Late at night of October 19, 1944, a Home Army (Armia Krajowa – AK) company led by Second Lieutenant Michał Babul (nom de guerre „Gaj”) attacked the small town of Ejszyszki in the county of Lida, the Province of Nowogródek, in Poland’s Eastern Borderlands. Soldiers from a local clandestine cell of the Home Army also took part in the assault. This was a routine anti-Soviet expedition staged according to the practice worked out during numerous similar operations carried out earlier during the Nazi occupation.

The objective of the operation was manifold. First, the AK planned to capture official Soviet documents and stamps from the local authorities. Second, the Polish underground desired to secure supplies from the local cooperative and from persons considered to be Soviet collaborators. Third, the freedom fighters prepared a strike against the Soviet terror apparatus and military in Ejszyszki. Undoubtedly, the Poles hoped to exploit the element of surprise to eliminate their Communist adversaries or at least to neutralize them for the duration of the action. The AK hit squads had the exact addresses of the quarters of the Soviet personnel. The plan was to capture them quietly one by one. The most important task was to kidnap an officer of the Red Army counterintelligence („Smersh” – Smert’ shpionam, Death to Spies) for interrogation and to secure his archive. In congruence with the guerrilla routine, less harmful Soviets and their collaborators were to be merely disarmed and undressed. Of course, those resisting were to be killed in the course of the action or executed after taking them prisoner. This applied generally to all NKVD personnel, red militiamen, and military men, in particular high ranking leaders and Soviet functionaries personally responsible for the terror. Their fate would be sealed even without any direct orders from the Home Army officers.

The operation in Ejszyszki had five phases based on a well-tested tactical paradigm. First, the AK carried out a reconnaissance of the area. This confirmed earlier intelligence reports and augmented them by several new vital details. Home Army units were ordered to assemble at that time. Every single commander informed his men about the purpose of the operation in general and the individual task of each squad in particular. The

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1 For clarity’s sake, we have consistently used the administrative nomenclature as it had been in Poland before 1939.
town was sealed off. The soldiers securing the outer perimeter were ordered to neutralize any relief force, should it appear, and to intercept any Soviets fleeing Ejszyszki. Next, the main force moved out. One of the squads was dispatched to expropriate a nearby state farm (sovkhоз). The rest of the AK soldiers entered the little town and surreptitiously occupied positions directly near the objects they were to attack. These were the red militia post, the local administration, the cooperative-tannery building, the mill, food and supply warehouses, and the residences housing the Soviet police and military personnel as well as real and alleged collaborators their ethnic origin notwithstanding, including those among the Jewish population.

Most likely the assaults were to be synchronized. However, not all AK squads made it on time to their pre-assigned strike zones. One of the Soviet militiamen noticed the approaching Home Army soldiers and warned his comrades. This allowed three red militia functionaries to flee their post and, as their commander put it, to hide “in the bushes” until the following morning. The local collaborators from the town Communist party and administration, most likely ethnic Russians and Poles, also escaped and dispersed under the cover of darkness. In addition, when each of the pre-designated objects was attacked by the AK, some of the men surprised inside fled, particularly those involved with the Soviet terror apparatus.

The operation unfolded according to the plan. In general, the AK squads managed to fulfill their objectives. They encountered serious resistance only during the attempt to seize the Smersh officer, a captain. The officer was billeted in the house of Moshe Sonenson, who served in the local outfit of the auxiliary Soviet militia, the so-called istrebitelnye batal’ony of the NKVD. Aside from Sonenson and the captain, there were also at least two other armed men inside: a sergeant of the Smersh and another local red militiaman, Alter Michałowski. The occupants resisted the assault squad of the AK. Consequently, two Soviets were killed but not on the premises, including later the Smersh officer, who was captured. Unfortunately, during the firefight a Polish woman was wounded and two Jewish bystanders were killed accidentally: a mother and her infant son, Zippora and Chaim Sonenson.

Immediately following the operation in Ejszyszki, the Communist terror apparatus (NKVD and NKGB) redoubled its efforts against the Polish independentist underground and its affiliates. Several Poles were shot and about 50 were arrested. The wave of Soviet terror in the vicinity swelled again as it already had in July and August 1944.

In response, on the night of December 6 and 7, 1944, the Home Army attacked Ejszyszki again. The Poles freed most of the prisoners, the AK men
and women and their sympathizers captured earlier. However, afterward, the Soviets punished the little town even more severely. The NKVD arrested several hundred fugitive Polish fighters, hiding in clandestine cells in the area, as well as members of their families and sympathizers. About a score of underground fighters were shot on the spot; others were executed following a sham court “trial”. Meanwhile, the Soviets destroyed the main forces of the AK self-defense units, in particular in a bloody battle in the Rudniki Forest on January 7, 1945. Most of the captured underground soldiers and their sympathizers were deported to the Gulag.2

The operation in Ejszyszki was but a small episode in the historical tragedy that befell the citizens of Poland since Hitler and Stalin’s joint attack on their country in September 1939. At the same time, the events in Ejszyszki were the culmination of the epilogue of Polish-Jewish relations following the final Soviet takeover of the Eastern Borderlands (Kresy Wschodnie) of the Second Polish Republic in 1944. The epilogue is pregnant with powerful emotions. It reflects the enormity of the tragedy of the peoples of the Eastern Borderlands during the historical cataclysm of the Second World War and its aftermath (1939-1947).

To a large extent, the historians have studied only a part, or more precisely, the very end of the epilogue of Polish-Jewish relations in Ejszyszki. There remain unanswered however many detailed questions concerning the background and the sequence of the events from July through December 1944. We know very little about pre-war Ejszyszki. We know even less about the Lithuanian, German, and Soviet occupations of that town and its environs. The same concerns also our limited knowledge about the Wilno region and the Eastern Borderlands in general, notwithstanding the valiant efforts of historians working under the leadership of Professor Tomasz Strzembosz of the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Science as well as independent researchers, working outside the state funded institutions in Poland. However, most scholars have focused on the history of the Polish independentist underground. Very few have researched ethnic and social relations in the Borderlands.

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The aim of our study is to assist in the process of recovering the memory of past events and broadening the field of the scientific inquiry. We have gathered together personal recollections, archival documents, journalistic writing, and scholarly essays concerning the events that transpired in Ejszyszki after the Soviet “liberation”. We shall first anchor the Ejszyszki affair in the broad context of Poland in general and the Wilno region in particular. Next, we shall scrutinize Ejszyszki between 1939 and 1947. We shall recall the historians of that little town, describe some Western reactions to their work, and, finally, describe the primary sources and other materials published in our collection.

Two Occupiers

The return of the Soviets to the Eastern Borderlands in 1944 spelled a total and collective catastrophe for the Poles and other inhabitants of the area as thriving ethnic, religious, and cultural entities. Like National Socialism, Communism was a complete antithesis of the pluralistic tradition of the old noble Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Second Polish Republic (1918-1939) inherited and cherished, for better or worse, the remnants of the old civilization. It could have only been restored through a victory of the Polish Underground State over its two enemies: the Third Reich and the Soviet Union.

3 In the short run, the return of the Soviets was beneficial for the Jews if only because it saved them from sure death meted out to them mercilessly by the German Nazis. In the long run, however, the Soviet “liberators” harbored similar plans with respect to the Jewish remnants as they did toward the rest of the population of the Borderlands. The Jews were to be subjected to total Sovietization, as was their traditional elite; Jewish religious and social institutions and Jewish culture were to be eradicated. This program spelled the annihilation of the Jews as a separate ethno-religious group.

4 At their most extreme, the Polish Underground State and its armed forces, the Home Army, postulated that the dominant place in the resurrected Polish state should be guaranteed to the majority ethnic group, the Poles, and the assimilated members of other groups. That option, which was after all consistent with the majoritarian stance then-current in Western democracies, also precluded the physical extermination of ethnic or religious minorities (contrary to the practice of totalitarian states like Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union). The mainstream Polish underground formula envisioned the restoration of an independent Poland which would be subject to far-reaching reform, where the interests of the minorities would be subordinated to those of the majority. In practice, however, any extremist measures aimed at the minorities would have been paralyzed both by the leftist and liberal circles in the Polish independentist camp as well as by the democratic Western powers, a point that needs to be stressed. Besides, in the wake of a victorious war, only a few Polish independentist groups laid plans for a radical future. Following the bloodiest conflict in history, the Polish nation expected foremost stability and reconstruction and not yet another revolutionary upheaval with its inherent contortions. Free Poland would have welcomed a program of far reaching reform to usher in stability and prosperity, but not a radical campaign to persecute national minorities. For drafts of various underground plans concerning post-war Poland see Komenda Główna Armii Krajowej, Oddział II, Archiwum Akt Nowych, Armia Krajowa [afterward AAN, AK], files 203/III-
Already during the first occupation of the Eastern Borderlands (1939-1941), Stalin proved unequivocally that his goal was to destroy the vibrant, pluralistic mosaic of the local society and to substitute it with the crushingly moribund uniformity of a totalitarian monolith. The Communists repressed above all the manifestations of Polish statehood and tradition. They expressed their hostility in invectives framed in ethnic terms, namely against “Poland” and “Polish lords.” The persecution targeted mainly ethnic Poles (including persons from the lowest socio-economic level, in particular those who manifested their patriotism), but not only. Anyone who had any connections whatsoever to the pre-war system could be, and very often was, considered an “enemy of the people,” infected with “Polonism”. In this way during the initial period of the Soviet occupation “Polishness” became the target of the terror. Stalin’s *modus operandi* was based on the extermination of the traditional elite, chiefly Polish Christians, but also others (e.g. the mass executions in Katyn and the mass deportations to the Gulag). Initially, the Communist propaganda glorified the Ukrainian, Belorussian, Lithuanian, and Jewish people. The minorities were promoted over the Poles. The latter were discriminated until a relative liberalization of the anti-Polish course was ordered from the above during the final stages of the first Soviet occupation in the late fall of 1940.

In practice, however, all nationalities of the Borderlands were to be Sovietized. A *homo sovieticus* – a slave of the Communist party – was to become the norm. To achieve this objective, the Soviets attempted to break the resistance of the peoples of the Borderlands. Terror gradually affected all ethnic groups, although it seems that the Poles remained Stalin’s favorite target until the end.

So-called *vostochniki*, or higher Soviet functionaries, mostly of Russian ethnic origin, imported from the USSR, guarded zealously the new order in the Borderlands. They were assisted by the “natives”: both local revolutionary fanatics and even more numerous opportunists, so-called fellow travelers (*poputchiki*). Both groups were eager for social advancement at any price. Their representatives considered the Soviet “revolution from abroad” as an unequivocal blessing. Thanks to Stalin they were able to take advantage of the benefits of the negative selection which is the totalitarian norm. Meanwhile, nonetheless, some persons connected to

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30 through 38; AAN, AK, file 203/III-48, vol. 2; Departament Rolnictwa, Program, AAN, DR, file 202/VI-4.

the *ancient régime* as well as opportunists of all colors were able to find a place for themselves at the very bottom of the new power structure. They strove to accommodate the Soviet occupation. Some of them combined their activities in the new administration with struggle against the Soviets.

Between 1941 and 1944 Hitler continued Stalin’s work in the Eastern Borderlands. Similar mechanisms of terror and power functioned under the Nazi occupation as they had under the Soviets. However, the difference was that now the Russian *vostochniki* were now superseded by Germans and persons declaring German ethnic roots, with the Jews being completely eliminated from the accommodation process. The Jewish population was ghettoized and gradually subjected to mass extermination. Aside from that, the Nazi nationalities policy also resembled its Soviet counterpart. The Lithuanians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians were promoted above the Poles. The Polish Christian elite was subject to partial extermination (e.g. mass executions in Ponary), and the Polish population was subjected to exploitation and terror (mass deportations for forced labor in the Reich, and police pacifications of the countryside). This lasted almost until the end of the Nazi occupation, when the Germans somewhat moderated their policies, in a vain attempt to court Polish support against the returning Red Army.

In reality, however, Hitler considered all conquered nations as *Untermenschen*. In return for minimal political, institutional, and cultural concession, the Nazi leader exploited the Belorussian, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian population economically and militarily for the benefit of the war effort of the Third Reich. Terror also touched all the inhabitants of the Borderlands. However, the Poles landed at the very bottom of the social

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6 Initially, the Lithuanians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians received cultural and limited political concessions from the Nazis. The Poles did not. However, in certain places, after the German entry into the Borderlands in June 1941, the new occupiers employed Poles—often pre-war officials—in the new administration. At least some of them, if not most in some areas, were later replaced with native Belorusians and Ukrainians. In addition, there were discernible regional differences. For example, in Volhynia, following the desertion of the Ukrainian auxiliary police *en bloc* in the spring of 1943, the Germans reconstituted this formation in part from Polish recruits who joined in the wake of a massacre of the Polish population initiated by Ukrainain nationalists. There were also reinforcements of Polish policemen sent into Volhynia from the Government General (central Poland under Nazi rule). The topic of the Polish participation in the Nazi administration of conquered eastern territories still awaits a comprehensive study.

7 About 70,000 Jews, 20,000 Poles, and 10,000 of other nationalities, including Soviets, Gypsies, Tartars, Belorussians, and Lithuanians, were shot in Ponary. The executioners were mostly Lithuanian collaborators, occasionally assisted by Belorussian auxiliaries, carrying out their tasks almost always under German supervision. See DIP, Kresy 1943, AAN, DR, 202/III-196, 7-8; Helena Pasierbska, *Ponary: Największe miejsce kaźni koło Wilna (1941-1944)* (Warszawa : Zarząd Ochrony i Konserwacji Zespołów Pałacowo-Ogrodowych, 1993); Helena Pasierbska, *Wileńskie Ponary* (Gdańsk: by the author, 1999); Kazimierz Sakowicz, *Dziennik pisany w Ponarach od 11 lipca 1941 r. do 6 listopada 1943 r.* (Bydgoszcz: Towarzystwo Miłośników Wilna i Ziemi Wileńskiej, 1999); Marian Maciejewski, “Proszę pana, dokąd jедziemy? Dokąd nas pan wiezie?” *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej* no. 10/21 (October 2002): 76-83; Grzegorz Górny, “Raport z rozstrzelanego świata,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 19-20 October 2002.
ladder (after the Jews), even though the surviving members of the Polish elites enjoyed – because of their education – greater opportunities to practice their accommodationist skills than, say, half-literate Belorussian peasants. Many representatives of the Polish elite took advantage of their low-level posts in the German administration to support the Polish underground and to plot against the Nazis.

The revolutionary scenario of the occupation repeated itself in a modified form after the return of the Soviets in 1944. Terror was coupled with the social promotion of local revolutionaries mainly from the Belorussian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and, to a lesser extent, survivors of the Jewish ethnic groups. It was they who, under the leadership of chiefly Russian Communists, re-introduced Stalin’s totalitarian order in the Borderlands. This time around the Polish elite was practically not given a chance to accommodate. Some, particularly members of the underground, were executed. Others were deported to the Gulag. The majority of the Polish elite was forced to leave for central Poland. As a rule, everywhere in the Borderlands the Polish people followed in to the footsteps of the elite. Only in the Wilno, Grodno, and Nowogródek regions did a large number of the Polish population remain to guard the land of their ancestors. This was also the case in Ejszyszki, where a sizable Polish majority stayed behind.8

The Wilno Region before the War (1918-1939)

Taken narrowly, the Wilno region means the territories of the Province of Wilno as delineated during the Second Polish Republic. Understood broadly, together with the Nowogródek and Grodno areas, the Wilno region constituted jointly the north-eastern Borderlands of Poland. It was the heir to the tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the splendid high-day of the historical Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Wilno region arguably retained the most traditional features of all the areas of interwar Poland. Apart from Polesia (Polesie), it was also the poorest in the nation. Agriculture and forestry dominated its economy. Modern industries were concentrated in the city of Wilno.

In 1931 almost 60 percent of the 1,263,300 inhabitants of the province of Wilno declared Polish as their native tongue. The vast majority of these undoubtedly were ethnic Poles who adhered to the Roman Catholic faith. The remaining nationalities were, in descending order: Belorussians (22.7

percent), Jews (8.5 percent), Russians (3.4 percent), Lithuanians (about 3 percent), Tartars, and “locals”. The proportions in Wilno itself were as follows: the Poles constituted an absolute majority (about 65 percent), the Jews constituted the second largest ethnic group (about 28 percent), and small groups of Russians, Belorussians, Germans, Tartars, and Lithuanians making up the rest. The Lithuanians accounted only for about 3 percent of the town’s population.9

As did the rest of the nation, the Wilno Poles considered the Polish victory in the Polish-Soviet war (1919-1921) as the “founding myth” of the country’s independence.10 The myth functioned with a much greater intensity in the north-eastern Borderlands than if did, for example, in the Poznań region, where local patriotism was forged in the struggle against the Prussians, or in the Lwów area where the fight against the Bolsheviks occurred in the wake of bloody battles against the Ukrainians.

The Wilno Poles regarded the victory over the Soviets in 1920 of primary importance. First, the victory was the climax of the 19th century Polish risings against Russia, which in the collective Polish memory of the Wilno region enjoyed a long-standing cult, in particular the 1863 insurrection. Second, the 1920 victory was won against the Bolsheviks. The Wilno Poles fought against the Communists longer than any of their fellow countrymen in other areas, from at least January 1919. They also arguably experienced the ferocity of the Bolshevik terror, revolutionary experiments, and internal subversion to a greater degree than anyone else in Poland. The Wilno Poles equally honored those fallen in the 19th century insurrections, most notably Countess Emilia Plater (1831) and Ludwik Narbutt (1863), and the many recent heroes, including the Peowiacy,11 as well as the surviving anti-Bolshevik veterans, for example the dashing cavalryman Colonel Jerzy Dąmbrowski who founded the volunteer 13th Wilno Lancer Regiment.12 Great popularity of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, a scion of the landed nobility

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9 In the Białystok province, with a population of 1,263,300, Poles constituted over 60 percent of the population, Belorussians almost 25 percent, and Jews – 12 percent; in the Nowogródek province Poles accounted for a little over 50 percent, Belorussians – 40 percent, and Jews almost 9 percent; in the Polesie province Poles accounted for a bit over 14 percent, Belorussians and Polesians (“locals”) – over 70 percent, and Jews about 10 percent. See Mały rocznik statystyczny 1939 (Warszawa: GUS, 1939), 22-23; Historia Polski w liczbach: Ludność, terytorium (Warszawa: GUS, 1994), 134, 136.


from the Wilno region, among the local Poles was also directly related to the triumph of 1920. Piłsudski was widely considered the architect of the victory over Lenin.

