

“SZMALCOWNICY”

BLACKMAILING OF THE JEWS IN LVIV AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON DURING THE NAZI OCCUPATION (1941–1944)

by **Taras Martynenko**

The behavior of the local non-Jewish population occupies the leading position among the research problems in the history of the Shoah. Over decades of work, researchers have managed to reconstruct the main demonstration and forms of the local response to the Holocaust, namely the relatively well-researched stories of people who revealed their position, including those who sheltered and actively helped the Jews as well as the direct perpetrators of crimes who cooperated with the Nazis. However, the causes of non-interference and sources of motivation for the passive majority of the population – commonly classified as “bystanders” – are still actively discussed. What exactly played a more important role in shaping their position; was it fear of Nazi terror or hostility to their Jewish neighbors? This issue remains acute not only in academic circles, but in the public sphere as well because it concerns the problem of social responsibility for the actions of its members regarding the deterioration of the status of Jews during the Shoah. One of the ways to determine the correlation of these two factors in the behavior of the “silent majority” is to study the manifestations of the

use of the Shoah tragedy by the population of the occupied territories for its own purposes in a more detailed way. Such cases undoubtedly include blackmailing of the Jews, which grew from a few cases of extortion and robbery into a regular phenomenon and became an additional or even main source of income for some categories of people. In its extreme form (as a specific social phenomenon of the considered period) it had even received a separate name – *szmalcownictwo*.

THE TERM “*szmalcownik*” comes from the Polish word “*szmalcować*” (Schmelz – lard (in German)), which initially had a double meaning – as the process of cutting away lard from an animal’s body and as a way of earning money (“*szmal*”, according to street slang).¹ People began to use this term during the German occupation to describe the engagement of people who hunted down and blackmailed the Jews using false documents on the “Aryan” side, or who denounced them to the police for remuneration.

This phenomenon was the most widespread in the territory of the General Government in large cities with considerable ghettos. Unfortu-

abstract

This article focuses on the blackmailing of the Jews during the Nazi occupation of Lviv, Galicia. Despite a considerable amount of attention from historians to the Shoah in Lviv, this issue is still one of the few unstudied problems. Based on the carefully collected source materials, the author reconstructs the main features of this phenomenon, its evolution, its local specifics, and the main types of blackmailers and the methods of their activities.

KEY WORDS: Shoah, WWII, blackmailing, Lviv, Galicia, social behavior.



Warsaw, spring 1943.

nately, Warsaw and its suburbs are the only place where a large number of sources have been preserved, which has allowed for a more representative display of this phenomenon in a number of works.² The situation looks much worse in other regions.

In this study we will consider the phenomenon of blackmailing using the example of Lviv, the capital of the District of Galicia. Moreover, we will outline its main features and social basis in terms of social behavior of the local population during the Holocaust. Despite the significant number of studies devoted to various aspects of the Holocaust in the region, the problem of blackmailers is not actually represented in such works, and the authors usually only state the existence of such a phenomenon within a passing sentence or two.³ More details about this are mentioned in the publication of the Ukrainian researcher Myroslava Keryk, although solely on the basis of sources and studies from other districts of the General Government.⁴ The only study containing information about local blackmailer groups (one short mention without detailed analysis) is the work of Eliyahu Yones.⁵

ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS for such a disappointing situation with the study of this issue is the problem of valid sources – first of all, the lack of court materials containing verified cases and, most importantly, personal data of the blackmailers. It is no coincidence that these types of sources serve as the basis for such stud-

ies in other regions. In essence, there is only one criminal case against blackmailers, which was considered by the Soviet Court in January–April 1945.⁶ Professional blackmailers were not found in the documents of the German courts, despite the considerable number of cases preserved (about 5,500 cases from the City Court and 2,300 cases from the Special Court). There is one note about a person who delivered a Jew to the police and received a reward for that,⁷ and a few cases where robbing and handing over Jews were just additional episodes to the main crime (robbery of Aryans, fraud, abuse of power, forgery of documents).⁸

In such a situation, narrative materials are the main sources for describing the phenomenon, although in this case their number is extremely small compared to Warsaw, Kraków, or Łódź. Cases of blackmailing were recorded in only a 34 out of more than 900 Lviv Jewish testimonies from the archives of the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (AŻIH) in Warsaw, and numerous published memoirs of the city inhabitants of that time, all of which were processed by the author. Only about half of them (16 cases) contain extended information with localization.

Obviously, the available number of cases is not enough to form a consistent picture. Therefore, in this study we have collected more evidence of crimes (robbery, abuse of power, and corruption) following the blackmailing, as well as a wide range of indirect sources that reveal the legal and social background of

the phenomenon under consideration. With their help, we can outline the evolution of blackmailing in Lviv and its local specifics, as well as present the main groups of blackmailers and the methods of their activities.

Legal and social conditions for the emergence and spread of blackmailing

As in the case of any other social phenomenon, the emergence of blackmailing, the scale and dynamics of its development, and its regional specificity were determined primarily by the available space formed by the policy of power, the objective conditions of existence, and the level of social tolerance of such behavior.

