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## GERMANS IN THE EYES OF POLES DURING WORLD WAR II

This article ties up with another, published elsewhere, in which I presented the character and functions of stereotypes of Poles and Poland as propagated by the Nazi mass media, which functioned among the Germans in the years 1939 - 1945.<sup>1</sup> Here I would like to deal with the image of the German in the eyes of Poles, as well as with the confrontation of a certain stereotype of an enemy with the experience of a time which became the most tragic chapter in the history of Polish-German relations. Of interest are here both the process of "authentication" of the negative elements of the traditional stereotype, and the process of reappraisal of the former positive estimations and opinions held by Poles about the German national character. I will also discuss the role of stereotype of a German as a factor moulding feelings and attitudes in Polish society, and thus conditioning the emergence of a national front of struggle against the invader.

The article has been primarily based on memoirs,<sup>2</sup> underground press and publications. I have not considered poetry or epic literature which appeared during the war or under the impact of the experiences suffered at the time, because, in my opinion, they should become the object of a separate and detailed study. Unfortunately, no soundings of Polish opinion for the period of

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<sup>1</sup> Poland and Poles in German Eyes during World War II, "Polish Western Affairs," 1978, No. 2, pp. 229 - 254.

<sup>2</sup> The date of writing the recollections is of essential importance here. But I am interested not only in the impact of later experiences and thinking but also in the transformations in terms and vocabulary, rarely spotted by researchers, to mention the increasingly often used term "hitlerowiec" [hitlerite], instead of "Niemiec" (German). The publication in the 70s of reminiscences containing information about wartime contacts with German anti-fascists seems to me very typical; cf. J. M a r t y s z e w s k a - P n i e w s k a, *Szukamy rodziny doktora Thuma* [Looking for the Family of Dr Thum], "Polityka," 1976, No. 37.

interest to this article are available ; we have to recreate it on the basis of somewhat vicarious sources. Among them pride of place have the jokes and anecdotes widely circulating at the time, the vocabulary used then, satirical and moral drawings, often appearing in the underground press or reaching the Poles in the form of leaflets or badges. In the analysis of this kind of material one should take into account that we have here both attempts at forming public opinion and expressions of the existing opinion, bearing in mind, however, that in this particular case there existed a marked conformity of individual views and the propaganda trends in the resistance movement.

To begin with, I should like to point out the danger of which I am aware when tackling the subject, namely the use of too far-reaching generalities. Contrary to statements, often appearing in publications, about the common experience of the years 1939 - 1945, identical to the entire Polish nation, reality was different and depended, first of all, on the place of residence, the Nazi policy conducted in a given area, the nature of contacts with the Germans, the fate of one's own family, the length of time under the enemy occupation, the scope of information about the crimes committed by them. It is not at all easy to speak about the gradation of suffering and humiliation, but it would be difficult to identify the experience of concentration camp inmates and that of POW's in officer camps, to overlook the differences in the treatment of the Polish population in the General Gouvernement, in the territories incorporated in the Reich itself or in the territories of the former Eastern Borderlands. Of course, many Poles had to do with Germans in various circumstances (the scale of wartime social mobility has to be considered), so experience accumulated, to mention the people deported to forced labour in the Reich, shut up in prisons and camps, refugees from the Poznań region, Silesia and Pomerania who spent the occupation years in central Poland. Mention must also be made of those who either did not have direct contacts with the Germans or met them for a short time only or in utterly different circumstances—I have in mind wartime emigration and Poles living permanently abroad (e.g. in France, England, Belgium, the United States).

## REVISION OF THE OLD AND FORMING OF A NEW STEREOTYPE

In the long list of Nazi crimes there is very seldom mention of the crimes perpetrated by them on their own people, consisting in the creation on a world scale, through their own fault, of a negative stereotype of a German. The process of revision of former opinions about the German nation and the change in the image of the German national character took place not only in all the countries occupied by the Third Reich<sup>3</sup> and involved in the war but also in neutral countries. The crime we are talking about concerned the good name of the German people—it meant a depreciation in world public opinion of their achievements and cultural treasures, undermined confidence in all manifestations of German thought, forced a reinterpretation of German literature, science and art, wronged the whole German culture, considerably restricting the future possibilities of its influence and reception abroad. The Germans themselves, proud in their regaining a strong political and economic position, are not very well aware of this fact.<sup>4</sup>

When speaking of a German stereotype in Poland prior to 1939, we must remember that it was a very differentiated stereotype which had many positive aspects expressing the recognition and respect for the German people. It should be noted that many

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<sup>3</sup> Here we have the problem of the appreciation of the quality of the employees of German administration sent to various occupied countries. Were the people taking up posts in the General Gouvernement really so much worse than those who went to Western Europe? In my opinion the behaviour of the average German official in France differed from that of his counterpart in Poland not because he had higher qualifications or represented a higher moral standard but mainly because his attitude towards and his opinion of the nation over which he wielded power was completely different. Let us add that the same German official who behaved fairly correctly towards the French, Belgians, Danes or the Dutch in the early days of occupation, could be just as ruthless a thug, when the resistance movement gathered momentum, as his opposite number in Eastern Europe.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Koch emphasized this in his article *Wer hat Angst vor den Deutschen* ("Stern" of 30.12.1976 - 5.1.1977), showing the negative stereotype of a German, propagated by the West-European and American mass media. But it should be noted that West Germany is making genuine efforts to show that the image of a German has undergone changes throughout the world. I would indicate two books: M. Koch-Hillebrecht, *Das Deutschenbild. Gegenwart, Geschichte, Psychologie* (München 1977), and G. V. Graf Zedtwitz-Arnim, *ein Ruf wie Donnerhall. Deutschenspiegel* (Düsseldorf-Wien 1977, München 1980).

Polish intellectuals had studied at German universities, maintained lively professional contacts between Polish and German milieus (doctors, lawyers, engineers). German music was admired, and numerous German books had been translated. Although the word "German" still had many negative connotations, it was almost always accompanied by the conviction about the many virtues possessed by the Germans which were worth imitating. Anna Pawełczyńska wrote: "Before the year 1933 there existed in German society a humanist tradition for the most part acknowledged everywhere and constituting the coexistence basis of European cultural life: respect for the human person, human life and justice. There also functioned to a considerably greater degree than in other societies instrumental values such as orderliness, obedience, economy, frugality, accuracy, and thoroughness".<sup>5</sup> Whether or not this latter statement is true is of no importance here, but the essential fact is that this is what Poles really thought about the Germans prior to 1939; they even considered most of the "German virtues" with certain envy, and found some of them downright impressive.

The war and Nazi occupation years could be called the period of the Germans themselves destroying the positive elements of their stereotype. The positive features, mentioned before, which were supposed to be typical of the Germans, harnessed by the Nazi system suddenly showed their other face, so to speak: orderliness began to mean efficiency of the crime machine; discipline and obedience, which could previously be opposed to Polish "factiousness," now became the symbol of passive subordination to Nazi power; the ridiculed wartime *Ersatz* became the symbol of the German thriftiness; thoroughness turned out to be the thoroughness of the executioner who fulfilled his duties efficiently, while respect for rules was discredited by the absurdity of prohibitions and orders issued in those times. At the same time, Poles who had a day-to-day experience of the Germans' behaviour, came to the conclusion that the old differentiated stereotype was to a considerable extent at variance with reality, that the positive

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<sup>5</sup> A. Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz. Sociological Analysis*, transl. by C. S. Leach, Los Angeles-London 1979, California Press, p. 8-9.

features ascribed to the Germans were difficult to find in the majority of people who represented the *Herrenvolk*.

Before we start discussing the process of transformations in the German stereotype during the war and occupation, we should look at the situation before 1939. An important problem, little researched so far, is that of the state of knowledge among the Poles about the circumstances prevailing in the Nazi Reich and the internal policies of the Nazi regime. We must remember that from early 1934 to the spring of 1939, the Polish mass media were restricted in their activity by the foreign policy of their own government; moreover, in the last months before the outbreak of the war, efforts were made not to exacerbate the Polish-German conflict. In the propaganda campaign emphasis was put on the anti-Polish excesses and persecution of the Polish minority in the Reich, but the successive stages of the Nazi regime's struggle with their opponents among their own population and the emergence of the system of a "martial law state"<sup>6</sup> in an atmosphere of violence, terror and intimidation, got less coverage. One might risk the argument that in 1939, Poles were not well informed about all the changes that occurred in Germany after Hitler's accession to power; they were not fully aware (despite the efforts of left-wing journalists) of the tragedy of German anti-fascists, communists, socialists and the clergy, oppressed and put in concentration camps.

Another factor of importance in the forming of opinions about the Germans on the threshold of the occupation was the result of the experience of those Poles who had lived through the German occupation of 1914 - 1918. That time, despite bitter memories about the difficult food situation and various sufferings (e.g. the burning of the town of Kalisz in 1914), was not synonymous with a rule of terror, it did not evoke constant law breaking and trampling of national dignity. As a result, and for a very short time, various strata of Polish society deluded themselves that the new occupation would not be different from the previous one. The mood of

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<sup>6</sup> This term was introduced by the outstanding Polish historian and politologue, F. Ryszka (*Państwo stanu wyjątkowego. Rzecz o systemie państwa i prawa Trzeciej Rzeszy* [Martial Law State. On the System of State and Law in the Third Reich], Wrocław 1964, 2nd ed. 1974).

the peasantry was still influenced by the situation in the Polish countryside under the pre-war Polish government, and was expressed in the view that "it could not be worse." The first weeks, and in certain areas even the first months of the occupation seemed to foretell an improvement in the living standards of the villagers (sudden rise in prices of agricultural produce, remission of indebtedness, deliveries of fertilizers without, at the beginning, obligatory quotas).

The behaviour of the Germans rapidly deprived the Poles of their earlier illusions. The first shock came with the very way in which they conducted the war—breaking international conventions, a fact observed in September 1939, such as : bombing of open towns and buildings bearing the red cross, machine-gunning from the air of trains and refugee columns on the roads, the application of collective responsibility, shooting and persecution of prisoners-of-war. Among other experiences was the behaviour of members of the German national minority with, in my opinion, much stronger anti-Polish manifestations in the rural areas (except for the Bydgoszcz events).

