

In the Captivity of One's Own Beliefs, or Who is Inconvenienced by Our New Knowledge Regarding the Ładoś Passports

A Polemic with the Article *Paszporty złudzeń. Sprawa paszportów południowoamerykańskich widziana z Będzina* [Passports of Delusion. The Case of the Latin American Passports as Seen from Będzin] by Michał Sobelman ["Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały" 2020, vol. 16, pp. 700–717]

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The most recent edition of the "Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały" year-book contains an interesting, although in my opinion completely misguided attempt at a critique of *The Ładoś List* (Kumoch et al., 2019), a publication that I myself edited and which was printed in Polish in December 2019 by the Pilecki Institute, and thereafter presented in English in February 2020 – as a supplemented and corrected version (Kumoch et al., 2020) – at London's Wiener Holocaust Library and at the seat of the World Jewish Congress. The attempt in question was undertaken by Michał Sobelman, a historian, translator of literature, and the spokesman of the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw, whose interest and involvement in the subject of the Holocaust spans many decades. Although I do know him and hold him in high regard, having had the opportunity of talking with him about Ładoś on a number of occasions, I cannot agree either with the conclusions which he put forward in the article, or – and with this above all – the methodology that he employed.

I am referring to his article solely to the extent to which it focuses on a critique of *The Ładoś List*, its methodology, and the inferences drawn regarding the activities of the Polish envoy to Switzerland, Aleksander Ładoś, and his staff. For a considerable part of Sobelman's analysis (its most valuable fragment, in my opinion) is devoted to how the Latin American passports were viewed by the activists of left wing Zionist organizations in the Będzin ghetto, with less focus being given to the procedure of creation of these documents. Michał Sobelman also provides an excellent portrayal of the tragic alternative with which the young, ideological Zionist activists were faced: avail themselves of salvation, or fight to the end, gun in hand, as the avant-garde of their nation. Had he confined himself to this alone, his article would constitute a superb supplementation of our research. However, the author has proceeded to a critique of *The Ładoś List* through an attempt at generalization, this by returning to the narrative of historians who studied the issue of the Latin American

passports before the opening of Swiss archives, and imputing to our team a deliberate overstatement of the number of those saved. Unfortunately, his argumentation is contrary to sources. Thus, I will attempt to respond to his charges in this very regard.

The central thesis of the article is altogether clear: the reinstatement of Aleksander Ładoś and his collaborators to the collective memory in 2017 marks nothing new, historians “have long known” about Ładoś, while the list compiled by myself and the team of researchers, which contains the names of more than 3 thou. holders of Latin American passports falsified in Switzerland is – and I think that the suggestion has been quite obviously made – a typical pretense based on a hollow argument. The Ładoś passports were but “passports of delusion”, they did not save lives, while the fact that nearly one quarter of those mentioned in the list and more than 45% of all those whose fates have been determined survived the Holocaust are data that can be waved aside. There is also a return to theses which we have already exposed, and first and foremost to the assertion that the production of Latin American passports for the purpose of saving Jews from the Holocaust was the work of Jewish Zionist organizations (Sobelman, 2020, pp. 701–703), whereas graphological research has demonstrated that at least 50% of these documents originated from the Consular Section of the Polish Legation.

I commenced my reading of Michał Sobelman’s article from the bibliography. It is interesting, for it contains the Hebrew memoirs of certain of the holders of the Ładoś passports, and also reports, elaborated in Israel, of persons associated in Jewish organizations which acquired passports for their members (pp. 716–717). I would like to reiterate: if this were the bibliography of an article about the Ładoś passports as seen through the memoirs of the Jews of Będzin, it would constitute a noticeable contribution of the author to research into the falsified Latin American documents from Bern. I noticed with astonishment, however, that all of the publications concerning the production of the passports are accounts penned long after the War. Quite obviously, materials of this type reflect primarily the state of knowledge and memories of their authors at the time of writing, and sometimes also their attempts at achieving a specific level of self-creation; in consequence, they must be carefully verified as a rule, ideally by a juxtaposition with sources originating from the period which the researcher is describing. It is therefore surprising that Michał Sobelman’s study does not contain even one (!) document from wartime Swiss archives, without which it is simply not possible to conduct thorough research into the issue at hand. Indeed, practically everything that we know about the process of production of the passports was determined thanks to the Swiss police surveillance of the Ładoś group.