The policy of the occupation authorities, which acted as the main “social frame-maker” is considered to be the central and most significant factor. Its actions, such as the systematic expulsion of Jews beyond the legal field limits, the gradual diffusion of the notion of a crime against them, and the systematic cases of robbery carried out by the police and civil occupation authorities, created the basis for the use of anti-Jewish measures for the sake of gaining profit. It is not surprising that the main stages of the development of blackmailing (July 1941– October 1942 and November 1942–late autumn of 1943) were inextricably linked to the process of “solving the Jewish issue” in Eastern Galicia. In view of this, it would be advisable to take a more detailed look at this process from the point of view of the evolution of opportunities for blackmailing and, accordingly, protection against such practice within the framework of the existing legal system and police practices.

IN GENERAL, ANTI-JEWISH policies were implemented in Lviv as part of the Eastern Galicia region according to the same pattern as in the other regions of the General Governorate, namely through travel restrictions, concentration in the ghetto, campaigns of “removing the asocial elements”, liquidation of the ghetto, and, finally, elimination of Jewish prisoners in concentration camps. The main difference was the speed of the transformations. The form of gradual restrictions and ghettoization, which was implemented within the territory of the “old General



Two Jewish Ghetto policemen guarding the gates of the Warsaw Ghetto, June 1942.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

“THERE IS ONE NOTE ABOUT A PERSON WHO DELIVERED A JEW TO THE POLICE AND RECEIVED A REWARD FOR THAT.”

Government” over the span of two years, was carried out in Lviv in only a few months. Already only two weeks after the city was occupied, in mid-July of 1941, wearing armbands with the Star of David was considered mandatory, and in August the use of transport and time of stay in trade areas was limited to two hours. Later, in early September of the same year, the Jews were forbidden to leave their districts of residence, and in October the creation of a residential area only for Jews (Juedisches Wohnbezirk) in the poor northern quarters of the city was announced, with the forced resettlement no later than in mid-December of that year.⁹ The area was not fenced; however, leaving its borders without special permission was punishable by death starting in the second half of October 1941.¹⁰ This situation existed until the autumn of 1942.

These measures created many opportunities for blackmailing already at this first stage of development (1941–1942). Thus, the limitation on the time Jews could spend in trade areas led to the following situation: “*The Interim Ukrainian Police, or any teenager who put on a yellow armband, started wandering around all the city squares, looking to catch a Jewish woman who purchased something from the housewife [street vendor from the village – T. M.] at a black market price because they could get a big ransom from her or deliver her into the hands of the Gestapo*”.¹² Restrictions on moving outside the Jewish area and the obligation to wear an armband led to blackmailing and street robbery of those who did not wear it or who wore it “in a wrong way”.¹³

In addition to legal restrictions, the behavior of the occupation authorities played a significant role in the spread of such practices. Constant seizures of Jewish property by the German authorities, the first campaigns against “asocial elements”, and sporadic executions provoked the spread of an atmosphere of fear of the police authorities and of any person in uniform, and such fear was used both by the artful policemen and the ordinary swindlers and gunmen for their own purposes.¹⁴

HOWEVER, IT SHOULD BE noted that at the same time, even amid the arbitrariness of “law enforcement” agencies, a number of formal opportunities for protection against blackmailers remained in force until the autumn of 1942. After all, their activities included a number of actions that were treated as anti-government crimes in terms of occupation legislation – including the unlawful use of powers on the part of the law enforcement agencies, impersonation of an authority representative by civilians, and ordinary robbery. It should be kept in mind that the main reason for the conduct of criminal proceedings was not the protection of the insulted Jew, but the containment of banditry



The map shows all Nazi German extermination camps, as well as prominent concentration, labor, and prison camps, major pre-WWII Polish cities with the new Jewish ghettos set up by Nazi Germany, major deportation routes, and major massacre sites.

and anarchism and maintaining discipline and order under the wartime conditions.¹⁵ Moreover, this concerned not only the local Aryans (Poles and Ukrainians), but also the Germans.¹⁶

THE STARTING POINT for the next stage in the process of deploying anti-Jewish measures and, accordingly, the development of blackmailing in Lviv (1942–1943) was the so-called “Great Action” in August 1942. Over its course, about half of the inhabitants of the Jewish residential area (more than 50,000 people) were “re-settled” to the death camp near Belzec. After that, the remaining Jews were concentrated in a much smaller closed ghetto, surrounded by a wooden wall and barbed wire, starting on 7 September of that year. Soon, on 10 November 1942, another radical reduction in the territory of the ghetto occurred, along with its transformation into a closed labor camp for the Jews referred to as “Judenlager No. 2”, led by the commandant.¹⁷ In this form, spread over the territory of several blocks and surrounded by a stone wall, it existed from January 1943 until the time of its final elimination in June 1943.

The autumn of 1942 was when blackmailing transformed into the classic “szmalcownictwo”. The hopes of Lviv’s Jews for

survival within the ghetto were gone after the “Great Action”, which led to a rapid increase in the number of persons on the Aryan side. In parallel with this, the legislation became even more rigorous in relation to those who gave them shelter. Thus, in the case of finding a sheltered Jew, not only was the owner of the house executed, but also his whole family was shot as accomplices. Also, a punishment for failing to provide information leading to the revealing of manifestations of “anti-German behavior” in the house was imposed on the responsible persons, in particular the yard-keepers. In this way, a strict punishment threatened not only those who helped, gave shelter, or nourished Jews outside the area, but also those who knew about the presence of a Jew outside the area and did not provide such information to the police.¹⁸ Starting then, the very appearance of Jews in an apartment exposed the owner and his family to great danger.¹⁹

