or revenge. An act of blackmail falls within the definition of crime formulated in the cited Article 251 of the Criminal Code of 1932; it was liable to imprisonment or detention of up to two years. Criminal liability for such actions was in force (with minor changes) until the end of the 1960s.[1] The Criminal Code of 1932 was also used during World War II, but it was brutally confronted with the occupation practices of the Nazi authorities, particularly towards the Jewish population sentenced to death The Article 251 of the mentioned Criminal Code also included acts committed by persons commonly termed as *shmaltzovniks*, which the Polish language dictionary broadly defines as an activity of "extorting ransom from Jews under the threat of handing them over to the Germans during Hitler's occupation."[2]

This definition, however, does not fully reflect the extent of the problem; it requires more detailed and precise explanation and collation of semantic scope of the term "szmalcownictwo" with the source material used in this paper. The above definition does not include extortion that Poles who hid Jews during the war were subjected to.

The aim of the article is to analyze the title issue on the basis of recovered archival documents produced during the years 1939–1946, including court and police records as well as witness accounts. I also take into consideration the results of research conducted by other scholars. This paper is divided into three main sections: introduction, development, and conclusions. Firstly, I refer to the state of research, sources and terminology. Subsequently, I briefly discuss the specifics of crime in occupied Cracow and the activities of most notorious blackmailers. I describe the latter using the stories of Maria Jawułowa, Helena Loho and Władysław Urbańczyk, Tadeusz Pawlus, Zdzisław Pohorecki, Feliks Kowalski and Aleksander Radwan. I also look into to the various techniques blackmailers used, depending on whether they acted alone or in a group, in a planned or spontaneous manner. I take into account the dynamics of war and the Holocaust, social background, gender and access to criminal networks. I also

[1] This offence has been criminalized under section 1, Art. 191 of Polish Penal Code – "Kto stosuje przemoc wobec osoby lub groźbę bezprawną w celu zmuszenia innej osoby do określonego działania, zaniechania lub znoszenia, podlega karze pozbawienia wolności do lat 3" [Who uses violence or an unlawful threat to coerce a person to perform a certain act, abandon an attempt, or endure certain situations, is liable to imprisonment of up to three years].

[2] "Wymuszanie na Żydach okupu pod groźbą wydania ich Niemcom w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej". "Szmalcownictwo" [in:] *Słownik języka polskiego*, https://sjp.pl/szmalcownictwo [accessed: 30th December 2024].

investigate the reaction of the Polish Underground State, the local community members, and the memories based on post-war accounts and memoirs. In the last section, I present the conclusions of my research. Only recently the history of Cracow and its blackmailers has been compiled, mainly due to the finally obtained access to court materials containing original lists of blackmailers and personal data of criminals, including their nationality and religious denomination. These documents allowed me to reconstruct the methods used by blackmailers and *shmaltzovniks*, which ranged from extortion, intimidation, threats of violence or reporting victims to the Gestapo.

The topic is still valid, and arises in both Polish and international discourse. An example is a recent statement of Mr. Paul Shapiro, director of the Office of International Affairs at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., about the Dutch government planning to throw open files about 300,000 people investigated for their collaboration with the Nazis:

> The expanded access to the general public […] is a crucial step in understanding how and why regular people and institutions participated in the Holocaust. Genocidal crimes leave a very long legacy behind them. For better or worse, the only way to resolve some of those issues is to have your eyes wide open and look at the past openly and accept what the history really was. One way to look at that is through the paper trail in the archives[3].

Although it is somewhat forgotten by scholars researching (besides a relatively small group of scholars mention further), the Holocaust in occupied Poland – Cracow in particular, probably due to the lack of adequate documentation.

The phenomenon of *szmalcownictwo* was described primarily by the Warsaw-based scholars, however, there is no description of this phenomenon from the perspective of Cracow, a city with a different socio-cultural tradition and history. The uniqueness of Cracow was in its Galician heritage and the history of the city, which was part of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy before 1918 and remained in its orbit at the beginning of the 20th century. Warsaw at that time was under the influence of the Russian Empire and its legislation. Before World War II Cracow was inhabited not only by Poles, but also by Jews, Germans, Ukrainians, Austrians, Armenians, Slovaks, Belarusians. According to the 1931 census, Polish nationality was declared by 171,206 people (78,1%), Jewish nationality 45,828 (20,9%), German nationality 740 (0,3%), Ukrainian nationality 924 (0,4%), Russian nationality 115 (0,1%) and 473 other nationalities.[4]

It was also a multi-cultural thriving university city, strongly influenced by cultural models from Vienna. Cracow attracted many people of various origins, and Jewish community constituted a large percentage of the newcomers.

After the World War II broke out and Cracow became the capital of the General Government, a huge number of Germans began to flow into the city, including *Volksdeutsche* and *Reichsdeutsche.* According to Röskau-Rydel's findings, by the end of

[3] https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/25/arts/dutch-files-accused-nazi-collaborators.html [accessed: 25th April 2023].

[4] Data based on Poland's second population census, see: L. Mroczka, *Krakowianie. Szkice do portretu zbiorowego w dobie industrialnej transformacji 1890–1939*, Kraków 1999, p. 35.

1940 there were 3,000 Volksdeutsche in Cracow.[5] The following years saw a relatively high increase in the number of Germans living in Cracow. By the census conducted by German authorities in the GG in May 1943, the population of Cracow consisted of the following groups: 251,912 Poles (85,5%), 20,997 Germans (7,4%), 8,753 Jews (3%), 1,947 Ukrainians (0,6%) and 1,184 representatives of other nationalities.[6]

These special distinguishing features of Cracow (its capital city and Galician heritage) had a significant impact on the occupation attitudes and behaviors of Cracovians towards the new system of power. As a result, many people were familiar with the German language, some even spoke it fluently, and were thus well acquainted with German realities, which significantly influenced their survival strategy during World War II. Those graduating from German gymnasia were able to try to infiltrate the German environment, although the great difficulty was the need to obtain false identity papers. This is also why I decided to describe the activities of blackmailers in occupied Cracow. This article may become an incentive for further analyses, including the field of social studies, especially since this topic is relevant to this day.

THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

The problem of blackmail and extortion during World War II is still a topic discussed in the academic forums. In recent years, many scholarly publications regarding this issue have been written by Jan Grabowski, Sławomir Buryła, Barbara Engelking,[7] Dariusz Libionka and Andrzej Żbikowski, amongst others. They represent the trend of micro historical research and refer to the military experience of specific individuals and communities, primarily in the Warsaw area.[8] They draw attention to the universality of the discussed phenomenon. This, however, cannot be applied to the case of Cracow, as the phenomenon presented differently. While analyzing the title issue,

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[5] I. Röskau-Rydel, "Volksdeutsche w Krakowie i dystrykcie krakowskim Generalnego Gubernatorstwa w latach 1939–1941," *Prace Historyczne* 2022, vol. 149 (4), pp. 721–739.

[6] *Małopolska Agencja Prasowa* 1943, no. 7, p. 3.

[7] B. Engelking, *„Szanowny panie gistapo". Donosy do władz niemieckich w Warszawie i okolicach w latach 1940–1941*, Warszawa 2003; eadem, "Murdering and Denouncing Jews in the Polish Countryside 1942–1945," *East European Politics and Societies* 2011, vol. 25 (3), pp. 435–456.

[8] D. Libionka, "Polska podziemna wobec szantażystów i szmalcowników w Warszawie. Korekta obrazu," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2018, no. 14, pp. 115–164; S. Buryła, *Wokół Zagłady. Szkice o literaturze Holocaustu*, Kraków 2016; J. Grabowski, *Ja tego Żyda znam! Szantażowanie Żydów w Warszawie 1939–1943*, Warszawa 2004; idem, "Szantażowanie Żydów. Casus Warszawy 1939–1945," *Przegląd Historyczny* 2008, vol. 99, no. 4, pp. 583–602; A. Rodek, *Tzw. szmalcownicy – Warszawa i okolice (1940–1944)*, manuscript of Master's thesis, see also abridgment "Tak zwani szmalcownicy na przykładzie Warszawy i okolic 1940–1944," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2004, fasc. 3; A. Żbikowski, "Antysemityzm, szmalcownictwo, współpraca z Niemcami a stosunki polsko-żydowskie pod okupacją niemiecką" [in:] *Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały*, ed. A. Żbikowski, Warszawa 2006, pp. 429–505. See also G.S. Paulsson, *Utajone miasto. Żydzi po aryjskiej stronie Warszawy*, transl. by E. Olender-Dmowska, Kraków 2007.