Throughout almost two decades of Polish statehood the message of the “founding myth” of the 1920 victory was constantly strengthened by the echoes of the Bolshevik crimes. Fleeing Russia, Poles and Jews, some of whom settled in the Wilno region, brought with them horrific stories of revolutionary terror. Later, news spread about the persecution of the Catholic Church, and all religion in general. Further, at least until 1924, Poland’s border with the Soviet Union was constantly violated. The Bolsheviks carried out an undeclared guerrilla war against the Poles, hoping to ignite a revolution in Poland. On the other hand, the Poles supported for a time the Belorussian partisan movement of the “Green Oak.” Polish army teams also penetrated into the Soviet area. Later, the newly founded Border Defense Corps (Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza – KOP) continued in a similar vain, albeit on a smaller scale. Based upon the 17th century ethos of the „knights from the Borderland outposts” (rycerze spod kresowych stannic), the KOP was unequivocally and universally considered as an anti-Communist shield of the Second Polish Republic. This was acutely felt in particular in the 1930s when the terrible news of the decimation and deportation of the Soviet Polish community, the collectivization and the accompanying mass starvation of millions of people, and the bloody purges repeatedly shook Poland’s public opinion. Many Wilno Poles, and the petty gentry in particular, had numerous relatives in the neighboring Minsk area of Belorussia, which became a part of the Soviet Union after 1920.14

13 These knights defended the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth from frequent invasions by Tartars, Cossacks, Russians, and others.
In the public sphere, the official media, educators, and priests constantly informed the Polish society about the Bolshevik terror. Various national and regional patriotic holidays affirmed the righteousness of having defied the Communist invasion of 1919-1921. The Polish army units, including the elite 13th Lancer Regiment and the KOP frequently participated in religious and national holidays and parades. That practice forged a powerful symbol of unity between faith and struggle for independence that strongly affected many ethnic Poles, including school children, who soon would volunteer to defend Poland just as their forefathers had. In the private sphere, the veterans of the war with the Soviets, including numerous military settlers in the Wilno region, recalled their deeds and appreciated that they saved their families from the unspeakable horror of Lenin and Stalin’s rule. The veterans shared their stories with their families. In this way, on many levels the past informed the present, and the Stalinist oppression just across the border re-enforced the feeling of the fragility of Poland’s security, and constantly cast a menacing shadow on the future of the peoples of the Borderlands.

For all these reasons, between 1922 and 1939, the attitudes of the Wilno Poles were strongly influenced by the “founding myth”. It consisted of the fresh memory of recent struggles against Communist totalitarianism and of the ever present fear of the possibility that the tyrannical Bolshevik nightmare might return. The memory of the recent past, as well as the more or less conscious concern about an uncertain tomorrow, also influenced to some degree the Polish Christian perception of the rest of the component nationalities of the Wilno region, who were viewed as uncertain allies of Polish statehood.15

In contradistinction to the constant aversion toward the Russian Communists, the Polish attitudes toward the Belorussians and Lithuanians oscillated between impatient irritation and paternalistic disregard. The Poles were annoyed at the politically active Belorussians for their leftist social radicalism, and their connections to the Soviets in particular. Belorussian national aspirations were largely ignored. This was also because a large segment of the Wilno region’s Orthodox Christians, so-called Poleszucy or

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“locals,” was yet to develop a Belorussian national consciousness. However, vivid and warm memories of Tsarist Russia among the Orthodox infuriated the Poles.

The Polish attitude toward the Lithuanians was a bit different. The negligible numbers of the Lithuanian minority in the Wilno region allowed the Poles to ignore the Lithuanian irredentist postulates. The military feebleness of the Republic of Lithuania rendered most Polish security concerns virtually immaterial. Nonetheless, the Poles were greatly irritated by the jingoistic declarations of the Republic of Lithuania with its capital in Kaunas (Kowno), which refused to recognize the Wilno region as Polish and therefore persisted in a state of formal war with Poland until forced by Warsaw to sign a peace treaty in 1938.\(^{16}\)

Polish-Jewish relations constituted a problem of an entirely different quality. Very few remembered that in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania the road to social advancement stood open for a Jew, if he converted to Catholicism. In the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century the proposition of cooperation, as encapsulated in the poetic vision of Adam Mickiewicz’s Jankiel (a Jewish character in the epic romantic poem *Pan Tadeusz*),\(^{17}\) functioned mainly as a romantic myth. Even the old paradigm of the economic symbiosis was slowly eroding. By 1918, the historical arrangements between the Polish lord and the Jew had been, if not eliminated completely, then at least seriously curtailed. The process of Christian inroads into hitherto traditional Jewish economic pursuits progressed apace, as did Jewish movement beyond the confines of their closed communities. Concomitantly, the boycott of Jewish establishments intensified. Initiated and propagated mostly by Poland’s National Democrats, the boycott reached its apogee in the 1930s and elicited a Jewish reaction of its own. It seems that the slogan “each to his own for his own wares” (*swój do swojego po swoje*) found eager ears among all ethnic groups in the Borderlands (and throughout Poland).\(^{18}\)

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16 In July 1920 the Soviets captured Wilno and turned it over to the Republic of Lithuania. A month later, the Poles counterattacked and chased the Bolsheviks out of the city. However, the Lithuanians refused to give up the region. Therefore Piłsudski staged a “rebellion” by General Lucjan Żeligowski, whose units occupied Wilno. Thus, the ephemeral state of “Central Lithuania” was born. A referendum was duly held as well as elections to the Wilno Parliament (Sejm). The national minorities largely boycotted the referendum. Sixty-four percent of the population took part in the referendum, for the most part ethnic Poles. Almost everyone voted for incorporation of the region into Poland, which took place in 1922.


18 The idea of economic self-sufficiency inspired both the Polish and Ukrainian cooperative movements. The Poles boycotted German establishments in western Poland in particular, where they were extremely strong, and Jewish businesses, which predominated in most regions, everywhere. The boycott action was
Everyday irritation on the economic plane was exacerbated by political and cultural conflict. The Jews bitterly complained about discrimination. They also accused the Poles of perpetrating a pogrom in Wilno in 1919. The Poles angrily rejected such accusations, explaining that this was not a pogrom but a battle against the Bolsheviks, including many Jews, who barricaded themselves in the Jewish quarter of the city and shot at Polish troops. The Poles also chastised the Jews for their opposition to the incorporation of the Wilno region into Poland after 1918. In reality, the attitude of the Jewish community toward the Second Republic oscillated between neutrality and hostility. Nonetheless, the accusations about “Jewish” support for Lithuania and the Soviet Union functioned throughout the entire interwar period.

The charges of favoring the Bolsheviks were naturally expressed most frequently as an invective: “Jew-Commune” (żydokomuna). The invective was applied not only to a small handful of Communists of Jewish origin in the Communist Party of Western Belorussia (Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Białorusi – KPZB), which did not recognize Polish sovereignty over the Eastern Borderlands. Many Poles also tarred as “Jew-Commune” all frequently carried out by young people: high school and university students of both sexes. It consisted in picketing Jewish (or German) stores and attempting to dissuade Poles (Christians) from entering. Jewish clients were “merely” jeered at. It seems that because of the presence of Polish police, there were relatively few acts of violence against Jewish (or German) merchants, although random acts of vandalism involving the rabble did occur which generally prompted police intervention and arrests, and occasionally shooting at the troublemakers. In addition, rowdy demonstrations occasionally occurred in cafés, restaurants, and nightclubs, where youthful intruders attempted to force Jews to leave establishments owned by Christians. Inconclusive evidence suggests that this unsavory practice manifested itself largely in verbal aggression.

Unfortunately, the topic still awaits impartial and comprehensive scholarly treatment. See Chodakiewicz, Żydzi i Polacy, 1918-1955, 72, 74, 82-83, 91-92; Lucy Dawidowicz, From That Place and Time: A Memoir, 1938-1947 (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 61, 169-71 [afterward From That Place and Time].

Unfortunately, we still lack a solid scholarly monograph on the Communist movement in the Wilno region. Lenin claimed that Jews constituted about “50 percent” of all members of revolutionary groups in the Borderlands. See Dimitri Volkogonov, Lenin: A New Biography (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 9.

other Jewish left-wing radicals whose parties advocated a social revolution. This primarily concerned the powerful Jewish Marxist Bund, which won the Jewish vote in the last municipal elections in Wilno before the Second World War, and also leftist Zionists, including the highly popular Poale Zion (Workers of Zion) party.20

On the other hand, rather illogically, Polish Nationalists accused “the Jews” of supporting the anti-Communist dictatorship of the Sanacja, which, headed by Piłsudski, took power in a coup d’état in 1926. In reality, it was only the Jewish conservative and traditionalist Orthodox circles that consistently cooperated with the Piłsudskites. In politics and elsewhere, the Poles often disregarded the rich pluralism of the Jewish community. They ignored the multifaceted conflict within the community, treating “the Jews” as a monolith.21 The Poles also stressed the anti-Christian elements in Judaism allegedly espoused by traditional Jews, who were oblivious the Polishness of Wilno and preferred to cherish it as the “Jerusalem of the East,” a magnificent center of Judaic religious studies. In addition, much of the Jewish community fiercely resisted assimilation, that is Polonization. According to Lucy Dawidowicz, the Wilno Jews considered constructs such as an “assimilated” Jew or “assimilationists,” the latter denoting the “advocates of assimilation,… a Yiddishists’s pejorative words, darkly intimating that to speak Polish instead of Yiddish was a public act of betrayal, an abandonment of one’s people.”22

Many Christian Poles were taken aback that apparently the majority of Jews did not bother to learn Polish and communicated in Yiddish or even in Russian. This was adjudged in a highly critical light. The Russian language had after all been the language of the hated Tsarist oppressors and, after 1918, of the Bolsheviks plotting to enslave Poland anew. This additionally contributed to the popular animus against the migrant (non-Polish) Jews, the so-called “Litvaks”. Poles usually failed to appreciate why a part of the

20 In the elections of May 21, 1939, the Jewish community voted for three lists: the Bund and the trade unions (43,359 votes), Poale Zion (13,220 votes), and all other Zionist groups of the Jewish National Bloc (30,008 votes). As far as Polish Christians were concerned, 156,896 voted for the National Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe – SN) and the Camp of National Unity (Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego – OZON). Consequently, the SN had 27 representatives in the city council, the OZON 19, and the Polish Socialist Party 7. According to an observer, “middle-class Jews supported the Bund, not for its socialist principles, but because it concretely addressed the problems of the Jews in Poland, undistracted by the issue of Palestine.” See Dawidowicz, From That Place and Time, 160.
21 Of course, conflict persisted between the Orthodox and the secular Jews; between the assimilators and the Yiddishists; between the right and the left. For example, in 1938 a paramilitary group of the Zionist-Revisionists beat up the principal of the leftist Zionist high school of the Tarbut. In May 1939 the Beitarim “pacified” their leftist opponents who attempted to disrupt a speech by Vladimir Zeev Jabotinsky. See Dawidowicz, From That Place and Time, 156-57.
22 See Dawidowicz, From That Place and Time, 107.
Jewish intelligentsia came from families that had elected to assimilate into the Russian imperial culture. Not only the “Litvaks” were affected by this process, but also some of the local Jews (and indeed Polish Christians). Simply, in the second half of the 19th century the Russian culture was in ascendancy. It was dominant and victorious and, thus, more attractive than the defeated one, Polish. For most people, who had resolved to break with the Jewish tradition in favor of secularization, the choice was simple: They pragmatically banked on the Russian Empire. They practically had no ties with Poland and Polishness traditionally understood in the Wilno region as reflecting deep-seated Catholic religiosity, gentry ways, and oftentimes romantic dreams of freedom which unexpectedly for the majority (including perhaps even the dreamers themselves) exploded in the fireworks of Poland’s independence in 1918.

A low level of assimilation of the Jewish population clearly stemmed from an over century long absence of the Polish statehood. Without the Polish state institutions, Polish schools in particular, the Polonizing processes simply had no conditions to bud in. Naturally, the situation changed after 1918.23

The changes took a painfully long, evolutionary route. Meanwhile, the marked cultural, religious, political, and ethnic differences that separated these two communities led to serious conflict between Poles and Jews in Wilno. The Stefan Batory University (USB) in Wilno was the scene of the most violent altercations. It was there that the National Democrats attempted to introduce first a quota or the *numerus clausus* for the Jewish students and then the *numerus nullus*.24 The so-called ghetto benches were established...
with Jewish students being forced to sit on the left side of the lecture halls. In the faculty of medicine students and faculty quarreled bitterly over “Christian cadavers” and the failure of the Jewish community to supply their own share of cadavers to experiment on. This resulted in acts of anti-Jewish violence, demonstrations, and marches which spilled beyond the campus onto the city streets. Finally, the USB witnessed several anti-government student strikes, where the protesters advanced anti-Jewish demands. Ethnic strife affected also municipal politics. According to one account, a fist fight erupted between Christian and Jewish councilmen during a

minories. Ethnic Polish Christians, mostly from poor families, benefitted from this anti-Jewish “affirmative action”. It should be noted that Poland produced an excess of university graduates which could not be absorbed by the nation’s underdeveloped economy. Moreover, the country was in the grips of the Great Depression. Universities were state run and supported by the taxpayer; thus the state favored students from the majority ethnic group. In any event, after September 1939, the Lithuanians, the Soviets, and the Nazis solved “the problem” in their own way. According to a Nazi report of January 1942, there were 778 students at the University of Wilno, apparently Lithuanians only for no Poles and Jews were listed among them. See Mały rocznik statystyczny 1937 (Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1937), 312; Piotr Łossowski (ed.), Likwidacja Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego przez władze litewskie w grudniu 1939 roku (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Interlibro, 1991), 74; Einsatzgruppe A, Gesamtb

ormerly thereon by Wojciech Jerzy Muszyński, “Lepiej zbadajmy archiwa,” Nowe Państwo, 1999); and a polemic thereon by Wojcie


In October 1931, during a riot in Wilno, Stanisław Waclawski, a Polish Christian university student, was stoned to death by the Jewish counter-protestors, while a number of Jews was injured, including Max Weinreich. See Witold Sasaki, Crossing Many Bridges: Memoirs of a Pharmacist in Poland, the Soviet Union, the Middle East, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Nebraska (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1988), 21-22; Kazimiera Bartoszewiczówna, “Tutejsi,” Magazyn Wileński, no. 1 (2002): 35-47 at http://www.magwil.lt/archivum/2002/mmw1/stt4.htm; Dawidowicz, From That Place and Time, 168-69. On the „Christian cadavers” controversy in Warsaw see Moshe Prywes (with Haim Chertok), Prisoner of Hope (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 1996), 65-66 [afterward Prisoner of Hope]. And for a case study of ethnic riots in central Poland’s countryside see Piotr Gontarczyk, Bogomorze? Zaścianka polsko-żydowskie w Przytyku 9 marca 1936 r.: Mity, fakty, dokumenty (Biała Podlaska and Warszawa: Rekonkwista i Rachocki i ska, 2000). See also Chodakiewicz, Żydzi i Polacy, 1918-1955, 66-72, 78-91; Jolanta Żydul, Zaścianka antyżydowskie w Polsce w latach 1935-1937 (Warszawa: Fundacja im. K. Keles-Krauza, 1994). Even more dramatic occurrences than those in Poland took place in the United States where “race riots” were frequent in those times. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, for example, at the end of May 1921, the city’s whites, incited by the press and by politicians, massacred several hundred innocent blacks.
debate. In another case, the level of acrimony was so high that the councilmen failed to make peace to honor a Christian boy who heroically gave his life while trying to save a drowning Jewish child.

Against this background, seen solely through the prism of conflict, Polish-Jewish relations in pre-war Wilno look rather morbid. However, the available data from Wilno is far from complete. It may well be that future in-depth research will reveal the current scholarly picture as overly grim. This provisional conclusion is based on several factors. First, a large-town existence usually fosters anonymity. Neighborly solidarity, if it exists at all, is limited mainly to “our” own streets or apartment building. The majority of Poles and Jews lived in separate town quarters that were also separated in terms of physical distance, religion, and culture. This resulted in a lack of contact between the groups. Everyday both sides scrutinized one another from afar. Mistrust was the dominant characteristic, and less often enmity. And what about the assimilated intelligentsia? Did Professor Manfred Kridl of the USB and his daughter Elisabeth, for example, retain only negative memories about their Christian neighbors, friends, and colleagues? Did Polish professors at the USB grade their Jewish students differently than their Christian ones? There is good reason to doubt that. Moreover, preliminary research concerning at least several towns in the Wilno region suggests that Polish-Jewish relations oscillated between conflict and cooperation, and even cordiality – despite the ethno-religious and cultural wall between them.

26 Hirsh Abramowicz, Profiles of a Lost World: Memoirs of East European Jewish Life before World War II (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 274.

27 On April 23, 1931, 18-year old Mieczysław Dordzik drowned while vainly attempting to save four-year-old Chackiel Charmac. The local politicians failed to issue a joint proclamation but both Jews and Christians participated in the funeral of Dordzik and, three years later, at the unveiling of a monument to honor the rescuer. See Słowo, 26 April, 17, 24, 29, and 31 May, 19 June, 4 July 1931 and 21 and 24 April 1934; Kurier Wileński, 24 April, 24 and 27 May 1931, and 24 April 1934; Jarosław Wołkonowski, “Miasto polsko-żydowskie”, Karta, no. 34 (2002): 28-55; Jarosław Wołkonowski, “Pomnik śp. Mieczysławowi Dordzikowi odbudowany”, (TMs, no date [July? 2002]) (a copy in our collection).

28 Once again, there are no comprehensive studies on the topic. For divergent opinions of Jewish students from Warsaw and Cracow, respectively, see Prywes, Prisoner of Hope, 71; Blanca Rosenberg, To Tell at Last: Survival Under False Identity, 1941-1945 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 4.