The invaders' behaviour in the conquered country first aroused surprise—it turned out to be contrary to the ideas about the German order and law-abidedness as well as German honesty and reliability. Leon Budny, who fought in the September campaign, was first shut up in a POW camp and next sent to forced labour, wrote several years later : "I did not think [...] that the Germans, who always and everywhere underlined their *Ordnung*, would break this very *Ordnung* constantly, that they would introduce new unwritten laws—the laws of the stronger, the laws of barbarians, that they would break the binding international rules concerning the treatment of prisoners-of-war." A country teacher thus remembers the beginning of the occupation in Pomerania : "The Germans began their typical work in our areas in a way unknown and even unimaginable to those who knew the old German times. Seeing their various efforts to

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<sup>1</sup> L. Budny, *Byłem jeńcem-robotnikiem* [I Was a POW-Worker], in : *Z literą "P."* Polacy na robotach przymusowych w hitlerowskiej Rzeczy 1939 - 1945, ed. by R. Dyliński, M. Flejsierowicz and S. Kubiak, Poznań 1976, p. 79.

destroy everything Polish, those people would say to themselves: 'This is not the old, honourable, ambitious imperial Germany, but simply some beast, some hydra which can neither be named nor described'.<sup>8</sup>

The image of the decent German was then confronted with the cases, observed from the very first days of occupation, of common abuse and theft, committed both by the soldiers of the Wehrmacht and the police, and the fairly highly placed public officials. A characteristic example was the pilfering of the furnishings of the Blank palace in Warsaw by the successive German supervisors of the Municipal Office, Otto and Dengel, both boasting a doctor's degree.<sup>9</sup> As early as autumn 1939, a joke was circulating in Warsaw about a trip to Berlin organised by the Orbis Travel Agency under the slogan "Find your furniture."<sup>10</sup> Somewhat later a saying became popular: "If someone steals, it is called kleptomania. If a whole nation steals, it is called Germania."<sup>11</sup> In February 1940, the underground "Komunikat Informacyjny" said: "The Germans are pillaging in a wild and primitive manner which suggests a 'hasty evacuation'. The Germans' dishonesty is blatantly conspicuous. The sight of soldiers carting large parcels of goods taken from Polish shops is something quite common."<sup>12</sup> We might add here that the figure of a German pilferer appeared in all the countries occupied by the Third Reich and became a sort of symbol. Of interest here is the joke, which circulated all over Europe, about the lightning-speed arrests in Paris, Brussels or Amsterdam of British spies dressed in German uniforms because ... they were not carrying any parcels or bundles.<sup>13</sup>

The underground "Biuletyn Informacyjny" of 27 Nov., 1941, i.e. the article *Doniosła sprawa* [*An Important Matter*] thus wrote about the confrontation of former opinions of the Germans with

<sup>8</sup> *Wieś polska 1939-1948* [*Polish Countryside 1939-1948. Peasants' Memoirs*], ed. by K. Kersten and T. Szarota, vol. IV, Warszawa 1971, p. 341.

<sup>9</sup> "Biuletyn Informacyjny" of 8.3.1940; cf. numerous mentions on the subject in the memoirs of J. Kulski and H. Pawłowicz.

<sup>10</sup> [A. Jachnina and M. Ruth-Buczkowski], *Anegdota i dowcip wojenny* [*Wartime Jokes and Anecdotes*], Warszawa 1943, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> "Komunikat Informacyjny," No. 2 of 1.2.1940.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Quand on ne pouvait rien dire... Les bonnes histoires de 1940 à 1944*, Lille 1945, p. 192.

present experience : "Together with the sufferings brought about by the war the Germans introduced into our country the moral rot typical of the creators of the 'new Order'. Remembering the former occupation, when the invader abided generally by the law and the rules of honesty—we were astonished at the beginning of the present invasion by the shamelessness of the villainies and abuses, committed at every step by the gentlemen bedecked with swastikas. By now all that has become commonplace."

A document sent by the underground home Office of the Delegate of the Polish Government-in-Exile to London in November 1942, contains extremely interesting and apt observations on the subject. Here are extensive excerpts from this document entitled *Łapówki i korupcja w systemie niemieckiej administracji okupacyjnej* [*Bribes and Corruption in the German Occupation Administrative System*]: "[...] Through their bribery, lust for profit, and corruption of their administrative apparatus (they) have completely buried the old legend about the supposed German law-abidedness, German sense of order and honesty, German talent for organisation. The Polish population listens with utter contempt to the boastings of German spurious propaganda about the 'model German administration in the East', because it knows from its own daily experience the real worth of the morality, honesty and justice of all this human machinery sent to pester the occupied territories. For instance, the Polish opinion considers that the majority of rules and regulations issued by the occupation authorities, which as a rule are aimed at restricting the freedom of movement of the Polish population and so are drawn up in extremely categorical and threatening terms, simply lays the foundations for extorting bribes; at such a price, the absurd 'legal provisions', obvious to anybody with a common sense, the utter sternness of the 'law' gives way to the real requirements of life, providing the 'guardians of the law' i.e. the administration, police etc. with considerable extra income which to them represents the more direct, understandable and valued meaning of the war [...]. Starved by years of Nazi despotism which rationed food, clothing, tobacco, beer etc., and which later not only stabilized wages inside the Reich but also limited the freedom of spending those nominal earnings (*eisern sparen*), the occupation Germans



rushed to the conquered lands, greedy, lusting after wealth, seeking pleasure, and looking after recompense for imposed continence of the Nazi system [...]. Suffice it to watch the reichsdeutsch in the GG, in restaurants, shops etc. to see their greediness, their desire to gorge themselves, to buy a pair of shoes without 'points' or a woollen jersey. The streets of major towns were and are full of German railwaymen, soldiers, uniformed party members and women, all with suitcases, bags, knapsacks, all crowding in front of shops, where everything can or could be until recently bought without ration cards and without delay. Well-known are the expeditions of these starved robbers to market places in search of lard, butter, eggs, sausage, sole leather, wool, etc."<sup>14</sup>

One of the Warsaw chroniclers described the opinions of Poles about the Germans and the Germans about the Poles in spring 1940 in the following words: "The Polish-German relations rest on mutual contempt. Poles despise Germans as robbers, bandits, boors, louts, liars and twisters, while Germans despise Poles as poor soldiers, poor organisers, poor producers, poorly housed and poorly fed, and now deprived of a state."<sup>15</sup> I should like to draw attention to those opinions about the boorishness and churlishness with regard to representatives of a people formerly described as a nation of "Dichter und Denker". This is part of a much larger question of the appraisal of German culture and the right of Nazi Germany to be proud of its achievements.

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<sup>14</sup> Central Archives of the Polish United Workers' Party's Central Committee (henceforth CA KC PZPR), Zespół Delegatury Rządu RP na kraj [Office of Representative of Polish Government-in-Exile], 202/I - 31, pp. 153 - 162.

<sup>15</sup> Notes by Stanisław Srokowski (September 1939 - August 1944), Archiwum PAN w Warszawie [Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw], III - 22, p. 66 (note of 7-8 April 1940). It is interesting to quote here the opinion about the Germans voiced by Poles in Berlin with whom Teofil Głowacki was in touch during the war: "The German as a man is much despised by Poles. Although Poles do not deny that Germans possess organizational ability, are thorough in their work and in mastering technology, yet they judge their character values very poorly. Above all, Poles despise the Germans for their doglike submission to the terror-spreading authorities, a submission expressed in that nearly all the Germans curse Hitler, fascism and the war, yet none has so much as tried to oppose the regime." *Niemcy w piątym roku wojny [Germany in the Fifth War Year]*, Warszawa 1944, p. 41 (underground printing).

In the autumn of 1940, the underground paper "Polska Żyje!" expressed the following view: "The old German nation, the nation of Beethoven and Goethe, does not exist any more. The Germans have no right to refer to it, little more than the present-day Italians can call themselves the heirs to the tradition of ancient Rome."<sup>16</sup> In a book, published immediately after the war, entitled *Niemiec wyszydzony* [*The Laughing-stocks German*], Stanisław Dzikowski wrote: "In a direct conflict we were the representatives of humanistic and humanitarian culture, they were its negation [...]. Between Beethoven and Goethe, and contemporary Poland there is more spiritual kinship than between them and contemporary Germany [...]. A German buying a book, interested in some branch of knowledge or art was an extremely rare sight in Warsaw, much rarer than during World War I."<sup>17</sup> It would be difficult to deny that the figure of the German *Kulturträger* was utterly compromised during that period.

In my view, a very significant fact is the very association of the word "culture" with street round-ups in the text of the popular, occupation-time song *Siekiera, motyka* [*Axe, hoe*]: "Their culture does not forbid hunting in the streets." In 1942, the underground paper "Nowy Dzień" published a cartoon showing an ape holding a hand grenade and wearing an armband with a swastika. The caption read: "Worthy of a gorilla, this flower of German culture."<sup>18</sup> And here is the opinion about German intellectuals contained in a counterfeit issue of a daily published in Polish by Germans in Cracow: "Wanted at least one German scientist who would not be doctor of lying, professor of thieving or master of murder—the Polish Nation."<sup>19</sup> The outstanding Polish scientist, Ludwik Hirszfeld, wrote sarcastically: "Their élite? What do we care for an élite which has had its character broken. For many years to come the nation of poets and philosophers will

<sup>16</sup> "Polska Żyje!," Nos 70-71 of 30.9.1940.

<sup>17</sup> Reproduction in: G. Załęski, *Satyra w konspiracji 1939-1945* [*Underground Satire 1939-1945*], 2nd ed. Warszawa 1958, p. 87.

<sup>18</sup> S. Dzikowski, *Niemiec wyszydzony* [*Laughing-stock German*], Warszawa 1946, pp. 117-118.

<sup>19</sup> Facsimile of the page with advertisements from the counterfeit "Goniec Krakowski," No. 282 of 1 Dec., 1943, in Załęski's book, *op. cit.*, after p. 60.

live in Europe's memory as a nation of murderers, pilferers and thieves."<sup>20</sup>

With time, the association of two terms: German culture and German barbarity began to circulate among the various circles of the Polish population; in the light of current experience these two terms became synonymous for many Poles. Such conclusions were drawn from facts of daily occurrence. The rural population was shocked as early as 1939 by the behaviour of the German troops and authorities which began to destroy the wayside shrines and crosses on the territories incorporated into the Reich. This kind of activity, which did not take into account the religious feelings of the population, was considered by the Poles not only as a sign of moral decline but also as proof of simply lack of culture.<sup>21</sup> Similar feelings were aroused in Polish intellectuals who had witnessed *Sonderaktion Krakau* (On November 1939, the Germans arrested 183 scientific workers of Jagellonian University and carried them away to the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen) and the destruction and pillaging of works of art and historical monuments, persecution of Polish literature, issue of regulations abolishing Polish higher schools and prohibiting scientific work. In this case they confronted the German pride in their own culture with their persecution of the culture of another people. No wonder that as a result of this confrontation the Germans forfeited the right to call themselves a cultural people.

We have not, so far, considered the essential question of the participation of members of the German nation in the crimes committed in Poland.

Quite often the clear-cut opinion about the Germans in certain towns or villages was formed under the impact of observation of the first manifestations of bloody terror. The example of the massacre at Wawer near Warsaw will suffice; there, on 27 Dec.,

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<sup>20</sup> L. Hirszfild, *Historia jednego życia [Story of One Life]*, 2nd ed. Warszawa 1957, p. 438; one might ask whether the departure of many members of the intellectual élite from Nazi Germany did not facilitate to some extent the indoctrination of the people and limit the influence of the anti-fascist movement on public opinion. These thoughts occurred to me when reading Cz. Madajczyk's article, *Emigracja intelektualistów [Emigration of Intellectuals]*, "Polityka," 1977, No. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Numerous mentions on the subject are to be found in the publication *Wiś Polska 1939 - 1948*.