ALSO, SINCE THE SUMMER of 1942, the practice of paying a reward for turning over any of these “dangerous state criminals” had become widespread, which, depending on the time and circumstances, varied from 200 zlotys in the middle of 1942 up to 1,000 zlotys (three average monthly salaries) in the spring of 1944.²⁰ In addition, the authorities could arrange rewards by means of the property of the detained person, which might consist of scarce goods such as a bottle of vodka, cigarettes, clothing, etc.²¹

All of these measures formed the basis for blackmailing’s transformation from sporadic robberies and extortions into a professional and highly profitable activity for people who were searching out hidden Jews and those who helped them. The only effective means of protection from them were threats to expose the blackmailer as a robber or harbinger of the Jews because such activities could lead to serious punishment no matter what the motives were.²² The final liquidation of the ghetto in June 1943 and the following proclamation of Lviv to be free of the Jews did not bring any considerable changes in the situation. Such blackmailing (“szmalcownictwo”) in some ways continued to be the standard course of police activity connected with searching out the Jews who had survived and remained the same in nature just up to the last days of the occupation.

In addition to the policies of the occupation authorities, blackmailing was greatly influenced by objective living conditions and social environments that were stimulating or restraining its development compared with other cities or regions. Thus, in Lviv, despite the presence of the General Government’s third-largest ghetto (with over 100,000 inhabitants) the social scope of possible blackmail victims was disproportionately narrow in comparison with Warsaw and Łódź. This is because during the



The Lodz Ghetto, 1940–1944.

whole Nazi occupation period Lviv was the city from which the Jews tried to leave, and there were several reasons for this.

First of all, the living conditions in the Lviv ghetto were comparatively more difficult and the city was smaller such that it was hard to hide for long. In contrast, in Warsaw and Kraków, at least until the summer of 1942, living conditions in the ghettos were comparatively easier and better organized, and it was easier to disappear on the Aryan side in general.

The presence of a great number of Jewish refugees from Poland's western regions who came to Lviv as early as in the September campaign in 1939 played a prominent role in the wide-scale departure of the Jewish people from the city as well. At the beginning of the Nazi occupation (summer 1941), these refugees made up a fourth or even a third of all Jewish citizens in Lviv. These people traditionally had relatives or friends in western districts of the General Government. Having a desire to "live among their own" in the ghettos of Warsaw or Kraków and holding the opinion that chances to survive there were better, they were the first to leave the city en masse in the winter of 1941–1942.²³

ANOTHER FACTOR HAVING influenced both the number of the Jewish people on the Aryan side and the development of blackmailing was that the Jewish people of Lviv were far poorer than Jewish communities in the "old" General Government. This was because in order to vanish successfully it was necessary to have a nice bit of money (mainly in the form of jewelry or gold dollars) for bribes, payments for hiding, buying food, and other urgent matters. The cause of this poverty was two years of the Soviet regime. Progressive property deprivation, nationalization of trade, arrests, and deportation of "bourgeois" class representatives, foremost rich elites and civil activists, led to a rise in the number of poor inhabitants in the region and the slow depletion of reserves. This in its turn influenced the amount of ransom payment. Thus, it was out of the question to pay such an astronomical amount for ransom as, for example, the 500,000 zlotys paid by a group of Jewish people near Warsaw.²⁴

The last but not least factor that had a multidimensional impact not only on the phenomenon under consideration, but

also on the development of Shoah in the region in general, was the specific nature of the local social environment, including the isolation of national communities, the experience of the Soviet regime, and the presence of an open Polish-Ukrainian conflict. Each of these components played its specific role in the activities of the blackmailers.

Isolation of communities' public life and the predominance of ethnocentrism led to the formation of a corporate moral code concerning ethics and behaviors that were seen as acceptable only among members of one's own group and that were not applicable to "outsiders" or to "others". This was precisely noted in the memoirs of K. Pankivskiy:

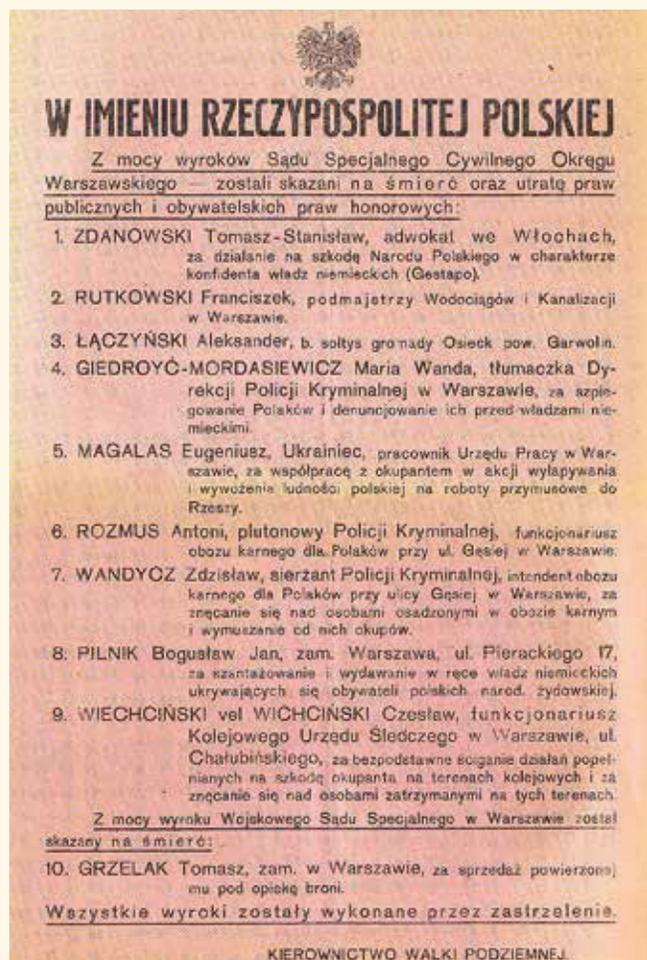
"No group was interested in the matters of the other groups or felt the pain from the blows being dealt to them. Each group felt the pain of those who were close to them but weren't interested in the humiliation or repression of members of other groups. The fate of the Ukrainians didn't matter to the Poles or Jews, and Ukrainians in their turn were not interested in theirs. Individuals from different groups contacted [each other] only due to the long personal friendship relations or family connections."²⁵