There is also another dimension that should be considered when we study Polish-Jewish relations in particular, and human affairs in general. We should bear in mind that life does not consist of conflict only. Unfortunately, for one reason or another, we tend to recall conflict most readily, perhaps because it interrupts the monotonous routine of everyday existence. We report to the police when a crime is committed. We do not do so when someone extends a small favor to us. Thus, we would look in vain for evidence of casual kindness in court records and police dispatches. To a certain extent, the same holds true for individual recollections. This is an indication that the data at our disposal at the present time is incomplete. We must delve deeper into the topic and work out a much more multifaceted methodology for micro-studies than already exists, one that does not overlook the complicated symbiotic interdependencies in everyday existence.

Let us endeavor to avoid the pitfall of obsessive, nay exclusive concentration on violence in studying Polish-Jewish relations before 1939. Let us restore the full picture of everyday life. After all, historians have largely avoided comprehensive studies of the topic. Therefore our observations concerning the Wilno region should be considered as preliminary and tentative conclusions stemming from a dearth of scholarship, inaccessible archives, and all too often from tendentious recollections and highly dispersed published primary sources.

All in all, we do not even have any solid monographs on pre-war Wilno and its environs, including the thorny subject of Polish-Jewish relations. Fortunately, from a scholarly point of view, the situation is somewhat better in regards to the study of the history of the Wilno region following the outbreak of the Second World War.30

The Wilno Region during the War and Occupations (1939-1947)


Between 1939 and 1947 the Wilno region survived five occupations: three Soviet, one Lithuanian, and a Nazi German one. The last Soviet occupation, which commenced in 1944, was permanent and lasted until 1991. The tragedy of the Eastern Borderlands began with the joint invasion of Poland by Hitler and Stalin in September 1939. The Red Army captured Wilno after a short struggle on September 18. The victors remained there for a month, looting the town and arresting some of the newly conquered “enemies of the people,” who were overwhelmingly Christian Poles. On October 27, 1939, Stalin nominally handed Wilno and its environs over to the Lithuanians. However, on June 15, 1940, the Red Army re-entered the town. The Republic of Lithuania, including the Wilno region, was incorporated into the Soviet Union. Then, on June 22, 1941, Hitler attacked his erstwhile Communist ally. In July 1941, the Wilno area fell to the Germans. The Nazi occupation lasted for three years. In July 1944, the Wehrmacht retreated under the blows of the Red Army. The Wilno region was once again occupied by the Soviets who re-incorporated this land into Soviet Lithuania and Stalin’s empire.

War and the occupations brought not only a total economic devastation of the Wilno region, as well as the entire country, but also irreversible demographic changes. The changes resulted from mass murder and deportations. The Soviets and Germans were the main architects and perpetrators of the terror, but their helpers included representatives of every single ethnic group collaborating with the occupiers. From the beginning the situation in the Wilno region took on a form of conflict that pitted each ethnic group against the others as well as internal strife within each individual ethnic group. The elements of class and ethnic struggle clashed in a myriad of collective and individual combinations. 31 A struggle erupted

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against the “aliens” (Germans and Soviets), “locals” (e.g., Lithuanian nationalists vs. Jews), and “our own” (nasi, amchu) (e.g., Polish independentists vs. Communists of Polish origin). In this imbroglio, parallel to the clash between the National Socialist and Communist giants, the dwarves were also fighting. The latter were often pre-war citizens of Poland, although the citizens of the pre-1939 Republic of Lithuania and the Soviet Union participated in the struggle as well.

As far as the fight of the Poles against other “locals” is concerned, it was characterized by the lowest degree of intensity in the case of their dealings with the Belorussians, where there was also a large degree of co-existence in day-to-day affairs among ordinary members of both communities. At the other extreme, the Polish struggle against the Lithuanians was arguably at its most vicious, though there too it did not prevent ordinary members of the warring sides from coexisting on an everyday basis. Neither of the feuding factions contemplated anything along the lines of systematic “ethnic cleansing.”

The attitude of the Wilno Poles toward the “aliens” evolved. Initially, the Soviets were considered the main enemy (1939-1941), and later the Germans (1941-1944), only to be superseded by the Soviets again (after July 1944). Let us remember that the enmity toward the Germans, as the main architect of the destruction of Poland, functioned also during both the Lithuanian and Soviet occupations. The animosity toward the Soviets, which declined somewhat because of the criminal conduct of the Nazis, once again began to grow gradually from the end of 1942. This stemmed from the excesses of “revolutionary banditry” of the Soviet partisans in the countryside, their attacks on the Home Army, the shock of the news of the Katyn Forest massacre, and the enmity of the Communists toward the Polish Government-in-Exile.

In any event, the conflict in the Borderlands of all against all was informed not only by the ideologies of class, race, and ethnic struggle. Aside from class and ethnic animosity, there were other factors at play, including neighborhood grudges, criminal pathologies, and various complexes of individual persons. After a restrained period of their incubation in pre-war Poland (and indeed earlier times), such attitudes manifested themselves with incredible power and in the most extreme forms only because of the totalitarian catalyst.

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Of course, armed struggle, including acts of aggression and self-defense, between the various local factions did not occur every day between 1939 and 1947. Sometimes it flared up wildly. On other occasions, it barely simmered. This was mostly in congruence with the intentions of the occupiers. While in control of the territory, Stalin and Hitler wanted to preserve “law and order”. Therefore both the Soviets and the Nazis attempted to direct, control, or at least rationalize, the outbursts of mutual violence among the captive peoples. Usually the violence of one set of “locals” against other “locals” was synchronized (consciously or not) with the policy of the occupier which targeted the most persecuted group of the moment (e.g., collaborationist auxiliary Lithuanian and Belorussian police formations vs. the Jews in 1942). In other instances, the violence of one set of “locals” against another reflected a reaction to perceived threats stemming from the past, present, or potential policy of one of the occupiers (e.g., Polish underground vs. Belorussian National Socialists and Communists between 1941 and 1944).

Of all the ethnic groups, only the Jews were threatened as a whole (July 1941-July 1944). The Polish elite, broadly understood, faced near total extermination between 1939 and 1947. However, because the policies of the occupiers toward the Poles kept fluctuating and evolving, a complete liquidation of the Christian elite was never achieved. Unfortunately, the Nazis virtually succeeded in annihilating the Jews of the Wilno region. In that regard, the policy of the German occupier was generally unremitting.\footnote{We’ve written “generally unremitting” because in 1941 the Nazis spared so-called “useful Jews,” i.e. artisans and others whose work assisted the German war effort. Later the ideology of race struggle almost completely overcame economic pragmatism. See Christian Gerlach, \textit{Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944} (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999).}

Chronologically, the history of the conflict of all against all in the Wilno region commenced on September 17, 1939. Revolutionaries and common criminals chiefly of Belorussian (in villages) and Jewish (in towns) origin began assaulting, robbing, arresting, and killing chiefly ethnic Poles: Polish soldiers, landed nobles, government officials, members of the intelligentsia, wealthy farmers, and military settlers. In some places the anti-Polish rebellion broke out spontaneously (e.g., in Skidel). In other localities it was inspired and coordinated by the invading Soviets who joined the “local” fighters against the Poles (e.g., in Grodno).\footnote{On September 17, a diversionary group of pro-Soviet Belorussians and Jews took over Skidel. A punitive expedition of the Polish army and police arrived shortly after and crushed the revolutionaries. In Grodno, between September 18 and 20, local revolutionaries, including Jews and Belorussians (although it is possible that a few ethnic Polish Communists participated as well), assisted from inside and outside Grodno the Red Army attacks on that town. The attackers were resisted mostly by Christian Poles joined by}
spontaneous rebellion manifested itself in a massacre of the Poles by the “locals” (e.g., Berdówka near Lida, Brzostowica Mała by Grodno). In other instances the rebellion took a more gentle course with the revolutionaries simply disarming the Poles and handing them over to the Soviets.

In any event, the heart of Polishness was hit in the Wilno region: from within and without. Soon, however, the Soviets quelled the anarchy. In congruence with the requirements of the “revolution from above” they attempted to yoke the local collaborators to follow the lines of a strictly controlled struggle against the Polish Christian elite and the institutional remnants of the Second Republic. However, the first Soviet occupation lasted too briefly in some areas to expose the entire Wilno region to the full scope of Communist terror. Because Stalin handed them over to the Republic of Lithuania, the inhabitants of the city of Wilno and a corridor along the interwar Polish-Lithuanian border avoided the mass arrests and deportations of February and April 1940, which painfully affected the rest of the Eastern Borderlands.

The Lithuanian occupation (October 1939-June 1940) was relatively mild. It was characterized by a cress Lithuanization campaign and harassment of the Polish population. Polish institutions were destroyed, including cultural ones such as the Stefan Batory University. Terror was mainly directed at Christian Poles who were active in the underground. Lithuanian terror, however, was not particularly lethal. The potential anti-Jewish or anti-Belorussian animus of the Lithuanian authorities was tempered by the presence of the Red Army. The conflict from below between the various ethnic groups of the “locals” essentially simmered down

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individual Russian and Jewish anti-Communist volunteers. See Chodakiewicz, Żydzi i Polacy, 1918-1955, 121; and Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, “‘Gangi bandziorów’ w Grodnie?” Więź, no. 1 (January 2002).

34 On the night of 17/18 September 1939 r., urged on by the Communist Zak Motyl (Motek Zak?) of Brzostowica Wielka, a pro-Communist criminal gang led by Koziejko and Ajzyk (Icchak?), consisting of Belorusians and Jews, attacked the estate of Brzostowica Mała near Grodno and the nearby village Brzostowica Mała, where the administrative authorities were located. It appears that they slaughtered a large number of, if not all, the ethnic Poles in those localities. This massacre requires further investigation as do the killing of Polish soldiers by Belorussian and Jewish revolutionaries in Berdówka near Lida most likely on September 18, 1939. See Krzysztof Jasiewicz, Lista strat ziemianstwa polskiego (Warszawa: Pomost-Alfa, 1995), 927, 1136-1137 [afterward Lista strat ziemianstwa polskiego]; Wierzbicki, Polacy i Białorusini w zaborze sowieckim, 70-72; Ryszard Szawłowski, Wojna polsko-sowiecka 1939: Tło polityczne, prawniomiczynarodowe i psychologiczne; Agresja sowiecka i polska obrona; Sowieckie zbrodnie wojenne i przeciw ludzkości oraz zbrodnie ukraińskie i białoruskie (Warszawa: Antyk–Marcin Dybowski, 1997), vol. 1: 370; Wojciech Wybranowski, “Musiel zginąć, bo byli Polakami,” Nasz Dziennik, 4 September 2001; Wojciech Wybranowski, “Są pierwsi świadkowie,” Nasz Dziennik, 8-9 September 2001; Wojciech Wybranowski, “Kłopotliwe śledztwo: Dochodzenie w sprawie mordu na Polakach w Brzostowicy Małej utknęło w martwym punkcie,” Nasz Dziennik, 2 October 2002.
at that time. Resentment remained keen, though. Almost all the “locals” awaited some change in the international situation.35

During the second Soviet occupation of the city of Wilno and the Wilno corridor (June 1940-June 1941) Stalin strove to make up for the lost time. The Communists struck both at the remnants of the Polish state and at the newly founded Lithuanian institutions. General Sovietization was the norm. Several thousand persons were shot and tens of thousands arrested and deported to the Gulag, mainly in the Spring and early Summer of 1941.36

Soviet terror affected all ethnic groups. Obviously, because Christian Poles both were overrepresented in the pre-war elite and constituted the largest ethnic group in the Wilno region, they were also the chief and most frequent target of the Communists. Among the Jewish population, the so-called bezhantsy, refugees from western and central Poland, suffered most. Communist collaborators and other pro-Soviet elements from among the “local” population – Belorussian, Jewish, Polish, and Lithuanian – joined in the struggle against the “enemies of the people,” both from among their “own” and other “local” groups.

It seems that Polish Communists and their sympathizers of Polish ethnic origin constituted the smallest group among the collaborators. They were active mainly in Wilno itself. Their influence in the city and especially the countryside was essentially non-existent. On the other hand, it was widely believed that the “Jews” collaborated en masse with the Soviets, conducting a war against the rest of the “locals.”37 In reality, however, such a stereotypical view fails to differentiate between accommodation and collaboration and to consider the evolution of Jewish attitudes (from friendly to cold, though certainly not uniformly) to the Soviet occupation policy. It is obvious that the stereotype applies only to a portion of the Jewish

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35 For some data on the Lithuanian and Soviet occupations of Wilno between 1939 and 1941 see Poczta do Rządu, AAN, Delegatura Rządu [afterward DR], file 202/I-45, vol. 4, 873-85; Sytuacja Polaków na Litwie i Wileńszczyźnie, Archiwum Zakładu Historii Ruchu Ludowego in Warsaw, the collection of Professor Stanisław Kot, file 92 [afterward, AZHRL, the Kot Collection]; and the testimonies in Województwo Wileńskie, the Hoover Institution Archives, Polish Government Collection and the General Anders Collection, Ministerstwo Informacji i Dokumentacji [afterward HIA, PGC, GAC, MID).

36 NKVD sources indicate the overall number and the destination of the deportations. However, we still lack detailed case studies of the scale of the arrests, deportations, and executions in each locality in the Borderlands affected by the Soviet terror. See Poczta do Rządu, AAN, DR, file 202/I-45, vol. 4, 1039-1044; Stanisław Ciesielski, Grzegorz Hryciuk and Aleksander Srebrakowski, Masowe deportacje radzieckie w okresie II wojny światowej (Wrocław: Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego and Wrocławskie Towarzystwo Miłośników Historii, 1994), 26-82. See also Tomasz Strzemiebsz (ed.), Okupacja sowiecka (1939-1941) w świetle tajnych dokumentów: Obywatele polscy na Kresach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej pod okupacją sowiecką w latach 1939-1941 (Warszawa: ISP PAN, 1996).

community: mainly young leftists, and the Communists in particular, but also some others of diverse backgrounds who were or became pro-Soviet. The former constituted only a small fraction of the Jewish community; the latter were representative of a much wider cross-section. The same most likely applies to Soviet collaborators of Belorussian ethnic origin. It is believed that while Jewish revolutionaries were overrepresented in Soviet institutions in towns, their Belorussian comrades were most numerous in the Communist administration in the countryside. Let us stress once again that the responsibility for the terror must be squarely laid at the feet of the Soviet leadership, which consisted mainly of imported Russians from the USSR. Nonetheless, the „locals” blamed for the terror those whom they encountered most frequently in their daily lives: real and alleged Communist collaborators, usually functionaries of the lower levels of the Soviet occupation regime. These were also potentially dangerous, especially in the early months of the occupation, because without them the system would have operated less efficiently.

The conclusion of the Soviet occupation and the commencement of the Nazi one (July 1941), or rather, more precisely, the eastward invasion of the armies of the Third Reich, triggered off a new explosion of conflict from below among the “locals”. Concomitantly with the German attack, an anti-Soviet rising of the „locals” erupted from below in the Wilno region. It was mostly carried out by the Lithuanian anti-Communist underground. Its violence far exceeded that of the anti-Polish rebellion of September 1939. This time the violence was directed mostly against the Jews. In the Wilno region (as in the Kaunas/Kowno area) the Lithuanian nationalist insurgents attacked the retreating Soviets, their “own” Lithuanian Communists, but most of all Jews. Initially, the attacks were purely spontaneous. As time passed, their ferocity, scale, and the level of coordination intensified. A few factors were at play here. First, the discovery of the mass graves of the local population killed in jails by the retreating NKVD inflamed the yearning for revenge against the real and alleged perpetrators. Second, the violence was

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39 About 4,000 Lithuanian insurgents fell in battle with the retreating Soviet forces. See Einsatzgruppe A, Gesamtbericht bis zum 15. Oktober 1941, OAM, 500-4-93, microfilm at RG-11.001M, reel 14, USHMM.

initiated or channeled by the Nazi police which had standing orders to incite pogroms or “self-cleansing actions”. Third, impunity for the violence was guaranteed by the Wehrmacht which – as many a Lithuanian believed – was “liberating” the territories of independent Lithuania from the Soviets and, thus, enlarging the area of operation of the anti-Communist insurgents. However, the latter increasingly and unequivocally turned from anti-Communist fighters exclusively into pogromists of Jews plain and simple.

At that time, the Poles in the Wilno region remained neutral for the most part. In some localities the Polish underground attacked the retreating Soviets. It cannot be excluded that death sentences were carried out on fleeing local Communists and their collaborators. It is quite possible that the unaffiliated Polish population participated in limited lynching of such persons. At the moment, however, we are incapable of defining precisely the scale of the phenomenon. Nonetheless, it seems certain that in the Wilno region, now renamed the Wilna-Gebiet of the Reichskommissariat Ostland, the Christian Poles (aside perhaps from a few exceptions) generally did not participate actively in anti-Jewish and anti-Communist massacres.41

However, by mid-summer 1941, the spontaneous risings by the Lithuanians were transformed into systematic, methodical, and highly organized forays of death. Well-armed, if often still ununiformed, the units of the Lithuanian riflemen fanned out over the Wilno region and assisted the Einsatzgruppen in the mass shootings of Jews in one town after another. The local Polish and Belorussian residents were customarily forced to dig pits and bury the bodies but also, sometimes, to transport in their carriages the condemned unfortunates to their place of execution. The largest executions took place in Ponary near Wilno. As many as 100,000 people, mostly Jews, were killed there.42 In this erstwhile summer resort locality, about 7 miles

41 See Tomasz Szarota, U progu Zagłady: Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie (Warszawa, Paryż, Amsterdam, Antwerpa, Kowno) (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2000), 265. For instance, in Głębokie the Christian population refused to be provoked to anti-Jewish excesses. See M. and Z. Rajak, Memorial Book of Gluboke (Canton, NY: No publisher, 1994), 27, 37, which is a translation of Khurbn Glubok...Koziany (Buenos Aires: Former Residents’ Association in Argentina, 1956). However, things were much different in central Poland occupied by the Soviets, the Podlasie region in particular, where some Poles participated in anti-Jewish massacres in over a score of localities in summer 1941. See Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, “The Massacre in Jedwabne, July 10, 1941: Before, During, After,” TMs (Charlottesville, VA, 2002); Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, eds., Wokół Jedwabnego, volume 1: Studia; and volume 2: Dokumenty (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2002).
away from the city of Wilno, Lithuanian nationalists, under Nazi supervision, massacred members of the Polish Christian elite as well as Soviet POWs and Communists of various nationalities, including some Lithuanians. The executions took place methodically throughout the German occupation. Ironically, in May 1944, the Nazis shot in Ponary a large contingent of Lithuanian soldiers and officers from the collaborationist units of General Plechavičius.