I could readily enumerate what is missing from the article: stenographic records of the examinations of the main protagonists of the operation – among others of Abraham Silberschein (Audition de Abraham

Silberschein..., 1943) and Chaim Eiss (Abhörungsprotokoll Proces-verbal d'audition Verbale d'interrogatorio Eiss Israel, 1943), as well as the testimony of Juliusz Kühl and Rudolf Hügli (Notiz im Sachen Hügli Rudolf..., 1943), and also that of Saul Weingort (Abhörungsprotokoll Proces-verbal d'audition Verbale d'interrogatorio Weingort Saul, 1943). Whereas the very fact that these examinations did take place contradicts Michał Sobelman's uncritical quoting of the exposition of an Israeli historian who maintained that the production of the passports was a safe undertaking, and that during its course only one person – Alfred Schwarzbaum – was arrested (Sobelman, 2020, p. 706).¹ Finally, the article makes no mention of the minutes of discussions between Aleksander Ładoś and the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs (Conférences avec M. Lados..., 1943), or between the deputy Polish envoy, Stefan Ryniewicz, and the Chief of the Swiss Police for Foreigners, Heinrich Rothmund (Notice du Chef de la Division..., 1943), which were elaborated and have subsequently been declassified by the Swiss authorities. The former – and this I would like to recall – blackmailed Switzerland, threatening a scandal if the country continued to torpedo the passport campaign, while the latter demanded that Silberschein be released from jail.

In any case, such a selective approach to sources is nothing new, and has accompanied studies into the Ładoś group for years. In 2015, the very same research error was made by Dr. Agnieszka Haska, who published an article about Ładoś (Haska, 2015, pp. 299–309) basing herself essentially on Polish-language sources and a scholarly book for the general public about Recha Sternbuch, which had been published in English (Friedenson, Kranzler, 1984). She also made use of the memoirs of Juliusz Kühl, Aleksander Ładoś and Stanisław Nahlik, even though none of them wrote about how the passports were manufactured.² However, she omitted the Swiss Federal Archive, which had by then been opened for many years. Thus, Dr. Haska contributed to the continuation of the paradigm of “Jewish causality” of and “Polish goodwill” for the operation. In *The Ładoś List* we fundamentally advanced the thesis that it was the Legation that was both the initiator and the nucleus of the operation, and that Jewish

1 I am referring to the following publication: Ronen, 2011, p. 246.

2 Nahlik's tendency to create a false narrative and confabulate should be noted. A typical indication is the description of the lavish wedding which Juliusz Kühl purportedly organized for himself in 1943. But a photograph taken during the event, which was passed on to me by Kühl's family, contradicts this. Furthermore, memoirs penned by Kühl himself or written down by a close associate in the 1970s or at the beginning of the 1980s contain numerous entries that are inconsistent with the facts (for example, Kühl stated that in 1939 Poland was ruled by the National Democratic Party, and that Grabski was the Prime Minister). However, Ładoś did not finish his memoirs and did not describe the passport operation (Nietytułowane pamiętniki Juliusza Kühla, n.d.; Pamiętniki A. Ładosia, 1961–1963; Nahlik, 2002, vol. 3).

organizations acted as its partners, without whom the undertaking would have been limited and deprived of logistical support.

Michał Sobelman builds his argumentation in a similar vein, basing himself on two studies authored many years after the Bernese “passport scandal” and setting them in opposition to our source-based research. Heini Bornstein, the former Swiss Zionist activist quoted uncritically by Sobelman, wrote thus in a book published in Israel in 1996:

At the beginning of 1943 in Geneva, it came to be known that the German authorities were ready to exchange their citizens located in various South American countries for the citizens of these states living in the Third Reich. We decided to verify whether the Germans were indeed interested in such an exchange. Since, further, we did not know what would have been the reaction to such a proposal of our colleagues in countries occupied by Germany, we resolved that the matter would be pursued by the HeHalutz office in Geneva. It then transpired that the consuls of Paraguay, El Salvador, Uruguay, Honduras and Haiti would be prepared to issue us such documents confirming that the holders of these passports were their citizens (Sobelman, 2020, p. 704).