Two years of the Soviet regime (1939–1941) worsened the desperate situation concerning interethnic relations. Considering the specific conditions of the region, when any action was interpreted from the perspective of ethnicity, cruel and repressive measures by the Soviet government deepened the polarization of public relations. It is small wonder, then, that a non-negligible number of inhabitants, especially at the beginning of the Nazi occupation, considered the persecution of the Jewish people to be a "historic penance for their supporting of the Soviet regime".²⁶

This went along with the experience of a long rivalry over the region between Poles and Ukrainians, which shifted to an overt conflict during the war. In this situation, the Jews were perceived as secondary rivals, the attitude towards which varied greatly depending on their place in this confrontation. Therefore, even such a "trifle" as being the bridge language for predominantly Polish-speaking Jews in the predominantly Ukrainian-speaking region acted as an additional factor of alienation and a reason for resentment.

ALL OF THESE factors created a favorable social background for the activities of blackmailers. The isolation of the national communities provoked the indifference of the Ukrainians and Poles concerning the fate of their neighbors, the "corporate" style

**"DURING THE WHOLE NAZI
OCCUPATION PERIOD LVIV
WAS THE CITY FROM WHICH
THE JEWS TRIED TO LEAVE."**



Polish resistance poster announcing the execution of several Polish collaborators and blackmailers (szmalcowników), September 1943.

PHOTO: POLSKIE PAŃSTWO PODZIEMNE

of morality, the erosion of the notion of “criminal acts” against non-members of their groups, and a competitive national environment, all of which were deepened by the negative experience of Soviet domination and led to the popularizing of the perception of Jews as an active or potential threat to their own national community.

In general, the conditions for the emergence and development of the blackmailing phenomenon in Lviv were in many aspects similar to other regions of the General Government. It occurred mainly due to the fact that the main factor – the policy of the occupation authorities – followed the overall general points. The core regional specificity was formed by a number of objective material factors and by the social environment. If the first point somehow constrained the scale of the studied phenomenon compared to the larger cities of the General Government, the second one enhanced it due to the presence of the previous Soviet experience together with the complex and conflicting national triangle.

Blackmailers: police, criminals, and “ordinary people”

The law enforcement officers who used their official position for personal enrichment played the leading role in the process of blackmailing. First of all, these were the members of units that had direct contact with the population, namely the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police and the Criminal Police.

The Ukrainian Auxiliary Police (*Ukrainische Hilfspolizei*, hereinafter – UAP) was formed in early August 1941 on the basis of the disbanded Ukrainian militia and was to be analogous to the Polish “Blue Police”, who were operating in other districts of the General Government. The UAP occupied the lower levels within the structure of Nazi occupation law enforcement agencies, and its members were engaged in patrolling the streets, working with appeals from the population, traffic regulation, primary detention, and transfer of offenders to the relevant specialized authorities (Kripo, Gestapo, SD, etc.). In addition, the UAP members, along with other units, were involved in the execution of various specific tasks of the Order Police (*Ordnung Polizei*), i.e. conveying the Jews to the forced labor camps, participating in various police raids (“*lapanky*”) and anti-Jewish operations “*aktions*”, and were periodically detached on guard duty to the forced labor camps.²⁷

Who served in the ranks of the UAP? According to their social origin, they were mostly peasants and first-generation burghers. At first, the service in the UAP ranks was considered primarily as a way of obtaining the necessary basic military skills and one of the ways to strengthen Ukraine’s influence in the region due to the situation of permanent conflict with the Poles.²⁸ Later, along with the gradual disappointment in the German policy concerning Ukrainians and the radical drop in the authority of the police, the number of people who joined its ranks only due to material causes, considering it as a way of earning money or getting benefits for themselves and their families, and also as protection from deportation to the Reich for the purpose of forced labor, only increased among the UAP functionaries. The total number of UAP personnel in the city was relatively small, varying from a few hundred to a maximum of 860 people in July 1943.²⁹

The Criminal Police (*Kriminalpolizei*, hereinafter referred to as Kripo), a division of the Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*) was of a different nature, and its duties included all investigative and procedural activities in criminal cases, including cases against the Jews and their concealers. In addition, Kripo functionaries, along with UAP and other police units, participated in various police raids and detentions of the law-violators. As a rule, criminal police units in the General Government were formed from among the former police officers of the pre-war Polish police.³⁰ The overwhelming majority of such personnel in Eastern Galicia were eliminated by the Soviet authorities in 1939–1941. Thus, the basis of the staff in Lviv (as part of Eastern Galicia region) was formed by the guest policemen from the western districts, mostly Germanized Poles from Silesia. The total number of Kripo in the city was small and amounted to not more than a few hundred people.³¹

“THE MAIN ‘HOT SPOTS’ FOR CATCHING VICTIMS WERE MARKETPLACES, THE AREAS AROUND THE RAILWAY STATION, AND THE GHETTO.”