Initially, however, the Lithuanian nationalists were not the only ones hoping to benefit by collaborating with the Third Reich. Some of the Belorussian nationalist activists harbored similar hopes, but not the Poles.43 By the end of 1941 at the latest, the Nazis created other collaborationist institutions, including Belorussian auxiliary police and the civilian administration. Of course, the Belorussian officials and policemen were included in all German undertakings, including the anti-Jewish ones. It seems however that they participated in the extermination of the Jews to a much lesser degree than the Lithuanian nationalists. The role of the Belorussian collaborators was limited to auxiliary functions, including the economic exploitation of the Jewish population, guarding the ghettos, and escorting Jews to their places of execution. Sometimes however, the Belorussian auxiliaries did themselves shoot Jews.44 Many in the Polish

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43 The Lithuanians were soon disappointed since the Nazis failed to restore the Republic of Lithuania. For the evolution of the Lithuanian and Belorussian attitudes toward the Nazis as well as the predicament of the Poles and Jews see Einsatzgruppe A, Gesamtbericht vom 16. Oktober 1941 bis 31. Januar 1942, OAM, 500-4-91, microfilm at RG-11.001M, reel 14, USHMM; Ereignismeldung UdSSR Nr. 192, 14. April 1942, OAM, 500-1-25, microfilm at RG-11.001M, reel 183, USHMM; DIP, Prasa bialoruska, AAN, DR, file 202/III-107; DIP, Tajna prasa litewska, AAN, DR, 202/III-109. See also Sokrat Janowicz, “Zderzenie wielu światów, czyli Kresy białoruskie w latach 1939-1953,” (in:) Jasiewicz, Tygiel narodów, 145; Piotrowski, Poland’s Holocaust, chapters 5 and 6.

44 According to Frank Buscher, the 19 SS auxiliary police Schutzmannschaften took part in Nazi undertakings in the Belorussian territories. That formation included 17 units directly subordinated to the SS and police commander in Minsk, among them 4 Lithuanian Schutzmannschaften, 2 Latvian, 3 Belorussian, 7 Ukrainian, and the so-called SS-Druzhina composed of 2,000 ethnic Russian and Ukrainian Soviets. In “Western Belorussia,” an estimated 80 percent of all local administrative officials in the area were of Belorussian origin. Belorussians also constituted 60 percent of auxiliary police stationed throughout the countryside and in towns. It seems that the Polish participation in the auxiliary police, initially prominent in the areas with a sizable Polish population, decreased already in the fall of 1941 as the Poles were purged and replaced with Belorussians. See Martin Dean, Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-45 (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 2000; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 21, 46, 52, 74; Jerzy Turonek, Bialoruś pod okupacją niemiecką (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza,1993), 65-66, 185-87; Frank Buscher, “Investigating Nazi Crimes in Byelorussia: Challenges and Lessons,” at http://muweb.millersville.edu/~holo-con/Buscher.html; Arūnas Bubnys, “Vokiečių ir lietuvių saugumo policija (1941-1944),” Genocidas ir rezistencija no. 1 (1997) at http://www.genocid.ltleysyba/1/genocida1.htm.
community perceived that at least some persons who were employed in the Nazi institutions had fulfilled similar functions under the Soviet occupation. This phenomenon has not been sufficiently studied yet. It is premature to state unequivocally whether this sort of continuum was the rule or an exception. Additionally, there were significant numbers of Poles in the Belorussian administration and police between the summer and fall of 1941. Many of them had ties with the Polish underground, having infiltrated these Nazi institutions with its consent.45

Against this background the multi-faceted struggle played itself out with ever-waxing intensity during the Nazi occupation. Around the spring of 1942 the conflict in the Borderlands was exacerbated by new and mutually intertwined factors: the economic policy of the occupier, widespread banditry, and partisan activities.

The Nazi policy of total economic exploitation of the Borderlands led to undercutting the means of existence of the local population. Not only were the industrial products lacking, but also, more importantly, the food supply began to run out. The Germans confiscated most of the crops and livestock as a forced food quota. What little remained barely allowed the peasants to eke out a livelihood on a subsistence level but hardly sufficed for replanting and reseeding. Moreover, the Nazis carried out obligatory recruitment for forced labor. Some of the unwilling draftees worked in their own localities on various public works, including mainly road repair. However, some people were deported to the Reich for slave labor. This mostly affected the young, who were also additionally targeted for their participation in the underground. All this undermined the foundation of the traditional society of the Borderlands, particularly in the countryside where large, multi-generational families settled in the same area and constituted a security net for the youngest, the oldest, and the sick relatives. Now, having barely recuperated from the Soviet terror, the net began to unravel anew under the Nazi heel.46

45 On the infiltration of the auxiliary police by the Home Army see Ereignismeldung UdSSR Nr. 175, 2. März 1942, OAM, 500-1-773, microfilm at RG-11.001M, reel 10, USHMA; Ereignismeldung UdSSR Nr. 192, 14. April 1942, OAM, 500-1-25, microfilm at RG-11.001M, reel 183, USHMA.
Further, the countryside experienced additional blows. First, common bandits became active. Second, the fugitive Soviet POWs seized provisions from the local peasants often against their will, and with increasing violence. Third, Jewish fugitives also carried out raids or supply expeditions at the expense of the villagers.

The bandits simply carried on as they had before the war, albeit on a much larger scale. It seems that they attracted new recruits, enticed by the apparent impunity and reacting to the dearth of food and industrial supplies resulting from the Nazi economic policy of total exploitation. The bandit element enjoyed a modicum of support among the local population, or rather of its pathological fringe: Polish, Lithuanian, and Belorussian. It seems that the bandits operated in small groups, mobilized only to carry out a particular robbery. In general, most “local” bandits could desist banditry and any time and return home. Local, unaffiliated bandits very quickly became the target of the village self-defense units and the Polish independentist underground. Their activities were terminated or brought under control. At first, the culprits were beaten. If they did failed to reform, they were shot. Some were probably given a chance to rehabilitate themselves as guerrilla fighters. (The instances of insubordination, the breaches of discipline, and banditry among individual Home Army soldiers constitute a separate issue. Usually the offending individuals were punished immediately with the full severity of war-time military law.)

In any event, the local bandits found themselves in a situation much less complicated than the Soviets did. The latter can be classified as follows. First, there were fugitive POWs who had escaped from Nazi captivity. Second, there were stragglers from the Red Army who were semi-hiding with the local population in the countryside. The Germans initially left them alone but in the spring of 1942 the authorities tried to register them, thus prompting a mass flight of the stragglers to the forest.  

Third, there were the NKVD paratroopers dropped behind the Nazi lines in the Wilno region with explicit orders to rebuild the Soviet state structures, to conduct partisan operations which would provoke the fiercest possible German reprisals against the Polish Christian population, and to organize an offensive against

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47 Tätigkeits- und Lagebericht Nr. 11 der Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD in der UdSSR (Berichtszeit vom 1.3. – 31.3.1942), OAM, 500-1-25, microfilm at RG-11.001M, reel 183, USHMMA.
the Polish underground. The acts of “revolutionary banditry” carried out by the NKVD inevitably led to a state of virtually permanent conflict with the Home Army. Constituting the fourth group of Stalin’s supporter in the Borderlands, local Communists also participated in the conflict against the AK. It is assumed that they were recruited chiefly from among the Belorussian population and to a much smaller extent from among the Jews and Lithuanians. The Poles constituted the smallest contingent of Stalin’s followers in the Soviet partisan movement. In general, the Communists enjoyed the support of only a small part of the local population in the Wilno region. Nonetheless, they could count on voluntary recruitment and resupplying at least in some areas.48

This was not the case with the Jewish fugitives. The latter found themselves in the most tragic predicament of all the ethnic groups under the Nazi occupation. First of all, the Nazi policy of extermination liquidated practically every Jewish support center, including the ghettos, where the fugitives could have counted on aid. So Jewish fugitives were unable to rely on “their own” as far as their supplies were concerned. Jews attempted to deal with this challenge in a variety of ways. Their activities to procure supplies usually reflected the profile of the fugitive group individual Jews were involved with. There were at least four distinct categories of Jewish fugitives who escaped extermination and strove to survive in hiding.49

First, there was a handful of Polonized Jews and assimilated Poles of Jewish origin in the Wilno region. These persons were mostly passing as Polish Christians. Their supply problems were practically akin to those of an average Polish Christian. At least in some instances these fugitives had links

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to the Polish underground. They took advantage of its protection and a few of them even fought in its ranks in the forest.  

Second, young, athletic people fled the ghettos in organized groups, often equipped with arms they were able to acquire through various channels. Some of them quickly formed separate Jewish partisan outfits in the forest. Their leaders were usually involved with some segment of the Zionist movement: from the extreme left to the far right. It seems certain that almost from the very beginning these Jewish fighters used force to capture food, clothes, and weapons from the peasants. It cannot be excluded however that they also paid or even begged for the supplies in some instances. After a while, almost all Jewish units became tactically subordinated to the Soviet partisan movement, which already earlier had incorporated some Jewish Communists into its ranks. Initially, at least some of the Jewish partisans, particularly the largest outfit, Tuwia Bielski’s Brigade from the Naliboki Forest, enjoyed proper and even cordial relations with individual units of the Home Army. The underground Poles sometimes saved Jews and later escorted them to the Jewish partisan camps. Both sides also cooperated against the Germans, for example during the great Nazi pacification action in the Naliboki Forest in the summer of 1943. Unfortunately, mutual relations kept deteriorating because of the increasingly frequent and brutal supply raids of the Jewish partisans which prompted the AK to intervene at the request of the desperate local peasants who were being robbed mercilessly. The increasingly fierce brutality and radicalization of the Jewish partisans stemmed mainly from the fact that their families had been murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators, and they had escaped from the ghettos with the thought of revenge. Jews were sentenced to death; they had nothing to lose. This attitude manifested itself, among other things, in “open hate and hostility towards the local population,” according to Dov Levin. The principal reason for the flare-up in the mutual relations between the Jewish partisans and the Home Army however was the conflict of the Polish independentists with the Soviet partisans who tactically controlled the Jewish partisan units. The Soviets were physically destroying Polish partisan outfits and also

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51 The Story of Two Shtetls, Part Two, 80-101.

strove to provoke Nazi wrath toward the civilian Polish population of the Wilno region. Thus, by the fall of 1943 the struggle for supplies and political supremacy in the Borderlands pitted the Jewish partisans squarely against the Home Army.53

Aside from the organized Jewish partisan units, so-called “wild” groups appeared in the forest. Making up the third kind of Jewish fugitives, these groups consisted of persons of diverse ages, both male and female, including children, the elderly, and often entire families. The “wild” groups were the least organized entities. At least initially, they lacked any funds and arms. Therefore they were rarely admitted into the affiliated Jewish or Soviet partisan units. Members of the “wild” groups were forced to beg or steal food from the peasants, some of whom they had been acquainted with already before the war. Sometimes the fugitives would force the farmers to surrender their hidden weapons to them. The “wild” groups lacked military discipline. They treated matters of security with insufficient vigilance. Encumbered by the elderly, women, and children, they were unable to change their whereabouts frequently, and often lived in dugouts in one location for extended periods of time. These features of the “wild” groups – in conjunction with the expropriation actions they carried out, which prompted the peasants to denounce them – resulted in those Jewish fugitives most frequently of all falling victim to German expeditions, village self-defense, and AK retaliation. Further, the “wild” groups were targeted by common bandits and Soviet partisans (it was often difficult to tell these two apart). Next, Jewish girls and women hiding in the dugouts fell prey to the sexual appetites of degenerate Soviet predators. The Soviet aggression against the “wild” groups also stemmed from the paranoid suspicion that Jews who were able to escape to the forest were agents of the Nazi police. Moreover, the Soviets resented the fact that the “wild” groups, through their carelessness, revealed the whereabouts of the Soviet partisan bases, did not fight the Germans, and supplied themselves from the same meager sources.

53 The Nazi police noted in many reports the clashes between the Home Army and the Soviet and Jewish partisans (as well as unaffiliated Jews). See Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, 18 December 1944, “Weisspolnische Banden in Litauen,” Auszug aus dem FS der Sipo Kauen Nr. 585, 18 January 1944, Auszug aus dem Fernschreiben vom. 6.4.44 der Sipo Kauen Nr. 3373, Auszug aus dem Fernschreiben vom. 1. April 1944 vom Kommandeur der Sipo und des SD Litauen in Kauen Nr. 3238, OAM, 504-1-7, microfilm RG-11.001M, reel 74, USHMMA; Geheim, Der Kommandeur der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD für den Bezirk Białystok an das Reichssicherheitshauptamt, 7 September 1943, Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, no date [March 1944], Abschrift Sipo Kauen Fs. Nr. 2494 vom 10.3.44, Abschrift Sipo Kauen Nr. 2663 vom 14.3.44, Auszug aus dem Fs. vom 27.3.44 Nr. 3070 des Kds. Litauen, Auszug aus dem Fernschreiben vom 6.4.44 Nr. 3373 der Sipo Kauen, Auszug aus dem Fernschreiben vom 1.4.44 Nr. 3238 von d. Sipo u.d. SD Kauen, Auszug des Fs. der Sipo Kauen Nr. 4672 vom 16.5.44, OAM, 504-1-10, microfilm RG-11.001M, reel 74, USHMMA.
that the Communist partisans did, and additionally antagonized the local population. Thus, the “wild” groups of Jewish fugitives were in the most precarious situation and were practically besieged from all sides.

Fourth, a much more lucky category, some Jewish fugitives, both individuals and groups, found shelter with the local Christian population in the countryside.\(^{54}\) Thus, they solved the problem of supplies. Those Jews were usually well heeled. They did not only have reliable Christian acquaintances, but also the funds to maintain themselves and, at times, even to buy the good will of their hosts. Sometimes Jews in hiding robbed the peasants in remote localities, returned to their shelter, and shared the loot with their Christian hosts in lieu of payment for their upkeep. Of course, such activities exposed those in hiding to denunciations to the Nazis or the retaliation by the peasant self-defense, Polish underground, or Soviet partisans – depending on who had fallen victim to the Jewish supply raids.

It has to be stressed that, because the Soviet partisans were most numerous in the Wilno region, they were also responsible for the greatest number of acts of violence perpetrated in the course of the expropriation and other actions directed against the civilian population. In any event, the expropriation actions of the common criminals, Soviets, and Jewish fugitives were facilitated by the fact that the Nazi authorities often ignored banditry so long as it was aimed at the non-German civilian population. Sometimes the Germans punished the usually innocent locals for the acts of banditry (or resistance) carried out by their antagonists from other local groups. It was safer and more convenient to “pacify” a Belorussian village or a Polish gentry hamlet than to chase armed bandits, Soviet partisans, or Jewish fugitives around the sylvan wilderness and swamps. This attitude stemmed in part from the indifference of the Germans to the plight of the local population and other groups.\(^ {55}\) It was also attributable to the lack of sufficient security forces to patrol the area and conduct massive anti-bandit sweeps. The efficiency of the Nazi security force was also conditioned by its ethnic make-up (for example, Lithuanian auxiliary policemen were rather

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\(^ {55}\) DSW, Raporty okresowe Głównego Inspektora PKB, Raport, 15 November 1942, AAN, DR, 202/II-35, 6.
unwilling to risk their lives to defend Polish or Belorussian peasants). Nonetheless, the indifference of the German authorities toward the predicament of the locals was tempered by the prerogatives of the Nazi economic policy of total exploitation of the Wilno region. After all, the success of the policy required the maintenance of order if, for no other reason, than to ensure the steady delivery of agricultural products.

The German reaction to the banditry and partisan activities was multifaceted. First of all, pacification actions and terror were intensified. From mid-1943 the Wehrmacht gradually took over a majority of the police functions in the Wilno area. The Nazi authorities also allowed the creation of local self-defense groups, even arming some of them in part. Further, in the second half of 1943, the Germans attempted to conclude an agreement with the Polish underground.

Secret cells of the Polish independentist conspiracy were established in the Wilno region already in September 1939. From the very inception, its participants believed that Poland in general and the Wilno region in particular had three enemies: Soviet and local Communists, German Nazis, and Lithuanian Nationalists. After mid-1942, most Polish underground groups subordinated themselves to the Home Army. By that time, in the Wilno countryside, the local cells of the AK had already commenced self-defense against revolutionary and common banditry as well as, sporadically, armed anti-German activities. At this point, the AK also attempted to work out a modus vivendi with the Soviet partisans.

Initially, the AK took at face value Soviet assurances that the acts of banditry were perpetrated chiefly by unaffiliated Soviet POWs or undisciplined individual Soviet partisans. Therefore no action was taken against the Soviet partisan movement as such. However, the AK soldiers


57 This was duly noted by the Nazis: “Weitere umfangreiche Massnahmen werden sich gegen die polnischen Chauvinisten richten, die sich Hand in Hand mit Juden und Kommunisten in äusserst starker Weise deutsfeindlich betätigen.” See Einsatzgruppe A, Gesamtbericht bis zum 15. Oktober 1941, OAM, 500-4-93, microfilm at RG-11.001M, reel 14, USHMMA. The trend continued for some time: “Die polnischen Widerstandsorganisationen unterhalten Zusammenhang mit kommunistischen Terrorgruppen und mit Juden,” and “Trotz der weltanschaulichen und politischen Gegensätze die russischen und polnischen Widerstandbewegungen zur Zusammenarbeit gefunden [emphasis in the original].” See Einsatzgruppe A, Gesamtbericht vom 16. Oktober 1941 bis 31. Januar 1942, OAM, 500-4-91, microfilm at RG-11.001M, reel 14, USHMMA.
strove to protect foremost the localities inhabited by Poles and Catholics. They proposed an arrangement to the Soviets whereby the Wilno region would be divided in a rational way better to collect supplies. The Poles proposed that the Soviets limit their actions to non-Polish areas, which in practice meant that the Communist supply raids be limited to those localities and individuals who supported the return of Stalin’s regime to the Borderlands. Meanwhile, the Soviets, who considered the Wilno region an integral part of the USSR, endeavored to subordinate to themselves all local armed organizations in the area. This included the self-defense groups, which operated legally with German blessing but which to a large extent were infiltrated by the Home Army.