This account – at least insofar as it concerns the genesis of the practice of producing passports – may be considered as inconsistent with sources. If the Latin American passports appeared in 1943 and had been originated by Zionists based in Geneva, then how is it possible that we have in our possession copies of documents from before that year? As a matter of fact, the letter attached to one of them was found by the group working on the film *Paszporty Paragwaju* in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute. First and foremost, however, the uncritically quoted statement contradicts the most significant document, which is dated 12 October 1941. Its author was none other than Rudolf Hügli, the Honorary Consul of Paraguay (and trader in the country’s passports), who after the outbreak of the Soviet-German war wrote thus to the Paraguayan Legation in Berlin:

Esteemed Mr. Minister! I hereby allow myself the opportunity of sharing the following matter with you. Following the Russian occupation of Poland, the Legation of the Republic of Poland in Bern requested me to aid certain Polish citizens who had found themselves under Russian rule, this by issuing them with Paraguayan identity documents (Rudolf Hügli an die paragwäische Gesandtschaft..., 1941).

Hügli proceeded to describe the key aspect of how these passports functioned: that their holders could apply to leave the Soviet Union for the

Japanese city of Kobe. Once the German-Soviet war started, however, the Nazi occupation authorities demanded the confirmation of each of Hügli's documents by the Paraguayan Legation in Berlin.

Hügli's letter cannot be ignored. In terms of historical method and technique, this is an important – if not key – source (during the course of the operation, a paid provider of passports admits his guilt to his own superior), for it points to the Polish Legation as the initiator of the campaign and places a question mark over Bornstein's actual knowledge of the topic. All the more so as the instruction attached by Hügli himself in May 1941 to a passport sent to Soviet-occupied Lwów for Osias Leo Weingort provides exactly the same information that Hügli wrote down a few months later in his report; namely, it contains a request that the beneficiary obtain a Japanese visa and proceed to Kobe (Rudolf Hügli an Osias Leo Weingort..., 1941).

But this is not the end of the problems with Michał Sobelman's narrative based on faulty memoirs from the end of the 20th century. The adoption of the theses put forward therein would necessarily entail the rejection of conclusions following from a reading of the testimonies of practically all members of the Ładoś group, which were given already during the War, and also from Hügli's testimony from 1943. The latter actually told the investigative judge that his sole regular customer was the Legation of the Republic of Poland, and that the first who purchased passports from him was Ładoś's deputy, Stefan Jan Ryniewicz (Hügli, Rudolf, 1872 (1942–1952), Dossier, 1952). This was repeated by Juliusz Kühn, a Jewish employee at the Legation who did not hold diplomatic immunity and was therefore also examined:

The matter of how we could aid Polish citizens in obtaining foreign passports first arose following the occupation of Poland by Germany and Russia at the turn of 1940 [...]. The passport forms were collected from Consul Hügli and filled in by Consul Rokicki, and thereafter returned to Hügli for signing. We paid Hügli for the issuance of passports on a case-by-case basis, depending on the number of persons, from around 500 to 2000 francs (Notiz im Sachen Hügli Rudolf..., 1943).

Hügli did not name any Zionist organizations – he sold the passports to Poles, who in turn were in touch with the head of RELICO, Abraham Silberschein, and the leader of Agudat Yisrael, Chaim Eiss. Eiss and Silberschein were examined in May and September 1943 respectively, and both testified – one in Zürich and the other in Geneva – that they had obtained the Paraguayan passports from the Head of the Polish Consular Section, Konstanty Rokicki, and that they were providing him with monies for their purchase (stenographic records of the examinations of Silberschein and Eiss, cf. Audition de Abraham Silberschein..., 1943; Abhörungs-

protokoll Proces-verbal d'audition Verbale d'interrogatorio Eiss Israel, 1943). Silberschein even went on to inform that he had been assigned to the operation by Rokicki and Ryniewicz in the spring of 1943 (Audition de Abraham Silberschein..., 1943).

I could cite further documents, among them the entirety of correspondence exchanged between Kühl and Eiss, and between Rokicki and Silberschein (Correspondence with the Polish legation..., 1943), however I think that those already quoted will suffice.