I have drawn from documents different than those used by the aforementioned researchers. The factors that influenced the activity of blackmailers in Cracow were the historicity and tradition of the city and above all, its Austro-Hungarian heritage in culture and society. As I mentioned earlier, from the end of the 18th century to 1918 Cracow remained a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, unlike Warsaw, which after the partitions was under the rule of Russian Empire, which later directly influenced attitudes of the occupied communities of these cities. The main feature that distinguished Cracow from Warsaw was a common knowledge (to a greater or lesser extent) of German culture and language, which helped residents to faster adjust to the changing realities of the war. German was the official language, and the heavy influx of officials from Austria and Austria-Hungary, entrepreneurs and soldiers significantly changed the fabric of the city. The military garrison was situated at Wawel which was used by criminals (who pretended to be German functionaries) for various types of fraud, extortion and threats of denunciation.

The difference between Cracow and Warsaw also enhanced the potential for blackmailing and why the perpetrator did not feel that he is committing such a terrible crime or crossing a moral red line. Also, Cracow's capital character (before and during World War II), intellectual and academic specificity and great mobility,[9] and finally, less anonymity than in Warsaw all made it quite particular in character. Above all, which should be mentioned, Cracow's status was different from that of other cities in the occupied country. From October 1939, when the city began to serve as the capital of the General Government, as Jacek Chrobaczynski rightly stressed, "it became one of the most important links of German occupation practice." All higher and lower occupation authority centers: district, county and municipal, as well as police and political institutions (including the GG government, Gestapo, Sipo, Kripo, Orpo, Schupo, etc.) found their offices in Cracow. It is estimated that at the turn of 1943 and 1944 there were about 4,000 German policemen and 6,000–8,000 soldiers of various formations stationed in the city.[10]

Kraków during the German occupation was a relatively small city,[11] and its inhabitants knew each other well even if only by sight. Furthermore, as Jan Dąbrowski – a historian and observer of these events – recalled, "Kraków was full of Germans, uniformed and not, behaving loudly and rambunctiously."[12] All that had a direct impact on the activities of blackmailers who, unlike for example, their counterparts

[9] M. Drozdowski, "Kraków jako stolica Generalnego Gubernatorstwa. Wpływ stołeczności na życie miasta" [in:] *Oblicza wojny*, vol. 5: *Miasto i wojna*, eds. W. Jarno, J. Kita, Łódź 2021, pp. 259–276; M. Bednarek, K. Zimmerer, *Okupanci. Niemcy w Krakowie 1939–1945*, Kraków 2017; J. Chrobaczyński, *Wojna a społeczeństwo. Ze studiów nad społecznością okupowanego Krakowa 1939–1945*, Kraków 1989.

[10] J. Chrobaczyński, "Kraków – 'stolica' Generalgouvernement (1939–1945)" [in:] *Kraków. Studia z dziejów miasta. W 750 rocznicę lokacji*, ed. J. Rajman, Kraków 2007, s. 239; M. Drozdowski, "Kraków jako stolica Generalnego Gubernatorstwa," s. 261.

[11] In 1939 Cracow had a population of 259,000; two years later this number grew to approximately 321,000.

[12] It is difficult to determine the number of German officers in Cracow. Staff numbers were constantly changing. According to Bogdan Musiał's findings, in 1940 there were 1,218 persons, in 1941 – 2,151 persons, in 1942 – 2,043 persons, in 1943 – 1,900 persons, in 1944 – 2,006 persons, see idem,

in occupied Warsaw, acted more often alone than in an organized way which I will discuss in more detail below.

I have carried out detailed analysis of: (1) four letters written by blackmailers, protocols on the arrest of blackmailers by the Polish Criminal Police (Polnische Kriminalpolizei)[13] (four confirmed verbal blackmails), files from investigations conducted by the Cracow prosecutor's office of the Municipal and District Court in Cracow (a total of four criminal cases concerning eight blackmails) and reports of conspiracy; (2) records of post-war criminal cases (a total of fourteen: twelve before the Special Criminal Court in Cracow and two before the District Court in Cracow); (3) post-war witness accounts (a total of twelve accounts submitted to the Provincial Historical Commission in Cracow). The selection of source material was determined by their non-rudimentary nature (many war documents have only been partially recovered, some have been lost or destroyed)[14] the subject matter (the selection of post-war cases concerning only blackmail) and the completeness of information (post-war accounts were often incomplete or devoid of specific data and needed to be verified). Court documents contain the mentioned original blackmail letters from 1940–1943 or testimonies of blackmailers and victims; all these allow us to reconstruct the course of events. However, it is not possible to determine the full scale of this phenomenon in occupied Cracow.

TERMINOLOGY: BLACKMAIL OR EXTORTION?

During World War II, the exclusion of Jews from society resulted in distinguishing a category of uncodified crime, commonly called *szmalcownictwo*, which in fact bore all the features of crime under Art. 251 of the Criminal Code of 1932, namely blackmail. Jews, however, were not treated as victims of this crime. The cut-off point was a year of 1941, when Jews were already stripped of almost all their rights, which in everyday life translated into impunity of people committing such reprehensible

Deutsche Zivilverwaltung und Judenverfolgung im Generalgouvernement. Eine Fallstudie zum Distrikt Lublin 1939–1944, Wiesbaden 1999, p. 87.

[13] S. Biernacki, *Okupant a polski ruch oporu. Władze hitlerowskie w walce z ruchem oporu w dystrykcie warszawskim 1939–1944*, Warszawa 1989; M. Chlipała, "Konspiratorzy w Policji Polskiej i Polskiej Policji Kryminalnej w Krakowie w latach 1939–1945," *Prace Historyczne* 2020, vol. 147 (3), s. 597–618; M. Mączyński, *Organizacyjno-prawne aspekty funkcjonowania administracji bezpieczeństwa i porządku publicznego dla zajętych obszarów polskich w latach 1939–1945. Ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Krakowa jako stolicy Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, Kraków 2012; idem, "Polskie formacje policyjne w stolicy Generalnego Gubernatorstwa," *Rocznik Krakowski* 1993, vol. 59, s. 155–156; A. Misiuk, *Historia Policji w Polsce od X wieku do współczesności*, Warszawa 2012, s. 163–165; T. Chinciński, "Gdyńscy policjanci w II wojnie światowej – losy funkcjonariuszy po wrześniu 1939 roku," *Dzieje Najnowsze* 2021, vol. 53, s. 27–41.

[14] *E.g.* the National Archives in Cracow contain 254 recovered files of criminal cases heard by the District Court between 1939 and 1944. The fonds is thus far from complete, as we know that 1365 cases were filed between September 1939 and December 1944.

acts against Jews. Often this affected Polish individuals too, who by helping Jewish people and providing shelter, food or clothing for them, also fell victim of this crime. Perpetrators adhered to the new rules and used every opportunity to capitalize on anti-Jewish regulations at the time. This did not mean, however, that they went completely unpunished. The blackmailers were legitimately accountable to the occupational justice system, and the *shmaltzovniks* were answerable to the Polish Underground State.

The main difference between blackmail, extortion and *szmalcownictwo* was that only the first two exhausted the characteristics of a crime and were subject to prosecution, arrest or imprisonment of up to two years. In the case of *szmalcownictwo*, as already mentioned, this act did not constitute a crime within the meaning of the applicable Criminal Code since Jews were deprived of legal protection, were dehumanized and therefore, could not be victims of these crimes. This criminogenic behavior was only punishable by death in civil special courts of the Polish Underground State. As Agnieszka Haska rightly points out, despite the term functioning during World War II, it was not used in official documents, correspondence or in records of conspiracy work. The meaning of *szmalcownictwo* was widely known, yet the word "blackmail" was used consistently, even when it was indisputably about extortion. It was not a legal term, but only a colloquial one for this crime with a pejorative meaning. This word derives from the word *szmalec* which in thieves' slang meant bribe. During the occupation, the word *szmalec* was used to describe a ransom, financial or material, extorted from Jews in hiding and Poles helping them in exchange for desisting from denouncing them to Gestapo.[15]

JUSTICE SYSTEM UNDER THE OCCUPATION AND THE ACTIVITIES OF BLACKMAILERS

The outbreak of World War II and brutalization of everyday life under occupation brought on an increasing number of petty crimes (in previously known and new forms). Deterioration of financial and economic situation and pervasive violence and crimes of the occupant pushed people into criminal activity. These intensified over the time and resulted in lower moral norms in society, now more prone to breaking the law. In September 1939 a wave of burglaries and thefts began, later followed by fraud, handling of stolen goods, extortion, and smuggling. Besides, general climate of state disintegration, chaos and pervasive poverty caused some criminal acts to be considered morally justified by poverty or repressive policies of the occupant. For example, bribery or petty thefts[16] as well as intimidation and extortion of money from

[15] *Warszawa walczy 1939–1945. Leksykon*, red. K. Komorowski, Warszawa 2015, p. 720.