Of course the attempts to subordinate these groups to the Soviets through negotiations failed. Initially, however, it appeared that an uneasy and mistrustful cooperation was possible between the parties. Naturally, the NKVD functionaries who led the Soviet partisan movement never abandoned their aim of total domination of the Borderlands by the Communists. Soviet agents were successful in infiltrating self-defense groups and even in the AK. Throughout 1942, the Soviet partisans carried out assassinations of the “leaders of Polish reaction,” i.e. the organizers of the AK in the countryside. In January 1943, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Belorussia, who simultaneously headed the General Staff of the Partisan Movement, Pantaleimon Ponomarenko informed Stalin that “in the interest of the [Soviet] state we must undertake certain activities… Partisan struggle needs to be ignited in Poland. Aside from its military effects, it will cause serious losses among the Polish population resulting from the fight against the German occupiers and will result in the Poles’ not being able to preserve their full strength [emphasis MJCh]” to defend themselves later from Stalin’s takeover. Ponomarenko regarded it “indispensable to send, in the spring, 80-90 diligently prepared and trained agents” to take over the leadership of the underground struggle in Poland.58 Stalin agreed. Soon after, Ponomarenko ordered his underlings “in every possible way to expose [the Poles] to the blows of the German occupier. The Germans will shoot them without any qualms if they find out [from the Communists] that they are the organizers of the Polish partisan groups or other organizations.”59 In the

context of the Wilno region (and the rest of Poland) this spelled an inevitable conflict with the Polish independentist camp, the Home Army in particular.

The breaking off of diplomatic ties by Stalin with the Polish Government-in-Exile in April 1943 over the Katyn affair served as a perfect pretext to introduce Ponomarenko’s ideas into practice. The NKVD leaders of the Soviet partisan movement were now free to act openly. They promptly showered severe blows on the unsuspecting Poles. The Soviets hit small clandestine garrisons in small towns and villages, individual AK cells, and even entire Polish guerrilla units. They killed not only soldiers of the Polish underground but also entire Polish civilian families. A handful of examples follows.

On May 8, 1943, the Soviet “Pobeda” unit and the outfits of the Jewish partisan Brigade of Tuvia Bielski assaulted Naliboki. A part of that small town was burned. One hundred and twenty-eight members of the local self-defense were shot. Most of them were clandestine soldiers of the Home Army. On August 26, 1943, near Lake Narocz, the Soviet “Voroshilov” Brigade used a ruse to disarm the AK unit of Lieutenant Antoni Burzyński (nom de guerre “Kmicic”). The commanding officer and 80 Polish POWs were shot. Likewise, on December 1, 1943, near Stołpce, the Communists similarly destroyed the AK unit of Lieutenant Kacper Miłaszewski (“Lewald”), having first treacherously lured its officers to a “meeting”. The Soviets consistently killed the representatives of the Polish elite, for example Captain Kosobudzki and the wife and mother of Edward Wawrzewski on the estate of Stare Bukwy near Rudziszki on September 18, 1943. They also continued to massacre the civilian population. The most infamous case was the pacification of Koniuchy, where at least 34 Poles of both sexes and all ages were killed and the village burned to the ground on January 29, 1944.

According to historian Zygmunt Boradyn, during the Nazi occupation, in the Nowogródek area alone, which was part of the general Wilno region, the Soviet partisans shot about 500 Poles – soldiers of the AK and their sympathizers. It is estimated that throughout the north-eastern Borderlands, between the fall of 1941 and the summer of 1944, the Soviet partisans, their allies, and common bandits killed about 5,000 Poles, including 500 Home Army members in the entire Wilno region. Of course, the Poles fought back. In the Nowogródek area alone, they shot around 600 Communists and their sympathizers. Conditions were similar in the countryside around Wilno itself. It seems however that, unlike the Soviets, the AK usually eschewed the mass shooting of civilians. The Polish underground fighters limited themselves mainly to fighting armed enemy. For example, on September 11, 1943, near Niedoroszła, Captain Zygmunt Szendzielarz (“Łupaszko”)
ambushed a Soviet detachment, killing 20 enemy without any casualties among his troops. In the north-eastern Borderlands the Polish-Soviet partisan war lasted until the German retreat in June 1944.60

In these circumstances, toward the end of the Nazi occupation, the concerted efforts of the Germans to establish contact with the AK finally bore fruit. Polish-German negotiations commenced in December 1943. At first, these were local talks limited to the Nowogródek area only. Later, the Germans managed to reach the Wilno District Command of the AK. However, the negotiations were promptly broken off on the explicit orders of the Main Command of the Home Army in Warsaw. Meanwhile, nonetheless, local AK commanders in the Nowogródek area agreed to a cease-fire with the Germans in exchange for weapons and ammunition which they desperately needed to fight the Soviet partisans. (The Nowogródek Home Army received neither air-drops of arms from the Western Allies nor war supplies from central Poland. This was also the case for AK units throughout the Eastern Borderlands, with few exceptions). Thus, strengthened with new arms, the Polish guerrillas continued fighting the Soviets. Yet, at the same time, they also kept up their attacks against the Nazis and their collaborators. The AK often carried out its anti-German operations disguised as Soviet partisans both to appear to be honoring the cease-fire “understanding” with the German occupier and to shield the local Polish population from Nazi wrath. In the spring and summer 1944, however, the Home Army dropped all the pretenses and stepped up its anti-Nazi operations significantly. At the time, the AK launched its most important offensive yet, codenamed the „Tempest” (Burza).61


The task of the “Tempest” in the Wilno region (as elsewhere in Poland) was to liberate the area and establish a Polish administration before the arrival of Stalin’s armies. The centerpiece of the offensive was the operation “Sharp Gate” (Ostra Brama). Its objective, the liberation of Wilno, was only partly achieved. In actuality, the Home Army on its own was incapable of defeating the Germans throughout the entire north-eastern Borderlands. Therefore in July 1944 most units of the combined Wilno-Nowogródek District Command cooperated tactically with the Red Army. Polish commanders in the Wilno area hoped that Stalin would at least consent to converting the Polish independentist guerrilla units into regular Polish army detachments. This turned out to be a pipedream of course. The Soviets treacherously lured most of the AK officers to a “meeting,” as was their practice, and the NKVD arrested them. Some were shot; others were deported to the Gulag. The rank-and-file shared their lot for the most part. First they were interned at a concentration camp in Miedniki; and then most of them were shipped off to Siberia. Only a minority was spared. These included the AK fighters who were forcibly induced into the collaborationist military formation, the so-called “Berling army,” and who managed to break through to central Poland, where many continued to fight against the Nazis and Communists.

The remnants of the Wilno AK descended once again into the underground. They regrouped to fight the Soviet occupier. The secret Active Self-Defense Units of the Wilno Region were created. They operated basing themselves on a somewhat modified structure of the Home Army. By 1947 most Polish guerrilla units were destroyed. Most of the AK soldiers of the last sizable self-defense unit of the county of Lida, where Ejszyszki was located, fell in battle in 1949. A few survivors fought on until they too were crushed in 1952. Just as under the Nazi occupation, there were among them surprisingly many Polish insurgents of the Eastern Orthodox faith and Belorussian or “local” origin (tutejsi). This was also true for the leadership cadre, in the county of Lida in particular. It is well worth noting that not only

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ethnic Polish Catholics fought and bled for the freedom of Poland’s Borderlands.63

The Soviet terror intensified manifold since the re-incorporation anew of the Wilno region into the USSR. During the summer and fall of 1944 Soviet security services undertook massive operations against the “enemies of the people.” As their henchmen, the NKVD drafted, and often accepted as volunteers, a fair number of “local” Communist sympathizers and persons thirsty for revenge for the crimes they and their families had experienced during the Nazi occupation. Thus, some Belorussians, Jews, and likely Poles joined the ranks of the Soviet police auxiliary formations, including the red militia and the so-called “extermination battalions” (istrebitel’nye batal’ony).64

The new wave of Communist terror targeted the stragglers of the German army, Lithuanian and Belorussian auxiliaries of the Nazi police, White Russians (monarchists and others), various non-Communist political and social activists, Home Army soldiers, and real and alleged Nazi collaborators. According to a gallows-humor joke current in Wilno at the time, it was enough to have a postage stamp bearing the likeness of Hitler to be considered a “collaborator”. However, under the Nazi occupation, there were virtually no other stamps issued. Thus, in the Soviet eyes, anyone who ever used the post office could become a “collaborator”. Those suspected of collaboration were usually arrested and promptly deported to the Gulag.65

Beginning in July 1944 the regular units of the NKVD pacified the countryside, shooting Poles and others. Guerrilla units were destroyed; Polish insurgents were killed. The waves of mass round-ups of Poles and other “enemies of the people” lasted without interruption until 1947.


64 For a brief period after the Soviet “liberation,” the Poles constituted a plurality, if not majority, of the istrebiteľné batal’ony in the south-eastern Borderlands, having joined to protect the remaining Polish settlements from attacks by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. See Tomasz Balbus, “Polskie istreibitel’ne batal’yony NKWD w latach 1944-1945,” Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, no. 6 (June 2002): 71-75. There are no comprehensive studies concerning the Soviet police auxiliaries in the Wilno region. However, some participants talk about “revenge” as the reason for joining. See e.g. Joseph Riwash, Resistance and Revenge, 1939-1949 (Montreal: No publisher, 1981), 66; Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, After the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Conflict in the Wake of World War II (New York and Boulder, CO: Columbia University Press and East European Monographs, 2003), 67-102 (forthcoming).

Incomplete data from the area of the pre-war Polish provinces of Wilno and Nowogródek show that in the space of three years the Communists killed 3,000 Home Army soldiers, arrested 13,000 members of the Polish underground, and shipped an additional 20,000 civilians to the Gulag. Concomitantly, beginning in the spring of 1945, the deportations and resettlement of the Polish population from the Wilno region to central Poland commenced. Tens of thousands of Poles were expelled from their ancestral homes. The process was halted in 1947. The Soviets initiated the collectivization drive. The terror intensified. It seemed that, with the entrenchment of the totalitarian regime, the Poles and the Polish tradition would disappear forever, just as the Jews had vanished from the Wilno region, including the small town of Ejszyszki.

Ejszyszki: From Its Origins to the Second Polish Republic (1070-1921)

Located about 50 miles south-west of Wilno, Ejszyszki spans both sides of the Wersoka River. The waterway divides the little town into two parts: the southern (larger) and the northern (smaller). The Rudniki Forest lies nearby. A historical road to Grodno known as the “Raduń highway” passes by Ejszyszki. This was an ancient royal road which once linked Wilno and Cracow, the respective capitals of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland.

Ejszyszki (written Eixiski in Latin text), and known as Eišiškės in Lithuanian, was probably founded in the 11th century. Around 1070 Eixius or Eiszius, a Samogitian military lord, was given land as a fief from Lithuanian Prince Erdziwiłł, the son of Mątwiłł. Eiszius built a castle in this

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strategic locality. The division of the little town into two parts occurred in the 13th and 14th centuries. By the end of the 14th century, the Grand Duke Vytautas (Witold) gave Ejszyszki and the surrounding lands to his knight, Sudeurmnd. The gift was part of the so-called “Königsberg donation” (1384) by which Vytautas – to oppose his brother King of Poland Jagiello (Jogaila) – passed a part of his patrimony to the Teutonic Knights. Therefore the King confiscated the land of Ejszyszki and established a royal county (starostwo) there. However, meanwhile, Vytautas founded the parish church of Corpus Christi in Ejszyszki in honor of his wife Anna who harkened from the area. For the next two centuries the Jagiellon family took care of the church, supporting it with generous donations. In 1524 a parish school was founded and thrived because of the gifts of the local nobility.

At the time, the local lands and forests accrued to the Hornostaj family. They promptly renamed as Hornostaiszki (Gornostaiszki) the estate of Ejszyszki which was located near the small town. Ejszyszki itself retained its old name, however. It also remained a royal county town. In the middle of the 18th century the county site and 16 surrounding villages were acquired by the relatives of the mighty Potocki magnates, the Sołłohub family. Their lands adjoined the estates of the noble Zawisza, Marcinkiewicz, and Romer clans. Between the royal, aristocratic, church, and noble lands, there were the petty gentry hamlets of Beniuny, Wilkańce, Korkuciany, and others. The locals referred to them as the “surrounding places” (okolice). At least 16 petty gentry clans resided in the “surrounding places” of Ejszyszki. Their nobility, as descendants of the warrior Kurpos, was verified en bloc et in perpetuum on August 23, 1560.

By that time the Ejszyszki area had developed its specific, multicultural character. The villages, settlements, and petty gentry hamlets were inhabited by Christians, mainly Catholics, but also by members of the Eastern Orthodox Church as well as a few Muslims (Tartars). The serfs constituted the single largest social estate in the countryside. Just like other small towns in the Borderlands, Ejszyszki became almost an exclusive domain of the Jews. Their religious, cultural, and social life revolved around the synagogue. They chiefly traded and worked as artisans. For centuries they served as intermediaries for the economy of the land of Ejszyszki. At the market, they bought horses and cattle from the local nobility and agricultural products from the peasants.

Thus, the Ejszyszki area was home for Poles, Ruthenes (Belorussians), Lithuanians, Jews, Tartars, and others. 68 Persons of diverse

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68 As late as the 16th century, Ejszyszki was considered a county with a Lithuanian majority. Later, the elite was Polonized and the peasants, overwhelmed by migrating Ruthenian and Polish villagers, largely
ethnic roots could be found in every layer of local society. Jews constituted the only exception. They were altogether lacking among the serfs. Nonetheless, it is quite possible that a few noble families may well have had Jewish ancestors. According to the law of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a Jew converting to Christianity was automatically ennobled. However, only a few followers of Judaism took advantage of this type of social advancement. Most of course remained true to the faith and customs of their forefathers.

Ejszyszki reached the apogee of its greatness in the 17th century, when King John III Sobieski granted the town the so-called Magdeburg laws. At the time the locality had four streets named Wilno, Raduń, Rymkunie, and Nowa. Since 1672, without any interruption, a market day was held every Thursday. The most famous market days occurred yearly in June on Corpus Christi and in April on the feast of the Ascension of Our Lord. Thus, the religious holidays regulated and, as it were, blessed commerce. In the middle of the 19th century, a sumptuous neo-classical Church of the Ascension of Our Lord was erected in Ejszyszki. It was designed by Teodor Narbutt. The beauty of its architecture competed successfully with the charming manor house built by the noble Sieklucki family in the nearby Gornostaiszki at the beginning of the 19th century.

Naturally, the town of Ejszyszki had only local importance. It never aspired to the level of Lida, Grodno, or Wilno. Nonetheless, as did the rest of the Wilno region, the small town experienced the historical vicissitudes of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. During the “Deluge” and then the Northern War, the Swedes burned down the town twice, looting it completely. Ejszyszki and the surrounding countryside witnessed the Polish insurrections during the Partitions of the 18th and 19th century. It was during the January Rising of 1863 that, in the nearby forest, the units of Father Horbaczewski, the vicar of Ejszyszki, who led the local nobility and peasants, and Michael Elviro Andriolli, who brought along a contingent of young volunteers from Wilno, subordinated themselves to the command of Ludwik Narbutt. On March 9, 1863, in Rudziszki the Polish insurgents scored a glorious victory against the Russian Cossacks. However, on June 23, 1863, aided by the traitorous peasant Adam Karpowicz, the Russians destroyed Narbutt’s detachment in a bloody battle near Korkuciany. The Polish commander himself fell as well.

As happened a multitude of times before and after the January Rising, the inhabitants of the gentry hamlets and peasant villages volunteered to

fight for Poland. Meanwhile, the Jewish population followed the time-
sanctified tradition of neutrality and apartness. They observed the Polish-
Russian struggles with trepidation, hoping to survive the calamity of war
unscathed. According to the Jewish chronicler Yaffa Eliach, the Poles
sometimes considered the Ejszyszki Jews to be supporters of the Russian
invaders and avenged themselves on the followers of Judaism. Eliach claims
that in 1831, following a lost battle against the Russians, the Polish
insurgents allegedly attacked a Jewish wedding procession and killed
everyone. In 1863, as punishment, Commander Narbutt putatively hanged
several Jews suspected of denouncing Polish insurgents to the Russians.

It is worth mentioning that following each Polish rising, the Tsarist
administrators officially thanked the Jewish community for its loyalty. The
Jewish Pajkowski family prospered in Ejszyszki because of a grant of land it
had received for its loyal services to the Tsar during the November Rising of
1831. On the other hand, however, the Jewish Kijuczewski family of inn-
keepers hid Commander Narbutt himself during the January Rising of 1863
and was honored and rewarded for its sacrifice after Poland regained her
independence in 1918.\textsuperscript{69}

Basically until the First World War the type of involvement
demonstrated by the Pajkowskis and the Kijuczewskis was rather
exceptional among the Jewish population. The Jews lived quite apart from
the Christians in their own small world of the \textit{shtetl}. Changes within the
Jewish community came imperceptibly, if at all. Exceptionally, in 1866,
more than a dozen of Jewish families in Ejszyszki had their land confiscated
by the Tsarist government, who subsequently distributed their plots to the
newly emancipated serfs. The latter benefited even more from massive
confiscations of land from the Polish nobility who were thus punished for its
participation in the January Rising.\textsuperscript{70}

A much more important event, for the Jewish community, was the
great fire of 1895 that swept Ejszyszki and nearly burned the town to the
ground. As a result, it was rebuilt and its streets widened. Despite the
adversity, the Jewish community grew apace. In 1866, they accounted for
610 out of 715 inhabitants. In 1897 their number reached 3,156 out of 3,196
residents. According to the data from 1911, the Jewish town dwellers of
Ejszyszki were “surrounded” by 10,385 Catholics, including 807 who spoke
Lithuanian. The Poles were the majority in the countryside, and the area.