1939, the Nazis murdered 107 innocent people. Halina Kraheńska wrote in 1944: “[...] this beastly use of collective responsibility [...] profoundly shook the consciousness of the people, and for many persons definitively determined their attitude towards the occupier.”<sup>22</sup> The German *Kulturträger* usually appeared to Poles in the years 1939 - 1945 in the guise of a common bandit and cut-throat, and the shock was caused not only by the very fact of killing and murdering defenceless people but also by their persecution, the common manifestations of sadism, trampling of human dignity, lack of any feelings of pity or compassion.<sup>23</sup> In effect, Poles whom the Germans had qualified as “submen” and treated worse than animals, began to deny the Germans any human features.”<sup>24</sup>

This “dehumanization” of the enemy manifested itself in two ways. On the one hand, the torturer began to be identified with a wild beast lusting for blood, on the other, he resembled an indifferent part of a monstrous, efficiently functioning crime machine. So we have here both animalization and reification of the image. This kind of stereotype is particularly clear in the recollections of the former inmates of concentrations camps. Here the fact should be noted that in these recollections the characteristics of members of the camp staff contain much more often opinions about the supposedly congenital sadistic inclinations of the SS-men than reflections on the Nazi system of incapacitating the individual and terrible mediocrity and ordinariness of the tormentors—those cold, efficient and professional executors of instructions and orders.

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<sup>22</sup> H. Kraheńska, *Postawa społeczeństwa polskiego pod okupacją niemiecką* [Attitude of Polish Society under German Occupation], typescript, CA KC PZPR, No. 383/II-4, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Mentions on the subject are probably most numerous in: *Wspomnienia więźniów Pawiaka* [Memoirs of Pawiak Prisoners], Warszawa 1964; cf. L. Wanał, *Za murami Pawiaka* [Behind the Walls of Pawiak Prison], 2nd ed., Warszawa 1960; A. Czuperska-Słiwicka, *Cztery lata ostrego dyżuru* [Four Years on Emergency Duty], 2nd ed., Warszawa 1968; Z. Słiwicki, *Meldunek z Pawiaka* [Report from Pawiak Prison], Warszawa 1974.

<sup>24</sup> Animalization of stereotypes is not, of course, an invention of our century. Of interest is always the animal species which acts as a symbol. In the Polish caricatures under the occupation the German was most often portrayed as a monkey which suggests malignity.

I will deal with the experiences of concentration camp inmates later on, here I would like to quote the reflections on the subject of the German national character noted by the writer Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, inmate of the Pawiak prison in Warsaw. He listed the following features as typical: "(i) Their need to shout [...]. Shouting is the natural means of communication between Germans. It makes us sick. At Pawiak we had constantly to do with this German urge—an urge hostile to us, always heralding unpleasantness, insult, injury.

(ii) Nazis' nerves [...]. You are in Pawiak prison—and every moment you hear *schnell, schnell!*—they call to you to hurry, quite unnecessarily, to no purpose [...] the warden is suffering from what the neurologists term disease of impatience. Whence this nervousness? From alcohol. In many cases, from drugs. But why this incredible drunkenness, why drug addiction? Because of beastly fear. Every one of them knows that he has deserved death at the hand of a Polish secret organization many times over—and he sees this death lurking at every step, round every corner, in waking hours and in sleep. He kills his constant panic with constant cruelty.

(iii) Organic vulgarity [...]. This Prussian *Grobheit* has, through the barrack education of the entire society, become not only a feature but also a kind of ideal of a German Nazi. A man, even from the lowest classes, who has been trained in social niceties, will not forget to say *Gut'Morgen, Mahlzeit, danke, bitte* etc., but deep inside he has preserved an extreme callousness which acts on our nerves like iron rasping on glass. Here it should be added that their vulgarity with regard to political prisoners has been enhanced by the Gestapo which had convinced them that 'they are bandits'—hence their special hatred of us, hence kicks, slaps in the face, torture [...].

(iv) Megalomania [...]. Deep in our heart every one of us, be he an Englishman, a Spaniard, Argentinian, Norwegian, considers his homeland the salt of the earth—yes. But at the same time he does not mind if others do not share his view, he understands that his opinion of himself is a subjective notion. The German fiercely wants the superiority of the German in the world to be an objective notion.

(v) Mechanization of the psyche [. . .]. A Nazi discharging a duty neutralizes or paralyses his spiritual system, he does not allow himself any 'weaknesses'; he will obey his orders with ideally impersonal accuracy. These dehumanised acts hit us with such strangeness, such awful, almost uncanny oddity, such, one might say, otherworldliness that in the long run their presence brings upon us something like panic. We get nervous symptoms, perhaps akin to feelings that constant living with e.g. a phantom would arouse in us. I think that these features were rooted in the German known by Tacitus, but that it was only Nazism that has brought them to a dramatic swelling."<sup>25</sup>

It is not my purpose to carry out an appraisal of the views presented above and confront the stereotype with facts. Of significance is here primarily the content of the stereotype, the circumstances in which it appeared and in which concrete opinions and ideas were shaped. In this context, let us turn once more to the recollections of Ludwik Hirszfied. In January 1943, the scientist, of Jewish extraction, is in hiding with his family in a far-away village; he is at the bedside of his dying daughter. Nearby, are Germans who have come hunting. The desperate father hears the shouts and the drunken clatter of voices. Later he wrote: "And then I felt hate and abhorrence clutching at my throat and throttling me. Hatred of those fruity and contented voices. Hatred of German lying which combines beastly cruelty and sentimentalism, of that disgusting behaviour which they call culture. And at that moment I felt that German speech and German thought will always fill me with disgust and hatred which I shall never be able to shed [. . .]. And I knew that millions would share such associations."<sup>26</sup>

A straight critical and damning judgment of the occupier may be found in Dzikowski's book, quoted earlier: "The Germans did not show any aptitude to govern a conquered country [. . .]. Like children or barbarians they delighted in showing soulless formalism [. . .]. There was never anything sensible in their activities,

<sup>25</sup> A. Grzymała-Siedlecki, *Sto jedenaście dni letargu (Wspomnienia z Pawiaka z lat 1942 - 1943)* [*One Hundred and Eleven Days in Lethargy (Reminiscences of Pawiak Prison, 1942 - 1943)*], Kraków 1965, pp. 117 - 120. Pawiak was a Gestapo prison in Dzielnia street Warsaw.

<sup>26</sup> L. Hirszfied, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

nothing foreseeing, nothing which would go to the heart of the matter [. . .]. Arresting, torturing, shooting, expelling from home, pilfering, taking bribes, gorging themselves with food and drink, bringing tarts home or to the canteen, muddling through a job with a heavy head—that was all they did.”<sup>27</sup>

Hirszfeld remarked also on another question, which we had mentioned before, viz. the harnessing of “German” virtues to criminal acts and destruction: “What is really worth imitating is the Germans’ orderliness, organization and thrift. These, the three greatest of their virtues, have been used in the perpetration of the greatest evil. Can you grasp the crushing ruthlessness, the monstrous efficiency of this dismal machine? That is Majdanek!”<sup>28</sup>

#### WARTIME AND OCCUPATION REALITIES AND HISTORICAL RECOLLECTIONS

So far, we have dealt with the impact exerted by experiences through which Poles went in 1939 - 1945, on the revision of the positive elements in the German stereotype. Now we shall turn to the authentication of the negative elements of that stereotype, in other words, the growing conviction that the traditional associations and notions had been confirmed by reality at hand.

The well-known saying that “Never will a German be a brother to a Pole” was never in history accepted with more conviction about its rightness and truth.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, those years seemed to be a culmination of the age-long Polish-German conflicts, with the Nazi regime being treated by the majority of Poles as the direct continuation of the aggressive efforts on the part of the Brandenburg Margraves, Teutonic Knights, the

<sup>27</sup> S. Dzikowski, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> L. Hirszfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

<sup>29</sup> Early in 1944 an anonymously published underground pamphlet by Antoni Trepieński appeared, *Niemcy osądzeni. Antologia 80 wypowiedzi polskich o Niemcach* [*Germans Judged. Anthology of 80 Polish Statements on Germans*], re-issued in an extended version after the war: *Potępieńcy. Sąd wieków nad Niemcami* [*The Damned. Judgment Passed by History on the Germans*], Łódź 1947. It was, of course, a collection of exclusively adverse opinions. As a motto to his book, S. Dzikowski selected the sentence: “*Naturale odium est inter Polonos et Teutonicos.*”

Prussian state, and later the German empire and the Weimar republic. In a broader context, the period of war and occupation was looked upon as a deadly struggle between the *German Drang nach Osten* and the Slavs as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

It is not our purpose to discuss the process in which the stereotype of a German, first as a "stranger", then as an "enemy", was formed in Poland. On this subject a wealth of material has been collected and published in 1938 by Kurt Lück who had lived in Poland.<sup>31</sup> The fates of his book are worth considering. The author's purpose was quite clear: he simply wished to prove how erroneous, wrong and incompatible with the German national character was the image of a German in the consciousness of at least a dozen-odd generations of Poles. In the light of his material (legends, folk sayings and couplets, literary and scientific works, press articles, pictures) the Poles were to appear as chauvinists whose critical appraisal of the Germans was unfounded, and utterly ungrateful for the Germans' role in Poland as carriers of culture and civilisation. Let us imagine for a moment that there had been no World War II or that it was the Poles who appeared in the role of aggressors and barbarous invaders, wanting to destroy their age-long enemy. Only then the work of Kurt Lück could be treated as a justified memento and would be otherwise eloquent. But, as we know, things did not happen that way.<sup>32</sup> It was the Germans whom Lück considered paragons of virtue who in 1939 appeared to Poles in the guise of a cruel foe. The old symbols and associations, saws and proverbs turned suddenly to be of current interest while the generalities they contained

<sup>30</sup> Cf. [B. Srocki], *Polska i Niemcy. Wczoraj dziś jutro. Co każdy Polak dzisiaj o Polsce i Niemczech wiedzieć powinien* [Poland and Germany. Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow. What Every Pole Should Know about Poland and Germany], Warszawa 1943, and pamphlet written by a National-Democratic activist Tadeusz Prus [Maciński], *Niemcy—największy wróg Polski i Słowiańszczyzny* [Germany—the Greatest Enemy of Poland and All Slavs], Warszawa 1944.

<sup>31</sup> K. Lück, *Der Mythos vom Deutschen in der polnischen Volksüberlieferung und Literatur. Forschungen zur deutsch-polnischen Nachbarschaft in ostmitteleuropäischen Raum*, Posen 1938, 2nd ed. Leipzig 1943 (published after the death of the author who was killed on the Eastern front).

<sup>32</sup> The West-German historian Frank Golczewski did not understand this at all; he wrote a kind of continuation of K. Lück's book *Das Deutschlandbild der Polen 1918 - 1939. Eine Untersuchung der Historiographie und der Publizist*, Düsseldorf 1974. Poles have been presented there as a nation of revanchists, chauvinists and German haters.



began to look like honest truth—they were confirmed by the daily realities of those years.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps the most frequent were at the time reminiscences harking back to the history of the Teutonic Knights. It is worth noting that even over the months directly preceding the war the tradition of the battle of Grunwald was used for propaganda purposes. The victory of the Polish arms in 1410 played the role of a symbol.<sup>34</sup> Let us remember that in July 1941, the Polish underground joined action "V" launched by the BBC, under the motto of Grunwald.<sup>35</sup> Also worth remembering is the popularity under the occupation of Sienkiewicz's *Krzyżacy* [*Knights of the Cross*] and Kraszewski's books, and the fact that the National People's Council created in February 1944 the Order of the Cross of Grunwald for services rendered in the struggle with the Nazi invader. The first proclamation issued by the Polish Workers' Party, of January 1942, said that "Modern Teutonic Knights from under the sign of the swastika cruelly torment the Polish people [...]. Together with the great Russian nation we shall all set out for the sacred struggle for the liberation of the Slavs from the Teutonic Knights' yoke."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> S. Dzikowski writes about Lück's book: "No other publication contains such a painstakingly put together collection of abuse, ridicule, jeers, jibes, insults, raillery, taunts, jokes, malicious mockery aimed at the Germans as this official publication of German propaganda [...]. This wonderful book should be placed in some prominent spot so one could enjoy its delicious contents collected so laboriously and naively in order to show what a lot of unjust and undeserved insults have been heaped by Poles on the innocent Germans," *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. the article, *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem* [*Battle of Grunwald*], "Polska Zbrojna," No. 194 of 16.7.1939, where the author writes: "Nowadays, the Grunwald victory plays almost the role of a symbol." On the other hand, the Germans planned to organize a big celebration on 27.8.1939 at Tannenberg, where they had won a battle in 1915. The idea was dropped after Soviet intervention.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. T. Szarota, "V"—znaczy zwycięstwo. Z dziejów wojny psychologicznej 1941-1945 [*"V" for Victory. An Episode of Psychological Warfare, 1941-1945*], "Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny," 1972, No. 4, p. 204.