[16] T. Strzembosz, „Przestępczość i okupacja" [in:] *Problemy bandytyzmu w okupowanej Polsce w latach 1939–1947*, red. T. Strzembosz, Warszawa 2003, pp. 9–13; S. Piątkowski, "Bandytyzm i inne formy przestępczości kryminalnej na obszarach wiejskich Generalnego Gubernatorstwa w początkach

wealthier people, and later from those excluded from public life (namely Jews), were rampant. The leaders rejuvenated the existing *modus operandi*, adapting them to the new circumstances (for example, the occupant's regulations, pauperization of society and frustration with the sense of public safety). Blackmailing of people who did not comply with the occupation law and could not notify the police turned out to be profitable business. Some exceptions were the situations when the blackmailed person was not afraid of threats and treated them as unfounded (the case of Franciszek Kucharski in 1943). Some victims of blackmailers also turned to the local conspiracy for help, which will be discussed further.

A specific character of Cracow played an important role in the blackmailers' operations. Cracow was a rather hermetic city; in 1939 it covered an area of ca. 48 km^2 and had 259,000 inhabitants,[17] who before the outbreak of the war knew one another even if only by sight. The fabric of the city, despite massive influx of refugees from territories incorporated into the Third Reich (mainly from Wielkopolska, Pomerania and Silesia)[18] had not changed much. Cracow was populated mainly with Poles (about 74%) and Jews (about 23%) working as small traders, industry workers, craft workers, public servants, or representing freelance professions (doctors, lawyers, actors, etc.).[19] These proportions changed as the war continued, directly affecting the situation in the city, its structure, and criminal patterns of behavior. The main determinant was the influx of a German population: civilians (officials) along with military and police personnel (Sipo, SD) and their families. In 1941, the population of Cracow increased to 321,000. According to the German data, in 1943 there were over 20,000 Germans permanently residing, which accounted for about 8% of the population[20] (318,924 – the number of all residents, including 155,644 men and 163 280 women).[21] Construction of a German residential district between 1940 and 1944 in Cracow with

okupacji niemieckiej (październik 1939–czerwiec 1941 r.)" [in:] *Polska pod okupacją 1939–1945*, vol. 1, ed. M. Gałęzowski, Warszawa 2015, pp. 79–124; A. Jarkowska, "Criminal Cases Involving Jews Heard in Kraków District Court in the Period 1939–1944: A Contribution to further Research," *Holocaust Studies* 2021, pp. 1–19; A. Czocher, "Drobna przestępczość pospolita w okupowanym Krakowie na podstawie akt więźniów więzienia przy ul. Senackiej (tzw. więzienia św. Michała) z lat 1939–1945" [in:] *Polska pod okupacją*, pp. 119–137.

[17] On 1st January 1939, the capital's population was 1,295,000 residents, before the start of the September campaign – 1,307,000, and after the campaign – 1,265,000. Central Statistical Office [Główny Urząd Statystyczny], Ludność i powierzchnia Warszawy w latach 1921–2008, p. 7.

[18] According to the statistical data of the Jewish community in Cracow, in February 1940 there was a stay in the city 7,000 refugees and displaced persons, mainly from Biała, Bielsko, Chrzanów, Kalisz and Łódź, as well as from the Third Reich. See the Archive of Jewish Historical Institute [Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego, further: AŻIH], 210/430, correspondence of the Jewish community in Kraków with the Presidium of the AJDC between 26th December 1939 and 30th April 1940, report on the visit in refugee centres, p. 72, cf. E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie krakowskim w latach 1939–1945*, Rzeszów 2014, pp. 93, 95.

[19] A. Czocher, *W okupowanym Krakowie. Codzienność polskich mieszkańców miasta 1939–1945*, Gdańsk 2011, p. 7.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv, HA IX 22405, BSTU 0165, Flache, Einwohner, Bevolkerungsdichte, Zahl der Gemeinden und Dorfer Der kleineren Verwaltungsbezirke, 1st March 1943.

a total of over 300,000 cubic meters had significantly changed the population dynamics, complemented by brutal ruthless evictions and displacements of mainly Poles, as well as internal mobility and resettlements. A distinct issue involved the Polonized individuals of Austrian descent living in Cracow, who either supported the occupying forces or aligned themselves with their political stance.

Cracow was also distinguished (apart from the accelerated germanization) by the specificity of the local conspiracy activities. In the capital of the GG, the conditions for carrying out anti-German measures were more difficult than in other occupied cities. They were limited by the city's character (former capital), the number of German police formations and civilian employees. In addition, Cracow was much more saturated with German administration and terror apparatus due to the capital character of the city. A Cracow Home Army officer, Ryszard Nuszkiewicz (1983) recalled that "great number of people [in Cracow] in uniforms of various types and civilians with *hakenkreuz* in their lapels was striking. At first glance, it seemed that there were more Germans living in Cracow than Poles."[22] There were also many Ukrainians, Hungarians, Romanians, Latvians, Czechs and Slovaks. Also, according to the latest research, Cracow was where the flights and smugglings of Jews from the GG territory to Hungary, Slovakia and Palestine were organized and originated. The groups responsible for these transfers needed to use the services of well-organized criminal networks who were already operating in prewar times, including local informants, criminals and smugglers.[23] Therefore, the blackmailers and *shmaltzovniks* had far more opportunities to ply their trade.

Cracow, as a university city with a rich academic tradition, was home to many Jews from intellectual and clerical circles. The numbers in this group were significantly higher than in other cities of the pre-war Poland, so war crimes against Jews resonated more widely in Cracow. The victims of blackmailers were well-known and respected people, and information about it spread very quickly within the city often becoming a frequent topic of conversations, as well as gossip which in turn fueled fear among Cracow residents. As a result, Jews needed to properly camouflage themselves and improve the methods they used. *Szmaltzovniks* observed the vicinity of the ghetto, the Plaszow camp, the railway station, the Planty (city park around Old City), as well as the central districts in the city, closely watching passers-by. They asked around caretakers of Cracow's tenement houses, taxi drivers, and intimidated their neighbors. Jews, in fear of being denounced and blackmailed, changed their places of hiding leaving the city for rural areas and hoped that relocation would improve their situation.

The above circumstances were conveniently used by small time criminals to steal, break and enter, and by blackmailers for extortion and intimidation. New methods of extorting money from Poles and Jews were devised. Already in September 1939, some individuals pretended to be Gestapo functionaries (a Polish-Jewish formation,

[22] R. Nuszkiewicz, *Uparci*, Warszawa 1983, p. 151.

[23] D. Swałek-Niewińska, "From Kraków to Bochnia to Piwniczna: Jews Escaping from the Generalgouvernement via the Slovak Border" [in:] *Entanglements of War: Social Networks during the Holocaust*, eds. E.R. Adler, N. Aleksiun, Jerusalem 2022; E. Farbstein, *Hidden in the Heights – Orthodox Jewry in Hungary during the Holocaust*, Jerusalem 2014.

the so-called Rumiński group).[24] The pretext for the "inspection" was, for example, a report of alleged possession of radio receivers or goods from an illegal source. During the "search," not only were apartments robbed but tenants were intimidated and blackmailed. The intruders threatened to report them to the Gestapo, pretended to be German police officers or claimed they had connections and influences. A Jewish woman hiding on the so-called Aryan papers, Janina Kalita recalled "a man from the police came and ordered us to show our papers [ID]."[25] A Pole who in 1943 blackmailed Stefania Popower and her family claimed to be German, demanding a ransom for silence about their Jewish origin. The family were hiding in a prostitute's apartment on a square on Groble, near Wawel. Popower remembered the events of that time:

> [...] during the hostess's absence, a German individual (later turned out to be a Pole) blackmailer entered the apartment and demanded ransom. We had no money, so he agreed to come back in the evening. We ran away to our acquainted caretaker. She put us up for one night, then we were homeless again.[26]

Popower was forced to change her hiding place and continued doing so several times. Eventually, she managed to escape to Slovakia, where she got help from local and Jewish residents. Popower had not previously encountered any troubles with blackmailers; these were the people who saw the occupation as an opportunity for regular income. Some of the blackmailers acted in a spontaneous manner and were motivated by desire for profit or revenge; they were mainly pre-war acquaintances, neighbors, caretakers. Anna Landesman was blackmailed by her seamstress and caretaker in the tenement house where she was hiding, which resulted in her arrest by the German police. Landesman escaped death unlike Paulina Spira, who was blackmailed by her pre-war acquaintance, Jan Buchaj. He demanded some radio parts which she was selling in her shop at 15 Zwierzyniecka Street, and then he wanted 2,500 zlotys. He threatened to report her to Gestapo after she refused his demands. This happened at the beginning of the war, and the woman did not take the intimidation seriously and went to a lawyer for advice. Spira's blackmailer carried out his threat and reported her to German authorities. The Gestapo searched Spira's apartment and detained her son and sister. The son was accused of hiding a bayonet and later was sent to KL Auschwitz, where he died after just a few months. Spira committed suicide short-

[24] A group operating in Kazimierz district and Cracow Old Town consisted of criminals of Polish and Jewish descent and carried out numerous burglaries and thefts in Jewish apartments between 1939 and 1941. More on the subject in the article by the author, preparing for print.