A certain aspect of Michał Sobelman's article is, however, plainly unjust: he never once mentions Rokicki, who falsified approximately one half of all the documents produced by the Ładoś group. Towards the end of 2017, we discovered his handwriting on the Paraguayan passports – it is identical to that found in passports of the Republic of Poland which were issued at the same time. In 2018, we located Rokicki's grave (which did not even have a gravestone), while in 2019 the Yad Vashem Institute recognized him as Righteous Among the Nations. Furthermore, we disclosed more than 200 Paraguayan passports with his writing, and correspondence with Silberschein, which contains instructions and requests for corrections in some of these documents; finally, all this finds confirmation in Kühl's testimony. Yet once again Michał Sobelman considers these sources as non-existent and quotes an Israeli historian, Avihu Ronen, according to whom the Paraguayan passports were both purchased and filled in by the Jewish Sternbuch family (Sobelman, 2020, p. 705). This is not true. The disregard shown for sources and their blatant ignorance constitutes – apart from the unjustified extrapolation – the main weakness of Michał Sobelman's article.

The entire argument whereby the role of Ładoś's collaborators was exclusively auxiliary, disintegrates when one visits the Swiss Federal Archives (and these are readily accessible, while some documents can even be found on-line). Further, historians at the Jewish Museum in Basel, who organized a topical exhibition devoted to Ładoś's operation, which was held over a period of a few months, came to the same conclusions as our research group – presumably for good reasons. Dr. Danuta Drywa, a historian from the Stutthof Museum, whose monograph on the Legation of the Republic of Poland in Bern has not even been mentioned in Michał Sobelman's article (Drywa, 2020), has drawn identical inferences. We all have one thing in common: in our research we have made use of the same, Swiss sources.

Meanwhile, the radical refusal to recognize the fact that previously unknown sources have come to light since the time of Bornstein's and Ronen's publications, Isaac Lewin's articles, and the series of publications from the years 1994–1995, clearly points to a defense of the paradigm which has been described, for instance, by Thomas Kuhn in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn, 2020). To put it shortly, "we have made a determination once and there is no need to probe further". And if in the

meantime there has arisen the matter of Rokicki's authorship, there has been discovered Hügli's letter to the ambassador of the country which he served, and there has been found a passport from 1941 (as well as numerous other documents), then may they return whence they have come – to the plane of non-existence. Journalists oftentimes say that “if the facts do not add up, then all the worse for the facts.”

Thus, I will now proceed to the argument that “historians have long known” about Ładoś. But the issue is not *if* they knew, but rather *what* they knew. In light of the literature cited by Michał Sobelman they essentially knew that someone of that name had existed, that he was a good man, and that he strongly supported Jewish organizations in the falsification of the passports. But if “historians had known” about Ładoś's operation, then why did the Yad Vashem Institute recognize Rokicki as Righteous Among the Nations only in 2019, and only in the wake of our research and initial publications? What prevented them – since “historians had known” – from recreating the list of passport holders before 2019/2020? I am simply of the opinion that, with the exception of a few persons, historians knew more or less that which had been written by Ronen and Bornstein, for researchers from outside Switzerland did not, by and large, look into the documents, and therefore perpetuated the paradigm. I have already mentioned this lack of knowledge when presenting the existing output of literature in articles published in “Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny” (Kumoch, 2018), and later in “Revue d'histoire de la Shoah” (Kumoch, 2019), wherein I enumerated the bibliography concerning the issue of the Latin American passports that was known to me at the time.

Is it really as Michał Sobelman writes? Have “historians long known” about the matter? This is indeed a hurried generalization, not to say a linguistic manipulation. For while “everyone” knows about Stalin's crimes, this does not mean that the circumstances of their committal have been determined unequivocally and that nothing new may be discovered. Historians know about Mussolini, about the Russo-Japanese War and about the process whereby Ireland gained independence, and yet each of these topics – rightly so – continues to be the subject of fresh analyses. Prior to 2017, did historians really know about Ładoś what we know today? Were they familiar with the mechanism of production of the illegal documents? Did they know about the role played by Konstanty Rokicki? Why did historians – having “long known” – overlook the main creator of the passports? Were the “long-knowing historians” aware that the very mechanism of falsification of the passports was initially used to extract Jews from the Soviet zone and that Polish diplomacy employed it not only in Bern, but also – for example – in Istanbul? Before 2017, Rokicki appears as no more than a footnote in a few Swiss articles, while he is missing from Polish writings altogether. As I have already observed, he is not present in Michał Sobelman's article either. Once again, the paradigm turns out to be stronger than documented historical fact.