<sup>36</sup> *Kształtowanie się podstaw programowych Polskiej Partii Robotniczej in 1942-1945. Wybór materiałów i dokumentów* [*Shaping of Programme Foundations of Polish Workers' Party in 1942-1945. Selected Materials and Documents*], Warszawa 1958, p. 12; very significant in this context is Tadeusz Trepkowski's poster on which two helmets are seen: one of a commander of the Order of the Teutonic Knights, the other with a swastika, and inscriptions which say: Grunwald 1410 and Berlin 1945, reproduced in J. Jaworska's *Polska sztuka walcząca 1939-1945* [*Polish Fighting Art, 1939-1945*], Warszawa 1976, p. 267.

The article *Zdziczały naród* [*The Savage Nation*], published in the "Biuletyn Informacyjny" of 23 Oct., 1941, contained an interpretation of the past characteristic of the wartime period: "German history from the times of the Teutonic Knights up to our days is a sea of human suffering and terrible wrongs, of monstrous and ruthless atrocities. Hitler did not invent concentration camps, mass murders and the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of people during a harsh winter. They have been bred over the centuries in the German soul. The ancient Pruthenians did not disappear from the world through assimilation—they had been literally slaughtered by the Knights of the Virgin Mary. The greatest Prussian king, Frederic the Great, was a model of a political gangster." Worth noting is the reference to the "German soul—the view about the existence of some sort of immanent evil rooted in the German national character. This kind of opinion, obviously unfounded but expressed in concrete circumstances, seemed convincing in the view of a considerable part of Polish society; it moulded its feelings and, at the same time, expressed them.

When, in the years of war and occupation, Poles referred to the tradition of the Polish-German relations, then not only the struggle with the Teutonic Knights would take on a topical meaning. How significant, for example, is the expression used by one of the diarists who described his experience at forced labour in the Reich: "The *Bauer* was not so bad but his wife was a real Pole-hater."<sup>37</sup> Of importance, particularly in Warsaw in autumn 1943, were the memories of how Germans were being disarmed in November 1918. One of the symptoms was the action "October," when this word-motto was being put up on the walls, heralding the approach of the settlement of accounts with the

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<sup>37</sup> T. Domański, *Sam się ratuj* [*Save Yourself*], in: *Z Literą "P"*, p. 156; Anna Czuperska-Sliwicka, writing about Hiersemann, deputy commandant of the Pawiak prison, uses the term "the fiercest Pole hater", *Cztery lata ostrego dyżuru*, p. 41; in the previously quoted issue of "Goniec Krakowski," counterfeited by the underground, there appeared the following advertisement: German bugs, infesting the Polish flats, can be destroyed by a Polish insecticide, the exact copy of the German "Ausrotten." Available at the Headquarters of Underground Struggle.

hated enemy.<sup>38</sup> These matters should be analyzed in a broader context, considering how the experiences in World War I of the commanders of the Polish resistance movement affected their political and military conceptions during World War II. We shall return to this question.

Another group of topics concerns the analysis of Poland's place in Europe and the working out of the principles of post-war domestic and foreign policies, which was carried out during the war and occupation. Here one should note the concurrence of views on the subject of insurance against a future German aggression. In this case, the difference of opinion concerned the choice of the system of alliances, not the merits of the case. The Polish public opinion as a whole approved the idea that the condition *sine qua non* of the Polish state's independent being was the solution of the German question. The representatives of various political groupings rather agreed that the transfer from Poland of the German minority was a necessity, as well as an adjustment of the western frontier, though in this latter case there were differences of opinion about the area of the lands to be regained.<sup>39</sup> It seems that the experiences of the years 1939-1945 were instrumental in the victory of the idea of a homogeneous state as concerns nationality, while the activity of the German fifth column and the German behaviour in Poland wrote off the chance of co-existence of the two nations on the territory of the Polish state. In the analysis of the post-war displacements of the German population from Poland the psychological conditionings of this action had been all too rarely considered. Doubtless, one of those conditionings was the image of the German enemy, rooted in the consciousness of the persecuted people who had become the object of the Nazi policy of extermination.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. W. Bartoszewski, *1859 dni Warszawy [Warsaw's 1859 Days]*, Kraków 1974, pp. 440, 447.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. M. Orzechowski, *Odra - Nysa Łużycka - Baltyk w polskiej myśli politycznej okresu II wojny światowej [Oder -Lusatian Neisse-Baltic Sea in Polish Political Thought during World War II]*, Wrocław 1969.

## FUNCTIONS OF STEREOTYPE IN SHAPING MOODS AND ATTITUDES

So far we have centred our analysis primarily on the intellectual aspect of the German image in the eyes of Poles during World War II. Our interest was focused on the then prevailing views, opinions and appraisals on the subject of the German nation. Now we shall deal with the role which the enemy stereotype played in the moulding of moods and attitudes of the Polish people; thus, we shall tackle the sphere of social psychology. We shall endeavour, on the one hand, to present the stereotype as a stimulant of feelings of hatred and contempt of the enemy, on the other, to analyze its function as one of the elements of the defence system of the Polish people, emerging spontaneously or built up deliberately by the resistance movement.

The state of the public feelings in the occupied country was the resultant of several, much differentiated factors; it was affected by the situation at the war fronts, the policy of the Nazi authorities and the underground activity. These feelings tended to undergo frequent and violent changes—the people oscillated between utter despair and helplessness, and outbursts of enthusiasm and optimism. In a concrete situation either fear and apprehension prevailed or faith and hope.<sup>40</sup> In our opinion, the German stereotype fulfilled a very vital role as a kind of remedy used by Polish society for conquering fear and apprehension, and also for increasing faith and hope in one's ultimate victory. The caricatured image of the enemy was to tone up the Polish population's spirits and to give it new courage.

Before we begin to discuss those specific functions of the German stereotype of the war and occupation years, let us quote the apt observations in the article *Strach i niepokój* [*Fear and Apprehension*], published in the underground "Biuletyn Informacyjny" of 20 March, 1941: "Apprehension and fear are deliberately fed by the Germans. The enemy must break down our

<sup>40</sup> Cf. T. Szarota, *Okupowanej Warszawy dzień powszedni. Studium historyczne* [*Daily Life in Occupied Warsaw. A Historical Study*], 2nd ed., Warszawa 1978, pp. 505-530, where I analyzed, after K. Levine, the "psychological living space" within the framework of zones of faith and hope, and fear and apprehension.

spiritual defences, he must exhaust our nervous strength. The enemy wants the feeling of fear to haunt us day and night, to muddle our minds at work, to poison our food and to chase away sleep. Whoever has lost his self-control, has become a toy in the enemy hand. It is clear that the breeding of fear is an important political activity ; it is as much of a battle with the Polish nation as was fighting in September 1939. This deliberate enemy campaign must be countered by a deliberate Polish campaign, an action to enhance calm."

The entire body of actions undertaken spontaneously by the people or organised by the resistance movement aimed at limiting fear, could be termed anti-fightening as opposed to the policy of intimidation applied by the occupiers. Among the many ways of reducing fear, wit and satire played an important role, as did the new vocabulary which conveyed the image of the enemy. The image of the "laughing-stock German" can be seen in the dozens of jokes and anecdotes while the words coined at the time to describe the enemy reflected it accurately ; his picture appeared in cartoons and caricatures published in the underground press. The German, thus presented, was to look pitiable and despicable instead of arousing feelings of fear. The presentation of the enemy, who in everyday life generated terror and fear, and of practically all his activities as objects of ridicule was of great psychological importance—in those circumstances, laughter was the first sign of the people breaking down the barrier of fear.

Mary Berg, shut up in the Warsaw ghetto, wrote about the role of humour as follows : "People laugh in order not to cry, but they laugh all the same. Laughter is the only weapon at our disposal—we sneer at death and the Nazi decrees. Humour is the only thing about which they are helpless, because they are incapable of understanding it."<sup>41</sup> Similar remarks are contained in an article published in the first issue of the underground satirical journal "Dylizans" of 15 Jan., 1944 : "Funniness is alien only to the Teutonic pigs. They are serious, great, infallible ; the thought that they might be . . . funny has never entered their

<sup>41</sup> *Le ghetto de Varsovie. Journal de Mary Berg*, ed. by S. L. Schneiderman, Paris 1947, P, 124 (entry of 29 Oct., 1941).

thick skulls." Let us note that this sentence shows up one of the elements of the German stereotype—the picture of a man devoid of a sense of humour. More, the Germans are called "Teutonic pigs," so we have here not only the animalization of the picture but a reference to the tradition of strife between Slavs and Germans. The same sentence also contains the words "thick skulls," meaning intellectual sluggishness. It is also said that the Germans are "great, infallible"—these are the further elements of the enemy stereotype, which emphasize his conceit, his conviction about his own dominance over other nations. Here we touch upon the very vital question of the attitude of the Polish people towards the Nazi race theory.

The myth about the German master race was every day confronted with the reality at hand. The *Herrenvolk* idea became an object of ridicule, it aroused not only the hatred of the persecuted and humiliated but also their contempt of the people obsessed with such an idea.<sup>42</sup> This has been expressed in, among other things, the following rhyme:<sup>43</sup>

Take Hitler's dark hair,  
And Goering's fat paunch,  
Add Goebbels' small size,  
Stir the mixture briskly;  
What rises from the brown mess?  
The lofty type of the Nordic race!

Jeered at were also Nazi orders and the whole activity of the occupation authorities aimed at emphasizing the superiority of the Germans. Suffice it to quote the reaction of Poles who saw at every step notices saying *Nur für Deutsche*—the same words began to appear on cemetery walls and street lamp posts.

Comicality has its own laws. Many apt remarks on the subject will be found in the classic work by Bergson who drew attention to the fact that man becomes funny when he reminds people of

<sup>42</sup> In the underground satirical journal "Luźna Kartka" there appeared in September 1943 an ingenious compilation of excerpts from Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (Song of the Bandar Log) and statements of several German scientists praising the master race—the similarity of the opinions expressed was quite shocking.