[25] AŻIH, 301/444. The blackmailer demanded 10,000 Polish zlotys. She gave him all her valuables.

[26] AŻIH, 301/4033, Stefania Popower. The wartime fate of the woman was dominated by continuing blackmails, which was why she and her family were forced to change their place of residence many times. It happened again in Warsaw, Bernerów, Kielce and Cracow. While hiding in a village on the Polish-Slovak border (probably at the turn of 1943 and 1944), Popower and the family were reported to the local authorities. However, she managed to escape to Slovakia, where she received help from the local and Jewish community.

ly afterwards[27] and Jan Buchaj continued to cooperate with the German authorities.[28] Sara Melzer and Maurycy Wasserman on the other hand were blackmailed by the so-called Blue Policeman. One of their officers intimidated Sara Melzer three times, extorting money and valuables from her. He searched the apartment she had been occupying at the time and threatened to denounce her to the commandant, which he eventually did not do. Sara Melzer and her daughter survived the war. Similar acts were committed by another Blue police officer, who was extorting money, watches and clothing from Wasserman. In March 1943, he demanded 100,000 Polish zlotys from him and appropriated some valuables until the money was paid. Eventually, it was a 21-year-old Ukrainian woman who reported the Wassermans to the Gestapo, which resulted in their arrest and imprisonment in KL Plaszow.

Poles who were hiding Jews and were cooperating with the Polish Underground State (Polskie Państwo Podziemne, PPP) also fell victims of blackmailers. Threats of disclosing information on providing help to Jews received amongst others Franciszek Gutter, Władysław Klimek, Franciszek Kopeć, Wiktor Węgorz, Felicja Troszyńska and Alojzy Zieleń. After the end of the war, the Cracow court sentenced Weronika Cieślik and Zenobia Porąbik to imprisonment for blackmailing Troszyńska and Zieleń. Rudolf Dudajk was also sentenced to three years in prison for intimidating the civilian population of Cracow with threats of arrest and extortion of money. He also denounced people to the police; one search was thus described by a witness in the post-war trial of Dudajk:

> He came around 6:30... He identified himself and said that I was a suspect, that I was Jewish, and demanded that the documents be shown to him. I showed him my Kennkarta, I told him that my child was illegitimate. He asked if the child had been baptized, but I said that I was waiting with that till after the war and maybe the father of the child would come back, then I would baptize my child. He picked up on this and ordered to go with him to the police station [my daughter was kneeling at the picture of Our Lady and the policeman found it endearing]. He claimed that his commandant told him to get a thorough explanation, otherwise he was to take us to the station. Meanwhile, the hostess knocked on the door and he turned around. Finally, I decided to bribe him and gave him palki [piece of clothing], 1500 zł [zlotys] and a burgundy English cape, and he claimed that he would give to the commandant […]. He took note of my birthplace and tried to find out the truth about me by saying that a report had come on me, but he would henceforth be my friend... After a few days he came back in the evening, saying that he had already checked everything and that I had lied about everything. And that there was also a report on me that I was hiding a Jew in the basement and trading gold. I told him to do a search to see if it was true. He did a search and found only two pieces of linen.[29]

Perpetrators of most petty crimes were accountable to the justice system under occupation. Their actions, depending on the offense and evidence, were penalized

[27] AŻIH, 301/3230.

[28] The Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Cracow [Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Krakowie, further: AIPN], 010/3352, vol. 1–2, investigation into Jan Buchaj. Materials concerning the suspect's cooperation with the Gestapo in Kraków during the occupation.

[29] AIPN, 502/41.

according to the Makarewicz Criminal Code.[30] The cases were processed by a district or municipal court in Cracow. In the case of blackmailers, a court usually convicted or acquitted them, and if it was not possible to determine whereabouts of the perpetrators or victims, it suspended the proceedings until they were found, and ordered the police to monitor perpetrators' activity. In some cases, at victims' absence at hearings, the courts sentenced the perpetrators, and relied on the material collected during the preparatory proceedings. Only five case files of blackmail from the war time have been recovered. Out of those five cases, two people were found guilty and sentenced (three and six months in prison), another two were acquitted, one proceeding was suspended in a closed session due to failure to determine the whereabouts of the accused. During the legal proceedings, the courts changed the legal qualification of the offence, and eventually classified blackmail as fraud, extortion or criminal threats.

Bringing an action against offenders required law enforcement agencies to undertake many explanatory actions: arrest the accused, interview witnesses, do search, gather and assess evidence, obtain the opinion of court experts (*e.g.*, graphologists), initiate an investigation, proceedings and a criminal case. I will reproduce these procedures later in the article, describing four selected criminal cases from 1939 to 1943 after pressing charges of blackmail.

REACTIONS OF THE POLISH UNDERGROUND STATE

Cracovians largely recognized one another by sight, which forced criminals and Gestapo agents to act with greater caution. They could be tracked down faster by counterintelligence of the Home Army or recognized by potential victims. A counterintelligence group led by Stanisław Czapkiewicz alias "Sprężyna" operated in Cracow; they specifically dealt with uncovering Gestapo agents and *shmaltzovniks* before killing them.

The Polish Underground State officially reacted to the blackmailers' activity in January 1943, when an article titled "Blackmailers" was published in the underground press. In the following months, blackmails "with anti-Semitic motivation" were reported, condemning such attitudes and declaring them disgraceful.[31] On 28th March 1943, the *Małopolski Biuletyn Informacyjny* [Małopolska Information Bulletin], a magazine of the local conspiracy published a warning:

> Polish society, despite being a victim of terrible terror, looks with horror and deep compassion at the remaining Jewish population in Poland being murdered by Germans. Polish society pro-

[30] Polish Criminal Code of 1932, also known as Kodeks Makarewicza (the Makarewicz Code), was introduced by the President of the Republic of Poland on 11th July 1932 and remained in force unamended throughout World War II. It was repealed on 19th April 1969 by the lower house of the Parliament of the People's Republic of Poland.

[31] *Szał donosów i szantaży*, ZWFC, cf., Agnieszka Haska, *Hańba! Opowieści o polskiej zdradzie*, Warszawa 2018, typescript, p. 122.

> tested against these crimes, which became known to the entire free world, and Poles provided so much help to the Jews who escaped from ghettos or torture camps that the occupant published an order with death threats to those Poles who help Jews in hiding. Nevertheless, there were individuals devoid of honor and conscience, recruited from the criminal world, whose vicious source of income is blackmailing of Poles hiding Jews and Jews themselves. The KWC [Kierownictwo Walki Cywilnej – Directorate of Civil Resistance] warns that such cases of blackmail are recorded and will be prosecuted with all severity straight away if possible, and certainly in the future.[32]

The first sentence on the blackmailer was carried out in Cracow probably in the autumn of 1943.[33] In the course of this year, the *Małopolski Biuletyn Informacyjny* reported that Jan Grabiec was sentenced to death by the Civil Special Court of Cracow District (Cywilny Sąd Specjalny Okręgu Krakowskiego) for "blackmailing the village residents with threats of reporting them to Gestapo for alleged hiding of Jews."[34] Grabiec was one of the 34 people convicted by Civil Special Court out of 67 found guilty of collaboration with the occupant. Fifteen people came from Cracow, including seven of them who were executed. In fact, the number of blackmails might have been higher. The specific character of this crime was that people, for fear of being denounced for blackmail, did not report it. Also, in some cases the authorities of the Polish Underground State failed to gather sufficient evidence of the blackmailers' guilt or investigations indicated that the blackmail was a result of family conflicts, disagreements or fabrications. An example of the above can be found in this report from the Cracow conspiration group from early 1944; it is difficult to assess how reliable the description of events is, but notably, the organizers of the blackmail were daughters of the victim:

> In II-III/44 there was a blackmail against doctor Karelus – an ophthalmologist, and his wife. As it turned out, this was his daughters' doing. Karelus's girls through their fiancées, namely: Leńcznar – son of professor in middle school, and Wójcik – apparently a taxi-dancer in some bar from Warsaw – blackmailed a number of people of non-Aryan origins.[35]

Another problem was the activity of informers and agents of the Cracow Gestapo, engaged in blackmail or extortion. They made reports that led to searches and arrests, or they captured and brought Jewish individuals to a police station. Some people, whom they randomly stopped on the street, likely managed to buy their freedom by giving the informant enough money or valuables. Around occupied Cracow, there were organized groups specializing in such dealings. However, it is not certain how many there were. The recovered records of the Cracow conspiracy group from 1943 have revealed a criminal group consisting of informants to Gestapo, blackmailing people "who, fearing arrest, pay ransoms of up to 100,000 Polish zlotys. This gang included Roman Czarski, a house painter, born on 8th June 1917 in Korzeniów, Dębica

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[32] *Małopolski Biuletyn Informacyjny* 1943, no. 13 (28th March), p. 2.