Methods of searching for and blackmailing the Jews by police authorities' representatives were directly related to the specifics of their official activities. Because the UAP functionaries were mostly engaged in patrol and inspection functions, they also encountered the Jews on the “Aryan side” when patrolling the city streets or received information about them from their relatives or acquaintances.³² Unlike the UAP, Kripo officers used their skills in operational searching and used police informants, including Jewish confidants.³³

The main “hot spots” for catching victims were marketplaces, the areas around the railway station, and the ghetto. Sometimes the police did not detain the Jew directly on the spot but used him as bait. In this case, the Jew was spied on, and then those who helped him were detained or blackmailed.³⁴

Flophouses and other places to stay were also specific locations that the police and blackmailers kept under close observation. Lviv, as the center of the district, remained an important transport hub during the war. Due to the constant shortage of housing, the profiteers and the city's visitors who did not have friends in the city used temporary lodgings and shelters to wait out the curfew and to sleep. The Jews, whose number significantly increased after deportations and extermination operations, amounted to a large percentage of the guests. The police regularly checked such places and, as a rule, worked in collusion with the owners. Thus, Bolesław Kopelman arrived in Lviv from Lublin in November 1942 together with his brother and colleague under false documents:

“Upon arrival, [I] bought a newspaper and read in the section of announcements that there was a room for rent at 27, Supińskiego Str., described very attractively. That was the bait, and we were unsuspecting of it. There was one Jewish girl. We went to the cinema to spend some hours somewhere and returned about 9 p.m. As soon as we fell asleep, a Ukrainian policeman came, approached this Jew, and ordered her to go with him. We were immediately patted down, after this he made sure that we were Jews, handcuffed us, and then brought us to the Gestapo department [which was located down the same street]. Having taken from us everything that we had, he immediately gave the hostess 300 zlotys. On the way to the department, I gave him 3,000 zlotys hidden in my hat, and he also took 600 zlotys from my brother, and after that he took from my colleague 2,000 zlotys and a gold watch. I convinced him that if he delivers us into the hands of the Gestapo,

I would say that he took all our money and he will get nothing in such a case. With this in mind, he let us go and gave us our documents back just in front of the Gestapo building to which we had been led.”³⁵

In general, this method had reached its peak in Warsaw and Kraków, where receiving a letter or a visit from a blackmailer was one of the first “adventures” of guesting Jews from Lviv in hotels and shelters.³⁶

Policemen could blackmail not only Jews, but also their concealers, by coming to conduct real or fictitious raids. In mid-1943, 12-year-old Leszek Allergand and his mother were concealed by their acquaintance seamstress.

“One afternoon, two Ukrainian police officers with rifles entered our house. We were pulled out of the shelter without further ado, and, not paying attention to our documents and tears, they ordered us to get out of the house. Negotiations and beseeching began, and the hostess with her crying son joined this process. They agreed to leave us for a ransom. Since we did not have any money on us, [they] agreed to let my mother go to the city, and I had to stay as collateral. In a short time, my mother came back and brought what they needed. The policemen ordered us to quickly leave the house and flee, and after having said that they scattered themselves.”³⁷

Realizing the danger of leaving the house late at night, Leszek's mother asked the hostess to allow them to stay for one more night, and later, while looking for something in the concealer's kitchen, she found a part of the paid ransom.³⁸

In this and many other cases, the police officers were not interested in the fate of the concealed, caring only for the money. The case of 12-year-old Lida Grunberg, who was hiding together with her mother, aunt, and grandmother, is rather a significant case in this regard:

“My grandmother committed suicide right when the Polish crime patrol (the Kripas) uncovered us hiding in a lodging in Lviv. They demanded a ransom from us, threatening to deliver us into the hands of the Gestapo; my mother offered them 10,000 zlotys per person, but that ransom seemed rather small to them and they did not agree. They conducted a house-check in our lodging, during which all our property (mainly money and jewels worth about 350,000 zlotys) was taken away. Then these Kripas went away, leaving us picked clean and with the dead body of our grandmother.”³⁹

Due to the cheapness of the Jews' life, the policemen could release the detainees, having no desire to cause any additional bother for themselves. The case of Helena Ostrovska, detained by a UAP patrol, illustrates this well. She had “some hundreds of zlotys, a nice comb and a pocket mirror”, and the approximate

payment for her that one could receive from the Gestapo at that time was about 200 zlotys. After a small argument, the policemen took the money and released her.⁴⁰

IN GENERAL, DUE TO THE SPECIFICS of the police authorities' work, blackmailing and extortion of money had become quite a common thing among them. Having the official powers, weapons, and the ability to take lives, policemen had unprecedented opportunities for robbery of the Jews. Therefore, it is of little surprise that the cases of police officers amount to up to two thirds of the cases of blackmailing.