<sup>43</sup> G. Załęski, *op. cit.*, p. 79 (the poem *Rasa* [Nordic Race] appeared in the "Moskit" in 1943).

a soulless mechanism. Elsewhere Bergson says: "We always laugh when some person reminds us of a thing."<sup>44</sup> Well, the Germans in occupied Poland often enough seemed to be a "soulless mechanism" or, to be more precise, a ruthless crime weapon. The anecdote about "The compassionate eye" is peculiarly interesting in this context: A Jew led by a German to where he is to be shot is given a chance to save his life, if he guesses which of the policeman's eye is a glass one. When the German marvels at the right answer, the Jew explains: "Oy, mister policeman, it looked so human-like at me."<sup>45</sup> I might add here that it is this very anecdote, as best reflecting the situation in occupied Poland, that Lucien Besnard has included in his collection of jokes circulating in Europe during World War II.<sup>46</sup>

Let us now tackle the characteristic picture of a German as it emerges from the lexical material.<sup>47</sup> The words most often used by the Poles to describe the enemy were the traditional terms of "szkop" (equivalent of Kraut) and "szwab" (equivalent of Hun); as well as those referring to past experience such as "krzyżak" (Teutonic Knight), "prusak" (double meaning: Prussian and a kind of cockroach). Among the new terms notable is the group of hate-filled epithets evoking the cruel murderers and persecutors: stinker, Nazi vermin, butcher, torturer, thug, monster, assassin, son-of-a bitch, bastard. Next to them are several terms conveying a strong sense of jeer and contempt: crew-cut oaf, seasonal master, seasoner, short timer, temporary master, gentleman in an iron or tin hat. It is this group of epithets that shows very clearly the specific function of the crystallizing stereotype of the enemy—a figure ridiculed, caricaturized, deprived of any greatness, arousing no respect, which was to diminish the only too tangible ghastliness accompanying the Poles in their daily contacts with

<sup>44</sup> H. Bergson, *Le rire. Essai sur la signification du comique*, 6th ed., Paris 1910, p. 59.

<sup>45</sup> [A. Jachnina and M. Ruth-Buczowski], *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>46</sup> L. Besnard, *Rires sous la botte*, Paris 1945, p. 64.

<sup>47</sup> Two works are of help here: S. Kania, *Polska gwara konspiracyjno-partyzancka czasu okupacji hitlerowskiej 1939-1945* [Polish Underground-Guerilla Slang during Nazi Occupation, 1939-1945]. Zielona Góra 1975, pp. 74-88; and F. Pluta, *Język polski w okresie drugiej wojny światowej* [Polish Language during World War II] Opole 1975 (both, however, should be supplemented).

the Germans. Thus, the stereotype as an instrument of struggle with the enemy was to reduce fear, but at the same time its purpose was to strengthen faith and hope. This aspect is quite clear when we analyze such terms as "seasonal master" or "short timer", which implied people doomed to defeat and failure—Germans deprived of any chances of victory.<sup>48</sup>

Naturally, the reduction of fear was accomplished not only through various means of decreasing the feeling of danger. No less important were the actions aimed at kindling the courage of one's own people, showing at the same time fear and apprehension sweeping over the enemy. Let us quote here an excerpt from an underground leaflet (Frost—the best insecticide) distributed and put up in Warsaw in February 1942: "Don't be afraid! Don't throw away or burn this leaflet. Don't be afraid of the enemy—the enemy is getting more and more scared of us—of you, too! Chin up! Don't care a hoot about all the nerve shakings! Don't care a fart about the Krauts!"<sup>49</sup> It should be remembered that at the same time a new political force had appeared in the Polish resistance movement—the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) whose conception of a continuously conducted warfare with the enemy included demonstrating to the Poles that Germans can be defeated, that they are not all-powerful; on the contrary, the German retreats or even lightens the terror under the impact of blows and an increasing sense of anger.

It would be probably unjust, if in the German stereotype presented by the underground we would see a coward, although it cannot be denied that some efforts were made in that direction. They can be detected in the cartoons sneering at the German soldiers and policemen assaulting fishwives and children or looting the homes of innocent and helpless people. The panic

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<sup>48</sup> In the witticisms under the occupation a separate category of jokes and anecdotes about the future of Germany and the German people can be distinguished. A favourite theme, tackled also in other occupied countries, was the vision of a "little Germany." A similar trend can be discerned in the prophecies and predictions, immensely popular at the time.

<sup>49</sup> A leaflet containing much information about the activity of the Polish resistance movement and the Polish troops fighting with the Allies was entitled *Mróz—najlepszy środek na robactwo* [Frost, the Best Insecticide], cf. W. Bartoszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 256.



which filled the Germans during air raids was laughed at for the same purpose. In September 1942, one of the underground papers published the following verse:<sup>50</sup>

Funny to see a mob of Krauts  
Who swagger as the master race  
To rush for life as the sirens wail  
So fast their pants drop off !

The trend in underground propaganda in this respect was fairly accurately reflected in the article *Czy Niemiec jest odważny?* [*It the German Brave?*], published in the "Biuletyn Informacyjny" of 21 May, 1942. It read in part: "It would be unpardonable to belittle the enemy and to lie to oneself in order to cheer up. On the other hand, it is common foolishness to liken a German to a lion and the German people to a people of heroes [...]. Suffice it to remember what we have seen and continue to see in Poland. That helplessness of German infantry during the siege of Warsaw, that panic, frequently shown in September, of Polish infantrymen attacking with bayonets, that irritating cowardice in Warsaw during the few minor Soviet air raids, when both soldiers and various uniformed Germans brutally pushed their way through women and children in order to be the first in the shelter [...] The German is anything if not disciplined. He trusts his commanders and the authorities implicitly. He has the courage of the wolf capable to charge a flock of sheep even single-handed."

In the view of the author of the article, when faced with a determined opponent "the German becomes susceptible to fear and panic; his psychological inability to offer resistance is then simply glaring, and vulgar, abject cowardice fills the German soul to the brim."

To conclude let us deal with a most essential matter, viz. the role of the enemy stereotype in the process of consolidation of the Polish society, in creating a community of people suffering the same fate. In this case, the stereotype fulfilled a double function: on the one hand, it helped in carrying out the boycott of the invaders, in completely shutting off the Polish community;

<sup>50</sup> G. Załęski, *op. cit.*, p. 43 (the verse appeared in the journal "Nowy Dzień" of 28 Sept., 1942).

on the other, it was an important factor facilitating the emergence of a broad social hinterland for the resistance movement. In a dichotomic division, the group of "us Poles" was opposed by the group "they, the Germans," the aliens, the enemies. In these circumstances, any social or intimate contact with a German became an act of national treason. The Nazi *Rassenschande*, by which term the members of the *Herrenvolk* described sexual relations with the population belonging to "the lower races," the Poles countered with punishing their fellow countrymen for this kind of behaviour with the loss of civic honour. It is no accident that one of the first signs of the nascent resistance was the handbills put up in the streets of Warsaw, which appeared in autumn 1939: "Women who associate with Germans are notified that there are still vacancies in brothels."<sup>51</sup> In a special leaflet, distributed in spring 1942, we read: "Relations with the butchers of the Polish nation are a crime against our fallen and murdered fathers, brothers and sons [...]. Women who associate with a german (written with a small letter, contrary to the rules of spelling) will be branded and cast out of the female community [...]. Infamous behaviour will not be forgotten, nor will it go unpunished, either now or after the war."<sup>52</sup>

As early as the first months of the occupation the foundations were being laid for the future moral code regulating the attitude of Poles towards the Nazi invaders. On 20 Jan., 1940, there appeared an article in the most popular underground paper "Polska Żyje!," headlined *Tym, którzy nie wiedzą* [To those Who Don't Know], which explained: "It is obvious that the sharpest boycott should be applied, and the avoidance as of a pest of everything German, primarily everything that smacks of German propaganda, because it only brings us poison and destruction." Later, the underground press would publish whole lists of moral command-

<sup>51</sup> Small notices with this inscription were put up in Warsaw on 11.12.1939, by members of the Plan organization. Cf. W. Bartoszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>52</sup> If I am not mistaken, the text of the leaflet *Kobiety Polki!* [Women of Poland!] has not been published after the war, nor made use of by historians. I found a copy slipped into the "Biuletyn Informacyjny," No. 15 (119) of 16.6.1942 (in the collection of the Polish Academy of Sciences' Institute of History in Warsaw).

ments binding upon the patriotic Pole.<sup>53</sup> Boycott concerned both personal contacts with the Germans and the events organized by them, orders issued by them, official press and even German language. A very precise image of the enemy emerges in the light of this code of national ethics, an enemy with whom one must fight in order to save ordinary human dignity. The enemy is cruel, ruthless, he wants to destroy the Polish nation and Polish culture, so he is an enemy with whom no compromise is possible. Underlining this truth was a very important element of the concept of civil struggle, of the gradual involving of the entire society in the resistance movement. According to the concept of the "London" underground, the internalization, i.e. the rooting and popularization of the proper attitudes was to be a process divided into stages. The matter was viewed differently by members of the leftist groupings who wanted a rapid stimulation of the masses into action, to use the load of hatred accumulated by them.

THE QUESTION OF GUILT OF THE GERMAN PEOPLE OWN  
EXPERIENCE AND THE DIFFERENTIATION OF OPINION  
ABOUT GERMANS

In autumn 1940, the underground "Biuletyn Informacyjny" published an article headlined *O "złym hitlerowcu" i "dobrym Niemcu"* [*The Bad Nazi and the Good German*], which is of significance in our discussion. Below are extensive excerpts: "Poles are a good-natured people, they forget their wrongs easily. This national feature is quite striking with regard to the Germans. A short time suffices to push the most heinous crimes into oblivion. For the past few months we have observed increasing Polish-German contacts. Sometimes the relationship is almost that of friends. The explanation offered most frequently is that 'the Nazis are criminals but the army...', but those elderly railwaymen..., but a German of my acquaintance... They are

<sup>53</sup> Cf. the article *Bojkot najeźdźcy* [*Boycotting the Invader*], "Polska Żyje!" No. 48—48 of 1.5.1940, and "Biuletyn Informacyjny" of 10.5.1940; probably in autumn 1941, the *Kodeks moralności obywatelskiej* [*Code of Civic Morality*] was drawn up and published; it contained 25 paragraphs on crimes of national treason and dignity, and on punishments meted out by underground courts; cf. the detailed analysis of the rules of that code: T. Szarota, *Okupowanej Warszawy...*, pp. 567 - 571.

all victims of the regime, just as we are. They are really decent people'. What a terrible blindness! What boundless naivety and ignorance! What stupidity, often villainy, this trying to justify one's own opportunistic meanness [...]. The theory about the German master race and Polish nation of labourers is not a Nazi invention but the 'achievement' of German scholars long before Hitler [...]. No! There is no discrepancy between Hitler and the vast majority of the German people! It is no accident that Hitler heads Germany. No leader has ever been so much approved of by his people as Hitler whose leadership ideas have pervaded, and fermented in, the German population infected with the Prussian spirit. One must not delude oneself. That is why we must force our minds and hearts to understand: it is not the Nazi that is the deadly enemy of the Poles, it is the Prussianized German. Unfortunately, nowadays a Prussian means every German man and woman."<sup>54</sup>

Aside the purely propaganda elements of that passage, which follows the appeal for a universal boycott of the invader, and the kind of arguments used in the article, I think it is worth noting the voices, quoted in it, which differ from the stereotyped generalities. The editors of the central organ of the Union for Armed Struggle saw in them the sign of almost national treason; the persons talking about the "good German" were charged with opportunism. Considering that the article appeared at a time of depressed spirits after the victorious German campaign in the West, when the chance for a rapid end to the war had receded and instead the necessity emerged of adapting oneself to the existing situation, the charge of opportunism might have been partly justified. On the other hand, the fact should be noted that the autumn of 1940, although dozens of Nazi crimes have already been committed in Poland, could not be compared with the balance of the occupation policies as it stood at the end of the war. With time and with the growth of tragic experience, as the Nazi terror escalated and the consolidation of the Polish people increased, the term "good German" was increasingly coupled with that of "dead German."