[33] In Warsaw the first conviction for blackmail was rendered by the Civil Special Court on 7th July 1943. See D. Libionka, "Polska podziemna wobec szantażystów," p. 138.

[34] *Małopolski Biuletyn Informacyjny* 1943, no. 33 (5th September).

[35] AIPN Main Commission [Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, Główna Komisja, further: AIPN GK], 174/670, Raport krakowskiego AK, f. 10/26.

district, residing in Cracow, at 39 Prądnik Czerwony."[36] The group also included Tadeusz Rzymczak, Marian Widel and Maria Czuraj, a pre-war teacher and a translator for Gestapo during the occupation. She held meetings with German services in her apartment at 32 Czarnowiejska Street.[37] The whole group probably continued informing Gestapo and, at the same time blackmailed their victims to make money. In a post-war questioning Czuraj described the way they acted to a functionary of the Provincial Office of Public Security: "The case was that Czarski denounced people to the GO [Gestapo], caused their arrest, and then extorted money from victims' families for their release."[38] During their detention by the criminal police they referred to the cooperation with Gestapo, which got them a release and closure of investigation. Such was the case with the arrest of Rzymczak in November 1943 and the rest of group at the turn of 1943 and 1944.[39] Czarski was executed shortly thereafter – according to the local rumors, he was shot by his own brother. Rzymczak returned to his apartment at Siemiradzki Street (near to Kripo's offices). It was him who in 1943 pointed out his accomplices: Czuraj and Czarski to the Criminal Police). Czuraj became involved with a Kripo's functionary, Włodzimierz Krechel, who was often seen in the Gestapo building at Pomorska Street.

During the war, the Polish Underground State mainly prosecuted for cooperation with German authorities, seldom for informing and other forms of collaboration. The recovered data are fragmented, because the dark figure of the crimes is unknown,[40] as is accurate information about the criminals, their past or numbers of crimes they committed. To determine this, following checks from prewar times would be necessary to include: those with a criminal record, convicts, reoffenders, how many of them had criminal background (*e.g.* juveniles could not be punished before as they would only come of age in the course of the war). The above categories cannot be used interchangeably, otherwise the conclusions would be wrong. Unfortunately, the

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[36] Wyciąg z materiałów AK: AIPN, 010/6886, f. 29.

[37] AIPN GK, 174/670, Raport krakowskiego AK, f. 10/26: "The activities of the G-O group of informants have been revealed; the group is concurrently involved on a larger scale in blackmailing people who in fear of arrest pay ransoms of up to 100,000 Polish zlotys.

This gang includes:

1) Czarski Roman, foreman painter, born 6th August 1917 in Korzeniów district Dębica, son of Filip and Stefania née Głowa, residing in Cracow, Prądnik Czerwony No. 39;

2) Rzymczak Tadeusz Feliks, mason trainee, born 20th June 1904 in Cracow, son of Stanisław, residing at Zalewskiego 16 m. 5;

3) Widel Marian, born 14th July 1897, son of Konstantyn and Helena née Karelus, residing at Mogilska 31 m. 3;

4) Czuraj Maria born 17th August 1912, Czarski's fiancée and friend of lieutenant Schulz from G.O., residing in Kraków at Czarnowiejska 91b m. 9."

[38] AIPN, 010/ 6886. Notatka służbowa dot. rozmowy Krechel z Marią Czuraj, 28th July 1955, f. 119.

[39] AIPN, 010/6886, Maria Czuraj. Raport „Sprężyny", 7th December 1943. The evidence gathered on her by the SB, including that based on reports of Cracow conspiracy, pointed to her cooperation with Rzymczak and Czarski during the occupation. In 1955, Czuraj denied she had cooperated with the Gestapo and these persons.

[40] Dark number of crimes – the number of offences actually committed but not covered by criminal statistics, resulting of non-disclosure by law enforcement authorities.

incomplete archival data did not allow to create a blackmailer "profile" in occupied Cracow. Especially since many of them were never detained by the police or worked out by conspiracy groups. In postwar accounts the data of blackmailers rarely comes up, more often we find mentions of extortion and intimidation.

BLACKMAILERS AND *SHMALTZOVNIKS* IN OCCUPIED CRACOW

Most blackmailers came from a criminal background and were joined by demoralized individuals who spotted the opportunity to capitalize on the difficult situation the Jewish population had to face.[41] This was probably what motivated Helena Loho and Władysław Urbańczyk to intimidate the Engländers (detailed descriptions of events further in the text). Tadeusz Pawlus and Zdzisław Pohorecki too were in this category of criminals; their *modus operandi* indicated that they might have been part of the pre-war demi-monde. Blackmailers should therefore be divided into professional and casual, acting alone (Jawułowa), in an organized manner, or cooperating with intermediaries (Pohorecki, Pawlus). They were "inspired" by actions of the occupant or took their own initiative to pursue their goals – for anti-Semitic reasons or simply a desire to make money. For some, blackmail was a permanent source of income, for others – a way to settle old scores or squaring up with some prewar acquaintances. They often knew their victims from before the war (Jan Buchaj, Helena Noworyta, Franciszka Kałuża, Wiktor Węgorz) or got back in touch with them during its course. Usually, none of it was a coincidence – the victims usually knew the blackmailers (even if only casually), which will be discussed in detail below.[42]

Blackmailers always acted in a calculated manner using a pattern, and the war realities allowed for introduction of new methods. I divided the blackmailers' motivations into the following categories which relate to the changing anti-Jewish regulations at the time and the living situation of Jews in the city):

1) settling of old scores, conflicts, sense of injustice;
2) violation of occupant's regulations concerning Jews, related to forced eviction or residing outside the permitted area;
3) violation of the economic regulations of the occupant authorities;
4) anti-German activity;
5) favoring the communists;
6) hiding or helping Jews.

[41] According to Jan Grabowski's research, these proportions were reversed in occupied Warsaw. Based on records of the Special German Court the author estimated that out of 200 people accused of blackmailing Jews before the Special Court in Warsaw between 1940 and 1943 only eleven were criminals, see J. Grabowski, "Szantażowanie Żydów," p. 588.

[42] AŻIH, 301/622, 301/780, 301/2082, 301/2349, 301/3230, 301/3721, 301/4033, 301/2393, 301/3277, witness accounts of Sarah Melzer, Anna Landesman, Szarlotta Klarfeld, Franciszka Gutter, Paulina Spira, Anna Insler, Stefania Popower, Michał Zelmer.

In this article I will address more specifically some of the above categories.

The first category comprises the story of Sarah and Bernard Engländer,[43] who were blackmailed in Cracow at the beginning of German occupation. In October 1939 Maria Jawułowa, the caretaker in the house owned by the Engländers at 19 Lubicz Street, paid a visit in their apartment at 12 Krzywa Street, "accompanied by a man in plain clothes who introduced himself […] as an official in the German police."[44] She demanded from them 834 Polish zlotys compensation for rent, threatening to denounce them to Gestapo and "imprisonment and expulsion" from the apartment if her demand was not met. The Engländers gave her the money, later explaining before the Municipal Court in Cracow that they had done so fearing the threat may materialize. Jawułowa felt wronged that earlier the court had taken the Engländers' side in a dispute over the amount of rent for the apartment she occupied in their tenement house. She believed that the rent was inflated, and she was entitled to a refund and compensation. In October 1939, she decided to use the anti-Jewish policy of the occupant for personal vendetta. Jawułowa not only achieved her goal, but also made it clear to others that such behavior goes unpunished (the Engländers did not report the blackmail to the police). Information about this quickly spread among other tenants (specifically Jawułowa's neighbors), leading to further intimidations. A month later, new swindlers came twice (on 17th November and 21st November 1939) to the Engländers' apartment using the same method and demanded to pay of 3,000 Polish zlotys for the alleged ramping up of rent; they threatened the family with an arrest by the Gestapo, if the Engländers had failed to meet the demands. They referred to their acquaintance with a German, Gustav Beckamann, allegedly with contacts in the Gestapo. The pattern repeated, but this time the Engländers sought the advice of the Cracow lawyer Dr. Aleksander Bartikow, and then filed a report about extortion to the Municipal Court. On 30th November 1939, the prosecutor's office of the district court in Cracow handed the case over to the Polish Police, recommending to question witnesses – the Engländers and Józefa Dworska (tenants from the tenement house at 19 Lubicz Street), and Helena Franciszka Loho and Władysław Urbańczyk[45]

[43] Dr. Bernard Englander, born on 25th April 1873, was a well-known gynecologist from Cracow ("specjalista chorób kobiecych i akuszer, b. l. sekundariusz szpitala krajowego powszechnego św. Łazarza"); *Naprzód* 1906, no. 96 (8th April). Author of numerous scientific articles published in *Przegląd Lekarski* and *Polska Gazeta Lekarska*. He died probably in 1942. See *Bibliografia Polska 1901–1939*, vol. 7, eds. G. Federowicz, I. Maziarz, E. Sterzycka, Warszawa 2006, pp. 61–62.