Apart from the suggestion that Polish diplomats were ascribed too great a role in the production of the passports and that journalists and I myself are taking the credit of others, Michał Sobelman's article presents yet another problem – namely the statement that the Ładoś passports did not really save lives, and that if anyone actually survived, this was due to completely different circumstances, while many of the people for whom the documents had been made out did not learn of their existence at all. At this point Michał Sobelman makes use of a classic strawman fallacy, consisting in the creation of an opponent's purported thesis and thereafter combatting it with vigor. But here is what we have written in *The Ładoś List*:

Evaluation of the role the Ładoś passports played in the survival stories must be set aside, as it would require deeper research into each individual case, for which the tools are currently lacking. Nevertheless, the accumulated evidence clearly reveals a direct connection between the survival of many of the rescued Jews from the Netherlands and Germany and the Ładoś passports, thanks to which they avoided deportation to KL Auschwitz-Birkenau or KL Sobibor and were interned instead in KL Bergen-Belsen or exchanged for Germans in the hands of the Allies. In the case of Polish Jews, only a relatively limited number of examples of survival thanks to the passports is known. In some cases, these were people with Polish citizenship who remained abroad in 1939. There is also a story of a group of families from the Będzin ghetto who ended up in an internment camp in Tittmoning in Bavaria. At the same time, it should be noted that in the account of his stay in Poland in May 1946, Abraham Silberschein wrote about “many people” whom he met and whose lives the passports had saved and continued to benefit (probably by enabling them to leave the country). Unfortunately, there are no figures or descriptions included in his memoirs of the use of the passports after the liquidation of the ghettos (Kumoch et al., 2020, p. 44).

Can we find anything in this text that would support the charge made against *The Ładoś List* that it purportedly “suggests” that each and every survivor was saved thanks to the passports?

We thus arrive at the statistics, the elaboration of which was the primary goal of our team. The analysis is numerical, and any attempt to denounce numbers should be viewed one of the weirdest journalistic exercises. I will make use of the English version of the book, for it presents the most recent published state of our research. Out of the 3,253 persons mentioned in the list, 834 survived the War, 962 perished, while the fate of the remainder is unknown. 26% of all those enumerated in the

list survived, as did 46% of those whose fates have been determined (Kumoch et al., 2020, p. 48). In the Netherlands and Germany, approximately 60% of holders of Ładoś passports survived, and at least 15% in Poland. We have very clearly emphasized that in Poland the operation was less successful than in the concentration camps of the occupied Netherlands. Can anything else be said in addition to this? Was the percentage of those saved greater than amongst Jews taken as a whole? Yes, decidedly so. If the percentage of those rescued in Poland had totaled 15–20%, as many as half a million of the country's Jewish citizens would have survived the Holocaust. In the Netherlands and Germany, too, the percentage of survivors who held Ładoś passports considerably exceeded the percentage of those actually saved from the Holocaust.

Does this mean that the Ładoś passports had a decisive influence on whether one survived or not? In certain situations – yes, while in others no. We have made this abundantly clear. It would be nonsensical to suggest that every survivor owed his escape to Ładoś and his collaborators, for I myself precisely remember my conversation with Minister Adam Rotfeld, whom I was the first to inform that the list contains his parents – victims of the Holocaust – and that he himself was also a false Paraguayan. And I am fully aware that Professor Rotfeld survived not because of the certification of his Paraguayan citizenship, but thanks to Ukrainian monks who hid him.

Another problem with Michał Sobelman's polemic is the completely different usage of the term "survival" and its attributive causes. Thus, a considerable part of his article is devoted to an analysis of the individual fates of certain families from Będzin, a township where – and of this I too am convinced – the passport operation did not bring about spectacular results, or in any case was considerably less effective than in the occupied Netherlands. This is, as I have already stressed, a very valuable part of the article, for it presents the passports from the perspective of the residents of Będzin and Sosnowiec, two cities of the Polish coal basin that had been incorporated into the Reich and which received a significant portion of the Ładoś passports. There is, however, no justification for the extrapolation of the conclusions thus obtained. If I were to undertake a similar analysis for Antwerp, where the documents were received on the whole in 1942, I could use this method to advance the thesis that they did not save nearly anyone at all. Were I, in turn, to analyze solely the Dutch part of the operation, I would state that it was in the main successful. In any case, this would be an unjustified translation of the results of detailed studies into general theses.

Sometimes, the division into categories of survival applied by Michał Sobelman is openly bizarre, if not consciously fallacious. The author writes:

For example, this passport did not, by and large, help Natan Eck, who, after spending more than a year in Tittmoning, was

deported to Auschwitz in May 1944; fortunately, somewhere near Paris he managed to jump off the train, flee, and survive (Sobelman, 2020, p. 707).