In addition to the representatives of "law enforcement" agencies, new opportunities for semi-legal robbery were used by criminals and people with a "misty past", many of whom were engaged in such an illegal business in the city during the war years. It is possible to roughly divide the criminal blackmailers into those who worked alone or in pairs, street thugs (teens), or organized gangs.

The loners were the most-often mentioned criminals in the documented cases of blackmail. In their case, it was usually a matter of an ordinary street robbery.⁴¹ They sought out the potential victims according to a number of traits in crowded places (squares, railway stations, markets, public dining-rooms), or they simply looked for them in the districts around the ghetto and followed the people who tried to escape from there.⁴² Such markers, in addition to physical appearance, were the signs of anxiety and fear in the eyes, specific gestures, face pallor (due to the prolonged hiding in enclosed spaces),⁴³ and even clothing because the Jews had their autumn and winter coats without fur collars.⁴⁴

Quite often Kripas members presented themselves as members of the Gestapo, secret police, or even a non-existent "secret Ukrainian police department"⁴⁵. The additional complicating factor for victims in this case was that the Kripas, unlike the Ukrainian and German police, did not conduct open activities on the city streets and did not wear a uniform. Therefore, it was difficult to distinguish the real Kripas from the "Kripo" pretenders.



Suppression of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising – Captured Jews are led by German Waffen SS soldiers to the assembly point for deportation.

For the most part, they captured their victim directly on the spot and, threatening to deliver him or her into the hands of the police, took away money and valuable things, and then released the victim. Less often, the blackmailers spied upon the victim in his or her apartment and then stated their conditions by means of an anonymous letter or an unexpected visit.

Along with the individual criminals, new ways of earning money from the Jews were mastered by the groups of street thugs (including both children and teenagers) who were roaming around the city. They could attack as a group and take valuable things from the victim. At the same time, the Aryans could suffer from their actions as well. As Tadeusz Tomaszewski mentioned in his notes dated December 19, 1941:

"Gangs of children roam along the peripheries of the city, the ghetto, and attack the Jews who just pass by them. They pull out their handbags, sleeves, pick their pockets. Mrs. Ziemilska was robbed twice in this way. Today, she was attacked by eight children, about 12-13 years old. A girl was one of the gang members. When Mrs. Ziemilska began claiming that she was not a Jew, they threw her back her handbag with her documents, but without her money. When she came back along the same road, she saw children arranging an ambush. It occurred on Zamkowa Street. When I went to Zamarstynów towards the ghetto a few weeks ago, I saw a group of children who sized up the passers-by. One of them said to another: "Let her be, she is not a Jew"."⁴⁶

However, the main danger caused by the street thugs was not the robbery itself, but the loud bullying that called the attention of passers-by and service officers. It was rarely possible for a Jew to survive after such a public unmasking. Just like Miriam Handelman, who fled from the forced labor camp at Persenkówka in 1943:

"After some time, a few Christian guys surrounded her and began shouting: "Jew! Jew!" That meant death. Broniek Zocha, one of the Joseph's sons, appeared right in time⁴⁷. He saw what was going on. That was such a fearless family, unafraid of anything. He presented himself as a secret police agent. He beat the guys as best he could, and told her: "You, the Jew, let's go to the police." He told her quietly not to be afraid, that everything will be all right, and brought her to his apartment."⁴⁸

In addition to the street thugs, there were groups of high schoolers who used blackmailing to earn easy money. For example, one Ukrainian girl used her long-time school acquaintances with Jewish girls for this purpose:

"Under the pretext of sending girls to a safe place, they were packed off to the railway station, and someone from the gang approached them and asked for a ransom by threatening to deliver them into the hands of the

“AS SOON AS THE VICTIM GAVE THE WHOLE AMOUNT, A POLICEMAN CONNECTED WITH THE GANG CAME AND SHOT HIM OR HER AROUND THE CORNER OF THE NEAREST STREET.”

Gestapo. After receiving the money, the gang released the girls and began to have fun using these funds. In the end, the Gestapo found out about it and the whole group went to jail. This girl was sent to Auschwitz.”⁴⁹

However, the gangs of professional criminals posed the biggest threat. Typically, these criminal groups were closely linked to corrupt police authorities and used this advantage in the context of police terror to engage in various illegal transactions, including those with the Jews⁵⁰. Thus, the most famous group of blackmailers, the “Doctor” gang and their subordinate “hairdresser” group⁵¹ could get arrested Jews released from prisons for significant amounts of money due to their engagement with German officers. However, this did not prevent them from simultaneously using blackmail and giving up the concealed Jews by employing not only the gang members, but also an extensive network of informers from the streets.⁵²

THE DETAILS OF THE BLACKMAILERS’ gangs are extremely limited because, while acting according to a well-balanced scheme, they rarely left witnesses of their crimes alive. One such incident is illustrated by the testimony of Benedict Friedman, the concealer of which (a Polish woman named Stefa) appeared to be a leader of one of these gangs. The Jews were offered concealment, while demanding money in advance “to be concealed till the end of the war” (in the case of Friedman it was about 40,000 zlotys). As soon as the victim gave the whole amount, a policeman connected with the gang came and shot him or her around the corner of the nearest street. Despite the fact that the bodies of this gang’s victims were often found over all the district, police carried out no investigations into these events⁵³. Friedman was rescued due to his caution (he did not give the whole amount immediately), the conscience of the immediate concealer (who had revealed Stefa’s real business), and most importantly, that on his own he had opportunities for blackmailing the criminals. Benedict told the gang leader that he had handed three letters to the Poles he knew, and in case he did not come to them two evenings in a row, they would transfer the letters to the Gestapo. In this way, he not only remained alive, but actually forced the blackmailers to find him another place to be concealed.⁵⁴

In general, with available documents, it is difficult to confirm the thesis that not the police members, but organized crime groups played the key role in blackmailing in Lviv (as in the case of

Warsaw, for example). All mentioned professional gangs of szmalcowniki worked in close connection with the criminalized police.