[44] National Archives in Kraków [Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie, further: ANK], Sąd Grodzki w Krakowie, Ds. 1184/38, Helena Loho and Władysław Urbańczyk, f. 2.

[45] Władysław Urbańczyk, a chemist by profession, was a prewar criminal. In 1937, the Municipal Court in Bielsko (Sąd Grodzki w Bielsku) ordered him to pay fine of 30 Polish zlotys under Art. 265 of the Criminal Code: "Kto bez zamiaru uiszczenia należności wyłudza pożywienie lub napój w restauracji, mieszkanie w hotelu, mieszkanie lub pożywienie w pensjonacie, przejazd koleją lub innym środkiem komunikacji, wstęp na przedstawienie, działanie automatu lub inne podobne świadczenie, o którem wie, że jest płatne, podlega karze aresztu do roku lub grzywny" [Who, without the intention of paying the amount due, extorts food or drink in a restaurant, an apartment in a hotel, an apartment or food in a guesthouse, a ride on a train or other means of transport, admission to a performance, operation of a vending machine or other similar benefit that he knows is payable, is liable to imprisonment of up to one year or a fine].

"as suspects under Articles 250 and 251 of the Criminal Code."[46] The summoned persons, apart from Dworska, gave extensive testimonies at the 4th precinct of Polish Police. The main hearing on 10th January 1940 – Judge Stanisław Solecki cleared the defendants of the charges, but the files lacked justification of the ruling. The Engländers appealed the judge's decision. The case went to the Court of Appeal in Cracow, but because Gustav Beckamann, a German citizen, was involved[47] the files were transferred to a German special court (Sondergericht) for further proceedings. They remain unknown, as the records have not been preserved.

It seems like the similar motivations led Władysława Urbaś to use her family connections (her daughter was married to a German aviator and signed a *volkslist*) to settle pre-war disagreements. She threatened her neighbors that she would report them to the Gestapo and they would be deported deep into the Third Reich. In 1944, Urbaś reported on Rozalia Radwanowa and Zofia Skoczeń, accusing them of stealing cream and butter from a German dairy co-op.[48] After the war, the women accused Urbaś of causing their arrest but the Special Criminal Court in Cracow acquitted her, justifying it as follows:

> Even if we were to consider the report on stolen butter and that the report of theft was made by the defendant, the actions of the defendant would still not qualify as a crime covered by this decree due to the fact that, according to the testimony of the witness Zofia Skoczeń, both Zofia Skoczeń and Radwanowa while working in the dairy co-op actually stole butter and cream, which in this case would be considered a petty crime[49].

The third category (and the second in the following part) includes the action taken in November 1940 by the then 27-year-old Tadeusz Pawlus demanding 10,000 Polish zlotys from Wolf Offmann, an employee of the Firma M. Händler Ladergrosshandlung with an office in Cracow, at 48 Dietla Street.[50] On 5th November 1940, Offmann received a registered letter addressed to his name, containing the following anonymous content:

> For silence on the recent burglary to the L.G.H. Hendler[51] in which you are indirectly involved, for the stocks you keep at home and with strangers, and for profiteering, we demand that you pay 10,000 Polish zlotys. The drop is to take place on 5*th* November this year at 8 pm at the Post Office at Plac Bernardyński where our man will be waiting. Failure to comply with this demand will entail reports to Mr. K. Günther and the Gestapo. Signed: Partners.[52]

After reading the letter, Offmann handed it to the Commissioner, Günther Krock. On the same day, Krock notified the Polish Criminal Police of that fact and told

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[46] ANK, Sąd Grodzki w Krakowie, SGKKr 93, Helena Loho and Władysław Urbańczyk, s.p.

[47] Ibid., ff. 2–6.

[48] AIPN, 502/569, Władysława Urbaś. She threatened one tenant to be arrested by the Gestapo, imprisoned in Montelupich prison and shot. On 26th July 1946, she was acquitted by the District Court in Cracow.

[49] AIPN, 502/569, f. 136.

[50] ANK, Tadeusz Pawlus, SGKKr 97.

[51] This burglary took place in August or September 1940.

[52] The letter was written in German, translated by a Kripo employee, ANK, Tadeusz Pawlus, SGKKr 97, s.p.

Offmann to follow the blackmailers' demands. At 8 pm Offmann met with the blackmailer's envoy at the designated address. The police checked his ID and detained a 30-year-old resident of Skała near Cracow, a pharmacist lab technician named Zygmunt Chowaniak. He revealed information about the author of the anonymous letter, who was detained shortly after. Pawlus raised suspicions the moment, after catching a glimpse of the police, he started to walk away from the observed Plac Bernardyński. Both men were brought to the precinct, were interrogated and then placed under arrest. When questioned by Sergeant Franciszek Kózka, Pawlus admitted to writing the letter, explaining that he did it for financial gain. He considered Offmann to be a wealthy person, capable of paying the ransom and easily intimidated. Pawlus's motivations might have been influenced too by Hans Franck's regulation regarding the obligation to report Jewish assets in the GG as of 21st January 1940. The hearing took place in the Municipal Court in Cracow on 17th December 1940, and was represented by Judge Dobesz who found the accused guilty of the act and sentenced him to three months of arrest including pre-trial detention. Pawlus confessed to the crime and expressed remorse in court. Zygmunt Chowaniak was acquitted as during the court proceedings there was no evidence that he acted in liaison with Pawlus.[53]

Dealings of Zdzisław Pohorecki[54] on the other hand fall into the second and fourth category. His *modus operandi* indicates an organized and planned activity. He threatened his victims that he would inform the Gestapo about their practice of anti-state propaganda and non-compliance with anti-Jewish regulations. On 5th December 1940, he sent two anonymous letters, demanding 400 and 500 zlotys and threatening that, if failed to comply with the demands, he would report them to the appropriate authorities which would bring on death on them and their families.

The first letter was sent to Israel Weinberg and Chaskel Zeibel, Jewish bookbinders. The letter was brought to their shop at 23 Bożego Ciała Street (Kazimierz district) by a boy messenger, who received for that 50 *grosze* from Pohorecki and did not give any details. In the letter Pohorecki instructed the bookbinders to pay 400 Polish zlotys under the threat of being arrested by the Gestapo and death ("if you and your families want to live") if they did not cooperate or reported the blackmail to the authorities. They were instructed to drop the money to a woman with a headscarf, who would be waiting for them at 7 pm. "on Starowiślna Street opposite no. 72." The blackmailer informed Weinberg and Zeibel that he had known about their anti-German activity and illegal residence in Cracow. Pohorecki probably referred to the decree of Hans Frank of 1st January 1940, prohibiting Jews in the GG from moving of their place of residence or temporary stay without a permit of appropriate German authorities (Weinberg and Zeibel officially resided in Wieliczka but lived in Cracow). All that was probably meant to further intimidate the men and would more likely bring on Gestapo interventions. As in the Offmann case, Weinberg and Zeibel reported the blackmail, later testifying that they had not taken the threats seriously and were not afraid of consequences. These words, however, raise some doubts – after all,

[53] Ibid., s.p.

[54] ANK, Sąd Grodzki w Krakowie, Zdzisław Pohorecki, SGKKr 93.

the men did bring the anonymous letter to the police,[55] who then organized an ambush on Starowiślna Street at the indicated time. The perpetrator, however, did not turn up to collect the money. The officers from the 4th precinct of Polish Kripo, Jan Pawełek and Stanisław Zaburda, identified Zdzisław Marian Pohorecki, a hairdresser residing at 6/14 Mieszczańska Street in Cracow who was "hanging around the place of the drop," but after questioning was released. Pohorecki appeared at the police station a few days later, on 10th December 1940, with a letter written by a certain Janiszewski, threatening him with death for non-payment of the loan. The handwriting was the same as in the anonymous letter to Zeibel and Weinberg. The police, suspecting that the author of the letter may be Pohorecki, on 12th December 1940, searched the apartment of Eugeniusz Pohorecki, the suspect's father. Eight notebooks, two copybooks, one bottle of ink and some sheets of paper were secured as evidence. Based on that, graphologist examination was carried out, confirming that Zdzisław Pohorecki was behind the anonymous letters.