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<sup>54</sup> "Biuletyn Informacyjny" of 28 Nov., 1940.

The question of the German nation's guilt with regard to crimes of the Nazi regime bothered the Poles both during the war and occupation, and after 1945; it is still often present in our discussions and polemics. Ludwik Hirszfild wrote in his memoirs: "A nation which adored the criminals and gave them power over itself and Europe is an accomplice in guilt [. . .]. I do not want to have millions of people murdered and then to hear, as if mankind has had simply its corns trodden on: 'Sorry, I did not mean it, I didn't want to'. I do not want it, because I had been with those who were destined for carnage and I know their pain."<sup>55</sup>

Similar reflections can be found in the article *Zdziczały naród*, quoted above and published in the "Biuletyn Informacyjny" on 23 Oct., 1941. The relevant passage reads: "There is a certain kind of mental disease called moral insanity. Such a patient does not distinguish good from evil and commits various offences and crimes with a perfectly clear conscience. Well, the German nation is sick with moral insanity! The Nazis are special specimens of this disease. But it is also rooted in the soul of the German reservist, in the elderly railwayman, in the sweetly smiling German girl, and in the soul of the 'kindly' fat German woman. We Poles, who are good-natured, must not forget it. Something must be done once and for all with that savage nation!"

This last sentence speaks clearly of the punishment which should be meted out to the German nation. At the time, the question of the Germans' responsibility for the crimes committed by the Third Reich would be discussed in its various aspects. Clearly, the feelings of anger frequently gained the upper hand, demanding retribution as redress of wrongs; but next to them we note voices which warn against imitating the enemy methods and demanding the just punishment of all guilty persons but excluding the possibility of applying the principle of collective responsibility. In my opinion, of great significance are the instructions received from the underground authorities by the Poles deported to forced labour in Germany. Aleksander Kamiński in his book, published underground in 1942, which was virtually

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<sup>55</sup> L. Hirszfild, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

a manual for a conspirator, wrote: "Never join an action which goes against your conscience. Destroy installations, equipment, stores, harvests; if you can, cause destruction in the ranks of the enemy troops. Protect the lives of helpless persons, women, children, old people and domestic animals. I know perfectly well that many terrible wrongs, monstrous misdeeds and atrocities have been committed by Germans in Poland. But I would not want the Poles to vie with the Germans in this field. A nation of criminals and bandits, a nation ill with moral insanity should remain alone in its savagery among the nations of Europe. We shall maintain and cultivate as long as possible a noble attitude, an attitude of fair play in this struggle."<sup>56</sup>

The Catholic underground publications played a special role in the propagation of this kind of ideas. In autumn 1943, the paper "Prawda", organ of the Front for Rebirth of Poland published an article headlined significantly: *Odwet, zemsta czy kara?* [*Retaliation, Revenge or Punishment?*] It read in part: "We do not crave retaliation, we do not crave revenge primarily because it multiplies evil and wrongs the person who takes vengeance by killing his sense of justice. And it is that sense of justice which we shall very much need in Poland [...]. Yet, the same feeling of justice forces us to demand punishment for our executioners. Let Washington and London draw up lists of the chief criminals, let them demand their extradition before declaring a cease-fire, we shall look for them on our own. And we promise, with a full sense of responsibility for that word, to find them."<sup>57</sup>

In the same issue there appeared a poem by Leonia Jabłonkówna, entitled *Modlitwa* [*Prayer*], of which two stanzas are quoted below for their humanitarian value:

For the graves which spell respite  
 In these fearful agonized days,  
 Save, o Lord, the women and children  
 From the fires of Hamburg ablaze.

. . . . .

<sup>56</sup> Quoted after: *Polskie siły zbrojne w II wojnie światowej*, t. III, *Armia Krajowa* [*Polish Armed Forces in World War II*, vol. III, *The Home Army*], London 1950, p. 96.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted after W. Bartoszewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 469 - 470.

In the hour of triumph over defeat,  
When in your wrath you'll appear,  
Give us strength, give joy victorious,  
But tear our hatred away.

Władysław Bartoszewski, who recalled Jabłonkówna's poem some years ago, wrote that it "had considerable repercussions among the Warsaw intellectuals. The publication of such a poem at a time of mass street executions was certainly an act of great moral and civic courage, a testimony to the very high ethical level of the Catholic élite.

Speaking of the question of guilt of the German nation, one should, in my view, take into account a certain feature of the Polish mentality which could be observed during the war and occupation, and which is very vital for the understanding of the present ideas and attitudes. I have in mind the expectation that the Germans will feel guilty of and responsible for the crimes of the Third Reich. An aphorism, which circulated in Poland in early 1944, illustrated this hope crisply: "The Germans will go on fighting for the next fifty years. For half-year they will hit out at the bolsheviks, half-year at the Anglo-Saxons, and for forty-nine years they will hit their own breasts!"<sup>58</sup>

In analyzing the responsibility of the Germans for all that happened in the years 1939 - 1945, people often reflected on the degree of their guilt. So it is in this context that the behaviour of the German army, police, civil servants and clerks in the occupied territories was discussed, as well as that of civilians in the Third Reich. In Czesław Madajczyk's opinion: "The people felt unqualified hatred towards the German police, the SS and the members of the NSDAP as the direct perpetrators of the atrocities. The older German soldiers aroused distrust while the younger hostility. Despite this hostile attitude towards the military, which manifested itself in universal joy at the sight or news of transports with wounded soldiers, compassion was sometimes shown in individual cases. With regard to the civilian officials and their families from the Reich the feelings were less uniform, the opinions differed—from hatred to sympathy for the "exceptionally decent"; generally speaking, determined unfriendliness

<sup>58</sup> "Luźna Kartka," I 1944.

prevailed. The attitude towards the volksdeutsch was particularly fierce.”<sup>59</sup>

Let us return to the question of the differentiation of Polish opinions about the Germans. Here several factors should be considered such as geographical differentiation, the impact of individual world views and political convictions on those opinions, changes in attitudes during the war. But it does not seem to me that there existed a clear difference of ideas on the subject of Germans depending on social and professional stratification, or the division of the population according to sex and age.

When speaking about geographical differentiation the following division appears compelling: Poles pre-war citizens of the German state, Polish population in the so-called Territories incorporated into the Reich, and Poles in the General Gouvernement. This division is unsatisfactory for many reasons. In the case of the German Polonia it does not take into account the different situation of Poles in Westphalia, Berlin, Warmia and Masuria or in the part of Silesia conceded to Germany. The common treatment of the Incorporated Territories does not take into account the difference in occupation policies in particular administrative units, while the use of the term General Gouvernement creates the danger of “Warsaw-centrism.” Besides the difference in the situation of Warsaw and Cracow, one should bear in mind the specific features of the Eastern Borderlands where since 1941 the Germans had deliberately been fuelling the already burning Polish-Ukrainian problem. During the intensification of the terror on the part of Ukrainian nationalists these same Germans sometimes presented themselves as “guardians” or “protectors” of the Polish population.

When examining the opinions and attitudes territory-wise particular attention should be paid to the fact of the existence or non-existence of any contacts between Poles and Germans prior to 1939. Putting aside the Poles who were citizens of the Reich, it must be said that such contacts, social as well as family ties, concerned Silesians, inhabitants of Great Poland and Pomerania, and also residents of Central Poland, to mention the

<sup>59</sup> Cz. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce* [Third Reich Policy in Occupied Poland], vol. I, Warszawa 1970, p. 489.



co-existence of the two nationalities in Łódź or in some Mazovian villages. Poles who knew Germans earlier, suddenly, in 1939, witnessed a transformation of their erstwhile neighbours and, a fact of importance, fellow citizens, into arrogant members of the *Herrenvolk*. A Poznań resident, Alojzy Andrzej Łuczak, who saw the occupation through the child's eyes, described one of the aspects of that metamorphosis: "The local Germans would move into better flats. All those I knew now became well-off. They were nicely dressed and looked very happy."<sup>60</sup>

Definitely, most of the members of the German national minority adopted a hostile attitude towards the Poles during the war, and manifested it ostentatiously at that. This does not mean that there were not among them people who behaved quite in contrast with the increasingly general stereotype. It would be difficult to say to what extent the observation of those different behaviours and attitudes aroused, even at the time, reflections about the falseness of generalizations according to which the entire German nation was blamed. Probably every such case was most often treated as an "exception to the rule". Of course, the matter was different when it concerned direct collaboration of Polish and German anti-fascists fighting "for our freedom and yours", but it should be remembered that such facts were rarely known to the general public. Today, after so many years, information on the subject can be found in the works of Polish historians, serving the cause of breaking down barriers of national prejudice.<sup>61</sup>

In the analysis of the differentiation of opinions about the Germans depending on one's own experience, two specific groups can be distinguished: prisoners of war and concentration camp inmates. The first group should also be divided into prisoners of soldier camps (Stalags), and those of officer camps (Oflags). Poles in Stalags were almost generally put to forced labour, so their

<sup>60</sup> A. A. Łuczak, *Głodny [Hungry]*, 2nd ed., Poznań 1976, p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Above all, I have in mind here a very valuable book by W. Góra and S. Okęcki, *Walczyli o nowe Niemcy. Niemieccy antyfaszyści w ruchu oporu na ziemiach polskich [They Fought for a New Germany. German Anti-fascists in the Resistance Movement in Polish Lands]*, Warszawa 1972; apart from thorough scientific research the book contains also reminiscences of Poles and Germans, and reprints of documents.

experience is closer to that of people sent to work in the Reich than to the conditions in which the officers in Oflag found themselves. True, even in those camps there were cases of persecution of Poles, trampling of national dignity and even executions of POW's, yet the image of the German, which the prisoners in officer camps saw, was seldom that of a hangman-torturer.<sup>62</sup>

Quite a different portrait of a German emerges from the recollections of the inmates of concentration camps. I am aware that it is a subject deserving separate analysis so I shall concentrate on a few selected questions. The first concerns a trend in camp literature which could be called martyrological. Its principal feature is the description of the camp reality on the principle of contrasted images of evil, personified by the German butcher, and good, represented by the Polish victim. Significantly, the figures of SS-men described as lords of life and death take on, unintentionally, a "superhuman" aspect, precisely the traits of the *Übermensch*.