This is an erroneous line of reasoning. Natan Eck together with his wife, Klara, and their teenage daughter ended up in the camp in Vittel in occupied France. They successfully smuggled their daughter out of the camp before its liquidation, and Eck himself did in fact escape from a transport to Auschwitz, however his wife perished. Does this mean that the passport played no role in his salvation? Had he not been in possession of it, he would have probably fallen victim to the liquidation of the ghetto or to one of the deportations – the passport extended his chances of survival by more than a year. I would also like to add that Tittmoning is located in Bavaria and that Paris does not lie along the route to KL Auschwitz; errors of this caliber should not appear in a serious scholarly journal devoted to the Holocaust. Natan Eck escaped from Vittel and did in fact hide in Paris, however the sequence of events presented by the author is itself incorrect.

As a matter of fact, this entire fragment of the article appears illogical. The author criticizes *The Ładoś List*, but actually gives as examples three situations in which the passports did play a significant role. The relatives of Eck's two companions – Keshev (Krzesiwo) and Liwer – are in any case known to me from various commemorations of the Ładoś group. It is the same with other fragments, in which the author makes *en bloc* statements about the lack of a connection between the Ładoś passports and survival, while at the same time giving examples proving their role in salvation: Szymon Frost, Michał Laskier, the Gold family, the spouses Graubart; *nota bene*, we have discovered 10 passports belonging to the families mentioned by my adversary, and – yet again – all were filled in with Rokicki's handwriting. Sobelman also cites instances that were hitherto unknown to me. In actual fact, his material allows me to partially verify my stance towards the effectiveness of the Ładoś passports in Będzin, which I considered to be very limited. Paradoxically, Michał Sobelman paints a more optimistic picture than our team.

For this reason – in order to avoid similar discussions – while adopting our methodology for *The Ładoś List*, we decided to trace the fates of those “for whom the passports were produced” applying a zero-one method. We recognized as survivors all those who lived until war's end, and as victims all those who died before 8 May 1945 and in consequence of events which took place before this date. For example, victims of the Holocaust figuring in the list include the passengers of the missing train in Tröbitz, who were liberated in a state of complete mental and physical exhaustion. Some of them died in July 1945. The grandmother of Lord Finkelstein and wife of Alfred Wiener, who died as a free person just after crossing the Swiss border, is similarly a victim. Further, all the prisoners

of Bergen-Belsen who died of exhaustion or epidemics are likewise considered as victims. The passports had previously saved them from deportation to Auschwitz, however – at the end of the day – they did not save their lives. We considered that it would have been difficult to substantiate in research terms the adoption of a category of “persons whom the passports helped” and “persons whom the passports did not help”. Helped to what extent? If a passport protected someone from being deported to Auschwitz, but not (for how could it have) from dying of typhus in Bergen-Belsen, then would it have been effective or not? It is obvious that the life of practically every holder of a Ładoś passport was threatened until the very end of the War, and that the documents did not safeguard them from death. There is indeed no document that has such power.

Despite my serious charges against the main line of argumentation presented in the article, I do agree with many of its parts. In any case, these do not constitute a polemic with *The Ładoś List*. Similarly to my adversary, I pay tribute to the fighters of the ghettos in Warsaw and Będzin, who chose to battle with gun in hand instead of attempting to use a Ładoś passport. The heroic decision of some of those from “The List” (and these include Tosia Altman, Cywia Lubetkin and Icchak Cukierman, about whom we have clearly written that they did not even know about the passports) not to use this lifebelt does not, however, constitute a charge against those who readied it.

I would like to repeat the words with which we closed the “Summary” in *The Ładoś List*:

The chances of survival and the later fate of the Ładoś passports holders in no way affect the ethical or moral assessment of this rescue operation. [...] The members of the Ładoś group had no influence on the Third Reich’s policy towards people who were in possession of the forged documents. Nor did they have any influence on the passports being used by the occupying German authorities, their collaborators or by those acting for personal gain (Kumoch et al., 2020, p. 48).