\textsuperscript{69} See Eliach, \textit{There Once Was the World}, 50-53.
\textsuperscript{70} The choicest estates were of course given to Russians. See Józef Kaczkowski, \textit{Konfiskaty na ziemiach
polskich pod zaborem rosyjskim po powstaniach roku 1831 i 1863} (Warszawa: Gebethner and Wolf, 1918).
During the First World War and in its aftermath, from 1914 to 1921, Ejszyszki changed hands seven times. The German occupation lasted the longest (1915-1918). The locals, Jews in particular, remembered German rule favorably. The bloodiest occurrences were the Polish battles against the Bolsheviks. During the short spells of Communist occupation in 1919 and 1920 the Bolsheviks reportedly ruled by terror. Particulars of those events are little known. We have been able to ascertain that the Cheka, the Bolshevik secret police, arrested Father Jan Naruszyc, the vicar of Ejszyszki, who was suspected of supporting the Poles, and shipped off to Wilno.\footnote{Roman Dzwonkowski, “Martyrologium: Losy duchowieństwa katolickiego w ZSSR, 1917-1939,” at http://www.kul.lublin.pl/dzwonkowski/n.html.}

Father Naruszyc followed into the footsteps of other local priests, including the parsons Paweł Kalinowski and Ludwik Łunkiewicz, who had, during the era of the 19th century insurrections, kept the spirit of freedom alive, and vicar Horbaczewski, who had fought for Poland’s independence with arms in hand. Father Józef Songin was another prominent priest who harkened from Marcinkiszki, a local petty gentry hamlet, near Ejszyszki.\footnote{See Liliana Narkowicz, “Marcinkiszki – okolica szlachecka: Zarys dziejów, sylwetka ks. Józefa Songina (1870-1936)”, at http://archiwum2000.tripod.com/504/narkow.html. On the Songin family see http://www3.sympatico.ca/sangin/home/linki.html.} Connected to the National Democratic party, Father Songin founded the Polish-language press in Wilno at the beginning of the 20th century. He continued his publishing activities in independent Poland. His intellectual influence on the inhabitants of the Ejszyszki area should not be ignored. Father Songin boasted many influential relatives, in nearby petty gentry hamlets in particular. More important, however, for the local Catholics were the everyday pastoral activities of Father Bolesław Moczulski, the parson of Ejszyszki, who was one of the most highly respected citizens of the little town during the interwar period. Rabbi Szyman Roznowski enjoyed an analogous position within the Jewish community.

Aside from the spiritual leaders, the elite of Ejszyszki and its environs consisted naturally of the landed nobility, led by Józef Sieklucki, the intelligentsia, including teachers, lawyers, doctors, and government officials, and entrepreneurs. Among the latter, Jews clearly dominated, such as the prominent Katz and Kabacznik families.\footnote{For a full list of the entrepreneurs in Ejszyszki see Księga Przemysłowa (1929), at http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Lida-district/eis29.htm.}

\textbf{Ejszyszki: Interbellum (1921-1939)}
In some ways the history of Ejszyszki in interwar period constitutes perhaps a greater mystery than during the Jagiellonian dynasty. Administratively, the town was attached to the county of Lida in the Province of Nowogródek. It was the seat of a civil parish (gmina). In 1939 Ejszyszki boasted about 5,000 inhabitants. Around 3,000 of them (about 65 percent) were Jews. Their numbers dropped relative to the Christian population largely because, after 1918, around 1,500 Jews emigrated to Palestine, the United States of America, and elsewhere. The rest of the Jewish population, aside from a handful of assimilated members of the intelligentsia, for the most part continued to ply their traditional trades: commerce and artisanship. Jews lived in their own part of town, chiefly congregating near the School Square, where their three synagogues were located.

We know nothing about relations between the local Jews and the small Lithuanian population. At most both ethnic groups could share complaints about the Poles who dominated the local administration. However, both the Jews and Lithuanians had their own cultural and educational institutions. The former boasted the cheders and a yeshiva in Ejszyszki; the latter cherished an elementary school in Nowa Wieś. While the followers of Judaism were able to worship Yahve unimpeded in their synagogues, the Lithuanians complained that “Lithuanian” masses were said only 6 times a year in Ejszyszki.

Meanwhile, the Jewish community experienced more serious problems with the Poles. It was with apprehension for their livelihood that the Jews observed the Christian population moving to the little town and competing with them in commerce and trade. The Jews claimed that the Polish authorities favor Polish Christians not only in granting of concessions for the sale of matches and salt (which were state monopolies) but also by requiring only of the Jewish entrepreneurs to pay high taxes and buy the obligatory artisan licenses. The latter charges appear to be baseless.

The Jews were affected most deleteriously by the economic boycott organized and carried out by the National Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe – SN). The boycott took on a form similar to that in Wilno and elsewhere in Poland. The Nationalists endeavored to block Christian clients from entering Jewish stores and enterprises. Exceptionally, there were instances of anti-

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74 According to 1931 census, the ethno-religious makeup of county of Lida, with a population of 183,485, was 79 percent Roman Catholics, almost all of whom were ethnic Poles, 8 percent Jews (by religion), and the remainder (around 13 percent) Eastern Orthodox (almost all of whom were Belorussians). Lithuanians, who were Roman Catholic by religion, accounted for about 1.3 percent of the population.
75 The language of the liturgy was, of course, Latin. However, the sermon was usually in Polish.
Jewish violence, mainly outside of the shtetl. However, frequent cases of arson constituted much greater danger in the little town. The background of these events still lacks an in-depth research.

It is unclear whether, for example, the attack on Israel Jekutiel in Poświty was a common or political crime. The instances of Jews being beaten at the marketplace and market day fist-fights were frequently of an ethnic or political nature. It seems that the persons responsible for the violence were common thugs or Polish Nationalists. The latter organized the boycott and spread the anti-Jewish propaganda. The self-defense activities of the radical Zionist groups were aimed both at the thugs and the Nationalists. Moreover, the peasants frequently ignored the boycott, which indubitably led often to fights with the organizers. As for the arson, Yaffa Eliach has established that the responsible party was a group of so-called “fire-starters” (podpalaszczycy). They were recruited from the dregs of the shtetl. The Jewish criminals frequently set fire to Jewish enterprises and households to rob them during the “rescue” action. At any rate, all these factors influenced the atmosphere in Ejszyszki, including its economic affairs.

According to the data in the town’s yizkor bukh, the number of Jewish enterprises declined somewhat in the interwar period. In 1925, out of 132 stores and enterprises in Ejszyszki, 130 were Jewish-owned. By 1935, 106 still belonged to Jews, out of a total of 117. When considering the reasons for the economic downturn, Jewish witnesses in unison blame the “Poles,” treating the Polish community as a monolith. They fail to appreciate that the obligation to buy the artisan licenses from the state and to pay taxes applied equally to the Christians of Ejszyszki. Jewish testimonies also ignore the Great Depression which paralyzed the economy of Poland and the world at the time. This is not to deny that anti-Jewish sentiments and deeds of various kind and intensity were a fact of life in Ejszyszki during the interwar period.

The Jewish community reacted to that adversity in a variety of ways. Some, the ultrareligious in particular, endeavored to ignore such attitudes and to live in their traditional and aloof way. Others increasingly demanded equal rights. They nonetheless remained anchored in their community and attempted to adjust the outside world to their own interests. Young Jews were the most radical of them all.

77 Shalom Ben Shemesh (Sonenzon) [Mosze Sonenson], “The Last Days of Aishishok,” (in:) Alufi and Kaleko, Aishishuk, 55-56.
78 It is entirely possible that at least some cases of arson were part of an insurance scam. See Eliach, There Once Was A World, 563-64; Kahn, No Time to Mourn, 10-11.
In the interwar period the conservative Orthodox governed the Jewish community. They endeavored to cooperate with the local Polish authorities. The Marxist Bund practically did not exist in Ejszyszki. The Zionist movement was the most active political orientation in the shtetl. The Zionists were split into several main groups of Jewish nationalism. While the liberal Zionist center kept shrinking, the Zionist-Socialists of the Poale Zion Party flirted with the social revolution and attacked their nationalist-radical detractors of the Zionist-Revisionist Party. Fist fights even broke out between political rivals. The youth Revisionist group, the Beitar, was particularly active in that respect. In addition, the brown-uniformed Beitarim, in their brown hats with blue trimmings, often fought against the Jewish Communists. This frequently occurred in self-defense when, together with the Polish police, the Revisionists protected the Jews at the market place from violence. At least twice the Beitar prevented desecration of the local synagogue by defeating the followers of Stalin, who had invaded the temple. In any event, it seems that the town cell of the Communist Party of Western Belorussia, as that organization was known, consisted mainly (if not exclusively) of revolutionaries of Jewish origin. We know nothing about its village counterpart. If it existed at all, it must have been composed of Poles and Lithuanians.  

There has been little published about Polish organizations and institutions. We know that an agricultural circle functioned in that town as well as a Cooperative Bank. It is safe to assume that there existed a chapter of the paramilitary Piłsudskite “Rifleman” and its mounted counterpart, the “Krakus.” We do not know their leading activists and have no idea how many volunteers they enrolled. The membership and numbers of the National Party in Ejszyszki are also a mystery as is the composition of the local Polish charitable and church institutions. We should command this knowledge to ascertain the continuity (or its lack) between those institutions and the Polish underground from 1939 to 1947.

Ejszyszki: The War and the Occupations (1939-1952)

Immediately before the outbreak of the war, some males in Ejszyszki were called up by the Polish Army (Wojsko Polskie – WP) for military

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service. They fought on various fronts. Meanwhile, the town was generally spared any fighting. It did witness however the movements of various Polish troops along the Wilno-Grodno highway. According to Yaffa Eliach, no instances of attacks on Polish soldiers by Soviet infiltrators or local revolutionaries were recorded. The Jewish population cordially assisted Polish Army stragglers. Moreover, the inhabitants took care of thousands of refugees, including Jews, who flooded the town in the fall of 1939.

The Soviets entered Ejszyszki around September 19. As late as September 28 the Red Army conducted mop-up sweeps to dislodge the remnants of the WP from the environs of the town. Nonetheless, a Polish unit led by Captain Jerzy Dąbrowski operated in the general area until mid-October 1939.81 Meanwhile, Ejszyszki was subjected to the new Soviet order. First, according to the testimonies gathered by Marek Wierzbicki, “red committees” and militias were formed. They were composed of “local Communists and the criminal element led by [Soviet] military commissars.”82 The revolutionary committee (revkom) was headed by Haim Shuster. According to Yaffa Eliach, the town committee consisted mainly of pre-war Communists of Jewish origin. The composition of the village revkom is unknown.

Second, the NKVD arrested an undetermined number of the local Christian Polish elite, including the landed noble Józef Sieklucki, the commander of the volunteer fireguards Stanisław Gotowiecki, the self-government official Antoni Bukiejko, and Ambroży Walukiewicz. At least a few Jews were seized as well, including Bluma Lubecka and Izaak Kowarski. Precise statistics of the terror in the countryside, particularly in the petty gentry hamlets, are still unknown. Sieklucki, Gotowiecki, and others deported from Ejszyszki disappeared in the Soviet Union.83

Third, the “revkom” and the NKVD commenced liquidating the majority of the institutions connected to the Second Polish Republic. Among other reasons, because of their ties to the Zionists, Hebrew schools were closed as “reactionary” and replaced by state schools that taught in Yiddish. Naturally, all political and social organizations were banned, save the Communist party.

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82 Marek Wierzbicki to Marek Jana Chodakiewicz, 20 November 2002, based himself on documents from the Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California: testimony no. 10426 (Antoni Bukiejko) and no. 10587 (Ambroży Walukiewicz), HIA, PGC, GAC, MID.
83 Jasiewicz, Lista strat ziemianstwa polskiego, 930; Witold Andruszkiewicz to Ryszard Tyndorf, 19 June-28 July 1999 (a copy in our collection).
Fourth, the Soviets and their assistants looted supplies, often under the guise of “buying” merchandise which they paid for with worthless rubles. A Jewish witness from Ejszyszki summed the situation up very aptly: Poland’s “eastern part was ‘liberated’ from freedom of speech, of movement, of press and even food and clothing. Persecution of [the] Zionists has begun.”

Then, suddenly, at the end of October 1939, the Red Army withdrew from Ejszyszki. The Lithuanian forces were allowed to enter the town. Some of the shtetl Communists fled to the nearby Raduń and Lida which remained within the Soviet-controlled territory.

Between October 1939 and June 1940 the Lithuanians concentrated on eradicating all traces of Polishness. No record remains of any terror directed against the Poles, including arrests in Ejszyszki and its environs. The Jewish community was pleased to see the Soviets depart. Bribery prompted the Lithuanians to leave local Jews almost completely alone. The latter returned to commerce, trade, and other pursuits interrupted by the Red Army. Jewish organizations operated semi-legally. Smuggling of merchandise and people to and from the Soviet zone boomed. One of those spirited away from the Communist side was Menachem Begin, a prominent Zionist Revisionist.

The return of the Red Army in June 1940 marked the end of Lithuanian rule in Ejszyszki. It also signified the return of terror. A new “revkom” was established. Its full composition is unknown. However, Luba Ginińska supposedly headed the local Communist party cell. Alter Michałowski became the militia chief, supervising a dozen or so of his underlings, including the ethnic Pole Władysław Jurewicz. Although some local Communists of Jewish origin became Soviet notables, we can safely assume that the leading positions were taken up by the so-called “Easterners” (vostochniki) – mainly ethnic Russians sent from the center. Undoubtedly Christians predominated among the local Communists and Soviet collaborators in the countryside.

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84 M. Chororovsky [Hodorowski?], “1939,” (in:) Alufi and Kaleko, Aishishuk, 46.
85 Yaffa Eliach lists a number of Communists of Jewish origin as the new rulers of Ejszyszki. However, she almost completely ignored Soviet Communists and their ethnic Polish collaborators. See Eliach, There Once Was A World, 571.
86 We can suggest the following working hypothesis as far as the local Communists, Soviet collaborators, and other participants in the Soviet occupation system were concerned. The majority attempted to accommodate Soviet occupation. A minority wanted to benefit from it. Among the latter, we can differentiate between the varied attitudes of malevolence toward the local population. Undoubtedly the collaborators of the secret police were the most harmful as were the persons parasitizing on the victims of Communism, blackmailing them or acquiring their possessions for a nominal price. Thus, it seems that the pathologies prevalent under the Soviet occupation find their analogies under the Nazi rule. More on the topic see Mark Paul, Neighbours on the Eve of the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Relations in Soviet-Occupied
The Communists confiscated houses, merchandise, and enterprises in Ejszyszki. The confiscations affected mostly the Jews since they owned most of the property and enterprises. Moreover, the authorities expropriated Polish landed nobility, including the more prosperous petty gentry. Ginińska and their shtetl comrades participated in partitioning the land among the peasants. However, the newly created farmsteads were soon to be collectivized. At least some of the poor peasants accepted the land allotments with reluctance, at times expressing their resistance in an anti-Jewish way: “A dirty Jew Communist has no right to Polish land,” they muttered.\(^\text{87}\) Overall, Polish-Jewish relations deteriorated seriously during the Soviet occupation. According to a Polish witness, “in general, the Jews displayed a hostile attitude toward the patriotic Poles. Some collaborated with the NKVD, and a few joined the NKVD.”\(^\text{88}\)

Mutual hostility was exacerbated by the deteriorating economy in Ejszyszki. The Soviet occupation policies brought about a universal pauperization of the population. Most survived thanks to black marketeering and otherwise cheating the system. This form of resistance was decentralized and spontaneous. The representatives of the Jewish community excelled in it in particular since they simply continued, in a clandestine manner, their economic pursuits as before the war. No record remains of organized Jewish resistance against the Communists. Nothing is available on the Polish underground during the Lithuanian and both Soviet occupations prior to June 1941. Undoubtedly, there were both formal and informal structures based on pre-war organizations, kinship, and friendship. Did their members suspend their activities? Did they plot? How many were arrested? We still do not know.

Meanwhile, the “shtetl Communists” and the NKVD compiled proscription lists of the “enemies of the people” to be deported. Mainly in June 1941 several hundred people were deported from Ejszyszki and the surrounding countryside. No official statistics of arrests and transports are as yet available.

The deportations were interrupted by the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Third Reich. On June 23, 1941, the Germans entered Ejszyszki. Some of the local Poles, believing they were being delivered from further oppression, welcomed the Wehrmacht with flowers. Others mistrustfully

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\(^{87}\) Eliach, *There Once Was A World*, 571-72.

\(^{88}\) Witold Andruszkiewicz quoted in Wilhelm Wojsznis to Ryszard Tyndorf, 23 September 1999 (a copy in my collection).
stayed at home. Nonetheless, following the nightmare of the Soviet occupation, essentially all the inhabitants of the little town expected a better future. This was also true for many Jews. They were sorely disappointed.

Initially, the Nazi terror did not affect directly the local Poles. Some of the villagers were ordered, along with Jewish males, to perform forced labor such as repairing the main road in July 1941. Soon, however, only the Jews were left to finish the project. German soldiers persecuted them hideously through the end of August. They were assisted in their “frolic” by Nazi policemen, who had established an outpost in Ejszyszki at the end of July. Later the army units marched off. The town military Ortskommandantur remained as did the police outpost. Five German gendarmes supervised a dozen-odd Lithuanian auxiliary policemen. The dreaded secret Lithuanian police, the Saugumo, appeared in Ejszyszki as well. It was led most likely by Ostrauskas, while Jonas Rudinskas was his deputy. A civilian administration was established by two newly arrived ethnic Germans, the Volksdeutsche, who spoke Polish. They soon appointed a pre-war Polish official as the town mayor. We can assume however that Lithuanians occupied most leadership positions in the administration. The Poles assisted in a subsidiary capacity. A Jewish Council (Judenrat) was also organized. It was chaired by Rabbi Szymon Rozowski. The Germans forced the members of the Judenrat to deliver contributions and supply males for forced labor. Ejszyszki entered a new occupation system. Suddenly, the apparent tranquility of the town was interrupted by horrific events.

On September 21, 1941, a Lithuanian armed group appeared in Ejszyszki. These were the so-called riflemen (shaulis), volunteers enrolled in special units (YPatingas Bürys). Ostrauskas took direct command over them. Their task was to mass murder the Ejszyszki Jews. SS Obersturmführer Gamann and a dozen or so of his underlings of the Sonderkommando 3 of the Einsatzgruppe A oversaw the execution.