A much more intricate portrait emerges from a more profound analysis of the realities of the camp world, above all, when the inmates began to see members of the German nation among those persecuted, and own fellow countrymen among the persecutors.<sup>63</sup> In the writing of this other trend one finds increasingly often reflections about the criminality of the whole Nazi system, with the "times of contempt" as one of the chapters in the history of

<sup>62</sup> Cf. M. Sadzewicz, *Oflag*, 3d ed., Warszawa 1958, pp. 30-33; F. Dończyk, *Stalag XIA Altengrabow*, Wrocław 1959, pp. 234-235; W. Ziemiński, *Wrzesień, oflag, wyzwolenie* [September, Oflag, Liberation], 2nd ed., Warszawa 1963 (description of Woldenberg camp, pp. 99-173). Of extreme interest are the results of attitude probes carried out among POWs in Oflag in 1940-1941 by K. Krakowski and K. Sobolski, *Spoleczne i światopoglądowe postawy polskich oficerów-jeńców przebywających w czasie II wojny światowej w wojskowych obozach w Niemczech* [Social and World Philosophy Attitudes of Polish Officer-POWs in Army Camps in Germany during World War II], "Studia Socjologiczno-polityczne," 1963, No. 14, pp. 57-109 (unfortunately, the respondents were not asked their opinion of the Germans, but much material was collected about their own national stereotype).

<sup>63</sup> Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz, in analyzing the situation at Stutthof, where he himself was an inmate, writes: "Unfortunately, some of the Poles holding senior posts who had been in the camp since its very beginnings, behaved mostly in solidarity with the German criminals. In their brutality, many Poles in charge of prison blocks or warders equalled or even outdid the German criminals." *Obóz koncentracyjny Stutthof* [Stutthof Concentration Camp], 2nd ed., Gdańsk 1970, p. 1.

mankind. The well-known motto from Zofia Nałkowska's *Medaliony* [*Medallions*]: "Men have meted out this fate to men" has been certainly most fully reflected in the writings of Tadeusz Borowski, whose stories from Auschwitz have been very aptly described by Andrzej Werner as "ordinary Apocalypse." In analyzing the torturers appearing in Borowski's works, Werner writes: "First of all, they are just people, human beings made of blood and flesh [...] no demonization and deification of the criminal, no camera shots from below, in which the figure of the SS-man dominates the world of subjects—as in the stale set film pattern depicting not just life in camps but life in general under the occupation, or in war films (the best way: a large figure in the foreground, the world of subjects—tiny, faraway ants—seen between the arrogantly poised legs of the masters). No terror, majesty, no ghastly colours—simply ordinary people."<sup>64</sup>

Stanisław Grzesiuk's view of the camp is similar. His recollections contain the following scene in Mauthausen: "When we were passing the SS barracks, I saw an SS-man. An oaf—a sort of soldier Schveik: big cap, baggy trousers, an idiot's mug. We were barely a few metres away from him. I burst out laughing and said to Stefan (Krakowski, Grzesiuk's friend): Look, what a specimen, if I hit him in the noddle, I would force him into the ground up to his ears."<sup>65</sup>

A separate question is that of the attitude of Poles, inmates of concentration camps, towards the Germans also shut up there. This varied according to whether the majority of pro-German "functions" was in the hands of German criminal elements (called green and black "winkel" or "corner") or the functionaries were German anti-fascists (red "winkel") as exemplified by the situation in Buchenwald. In many camps Poles and Germans cooperated on the basis of the international resistance movement, but even in this kind of contacts there was a certain amount of mistrust.<sup>66</sup> It should be noted that Poles felt much respect towards

<sup>64</sup> A. Werner, *Zwyczajna Apokalipsa. Tadeusz Borowski i jego wizja świata obozów* [*Ordinary Apocalypse. Tadeusz Borowski and his Vision of the Camp World*], Warszawa 1971, p. 87.

<sup>65</sup> S. Grzesiuk, *Pięć lat Kacetu* [*Five Years in Concentration Camp*], 4th ed., Warszawa 1970, p. 88.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. J. Garliński, *Oświęcim walczący* [*Fighting Auschwitz*], London 1974, pp. 60 - 67, 197, 201.

a small group of German inmates marked with a purple "winkel," i.e. Jehovah's Witnesses, people belonging to a sect which opposed war and behaved with great dignity.

Theoretically speaking, the inmates of concentration camps formed a group prepared for carrying out acts of vengeance, retaliation and bloody drawing of accounts with their persecutors. We know that in some camps lynchings really did take place at the moment of liberation. But it was quite on the cards that the hostility towards the Germans would also take its toll of the civilian population. This did not happen. Antonina Piątkowska, an Auschwitz inmate, wrote in her memoir of the evacuation of the camp and the march across Germany: "How strange is the human heart. For years the hatred of the Germans, who tormented us, waxed and became more and more fierce. But from beneath the rubble there floated to us wailings, suffering people were desperately crying for help. This was enough to make us try as we might—we were so weak and half starved—to dig up those trapped beneath, to save those still alive. The fact that they were Germans did not matter, so much so that the SS-men guarding us looked on our persistent efforts with disbelief. They did not urge us on, there was no one to urge."<sup>67</sup>

This transformation of hatred into pity could also be observed in the behaviour of Poles towards the German soldiers during the last stage of the war, for instance in the help offered to deserters or the compassion shown to the wounded—much more often in the years 1944 - 1945 than earlier.

A significant evolution of views on the subject of Germans can be detected in the journalistic writings of the Polish Workers' Party. The article *O robocie wśród żołnierzy niemieckich* [Work among German Soldiers], published in the Warsaw underground "Okólnik" of 1.7.1942, said: "The fundamental principle which stems from our everyday reality and thus is instrumental in our attitude towards the German soldiers is as follows: every soldier on the Polish soil is our enemy. We shall fight him at every step and with every means. We emphasize this principle very clearly lest our comrades have false ideological illusions or doubts:

<sup>67</sup> A. Piątkowska, *Wspomnienia oświęcimskie* [Reminiscences of Auschwitz], Kraków 1977, pp. 147 - 148.

every German soldier, irrespective of whether he is a worker or a peasant, is, first and foremost, an integral part of the military machine which is crushing the living body of Poland." It does not require much effort to detect the allusions hidden in the term "ideological illusions"—they concerned the notions, deeply ingrained in the communist movement, of internationalism and brotherhood of the "proletarians of all countries."

About half-year after the publication of that article, a reference to its ideas could be found in the well-known open letter of the PPR Central Committee to the Office of the Polish Government-in-Exile, of 15.1.1943, where one sentence sounded quite an exceptional note in the then prevailing situation. It read: "We appeal to all who can, in any way, serve the cause of the liberation of our people: let him join us be he a German, a Ukrainian or anybody else."<sup>68</sup> Seeing in a German a possible comrade-in-arms must have certainly shaken public opinion, the very use of such a formulation must be acknowledged as an act of political wisdom as well as political courage.

The article *Nasz stosunek do Niemców* [*Our Attitude towards Germans*], published in the Łódź, incorporated in the Reich, underground paper "Okólnik" on 16 Dec., 1943, contained an extensive exposition of the views of PPR leaders on the subject. Excerpts from it: "Should we hold the view that every German is our enemy and that there is no way to come to an agreement, or should we try to find certain dividing lines which differentiate the German people and point out those Germans who are our ruthless enemies and whom we shall fight to the end, and those who, like us, are the victims of Nazism? Such dividing lines do exist [...]. They divide German society, both in the Reich and in our lands, into Nazis and anti-fascists, into those who have joined Hitler's bandwagon for better or worse, i.e. the SS, Gestapo, high officials, industrialists, members of the Nazi party etc., all kinds of police, for whom the end of the war spells death, and so they press at all costs for the prolongation of the hostilities, expending millions of lives in the process—and the thousands of German workers, peasants and working intelligentsia who are

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<sup>68</sup> *Kształtowanie się podstaw programowych PPR...*, pp. 91 - 92.

dying under the rubble of the bombed cities, whom the Nazi machine drives to the front [. . .]. Every German in authority is an occupier and mortal enemy whom we are and will be fighting. But every German who has understood what Nazism means, who has grasped that only solidarity in struggle of all the anti-Nazi forces may bring liberation also to the German masses, becomes our ally in the fight against Nazism. We must remember Stalin's words : 'The German nation has been and will be, Nazism has come and will go'.<sup>69</sup>

We have mentioned elsewhere the question of impact of the experience gained by the leaders of the "London camp" military underground on their concept of the fight with the enemy. One of the basic principles of that concept was preparation by stages to armed insurrection which was to coincide with the decline of the German war machine. It was thought, incorrectly as it turned out, that the end of World War II would be similar to 1918, that the German army would have its morale violently undermined and that, in the final stage of the war, would not offer any resistance and would let itself be disarmed or at least neutralized. Therefore, on the basis of such notions, not only appropriate propaganda was developed but also appropriate tactics applied in the war with the enemy.

In the field of propaganda of special significance was action "N" (*Niemcy—Germans*) conducted by the "London" underground, which by now has been amply documented.<sup>70</sup> Its object was to demoralize the enemy, to spread despondency and doubts in the minds of German soldiers, to drive a wedge between the Wehrmacht and the Nazi police and SS. Characteristically, the appeals and press of the "N" group referred to quite a different German stereotype—the virtues of the German soldier were spoken of with respect, the soldier's honour was appealed to, outstanding German generals such as G. Rundstedt or W. Reichenau were presented as supposed enemies of Hitler, who were allegedly trying to save the dignity and honour of the German army.

<sup>69</sup> Stalin's statement has been quoted somewhat incorrectly. Actually, he said : "Historical experience teaches us that Hitlers come and go, but the German nation, the German state remain."

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Akcja "N". Wspomnienia 1941 - 1944* [Action "N". Recollections, 1941 - 1944], ed. by H. Auderska and Z. Ziólek, Warszawa 1972.

The acceptance of the idea that, at the outbreak of the insurrection, the German soldiers may give it a sort of passive support had its repercussions on the forms of the struggle with the enemy during the occupation. Up to the end of 1942, the AK (Home Army) underground tried to avoid terrorist actions and attempts against the Wehrmacht soldiers. During the actions aimed at securing arms, members of the organization were to kill them only in extreme circumstances. In the next period, too, when the armed activity of the Home Army increased, the victims of the attempts were primarily Gestapo functionaries and officials in hated institutions (e.g. the Arbeitsamt), rarely officers and men of the regular army.<sup>71</sup> Incidentally, with time Poles began to look upon the German army as a vital component of the entire Nazi terror machinery. In Warsaw, such an opinion was justified by the participation of soldiers in street round-ups and by the way they treated the Polish population. Here the most brutal and ruthless were airmen.

Let us move now from the occupied territories to the Reich and tackle the image of a German as it appeared before the eyes of the hundreds of thousands of Poles deported there to forced labour. It is an absolute fact that it was precisely in those special circumstances and against the intentions of the Nazi regime that the process of the two nations becoming acquainted, unprecedented on such a scale, began. Personal contacts were unavoidable, the people observed one another, drew conclusions from attitudes and behaviour, confronted an earlier stereotype with the reality. The consequences of this confrontation differed.