During further investigation the police also established that Pohorecki was the author of yet another anonymous letter brought in by Bernard Traub on 5th December 1940, who was blackmailed on the day of the ambush on Starowiślna Street. The blackmailer demanded 500 zlotys from Traub, threatening to reveal to the German authorities that Traub listened to the radio (which was illegal at the time), his Jewish origins and that he was collecting food stamps that only Catholics were eligible for (Traub converted to Catholicism in 1940). Pohorecki admitted to writing this letter, explaining it as follows: "I wrote these letters as I earn very little as a hairdressing assistant and wanted to make some money. I would like to mention that no person coerced me into doing this, and I acted alone." The submitted explanations were denied during court proceedings, which took place on 8th September 1940. After considering all circumstances and analyzing the minutes of witness testimonies on 22nd September 1941, Judge Światosław Konieczny sentenced Pohorecki to six months in prison. The convicted appealed the court's ruling. On appeal, he denied that he had committed the alleged crime, explaining that he had confessed only for fear of being arrested. Pohorecki's lawyer undermined the witnesses' testimonies and the results of forensic expertise claiming that the graphologist's examination "cannot be the basis for conviction, as graphology is not yet recognized as a field of science, and expert graphologists are frequently wrong."[56] The date of the appeal hearing was set for 24th March 1942, prior to which Prof. Henryk Grudziński had conducted additional graphology expertise to reassess the evidence which confirmed that the accused was the author of all three letters. In a public hearing before the district court in Cracow Judge R. Rosnowski however, having heard the case, overruled the contested judgment and sentenced Pohorecki to one month detention.

In the case of Feliks Kowalski and Aleksander Jan Radwan, suspected of blackmailing Franciszek Kucharski (who allegedly was hiding a Jewish individual in his

[55] A. Jarkowska, "Donosicielstwo w Krakowie w latach 1939–1945. Problematyka i założenia projektu" [in:] *Żydzi krakowscy. Nowe kierunki badań*, ed. A. Maślak-Maciejewska, Kraków 2021, pp. 259–277.

[56] ANK, Sąd Grodzki w Krakowie, Zdzisław Pohorecki, f. 67.

home), the proceedings in the early 1943 took a very different course. Kowalski and Radwan acted according to their plan: on 23rd January 1943, pretending to be Gestapo officers, they did a sweep of Kucharski's apartment in search of a Jewish woman hiding there. Radwan played a policeman speaking fluent German, and Kowalski was his translator. The offenders made Kucharski give them three hundred zlotys towards the total of 2,000, threatening to officially denounce them for hiding Jews illegally, had they not complied with demands. They said they would collect the remaining amount two days later. Kowalski, however, came to the victim earlier (on 24th January) demanding immediate payment. Kucharski, under the pretext of collecting the remaining amount, went with the blackmailer to his sister's apartment at 22 Bożego Ciała Street, where they together ambushed Kowalski. The Polish Police (whom they had called about the fraudster coming) detained him and brought him to the Kripo headquarters in Cracow. When questioned the next day, Radwan admitted to the charges of blackmail, showed remorse, and gave the extorted money back to the victim. He explained his actions by his recklessness and some rumors about Kucharski hiding Jews which he had heard at the market. He admitted to extorting money and pretending to be a German but denied introducing himself as a police officer. Both blackmailers were rather young – Kowalski was 18 years old[57] and lived with his parents, and Radwan was a 20-year-old fireman and a son of a Polish Police officer in Cracow (5th precinct of PP).[58] Finally, on 31st January 1943, the prosecutor's office changed the legal classification of the act from blackmail to fraud (Art. 264 of the Criminal Code).[59] The hearing was in the District Court in Cracow on 25th June 1943. The defendants did not appear and had not submitted a valid excuse; only Radwan's attorney, Wallisch, was present and claimed he had no information on whereabouts of his client. The court ordered the Kripo to search for perpetrators. Kowalski, according to his mother, was in the Third Reich ("was sent there by a German company"). In September, Radwan submitted a medical cert as being unfit to appear in court, due to "the patient's condition that requires bed rest, hot compresses and injections for two to three months."[60] The District Court kept postponing further hearings for as long as the accused were not found. Radwan continued to be represented by his defender, Dr. Wallisch. One of the last police findings comes from March 1944. Alexander Radwan's father, Józef, testified during the inquiry that his son,

[57] He graduated from the School of Economics at 5 Brzozowa Street in Cracow.

[58] ANK, Sąd Grodzki w Krakowie, Zdzisław Pohorecki, f. 6.

[59] "§ 1. Kto w celu osiągnięcia dla siebie lub kogo innego korzyści majątkowej doprowadza inną osobę, za pomocą wprowadzenia jej w błąd lub wyzyskania błędu, do niekorzystnego rozporządzenia własnem lub cudzem mieniem, podlega karze więzienia do lat 5. § 2. W przypadkach mniejszej wagi sąd może zastosować nadzwyczajne złagodzenie kary. § 3. Jeżeli przestępstwo popełniono na szkodę osoby najbliższej, ściganie następuje na wniosek pokrzywdzonego" [Who, in order to obtain financial benefit for himself or someone else, brings another person by misleading him or exploiting an error, into an unfavorable disposition of own or someone else's property, is liable to imprisonment of up to five years. In cases of minor importance, the court may apply extraordinary leniency. If the crime was committed to the detriment of a family member, prosecution takes place when requested by the victim].

[60] ANK, Sąd Grodzki w Krakowie, Zdzisław Pohorecki, f. 35.

> [...] on 18th September 1943, left for Zakopane from where he then went to Radom where he was to work in a weapons factory as a nightguard. At the end of November 1943, he came to Cracow, took his clothes and said that he was joining German army as a volunteer in the SS formation. From that point on, he did not know where his son was because he did not write to him.[61]

A corporal of the Polish police Mieczysław Sierek confirmed that in 1943 the suspect changed place of residence from Cracow to Zakopane.[62] Having no information on Radwan's whereabouts, the District Court in Cracow ordered his surveillance. In 1949, Radwan was sentenced by the district court in Słupsk to two years in prison and loss of civil rights for committing a crime under Art. 286 of the Criminal Code.

The last, sixth category includes the activity of *shmaltzovniks*. Numerous blackmails forced Anne Isner,[63] Janina Kalita[64] and Franciszka Gutter and her parents to leave their temporary hiding place and seek help of other people. Isner eventually fled to Hungary, and the Gutters to a village near Cracow. In both cases, they all received a lot of support from Polish families who negotiated on their behalf with blackmailers and arranged new shelter for them. Anna Isner, who had been blackmailed numerous times, was brought to the Slovak border by Mrs. Romanowiczowa, who had done so of her own accord. The Gutters received help from Mrs. Jaśkowa in Cracow and Mrs. Krzywicka in the villa near Kalwaria, which alternately gave them shelter between 1942 and 1944 to protect them from repeating blackmails in the form of letters and face to face threats.[65] All the three women, despite enduring constant intimidation from *shmaltzovniks*, survived the war.

The fate of Stefan Goldberg, who lived in hiding as a child, panned out differently. Since 1943 he was hiding with the Węgrzyn family in a tenement house at 41 Emmaus Street,[66] and then between June and July 1944 with the Stelmach family in Gnojnik village near Cracow. The Węgrzyns paid Franciszka Kałuża, who brought the boy over to Gnojnik. The Stelmachs, however, fearing denunciation for hiding a Jewish child, brought him back to Cracow. The boy, abandoned by Kałużowa in Cracow's Błonia, returned to Węgrzyn family, where the Gestapo appeared and detained him. His further fate remains unknown. The German police also arrested Wiktor Węgrzyn, who was out at the time of the arrest. They stopped him on Kalwaryjska Street and put him in a Montelupich prison, where he was kept for six weeks. After the end of the war, Węgrzyn and his family accused Franciszka Kałuża of causing Węgrzyn's arrest by filing a report with the Gestapo; this allegation was confirmed by Józef Gaudyn and Kamil Bicz. According to the eyewitness accounts, Kałuża charged money for hiding young Goldberg during the occupation, and still demanded

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61 ANK, Sąd Regionalny, Feliks Kowalski, 29/1988/2237, f. 43.