According to our present-day knowledge, the Ładoś group, as we call the Polish diplomats and their Jewish associates, attempted to save approximately 8–10 thou. people by means of the falsified passports and by their representation of support for the operation before the Swiss authorities. But after producing the documents they had only a small influence on the further fates of these persons. Indeed, Ładoś did initiate an intervention on the part of the Polish government with certain Latin American states, which was seconded by the USA and the Holy See (Telegrams between Ministry..., 1943). In January 1944, this allowed the envoy in Buenos Aires, Mirosław Arciszewski, to obtain a letter from the Paraguayan Minister of Foreign Affairs. Luis Andrés Argaña wrote thus:

“Aquellos pasaportes son considerados válidos mientras que dure la guerra en Europa [original wording]. (These passports are recognized as valid until the end of the war in Europe)” (Luis Andrés Argaña..., 1943). The document in question, which was mentioned by Isaac Lewin in the 1970s (Lewin, Krzyżanowski, 1977), and which I obtained as a scan from a Paraguayan historian, has laid to rest yet another myth reiterated by both historians and journalists – namely the conviction that the cause of death of many of the passport holders was that they were not recognized by the Latin Americans.

I will end with a story that made an immense impression on me at the time. While I was experiencing great difficulty trying to get through with the story of Ładoś to the Israeli media, I met Shimron Shiff. This Israeli IT specialist chanced upon me on one of the social media, and was soon in a state of slight shock: “I have such a passport at home. It was my grandfather’s” – he wrote.

We talked at length. A story from Będzin. Natan Garfinkiel, a twenty-something-year-old man, was added to the passport of his girlfriend as her fictitious husband (fictitious marriages were a common practice aimed at saving more people, and this has been touched upon, among others, by Paweł Wiedermann; Wiedermann, 1948, pp. 339–340). He ended up in Auschwitz. He did not use the passport, but he had it on his person all the time. It is not known how he smuggled it through the selection. The passport accompanied him in Auschwitz, during the death march, and after the War on his illegal journey to Palestine. I do not know what he was thinking about and why he kept hanging on tightly to the document after reaching the camp. Doubtless he knew full well that showing it to the Germans would have been a great risk, an act that would not necessarily save his life, and indeed could result in his immediate death. I assume that he treated it as his sheet-anchor: if he had been chosen during one of the selections, if he were to somehow try to save his life, if he were to be murdered and there would have been nothing left to lose. I do know that Heinz Lichtenstern, a German Jew and the grandfather of the writer Heidi Fishman, acted in the same way. He did not use his passport in the concentration camp in Westerbork, but only at the ramp in Theresienstadt, when he was to depart on the transport to Auschwitz and when he had already said his farewells to his wife and daughter (Fishman, 2017, p. 149). He was removed from the transport (I touched his scrap of paper with the words “Heinz Lichtenstern, geb. 1907. Ausgeschieden”), survived, and passed on only towards the end of the 20th century, in Lucerne, Switzerland, at the age of 85.

If we were to apply Michał Sobelman’s reasoning, only one of these passports saved a life, while the other was simply worthless. But this I do not know. I cannot assess to what degree the possession of a “spare parachute” helped Garfinkiel in the camp and during the march, how it improved his will to survive and helped maintain his fortitude. Shimron

does not know either. We do know – and this is a fact – that Garfinkel lived out his days in Tel Aviv, dying in the 1990s. Just as it is a fact that Uri Strauss, an artist photographer from Zürich, lives on, and is also of the opinion that a Ładoś passport saved his life. His father, a Jewish refugee from Hamburg, held an additional falsified document while living in occupied Amsterdam, and thanks to his connections cleaned his police record and simply disappeared from the files. Again, applying Michał Sobelman's logic, this was another worthless Ładoś passport, but Uri Strauss views the matter differently. I do not possess the tools required to look into the soul of each person from the list. No mortal does.

That is why while working on *The Ładoś List* we adopted a certain cohesive methodology and provided only dry numerical data. And these indicate that the percentage of persons on the list who survived the Holocaust is considerably higher than the percentage of those saved from amongst Jews as a whole (Kumoch et al., 2019, p. 42). At the same time, however, we are making all possible reservations to the effect that those who applied for a passport were on the whole more influential and perhaps more ingenious, that they were frequently people of substance, and younger, and that efforts made to obtain a passport could have been accompanied by other activities (pp. 42–43). There is no hiding going on here – we are presenting only specific, easily verifiable data. I would therefore urge Michał Sobelman to re-read the study and, perhaps, review his opinions on the topic. And any valuable information concerning the survival or death of persons whose fates were unknown to us will surely be introduced into the next edition of *The Ładoś List*.

(transl. by Maciej Zakrzewski)

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