Doubtless, for the majority of Poles coming face to face with the fairly general hostility of the Germans the negative stereotype was confirmed as their sufferings and humiliation attested all too clearly the truth of the notion about the abyss separating the two nations. In the collections of reminiscences of people drafted for forced labour almost every page testifies to the wrongs perpetrated by German hands, to physical and moral

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<sup>71</sup> General Stefan Rowecki, cryptonym Grot, commander of the Home Army, issued several formal orders forbidding attacks on soldiers of the Wehrmacht; cf. e.g. Order of 13 March, 1943. CA KC PZPR Home Army Headquarters 203/I - I, p. 18.

persecutions, beatings, tormenting, and vulgar abuse. Weronika Wolska: "I got used to the 'Polish swine' as one gets used to his daily prayers."<sup>72</sup> Many authors underlined the sadistic inclinations of the Germans with whom they came into direct contact. Often the pages of these recollections bring descriptions of the shameful procedure used by the bauers and businessmen in the selection of the Polish workers deported to the Reich, which was practically indistinguishable from the one used in animal or slave markets.<sup>73</sup> There is also a number of remarks about the alleged German honesty, thoroughness, truthfulness. Zofia Taborska concludes thus: "The Germans themselves taught us not to believe any of them."

Besides this type of experience and the accompanying reflections, forced labour in Germany had also other consequences, comparatively less emphasized, both in memoirs and historiography. I would include among them the direct contact with a society under Nazi totalitarianism, i.e. the ability to observe at close quarters and every day the results of the propaganda indoctrination and police terror which created a universal psychosis of fear.<sup>74</sup>

When talking about the indoctrination through Goebbels's propaganda, attention should be drawn to the myth, created by it, of the bloody Sunday in Bydgoszcz and the murdering by Poles of 58 thousand Germans residing in Poland. Although the background of this affair is now universally known,<sup>75</sup> I think

<sup>72</sup> W. Wolska, *Nigdy więcej* [Never Again] in: *Przemoc - Ponizenie - Poniewierka. Wspomnienia z przymusowych robot rolnych 1939 - 1945* ed. by I. Staszyński, Warszawa 1967, p. 409.

<sup>73</sup> Zofia Taborska recollects: "[...] we were led into a large square. Many Germans who were to buy us were waiting there. Yes, buy us. It was literally a market. The Germans would approach us, look at our hands, muscles, pay attention to good looks, often use sticks to tilt a head upwards or to indicate the direction in which the slave was to turn." *Ibidem*, p. 620. Roman Paś, also put up "for sale," wrote later: "[...] the ancient slave markets in Egypt, Rome or Greece were supposed to be ages away from us. Since Lincoln, there was to be no more slavery in the world. I believed so. And now I found myself on a slave market in our times, in 1940, in the Third Reich," *Ibidem*, p. 121.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. on this subject the very apt remarks by F. Ryszką, *op. cit.*, 2nd ed., pp. 302 - 305.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. K. M. Pospieszalski, *Sprawa 58.000 "Volksdeuschów". Sprostowanie hitlerowskich oszczerstw w sprawie strat niemieckiej mniejszości w Polsce w ostatnich miesiącach przed wybuchem wojny i w toku*



that its psychological repercussions are still underestimated. It had an exceptionally strong impact on the treatment of Poles in the Reich. Let witnesses speak—Stanisław Spich recollects: “The first contact with the hostile Germans in their own land caused sensation among the residents of Brandenburg. The news that Poles, those people who they thought had killed Germans, had arrived spread like lightning. A fairly big group of adults and children accompanied us on the way, spitting and shouting: ‘Polnische Schweine!’. But for the escort of the Schutzpolizei, a group of the Hitlerjugend would have lynched us.”<sup>76</sup> Seweryn Kowalczyk had a similar experience: “The older, bolder young people spat on us and called out ‘bromberger Mörder’ which alluded to the so-called by the Germans ‘bloody Sunday in Bydgoszcz’. I did not realize that the impact of Nazi propaganda on German society could be so strong.”<sup>77</sup>

Leon Budny’s relation carries interesting remarks on the subject of confrontation of the stereotype with reality: “There was quite a gathering in front of the camp. I heard people say: ‘But they were supposed to bring Poles and these people do not look like Poles’. Later, I learned from Germans that Poles are ‘Barbaren’, ‘Bromberger Bluthunde’, etc. But they saw intelligent-looking young people. Such was the propaganda about the Poles. For the German supermen we, the Polish prisoners, were slaves and submen.”<sup>78</sup>

The question arises to what extent that stereotype of a Pole, disseminated by the Nazi propaganda, implanted itself in the German consciousness and became a constituent of their personal views and attitudes, and to what degree the direct contacts destroyed the stereotype so strikingly different from reality. The studies conducted in West Germany after the war on the image

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*kampanii wrześniowej* [The Case of 58,000 “Volksdeutsch.” Correction of Nazi Slanders about the Losses Sustained by the German Minority in Poland in the Last Months before the Outbreak of War and during the September Campaign], Poznań 1959, 2nd ed., 1981 (it is the 7th volume of the series *Documenta Occupationis*).

<sup>76</sup> S. Spich, *Nad Hawelą* [On the Havel], in: *Przemoc...*, pp. 681–682.

<sup>77</sup> S. Kowalczyk, *Moja Gehenna* [My Hell], in: *Z literą “P”...*, p. 294.

<sup>78</sup> L. Budny, *Byłem jeńcem-robotnikiem*, p. 83.

of a Pole in Germany indicate a considerable impact of the stereotype as a means of propaganda in the Third Reich on the system of values of the post-war German society.<sup>79</sup> The answer to the second question is much more difficult. We simply lack source material of the type of mass memoirs—a form of information most valuable in Poland. In Germany, unfortunately, no competitions for recollections of wartime experience and thinking have ever been organized.

Poles who were sent to forced labour saw with their own eyes and learned at their own cost the effects of the relevant indoctrination of German society, carried out under a totalitarian regime. At the same time, they realized to what extent the Germans were lied to by that regime, and also how vital was the role of the information reaching the German people. This should be analyzed in connection with the still controversial question of the Germans' degree of knowledge about the crimes and offences committed by the Third Reich. It seems that the memories of Poles deported to forced labour provide many arguments against the thesis that Germans were relatively well informed about all the criminal activities of the regime. Characteristically, most of the German employers were convinced that the Poles brought to forced labour were really volunteers who came to the Reich of their own free will. A similar view prevailed about the Varsavians who were brought to the Reich during and after the fall of the Warsaw Rising; in this context, it turned out that the Germans learned only from them about the course of the fighting on the Eastern front and the progress of the Soviet offensive.

Much more complicated is the question of the extent to which the German population was informed about the system of Nazi concentration camps. Doubtless, in the years 1944-1945 many more Germans knew about them than in previous years. By the

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<sup>79</sup> K. S. Sodhi and R. Bergius, *Nationale Vorurteile. Eine sozialpsychologische Untersuchung an 881 Personen*, Berlin 1953, pp. 41-42, 46; H. W. Wolf, *Stellungnahmen deutscher Schüler zu osteuropäischen Völkern*, "Kölner Zeitschrift für soziologie und Sozialpsychologie," 1963, No. 3, pp. 478-510; K-Ch. Becker, *Einstellung deutscher Schüler gegenüber Franzosen, Polen und Russen*, in the same journal 1970, No. 4, pp. 742-743.

end of the war many of them saw the inmates during the march of the columns from evacuated camps. Others learned about the reality, when after the liberation they visited the camps at the initiative of allied armies. When I saw the film made by Americans during a compulsory "excursion" to Dachau of Munich residents in 1945, I felt that the reactions of the Germans, registered by the camera, testified to a genuine shock felt by people unprepared for what they saw, who learned for the first time about the true face of crime. On the other hand, since I have already quoted a personal impression, I may add that I have been surprised to hear West Germans boast before a stranger that they used to listen secretly to the BBC, and to emphasize at every occasion that "We did not know anything about it." After all, the BBC broadcasts were full of information about the Nazi concentration camps and the extermination carried out there.<sup>80</sup>

But let us return to the consequences brought by the stay of Poles on German territory and among Germans during the war. In the light of the recollection of forced labourers the fact emerges clearly that their experience of contacts with Germans had turned out to be much more differentiated than that of Poles in occupied territories who mostly had to deal with German administration and the terror apparatus. I have in mind, on the one hand, the fairly frequent cases of help shown to Poles by civilians in the Reich, as well as signs of sympathy or compassion for the victims of persecution; on the other, the more frequent contacts of Poles with German anti-fascists, the discovery on the spot of the existence of not only signs of dissatisfaction or criticism of the regime but also of the struggle carried on by the German anti-Nazi resistance movement.<sup>81</sup> In that movement, which primarily carried out sabotage actions, an important role was played by German communists. Several mentions about their

<sup>80</sup> It is a moot question whether the Germans believed information reaching them through that medium. It should be remembered that during World War I, the English and French deliberately made use of the so-called "Greuelpropaganda" not based on fact.

<sup>81</sup> On the subject of contacts of Poles, carried away to the Reich, with the German population there is an excellent monograph by Czesław Łuczak, *Polscy robotnicy przymusowi w Trzeciej Rzeszy podczas II wojny światowej* [Polish Forced Labour in the Third Reich during World War II], Poznań 1974, particularly pp. 192-212.

contacts with Poles can be found on the pages of the books of memoirs written by forced labourers.<sup>82</sup>

In conclusion of these deliberations on the subject of the image of a German in the eyes of Poles during the war and occupation, I would like to quote two passages from those memoirs. They indicate very forcefully that even at the peak of the conflict between two peoples one could reflect on the deceptiveness of stereotype and the need to differentiate opinions and values. The mother of Ryszard Borowiec, in her account to her son of the hell she went through at forced labour in Germany, concluded her story: "In our life we met good and bad people. Even among the Germans there were some who respected human dignity and were guided in their behaviour by the heart. They were few, but they were there. And that was important, because despite the extensive propaganda, despite hate and terror, some Germans knew where Hitler and his likes were leading them."<sup>83</sup>

Jerzy Nowicki gave vent to very similar feelings: "I became convinced [...] that one should not gauge all the Germans according to the old proverb, still popular among us: 'Never will a German be a brother to a Pole.' My conviction about the injustice of that saw was many a time confirmed during my six-year stay in Germany. The great physical and moral pain I had to endure at the hands of the 'supermen' might authorize me to appraise the Germans in accordance with that proverb which, after all, had sprung from the many wrongs done us by our Western neighbour in the course of ten centuries of history.

Yet, such a treatment of all Germans would be unjust and incorrect. Among those I had come into daily contact with throughout my slave work, a considerable majority, I admit, were infected with the idea of 'supermen.' But there were also those who deserved respect for their heartfelt friendliness, balanced wisdom, courage and perseverance in truly humane convictions—

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. *Z literą "P"...*, pp. 248 - 250, 269 - 271; numerous mentions on the participation of Germans in the Polish resistance movement are to be found in the earlier cited work by W. Góra and S. Okęcki. Doubtless, that brotherhood-in-arms was a particularly clear denial of the current stereotype.

<sup>83</sup> R. Borowiec, *Opowieść matki [A Mother's Story]*, in: *Z literą "P"...*, p. 67.

despite the general climate of '*Deutschland siegt an allen Fronten.*' Many of those Germans, who did not want to take part in tarnishing German history and culture, preferred to stand in the wings. There were also those who actively opposed Nazism in order to hamper the realization of the infamous plans of the 'supermen.' It was they who later found themselves with us behind the bars of the Nazi death complexes. Many of them did not live to see the defeat of the 'thousand-year Reich.' By their martyr's death they showed that there were men in the German nation worthy of the name and of respect."<sup>84</sup>

*(Translated by Krystyna Kępicz)*

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<sup>84</sup> J. Nowicki, *Jurandowskie czasy* [Jurand Times], in: *Przemoc...*, p. 46.