The last but most interesting type of blackmailers was ordinary people, i.e. persons who had no background experience in criminal activity or in active cooperation with the occupation authorities. This group was different from the two groups discussed above according to its structure and manner of behavior.

The main thing that catches the eye when looking closely at the material is the large variety of motivations and social origins of those “random” blackmailers. They could be neighbors who had long-lasting previous conflicts and decided to seek revenge or who just wanted to get easy money, former friends who might be unexpectedly met at other locations, and common passers-by to which any bypassing Jew was firstly a money bag.⁵⁵

Such blackmail could be carried out both through planting of anonymous letters and personal threats or even nice chats that might look ordinary enough from the outside. A good example is given in the memoirs of Leshek Allerhand for April–May 1943:

“Me and my mother were walking along Kurkowa Street. As usual, I was walking 10 meters behind her. Suddenly I noticed that two women passed by my mother. They paused a bit, then approached her. The women were speaking and gesturing, mom pulled out some documents from her purse, after which they all went to the nearest gate. I watched all this standing in the gate of the neighboring house. After some time, the women came out. My mom appeared a moment later. She had no purse or her grey jacket, and there were drevniaki [clogs] on her feet.”⁵⁶ We continued our walk.”⁵⁷

Another distinctive feature of such “common people” was a great variability in behavior. If for criminals and policemen the blackmailing was a natural continuation of their normal activity, common people needed to overcome a certain barrier to commit a crime, and that barrier depended on the conditions of one’s particular situation, one’s moral imperatives, and social attitudes.

INNER STRUGGLE provoked by a change in one of these components sometimes made blackmailers give up their demands. Such a case, for example, happened with the teacher Wanda Łądniewska-Blankenheim who was hiding with the help of a false identity. She received, through an intermediary, a letter from unknown blackmailer (with ransom requests). She wrote back an answer: “I have no money, the only thing I have that might be worth something is a golden wedding ring, and if he wants it, then I can send the ring to him”. She then received a new letter from him with apologies “I am your student, and I saw you in the kitchen of the people that host you, and to prove that your students loved you very much, I will not only cancel my demands, but I can even save you if necessary”.⁵⁸

As a rule, “the ordinary people” were less dangerous for the victims of blackmailing because they were more likely to make a bargain, they acted spontaneously without a pre-arranged



Allerhand and her false ID.

scheme, and, most importantly, they acted alone, and not as a group. However, this category of blackmailers narrowed the social safe zone for both Jews and their concealers because even if one might be able to hide from the police officers, it was almost impossible to hide from one's own acquaintances or friends.

In general, the available cases do not provide sufficient evidence for allocating any local specifics for the social origin or the methods of the blackmailers' activities in Lviv. As in other cities of the General Government, it was a rather heterogeneous group, united only by opportunities for earning money from Jews and a readiness to commit criminal acts (both from the point of view of the law and the Christian ethics of conduct). Not only representatives of the marginal groups associated with the criminal environment, but also people from other social environments (both police officers and ordinary civilians) were among the blackmailers. The behavior of the blackmailers allows the assumption that the main motive for self-enrichment was not necessarily accompanied by anti-Jewish or anticommunist political attitudes.

“THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF RECORDED CASES CONCERNED ABUSE BY POLICE OFFICERS AND STREET ROBBERY.”

Conclusion

The blackmail phenomenon in Lviv, as in other cities of the General Government, was generated by the occupation authorities' policies, and the practice accompanied a “legal” form of robbery by the German civil and military authorities. It is not a coincidence that the overwhelming majority of recorded cases involved abuse by police officers and by criminals who represented themselves to be police officers. Accordingly, as a Shoah satellite phenomenon, blackmail repeated its (Shoah) stages of evolution and local specifics.

The blackmailers' activities in Lviv did not grow to such a scale as in Warsaw or Łódź, and this was due not so much to the social environment, but to objective conditions of existence, namely, the smaller size of the city, the disproportionately smaller number of potential victims (despite a rather large ghetto), the more recent establishment of the ghetto, and the more complicated living conditions there. The overwhelming majority of recorded cases concerned abuse by police officers and street robbery. For most persons involved for whom at least minimal background information is available (including organized criminal groups), blackmail was not the main activity, but primarily a situational side job. In general, the number of blackmailers in the city was small and could hardly have exceeded a thousand people.