First, Jews from the neighboring shtetl were herded into Ejszyszki. Next, the local Jews were forced out of their homes and concentrated in the synagogues at the School Square. Lithuanian collaborators vandalized and robbed the abandoned Jewish households (later some representatives of the Polish population rummaged around there as well). Then, the Lithuanians and Germans collected ransom from the imprisoned Jews. Beatings and humiliation of the Jewish population lasted for two days. On September 24, all of the Jews were herded into the so-called “horse market”. The following

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89 Another source mentions Abraham Kaplan as the head of the Jewish Council in Ejszyszki. See Kahn, No Time to Mourn, 26, 28, 30.
day a selection took place. The men were taken, including the community leaders together with Rabbi Roznowski. They were escorted out of town in groups and shot. According to Yaffa Eliach, at least one group of Jewish men, escorted by their Lithuanian guards, was taken to the place of their execution on carriages driven by the Poles, who were ordered to transport the Jews and who were also forced to dig the graves. A day later, on September 26, the Lithuanian collaborators under German command shot the Jewish women and children.\textsuperscript{90}

Reportedly, between several score and several hundred people managed to escape the massacre.\textsuperscript{91} Most of them avoided death thanks to the help they received from a number of Poles, including Józef Chinkiewicz (Jaśko Sinkiewicz?), Jan Szczesnolewicz (?), and Józef and Zofia Aliszkiewicz. A few or even a dozen Jews managed to slip through the guards by bribing individual shaulis. Within a week after the mass murder most of the remaining Jews emerged from hiding and headed to the nearby ghettos of Raduń, Wasiliszki, and Lida. They remained there until the Nazis decided to liquidate those ghettos in spring 1942.

Because of the anticipated massacres in April and May 1942, a massive flight from the ghettos again ensued. Some Jews from Ejszyszki headed for the forest. Some joined Jewish or Soviet partisans, mainly in the Naliboki Forest, and to a lesser extent in the Rudniki Forest. Other Jews decided to return to their own localities where they joined the Jewish remnant hidden by the Poles, including in the petty gentry hamlet of Korkuciany and the demesne Lebiedniki. Their rescuers were Kazimierz Korkuć and his mother, who were assisted by their estate hand Antoni Gawrylkiewicz, as well as their numerous neighbors. The Sonenson family of five was one among at least 34 Jews rescued in that single locality.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{90} In the Osobyi Archiv in Moscow (501-1-25, fol. 109-117) there is the infamous SS-Standartenführer Jäger raport of December 1, 1941 (Einsatzkommando 3, Gesamtaufstellung der im Bereich des EK.3 bis zum 1.Dez. 1941 durchgeführten Exekutionen, Kauen, am 1. Dezember 1941), which lists the crime in Ejszyszki (under a wrong date: September 27). A microfilmed copy of this raport is available at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC (USHMM RG-11.001M, reel 183). In addition, there are the testimonies concerning the massacre in Ejszyszki in the collection of Sąd Wojewódzki dla Województwa Warszawskiego, file 736, 1292-1306. Documents concerning the operations of Einsatzgruppe A and its assistants in the Wilno region have been published in part by Raul Hilberg (ed.), \textit{Documents of Destruction: Germany and Jewry, 1933-1945} (Chicago: Quadrage Books, 1971), 47-55.

\textsuperscript{91} An estimated 40 persons fled directly from the “horse market” and the place of the execution. However, according to Eliach, about 700 Jews fled from the surrounding shtetl (e.g. Olkieniki) right before the round up. In any event, the official Lithuanian statistics showed no Jews in Ejszyszki in 1942. See Eliach, \textit{There Once Was A World}, 595; Wołkonowski, \textit{Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej}, 77.

Many Christians risked their lives to help Jews. In Poland, the Germans punished with death the sheltering of a Jew. That was also the case in Ejszyszki and its environs. For example, for this “crime” the Nazis killed the entire Wołyńiec family in Romaszkańce. In Maciuńce, for hiding Jews, the Germans shot Józef Borowski along with eight members of his family and four guests who happened to be there. His farmstead was torched. In Mierzańce a Lithuanian women, Leokadia Daglis, was executed for having taken in a Jewish child.93

Moreover, on orders of the German occupier the civilian population was punished for failing to fulfil the mandatory food quota, for avoiding to appear for forced labor, and for any other infraction. The Nazis also punished the Poles for banditry or any act of resistance, even when the Communists or others were the culprits. For example, after the Soviet partisans killed two Germans near Pirciupe, the Nazi police pacified the village on June 3, 1944. One hundred and seventeen villagers, Poles and Lithuanians, were shot and burned alive. However, we still do not know an exact count of local Christians who fell victim to the Nazis between 1941 and 1944.

In addition to Nazi terror, partly triggered by “revolutionary banditry” of the Communists, the inhabitants of the countryside around Ejszyszki were plagued by constant expropriation raids by Soviet and Jewish groups. Some of them were described in Nazi police documents.94 A few are confirmed by the accounts of the participants themselves. Chaim Lazar has described a so-called zagotovka, a supply raid by Soviet and Jewish partisans from the Rudniki Forest. Lazar admitted openly that their goal was not to fight the Germans, but to capture supplies at the expense of the local Polish population.

93 Unfortunatelly, we do not know how many Polish Christians died trying to save Jews in the area around Ejszyszki. See Dr. Wacław Zajączkowski, Martyrs of Charity (Washington, DC: St. Maximilian Kolbe Foundation, 1988), part I: 181-82, 191.
94 For instance, on November 9, 1943, about 25 Soviet and Jewish partisans raided the landed estate of Rakliszki near Ejszyszki taking 12 horses, 8 cows, 3 tons of grain, 2 tons of coal, and 450 German marks. On December 8, 1943, a unit of 200 Jewish and Soviet partisans attacked Wilkańce near Ejszyszki. The village was looted, one inhabitant shot, and his farmstead burned to the ground. On December 12, 1943, a group of 50 Jews raided the village of Montwiliszki, completely despoothing the inhabitants and carrying off the loot on 25 paddy wagons. On January 7, 1944, 30 Soviet and Jewish partisans raided Karklinki, Torosinki, and the petty gentry hamlet of Songiniszki. They loaded their bounty on 15 carriages and left. On January 25, a Soviet-Jewish group of 25 fighters expropriated Dajnowa and Kamerowszyna taking 9 cows, some pigs, clothes, and other items. See Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, 17 November 1943, Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, 16 December 1943, Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, 21 December 1943, Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, 13 January 1944, Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, 3 February 1944, OAM, 504-1-7, on microfilm at RG-11.001M, reel 74, USHMMMA.
Anton Bonder, a unit sergeant, announced that we should be prepared for a mission to obtain provisions. The partisans who were sent on this mission, began to clean their weapons. At three, they had their meat stew. A group of forty men left the base [in Rudniki forest]. The village we were aiming for was near the village of Eishishkes [Ejszyszki]. We had to walk thirty kilometers in one direction and the same distance back, and these sixty kilometers had to be covered within twenty-four hours...

We were told to encircle the village, spreading out among the houses, and order the farmers to harness their horses to sleighs and fill them with food, and not to spend too much time doing this and to return immediately. The commander, Michael Trushin, decided on the assembly point: near the bridge on the way back to the forest. He keeps with him the crew with the machine gun and myself as liaison. We all stand alongside the little bridge, prepared to fire on any enemy who turned up.

The village was large, with wooden houses and large peasant barns. . . Everything was done silently. Within an hour, we loaded the sleighs with provisions of every kind. A cow was attached to each sleigh and the procession of sleighs proceeded on its way back to the partisan base. . . The farmers sit in their sleighs and spur on the horses while the partisans march on foot alongside the sleighs, fully on guard and with their weapons prepared for any enemy who appeared on the scene. In the village of Vishintchi [Wisińcza], some ten kilometers from the base, we left the farmer-drivers and promised them that on the morrow, they would get their horses back together with the sleighs. They had no alternative but to wait for the return of their horses and sleighs. It was a partisan rule that farmers were not allowed to come near partisan bases.95

According to the testimony of another Jewish partisan, Israel Weiss:

Securing supplies, however, was often more than a matter of persuading reluctant peasants. One such operation I

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remember most vividly. A detachment, of company strength, under the command of Shlomo Brand, started out at dusk on a wintry day to forage for supplies at a “rich” village, near the town of Ishishok [Ejszyszki], which we reached towards midnight. We posted guards on both sides of the village, and I, together with my men, entered the first farmhouse. … We worked feverishly the night through collecting food, and were ready to retrace our steps when dawn broke. Shlomo and 20 of his men stayed behind to protect our rear, and we started out in our sleighs. … This was by no means an isolated incident. … We succeeded in wresting considerable quantities of arms and ammunition from villages who collaborated with the Germans and were supplied with arms by them. Punitive measures were undertaken against collaborators; and one village which was notorious for its hostility to the Jews was burned down completely.96

In the early morning hours of January 29, 1944, at least 34 Poles of both sexes and all ages were killed by Soviet and Jewish partisans in Koniuchy near Ejszyszki. There were neither Germans nor Lithuanian auxiliaries in the village. The members of its tiny self-defense force were armed with a few rusty rifles. They were caught completely off guard and annihilated along with most other inhabitants.97 According to a Jewish account:

96 Israel Weiss (in:) Baruch Kaplinsky (ed.), Pinkas Hrubieszov: Memorial to a Jewish Community in Poland (Tel Aviv: Hrubieszov Associations in Israel and U.S.A., 1962), xiii.
The Brigade Headquarters decided to raze Koniuchy to the ground to set an example to others.

One evening a hundred and twenty of the best partisans from all the camps, armed with the best weapons they had, set out in the direction of the village. There were about 50 Jews among them, headed by Yaakov (Jacob) Prenner. At midnight they came to the vicinity of the village and assumed their proper positions. The order was not to leave any one alive. Even livestock was to be killed and all property was to be destroyed.

The signal was given just before dawn. Within minutes the village was surrounded on three sides. On the fourth side was the river and the only bridge over it was in the hands of the partisans. With torches prepared in advance, the partisans burned down the houses, stables, and granaries, while opening heavy fire on the houses. Loud explosions were heard in many houses … Half-naked peasants jumped out of windows and sought escape. But everywhere fatal bullets awaited them. Many jumped into the river and swam towards the other side, but they too, met the same end. The mission was completed within a short while. Sixty households, numbering about 300 people, were destroyed, with no survivors.\(^\text{98}\)

This is confirmed by another Jewish partisan:

Our base commander gave the order that all able-bodied men should be prepared in an hour to leave for an operation. … When we were closing in on our destination, I saw that partisans were coming from all directions, from various detachments. …

Our detachment got the order to destroy everything that was moving and burn the village down to its roots.

At the exact hour and minute all partisans from all four corners of the village started pouring rifle and machine-gun fire, with incendiary bullets, into the village. This caused the straw roofs of the houses to catch fire.

The villagers and the small German garrison [sic, there was no German garrison in this village—MJ.Ch.]

\(^{98}\) Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance*, 174-75.
answered back with heavy fire, but after two hours the village with the fortified shelter was completely destroyed. Our only casualties were two men who were lightly wounded.

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The villagers and the small German garrison [sic] answered back with heavy fire, but after two hours the village with the fortified shelter was completely destroyed. Our only casualties were two men who were lightly wounded.

When, later we had to go through Koniuchi [sic] we did not encounter any sniper shots, because it was like crossing through a cemetary.\textsuperscript{99}

Furthermore, aside from assaulting Polish villages, the Soviets and their allies consistently killed members of the Polish elite, for example Walentyna Kunczewicza of the estate of Radziwoniszki on October 4, 1942.\textsuperscript{100}

From the very beginning the Polish independentist underground defended the population against the Germans, Soviets, bandits, and persons considered as such. Its clandestine structures were established in the entire parish of Ejszyszki. One of the first secret organizers was Lieutenant “Krzywda” (NN). The commander of the clandestine Ejszyszki I garrison was Cavalry Sergeant Władysław Więckiewicz (“Wiatr”, “Zemsta”), and Platoon Leader Witold Andruszkiewicz (“Agawa”) commanded Ejszyszki II garrison. Altogether, they led about 200 Home Army soldiers. At their peak in June 1944, the numbers of the local AK grew to about 400. Many of the fighters were middle-aged adults. Some became active in the underground probably in 1939. Young men and women were invited to join later. Along

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{100} Jasiewicz, \textit{Lista strat ziemianstwa polskiego}, 550-51.
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with over a dozen village outposts, the Ejszyszki garrison constituted the backbone of the 6th company (codename “Puszcza”) within the 1st (“Irena”) battalion. Initially, however, the Ejszyszki garrison served mainly as a support area for the 2nd battalion of Lieutenant Jan Borysewicz (“Krysa”).

On March 31, 1944, a portion of the Ejszyszki company was mobilized as a forest unit. The rest remained behind in the outposts as a reserve company. „Puszcza” was now officially designated as the 3rd company 5th battalion of the 77th Infantry Regiment of the Home Army of the Lida Land. The Ejszyszki company was commanded first by Second Lieutenant Czesław Stecewicz (“Śmiały”) and then by Second Lieutenant Jan Bobin (“Kalina”). The overall command of all the local AK units, dubbed Group “North,” was assumed by Lt. Borysewicz (“Krysa”).

Unlike the Soviet partisans, the Polish underground fighters did not destroy the economic infrastructure, including state-controlled property. On the contrary, the Home Army often staged supply raids on such targets. Most frequently, however, the AK received supplies from its outposts in the countryside, in particular from the more prosperous peasantry and petty gentry, mainly in Korkucianny. The Polish independentists also carried out military operations against the Germans and their collaborators. Those included the destruction of the gendarmerie outpost in Koleśniki near Ejszyszki on November 3, 1943. Arguably the most famous action was the assault on Ejszyszki itself. It was carried out on January 22, 1944, by the AK squads of the “Puszcza” and “Sołcza” companies. The squads were led by Corporal Bolesław Siemiątkowski (“Czarny”) and Corporal Józef Zarzycki (“Piętka”). They carried out a death sentence on a Ukrainian collaborator, shot a Nazi gendarmerie officer, and wounded one of his underlings. The AK also captured a supply of leather at the local tannery.

We do not know precisely the details of the relations between the AK and Jews in Ejszyszki and its environs. However, in this context, the AK veterans and most historians of that organization in the Borderlands write

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101 Auszug as dem Fernschreiben vom 6.4.44 Nr. 3373 der Sipo Kauen, OAM, 504-1-10, microfilm RG-11.001M, reel 74, USHMMMA.
102 See Krajewski, Na ziemi nowogródzkiej, 126, 244-53; Witold Andruszkiewicz to Ryszard Tyndorf, 19 June-28 July 1999 (a copy in our collection).
103 Among the major engagements against the Nazis of the 5th battalion 77th AK Infantry, there were: the capture of the estate of Horodno on January 30, 1944, and of Bieniakonie on April 6, as well as the destruction of the German garrison in Tenikowszczyzna on April 29, and the assault on Wilno on July 7. See Krajewski, Na ziemi nowogródzkiej, 252, 498-514. However, we know nothing of the relations between the AK and the Germans in the area of Ejszyszki. We can assume that the AK exchanged German POWs for seized Poles or swapped them for arms. At least in one instance, according to Boradyn, “the battalion commander Cpt. Truszkowski exchanged with the German officer of Ejszyszki sausage and butter for two cases of ammunition.” See Boradyn, Niemen – Rzeka niezgody, 43, 45.
most often about the self-defense against banditry and against anti-Polish purges conducted by the Soviet partisans and their allies. Western historians, including Yaffa Eliach, claim that the AK murdered Communists and Jews, the latter allegedly for racist reasons. It has been argued that a special conference was convened by the Polish elite in Ejszyszki on January 25, 1944, at which that exterminationist anti-Semitic decision was made. The murder of a number of Jews hiding on a farm in Lebiedniki on February 20, 1944, is said to be an outcome of that conference. In reality that case still remains unsolved. However, we do know that the alleged “conference,” where the AK supposedly resolved to murder the Jews of Ejszyszki, never took place. This was simply the March 31, 1944, concentration and review of the “Puszcza” unit and its transformation into the 3rd company 5th battalion 77th AK Infantry.

In any event, about 50 Jews survived in the environs of Ejszyszki to see the return of the Soviets. They felt extreme gratitude toward the Red Army for having saved their lives. Some of them, about 30 persons, returned to Ejszyszki. They moved back home and clustered close to one another in several houses. They endeavored to reclaim their property and start life anew. Unfortunately, some of them joined the local power structure. At least a few former Jewish partisans and fugitives joined the Soviet militia subordinated to the NKVD, Alter Michałowski and Moshe Sonenson among them. According to the former, the militiamen avenged themselves on German POWs, real and alleged Nazi collaborators, and “white Poles” of the Home Army. This caused conflict with the Polish underground. (In some cases the situation was additionally exacerbated by private quarrels regarding property disputes between Christians and Jews). Along with the

104 The Nazi police noted that in the countryside surrounding Ejszyszki the clashes between the AK and the Soviet and Jewish partisans occurred between September and November 1943. This surely excludes earlier Polish self-defense actions against bandits and armed groups considered as such. See “Weisspolnische Banden in Litauen,” Auszug aus dem FS der Sipo Kauen Nr. 585, 18 January 1944, OAM, 504-1-7, on microfilm at RG-11.001M, reel 74, USHMMMA. However, the Nazis also reported negotiations between the Polish and Soviet partisans on a bridge over the Wisińcza river and later at the estate of Rakliszki near Ejszyszki. See Auszug aus dem Fernschriften der Sipo Kauen Nr. 5122 vom 3.6.44, OAM, 504-1-10, on microfilm RG-11.001M, reel 74, USHMMMA. 105 A group of Jews and their Polish Christian rescuer were killed in Lebiedniki on February 20, 1944. Various sources ascribe responsibility for this crime to the Germans, Lithuanian collaborators, common bandits, renegades from the AK, and, finally, the Home Army itself, either as a result of a lethal mistake or a premeditated action. See Chodakiewicz, Żydzi i Polacy, 1918-1955, 340, 632-33; Eliach, There Once Was a World, 622-23; Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews During World War Two (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986), 218, 249 n. 74; Jarosław Wolkonowski, “Polskie podziemie wileńskie a problem żydowski w latach 1939-1945,” (TM, a copy in our collection); Witold Andruszkiewicz to Ryszard Tyndorf, 19 June-28 July 1999. 106 See Paul, A Tangled Web (forthcoming); Eliach, There Once Was a World, 614, 624, 671, 745 n. 12; Witold Andruszkiewicz to Ryszard Tyndorf, 19 June-28 July 1999.
rest of the Polish population, Home Army soldiers considered the surviving Jews to be sympathetic to the Soviets. The Jewish militiamen were unequivocally seen as a part of the Soviet terror system itself. 107

From the beginning of a new Soviet occupation, the Polish population in general, and the independentist conspirators in particular, became the main victims of the NKVD. Detailed and comprehensive statistics have not yet been compiled concerning Ejszyszki and its countryside. We can only surmise the intensity of the terror and mention some local developments which impacted the situation in the area.