62 Ibid.

63 AŻIH, 301/3721.

64 Ibid., 301/444.

65 Ibid., 301/2349, as a wife of a Pole, she was baptized. At the beginning of the war, she fled from L'viv to Cracow and then to Warsaw, where she often fell victim to blackmailers.

66 In 1943, Węgrzyn was a commissar at the Optima Factory located in the ghetto and kept in contact with the Jews working there, including Goldberg's mother.

more money for his maintenance, she also wanted some Jewish clothes from the liquidated Cracow ghetto and said she would report the Węgrzyns to the Gestapo. On 16th April 1946, the Prosecutor's Office of the Special Court in Cracow accused Kałuża of threatening Wiktor Węgrzyn and causing his arrest by Gestapo.[67] The prosecutor's office did not collect sufficient evidence of guilt and by the court's ruling Franciszka Kałuża was acquitted. This decision was based on testimonies of Zofia Borowska and Józef Gaudyn that almost all neighbors on Emaus Street knew about Kałuża hiding the Goldberg boy, and "even children playing with this boy Stefan knew, even for that reason alone that he sang a Jewish song about the Montelupich prison on the street while playing with the children, this I heard myself."[68]

In another case, the District Court in Cracow acquitted Agnieszka Rückert, accused of threatening and handing over Regina Hausner to the Gestapo. There was no sufficient evidence, and according to witnesses everyone "knew that Hausnerowa was Jewish." In the court's justification, one could read that "from the testimony of witnesses it appears that Hausner herself was very careless, was not even trying to hide, voluntarily showing her to these Germans in the restaurant, which must have drawn the attention to her and her Semitic features."[69]

CONCLUSIONS

There was a fine line between blackmail and extortion (activity of *shmaltzovniks)*. The dynamics of the war and the Holocaust made the latter a more lucrative occupation and by and large, did not entail legal consequences for the perpetrators. An exception to this rule may have been cases of wrong accusations of hiding Jews. In such situations, the slanderers turned to law enforcement agencies for help, knowing that there was no threat of any consequences due to false allegations, as in the case of Kowalski and Radwan.

As mentioned before, the blackmailers were often notorious offenders with criminal background from before the war, or simply random people guided by low motives, such as revenge, envy, anti-Semitism, or the desire to line their own pockets. The subjects of extortion were sums of money ranging from 400 Polish zlotys to 100,000 Polish zlotys. The author did not see regularity in the subsequent years of occupation; the largest amounts were recorded in 1942, around the time of Operation Reinhardt in the GG. However, blackmailers did not always demand money, they only wanted Jews to follow their orders and leave a hiding place, fearing for their own lives; the consequence for persons hiding Jews was death penalty, in force since 1941.

[67] AIPN, 502/584, p. 59.

[68] Ibid., p. 40: "a nawet dzieci bawiące się z owym Stefanem, choćby i z tego powodu, iż śpiewał on na ulicy, bawiąc się z dziećmi, żydowską piosenkę o więzieniu na Montelupich, co ja sama słyszałam."

[69] AIPN, 502/167.

Activities of *shmaltzovniks*, repressed and persecuted by the Polish Underground State, significantly influenced the attitudes of Cracovians towards their Jewish neighbors. Reactions of the city residents facing the reality of the Holocaust and the occupants' repressive policies hugely varied. Some remained indifferent, others refused to help the Jews. However, we should not forget those people who, that despite the threat of being arrested by the Gestapo, or worse, the death penalty, decided to heroically support the Jewish people Although everyone was vigilant of one another, paid attention to any changes in behavior, daily routines, and new people appearing in the vicinity. Information about the activities of *shmaltzovniks*, as I have already mentioned, spread fast within the city, as well as rumors about Jews in hiding, or Poles having been detained by the Gestapo. Some residents of Cracow, fearing reprisals from the occupant, intimidated their neighbors, forced them to get rid of the hidden Jews. Not everyone, however, involuntarily gave in to the terror of German authorities, for example, the Latawiec family, who sheltered a Jewish girl until the end of the war, pretending she was their relative. Karolina Sapetowa also brought essential items to Jewish children in the Cracow ghetto and then hid them in various places despite pressure of the community.[70]

Attitudes of Poles during the war were very polarized which is exemplified by the story of Jakub Walcer, a man with a strong survival instinct, who could perfectly read the situations he found himself in. From the spring of 1939, he together with his wife and son often changed places of residence and then hiding places. First, they stayed in Cracow (in several locations), then in Rudawa near Krzeszowice, Smardzowice, again in Cracow and in a village near Cracow. During their stay in Smardzowice, someone from the local community reported to the Blue Police about their illegal place of residence. As a result of this report, Germans murdered Walcer's wife and son in Skała near Cracow but Walcer himself managed to flee back to Cracow. There he received help from a Polish caretaker and his family from the building at 15b Batorego Street, where he hid for the next 12 months (until December 1943) in the attic. He risked a lot by staying there because most of his neighbors were Germans. Warned by his benefactor about Germans planning to develop the attic for residential purposes, he left the place. However, the caretaker did not leave Walcer without help and together with his family organized a shelter in a village near Cracow for three months at Edward Szostak's (a Home Army soldier) home. Szostak however sold off Walcer's possessions and provided various places to hide. However, Walcer broke off contact with this family for a while, because as, he recalled in his post-war account:

> His sisters, two young ladies, wanted to finish me off, because they had hoped that they could get their hands on my stuff left at Szostak's... I left my host and went to his mother-in-law. She was a sly woman, and she would have been glad if I had died not from her hands.

His decision to leave his place of residence at the time was ultimately caused by Germans searching the vicinity. In July 1944, Walcer returned to Szostak, who hid him in the attic, where he lived to see the end of the war.[71]

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[70] AŻIH, 301/579.

[71] Ibid., 301/1716.

Shmaltzovniks in Cracow used a particular form of blackmail, fraud or extortion which was not uncommon but it is difficult to accurately illustrate it as perpetrators remained largely anonymous, or victims feared of their personal details being revealed. They were afraid of possible revenge or being reported to Gestapo for hiding Jews. Even if they somehow managed to avoid arrest, the circumstances forced them to relocate immediately. All these factors made it extremely difficult for the Polish Underground State to find evidence against the vicious operations of *shmaltzovniks*. The other reason for this was the Gestapo's protective umbrella that covered some blackmailers, some of whom worked full-time in various police formations side by side with the occupant. However, those *shmaltzovniks* who managed to avoid justice during the occupation had their time of reckoning after the war. The persecutions were continued by communist courts, and the perpetrators were sentenced to death or imprisonment from a couple to several years. The activities of blackmailers and *shmaltzovniks* were also condemned by local communities, and to this day the word *szmalcownik* carries a pejorative meaning.

To sum up, it is not quite possible to determine the full scale of activity of *shmaltzovniks* and the number of their victims, as well as agents and informers. One can only intuitively assume that one *shmaltzovnik* could cause the arrest of several or more people. This assumption is based on analysis of activities of only a few hundred Gestapo Blackmailer/Smaltzovnik. In fact, there may have been more victims than the one that the *shmaltzovnik* intimidated or blackmailed as one consequential Gestapo search might have discovered unexpectedly several people. Then, we still have anonymous, mostly Jewish victims, who were intimidated into paying the extorted fees and they never came to the attention of the Gestapo.

By gradual reconstruction of lists of Gestapo agents and *shmaltzovniks*, I have put together new information on the Gestapo victims that have often been anonymous to this day. By restoring their names and surnames, I give them back their dignity, and their families get a chance to learn about their lives during the war, also about how they died.

One example of such family story is the Spira family, which I have reconstructed having only the victims' names, and the original denunciation record from 1940 and the informer's name. The informer in question was a pre-war employee with the Spira family and later became an agent. He denounced the family to Gestapo in 1940 for possession of an illegal radio receiver and a bayonet. The 15-year-old son Julian and father were murdered in KL Auschwitz, and the mother committed suicide when she heard of her son's death. Only her 13-year-old daughter Fryda survived the war. The agent continued denouncing other people till the end of occupation and he did so regardless of their nationality or religion – this was how he adapted to the reality of war. After the war, in the People's Republic of Poland he became a communist activist and probably a collaborator of the Security Bureau. Significantly, this individual for many years was active member of an organization that associated former underground soldiers. He was decorated and awarded with communist orders.

Only meticulous research of historical facts will provide more data on the perpetrators and their fates. Especially considering that some of them remained unpun-

ished after the war, further being in the service of the new authorities. Some of them associated with agents of the Security Bureau continuing their criminal activities. The particular individuals even took part in the Anti-Jewish campaign in Poland in 1967–1968. However, this issue requires a separate publication.

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