DESPITE SUCH A SMALL number of active participants, it is difficult to overestimate the role of blackmail in worsening the situation of the Jews in Lviv during the Nazi occupation. After all, in ad-

dition to direct harm, the blackmail phenomenon significantly increased the level of fear in society and the potential risks for saviors. ❌

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- Taking into account that Michał Czerniak, mentioned in the case, worked at the same firm as the victim, he could hardly be a professional blackmailer. (The case of Stefania Cieplik on the count of sheltering the Jews // DALO, R. 77, 1, 1227: 3)
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- Various armbands (yellow, blue and yellow, white with a trident) were used as a designation of representatives of the self-proclaimed Ukrainian police during the first month of the Nazi occupation. In addition, the armbands were widely used as a sign of authority by a variety of criminal and semi-criminal elements for the sake of uncontrolled terror and robbery of the Jewish population (especially during the outrages) in the chaos of the first weeks of the new authorities' coming into power. In mid-July 1941, the German Commandant's Office approved the unified format of the armbands separately for the city police and the deployment groups (Einsatzgruppen). Since then, all who wore the armbands of an unauthorized type became subject to arrest by the authorities due to improper representation of themselves. (Kommandatur Befehl No. 3. 14.07.41 // YVA, O. 4, 111: 251)
- Rusia Wagner Testimony // YVA, M. 49, 442: 8.
- Leonard Zimmerman Testimony // YVA, M. 49, 596: 3; The case of Zdisław Wanat and Roman Okopski on the count of beating and robbery of the Jew Yoel Susmann // DALO, R. 77, 1, 89: 2–4, 67.
- This situation is well illustrated by the notes of Professor Maurycy Allerhand (1868–1942), in which he noted the frequent cases of such abuses just on one small street in the second half of February 1942: "1. A Ukrainian militiaman, accompanied by a civilian, arrived at one of the houses up on Wolności Str., in the second half of February 1942 [Using the experience of one of the first campaigns held in the ghetto, namely the campaign against the "old beggars", during which many disabled and elderly people who could not work were caught in November–December 1941. – T.M.] and announced that he will take away all elderly people at 12:00 (at noon). This provoked a turmoil in the street, but some people reported this to the Jewish public order service. Its representatives called the German police officers, who in turn arrested the Ukrainian militiaman. Undoubtedly, it was about extortion of money.
2. On 23 February 1942, in the early morning, a certain man out of uniform detained a Jewish woman and asked why she covered her armband. She testified that this was not true. In response to this, the person concerned called her to the entrance hall of the nearest house and showed that he was a police member. At the same time, he wanted [to get] 100 marks, otherwise he would bring her to the Gestapo department. When the Jewish woman testified that she had no more than 32 zlotys, he asked where she was going. When she told him that she was going to Balonowa Str., he went with her to the same apartment. There he demanded 100 marks from those present, and then, when they told him about their lack of money – 75 zlotys, he testified that if he did not receive money, then he would arrest everyone and bring them to the Gestapo department. Then he said they had until 12 o'clock in the afternoon and demanded that the Jewish woman whom he detained come to Zamarstynowski Bridge with money. [...]
[The aforementioned Jewish woman complained about it to the Jewish public order service, and its representatives arrived at the place at the appointed time and detained the blackmailer. He was then taken to the Ukrainian auxiliary police station, where he was identified as a Ukrainian policeman fired due to earlier cases of robbery and hooliganism.]
3. In the second half of February 1942, a certain Ukrainian appeared on Wolności Str. and claimed that he was a gas worker and had the right to take cash. Many people went for that, but others refused to pay" (Maurycy Allerhand, Leszek Allerhand, *Zapiski z tamtego świata. Zagłada we Lwowie w dzienniku profesora i wspomnieniach jego wnuka* (Kraków: Wysoki Zamek, 2011), 99–100.)
- This situation led to paradoxical cases. As, for example, in the case of Jan Petruszyn, sentenced by the Special Court (*Sondergericht*) to seven years of community work for the murder of a Jewish woman while attempting to commit a robbery in the town of Brody in the north of Lviv. The cherry on top here was the fact that he and three other unspecified German soldiers committed this crime during the elimination of the ghetto in Brody. At the trial, the defendant replied that the corpses of Jews were lying around and he did not know that it was illegal to kill them. (The case of Jan Petruszyn on the count of killing the Jewish woman, stealing of clothing and desertion // DALO, R. 77, 1, 502: 6, 9, 27–28, 30–32.)
- For example, on 7 September 1942, on the last day before the creation of a new ghetto instead of a closed one, Helena Bojko, a Jew, came to the Auxiliary Police Department and stated that four unknown drunken men forced entry into her house and, under the pretext of a house-check, committed robbery in her apartment, as well as the apartments of her

- neighbors. A policeman was sent to the crime scene, where he detained one of the robbers, Erich Albert, a Hitlerjugend member from Łódź (his other accomplices scattered). Later, Kripo arrested another accomplice, Adolf Wydra, a serviceman. Police failed to find the other two criminals. A. Wydra was charged by the Military Tribunal for robbery and illegally identifying as a representative of the German authorities, and E. Albert was charged by the German Court in Lviv. (The case of Erich-Rudolph Albert on the count of looting of the Jewish apartment during a search // DALO, R. 77, 1, 235: 3–4, 18–21.)
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- 53 In the case of the investigation of murdering an unknown, as soon as the Jewish ethnicity of the victim was clarified, the investigation immediately ceased. See: The case of Maslii Semen and Maslii Joseph on the count of hiding two Jewish women and their murder // DALO, R. 77, 1, 343: 16; The case concerning the corpse of an unidentified Jew // DALO, R. 77, 1, 552: 1–12.
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- 58 Wanda Łądniewska-Blankenheim Testimony // YVA, O.3, 3118: 5.