First, the Soviets disarmed or destroyed Home Army units in the field. Most likely at the end of July 1944 in Butrymańce near Ejszyszki, they intercepted a convoy containing printing equipment and archives of the Bureau of Information and Propaganda of the Nowogródek District of the AK. On August 21, 1944, near Surkonty, the NKVD destroyed the unit of Lieutenant Colonel Maciej Kalenkiewicz (“Kotwicz”), the commander of the Nowogródek District. Following the battle, the Communists shot wounded Polish POWs. On September 29, Soviet police units destroyed the AK squad of “Karaś” (NN), and on October 27, the detachment of Władysław Grabowski (“Żyd”). On January 7, 1945, the combined forces of the AK Ejszyszki company and other units under Second Lieutenant Józef Chiniewicz (“Grom”), Second Lieutenant Czesław Stankiewicz (“Komar”), Second Lieutenant Czesław Stecewicza (“Śmialy”), and Platoon Leader Michał Tetianiec (“Myśliwy”) suffered serious losses in a battle with the NKVD in the Rudniki Forest. On January 21, near Kowaliki, the Soviets annihilated a large part of the detachment of Lieutenant Borysewicz (“Krysia”). The Polish commanding officer himself fell in this battle.

Second, the Soviets arrested many demobilized Home Army soldiers. Some were shipped off to the Gulag; others were inducted into the Red Army or to the so-called “Berling army” led by Polish Stalinists. Whenever the NKVD failed to capture AK fugitives, the Soviet policemen maltreated their families. Anyone attempting to flee was shot. We know that such events took place in Ejszyszki but we do not know their scale and frequency. Without any doubt, however, in Ejszyszki and its environs between December 17 and 29, 1944, 16 Poles were shot and 360 Polish “enemies of the people” arrested. On February 20, 1945, during the NKVD operation between Ejszyszki and Raduń, 15 suspected “counterrevolutionaries” were shot, and 40 seized. On April 9, 1945, 7 persons were killed and 4 captured near Ejszyszki.

107 See part I, documents no. 1-6 below.
Things were similar in the Wilno territories farther afield of Ejszyszki. On August 22, 1944, an NKVD squad shot 40 persons near Klukowicze. On September 11, in Gród, the Soviets arrested 11 and executed 14 Poles. On September 23, in Kłodziszki, they killed 23 suspects, and seized 7. On January 15, near Chlebowce, the NKVD shot 11 “counterrevolutionaries,” while it captured 22. During the pacification of the Lipiczany Forest on February 7, 1945, the Soviet police forces arrested 441 “enemies of the people” and killed additional 34. Between March 15 and April 15, 1945, in the course of the great pacification operation carried out throughout the Province of Nowogródek, two NKVD divisions shot 109 persons and seized 5,245. The losses of the NKVD were minimal (6 killed and 10 wounded) thus suggesting that the Communist terror chiefly targeted the defenseless civilian population.\(^{108}\)

As could have been expected, Soviet terror forced a number of young people into an illegal existence. They served as the backbone of the reconstituted self-defense detachments of the Home Army. As during the Nazi occupation, these units based themselves on the garrison outpost structure. Following July 1944, the AK in Ejszyszki and its environs remained underground. The new code name for the Ejszyszki company was “Ospała-A.” It was once again led by Lieutenant “Krzywda” (NN). The following fighters commanded units operating in the vicinity of Ejszyszki: Sergeant Władysław Janczewski (“Laluś”), Platoon Leader Michał Tietianiec (“Myśliwy”), Second Lieutenant Czesław Stecewicz (“Śmiały”), Second Lieutenant Józef Chiniewicz (“Grom”), Second Lieutenant Michał Babul (“Gaj”), and Sergeant Władysław Więckiewicz (“Wiatr,” “Zemsta”). The AK undertook self-defense against the NKVD and its agents. They also carried out a few acts of sabotage, including the burning of 9 bridges in the environs of Ejszyszki on September 17, 1944, to mark the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland. At least one train transport was blown up. Further, the AK assaulted Ejszyszki twice. The first attack took place on the night of October 19/20, 1944, and the second, to free prisoners, on the night of December 6/7, 1944.

Following the wave of mass arrests in November and December 1944 and the destruction of most of the local self-defense units in January and February 1945, the decimated Home Army garrison of Ejszyszki descended even deeper underground. In the next few years the local conspirators

supported the insurgents fighting under the command of Sergeant Anatol Urbanowicz (“Laluś”) and Second Lieutenant Anatol Radziwonik (“Olech”), the successive commanders of the Lida Region no. 46/67 of the AK. Within this framework, two Home Army squads operated permanently around Ejszyszki: the squad of Grygielewicz (“Bitner”) and the unit of Second Lieutenant Stecewicz (“Śmiały”). The latter remained active only until May 1945, when it retreated to central Poland. However, Second Lieutenant Radziwonik and his men remained behind. They fought until the destruction of their combined forces by the NKVD in May 1949. Most of the AK soldiers fell in battle, including the commanding officer. However, the remnant of the “Olech” unit stayed active in the field until 1952 under the leadership of Władysław Szwarobowicz (“Kiepura”).

The *modus operandi* of the Polish insurgents reflected the conditions of the struggle imposed by the enemy but also took into consideration the interests of the civilian population. Between 1944 and 1952, the AK liquidated agents and functionaries of the NKVD as well as especially malicious Communist party activists and Soviet state officials. These resistance actions seriously retarded the Sovietization of the countryside, including the collectivization of agriculture. The Active Self-Defense Units of the Wilno District of the AK were supplied in congruity with the rules worked out during the Nazi occupation. First of all, enemy warehouses were attacked and despoiled as well as those considered as Soviet collaborators. Only as a last resort would the AK turn for aid to the pauperized local Polish population. It was one of the self-defense units, led by Second Lieutenant Michal Babul (“Gaj”), that assaulted Ejszyszki on the night of 19/20 October 1944. As mentioned, the AK captured supplies, kidnapped a “Smersh” captain, and shot two other Soviets in battle. Unfortunately, two persons were accidentally killed the ensuing fire fight: Zippora Sonenson and her baby son, Chaim. His father Moshe Sonenson and his sister Sheinele (Sonia) survived the attack.

**Sheinele Sonenson’s Memory**

Sheinele remembered. Having emigrated to the United States, where she trained as a historian, she devoted nearly 20 years of her life to recreate the Jewish life in the shtetl of Eishishok. She assembled a memorial to the

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Jews of Ejszyszki at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. She wrote a massive volume, *There Once Was A World*, which traced their history over the centuries. This work honors her family and their Jewish friends and neighbors. The author also preserved the memory of a handful of Righteous Gentiles. She even successfully appealed to Yad Vashem to grant its medal of recognition to Antoni Gawryłkiewicz.\(^{110}\) Most ardently, however, the shtetl chronicler branded numerous criminals who, she claims, were found mainly in the ranks of the anti-Semitic Home Army. According to its program, the AK allegedly murdered Jews to fulfill its slogan “Poland without the Jews.” Initially, the AK murdered Jews in collaboration with the Germans. After the “liberation” of Ejszyszki by the Soviets, the AK soldiers endeavored to finish the Nazi genocidal project on their own.

Sheinele Sonenson, today Professor Yaffa Eliach, has repeated various versions of her thesis in many an interview and through other means. The telling of the terrible tragedy that befell Eliach’s family leads the average person to accept at face value the events as she described them to recoil from researching the Ejszyszki events and not question her interpretation of those events. One of the reviewers of her work remarked that “it would be churlish to voice anything other than admiration for Eliach’s determination to reclaim her shtetl.”\(^{111}\) Other reviewers wrote in a similar vein, copiously showering the author of *There Once Was A World* with effusive compliments.

Susan Miron called the book “a monumental labor of love.” She agrees that the Jews of Ejszyszki were murdered “during the Holocaust by Germans, Poles, Lithuanians, and Russians.” This is the only time Miron mentions the Germans in her review, where the primary responsibility for this crime is not at all made clear. The reviewer goes on to write about “the massacre of nearly 5,000 Jews in September 1941 and other killings by the horrendously anti-Semitic local population after the war.” And since it was recruited from among this very population, the “Home Army” was of course the worst.\(^{112}\)

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\(^{110}\) The information about Antoni Gawryłkiewicz in the Yad Vashem web site states erroneously that Gawryłkiewicz was severely beaten by the Home Army for helping Jews, which he did not confirm. Compare [http://www.yad-vashem.org.il/righteous/index_righteous.html](http://www.yad-vashem.org.il/righteous/index_righteous.html); and Anna Ferens, “Głowy na wietrze,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27-28 May 2000.


Another pundit, Judith Dunford, differentiates between the Germans, who murdered most of the Jews of Ejszyszki, and the AK, “the Polish underground army whose motto was ‘Poland without Jews,’ and who finished off whatever the Nazis missed.” Dunford admits that Eliach “often falls into sentimentality… But who can blame her?”

One of very few professional historians who reviewed There Once Was A World, British scholar Mark Mazower flatly questions Eliach’s scholarship. Nonetheless, he credits her work with some didactical utility for broaching the topic of Polish anti-Semitism and exposing the unsavory side of the Home Army. According to Mazower,

Her book is an attempt to combine the scholarship of the trained researcher with the personal insight of the participant. That she does not succeed in this is hardly surprising – few books of this kind do…. Once There Was a World is both history and memorial book, with more than a little flavouring of shtetl schmaltz for good measure. There are too many photographs of the author and her family to satisfy the impersonally minded academic, too many golden-voiced cantors, wise rabbis and gifted scholars to allay the suspicions of the cynical observer of contemporary life who knows that much of this comes from a world of make-believe. The yearning of memory often overwhelms the sense of scholarly detachment…

The final chapters on the 1940s have provoked much controversy in Poland, where there is still difficulty in accepting that the wartime Home Army did not only battle gallantly against the Nazis (and later against the Russians), but also killed many Jews. Still greater is the taboo against recognising the depth of anti-Semitism in Polish life and the way this coloured attitudes to the Nazis, to Jewish survivors and to those Poles who helped them…. So, is there, then, in reality no shared history of Jews and Poles beyond that of anti-Semitism and murder? It seems unlikely. Yet for Eliach the history of Eishyshok is synonymous with the history of its shtetl. If this was once a world, then there was another, Christian world just next door to and down the street from it. Until we have a clearer sense of how these worlds intermeshed, entangled and then

broke apart, it will be harder for us to see our century for what it is.\textsuperscript{114}

A few other scholars criticized \textit{There Once Was A World} in a similar vein. David G. Roskies of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York readily acknowledges the shattering effect of the personal tragedy of “7 ½-year-old Sheinele Sonenson, whose mother and baby brother were murdered in cold blood before her very eyes by members of the ragtag Armia Krajowa, the ultra-nationalist Polish liberation forces.” Nonetheless, Roskies rejects her methodology. He stresses that “a historian has to negotiate among disparate and often warring perspectives. Ms. Eliach, however, relies mainly on legends and rosy recollections.” The work virtually lacks information about the local Christians. The historical context is largely missing. Eliach focused on the elite of the shtetl, and forgot about the Jewish people. “Ms. Eliach’s chronicle of Eishyshok is virtually goyimrein… Except for the rare ‘righteous gentiles’ – most of whom apparently lived in the outlying villages – the local Christian inhabitants are remembered for their gratuitous cruelty and implacable hatred.” As a result, “this is a shtetl that Jewish dreams are made of.” But not the historical reality.\textsuperscript{115}

Irene Tomaszewski agrees that Yaffa Eliach focuses mostly on the elite. Ideologically, she reserves her praise for the Zionists. Elements of her work clearly demonize the Poles. Christians are usually a unidimensional “rabble”. “Poles are crude, drunken, sadistic, anti-Semitic and largely stupid.” Eliach largely ignores the Nazi terror against the Polish population.\textsuperscript{116} Zdzisław Krasnodębski has expressed similar criticism concerning Eliach’s theses.\textsuperscript{117} Professor Israel Gutman of Yad Vashem has essentially concurred with that scholar, while modifying some of the more unequivocal opinions:

\begin{quote}
It is a good thing that Zdzisław Krasnodębski has devoted so much space to Yaffa Eliach, who dealt with the case of Ejszyszki. I have no sympathy for this author: She is not an authority on the Holocaust and her book has not been
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[115] David G. Roskies, “Can a Redemptive Elegy Also Be a Work of History?” \textit{Forward} [New York], 6 November 1998, 11-12.
\end{footnotes}
translated into the Hebrew. One should not close one’s eyes to the fact that the AK units in the Wilno region fought against the Soviet partisans for the liberation of Poland. And that is why, the Jews who found themselves on the opposing side perished at the hands of AK soldiers as enemies of Poland and not as Jews. We can ponder however why the Jews joined the Soviet partisan movement. One of the reasons was that the AK (unlike the [Communist underground] AL) did not want them. This was no accident that Aba Kowner, a sworn enemy of Communism, found himself along with several hundred Jews in the ranks of the Soviet partisans. And he was afraid of the Poles. Most Jews from Poland for class, religious, and cultural reasons felt alien in Soviet Russia. But they felt grateful that the Russians had saved them. Despite everything, this was a liberation [for them].

Alas, despite a distinguished scholarly career spanning almost half a century, Professor Gutman is yet to publish such moderate opinions in English. It is primarily the virtual lack of moderate statements such as this one that has led to the creation and encouraged the proliferation of the negative stereotypes about the Home Army, Poland, and the Poles to take hold in the popular culture in the West, the United States in particular. These stereotypes are reflected in the theses of Yaffa Eliach. It is noteworthy in this context that serious scholarly periodicals for the most part ignored There Once Was A World. Moreover, in their private correspondence and conversations a few prominent Western historians expressed their disapproval of the theses of her book. However, practically not one of them reviewed it critically.

Testimonies, documents, historical punditry

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A debate on the events in Ejszyszki and, more broadly, on the damming theses popularized in the West by Yaffa Eliach also took place in Poland. Both pundits and historians participated in it. Most lacked access to many testimonies and documents concerning these events. We have resolved to remedy the situation by publishing this volume. We would like to establish the basic facts and to popularize them so as to trigger additional research and to endeavor to re-conceptualize the events in Ejszyszki in a broader context and, more generally, Polish-Jewish relations.

We have divided our work into three parts. The first consists of individual testimonies. Some of them were written immediately after the Second World War; the rest arose in reaction to the claims made by Yaffa Eliach. The authors of the accounts survived the war in Ejszyszki and its environs, only to leave shortly afterward. The witnesses shared similar experiences within their own ethno-religious groups.

Two witnesses, Alter Michałowski and Leibke Kaganowicz, were connected to the Soviet authorities during the first and second occupations of Ejszyszki (1939-41). During the Nazi occupation, both men escaped from their ghettos to fight with the Jewish and Soviet partisans against the Nazis. Following the return of the Red Army, they joined the Communist terror apparatus. The third witness, Icchak Sonenson, had not been tied to the Soviets prior to June 1941. He survived the war hiding with Polish families near Ejszyszki. After July 1944 he was “adopted” by Kaganowicz and stayed with him in nearby Orany and, alternately, with his own parents in Ejszyszki. In 1945 the trio left the area and moved to Israel. However, at least one of them ended up in North America.

The Christian witnesses, Wanda Lisowska, Witold Andruszkiewicz and Wiktor Nosowski, were Home Army soldiers. They survived all the consecutive occupations in Ejszyszki. After 1944, the Soviet terror forced them to abandon their little fatherland. They left for central Poland as fugitives or were deported to the Gulag as prisoners.

The juxtaposition of the witness testimonies demonstrates clearly that all participants agree on the basic facts. Both Jewish and Christian witnesses recall similar events. But they do not interpret them similarly. What seems important for the Jews is either ignored, or underestimated, or understood completely differently by the Poles. What makes one side proud, causes tears for the other. What is an understandable and laudable mode of conduct for one ethno-religious group, is seen as a shocking crime by the other. And vice versa. Let us repeat: only the facts tally. Their reception, perception, and interpretation are radically different.
The second part of this work contains NKVD interrogation records concerning the events in Ejszyszki. Altogether, the investigation targeted 142 Poles. As the records show, between April 1 and 5, 1945, some of them were sentenced in a secret trial in the Łukiszki prison in Wilno. At least 4 Poles were shot. Most were sent to the Gulag.

The bulk of the documents was discovered, translated, and published in 1992 by Jerzy Surwiło, a scholar from Vilnius (Wilno). The remainder are the fruit of a research project carried out in 2002 by Dr. Jarosław Wołkonowski also of Wilno. These records not only shed new light on the events of the night of October 19/20, 1944, but also describe the fate of the participants. Further, the documents reveal the investigative modus operandi of the NKVD and the salient features of the Soviet “justice” system under Stalin.

The records concern also such issues as, for example, the propaganda potential of the interrogation material. This is reflected in the attempts by the NKVD functionaries to “establish” that is to torture their AK victims into confessing, that the suspects allegedly maintained links with the Gestapo and that the objective of the operation was to attack the Jews. This propaganda leitmotif regarding the alleged anti-Semitic objectives and Nazi police links of the underground Poles was quickly abandoned by the Soviets when it transpired that the Ejszyszki case would not be a show trial. It was referred to a secret court.

A few KGB documents, dating as late as the 1970s, concerning the fate of the prisoners are also reproduced. Last but not least, as a fitting end to our documentary section, we present the official “Statement on the Case of Ejszyszki” by the World-Wide Union of the Soldiers of the Home Army.

In the third part of this compilation, we endeavored to show a variety of opinions expressed by the pundits, both journalists and professional historians, about the events in Ejszyszki. We have encountered an obstacle, though. The only voice in Poland affirming the theses of Yaffa Eliach appeared in Gazeta Wyborcza. Unfortunately, when we turned to its editor-in-chief, Adam Michnik, who also wrote the piece for permission to publish it here, the author refused to cooperate in our project. However, thanks to the kind permission of The New York Times, we do reproduce an article on Ejszyszki penned by Professor Eliach and published in that American daily on August 6, 1996.

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120 See [Jerzy Surwiło], “Z gminy Ejszyskiej: Przyczynek do dziejów AK na Wileńszczyźnie po lipcu 1944 r.,” Kurier Wileński, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30 and 31 July and 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27 and 28 August 1992.
Because of Adam Michnik’s refusal, we had to limit ourselves to those authors who agreed to have their opinions reprinted here: Michał Wołłejko, Jarosław Wołkonowski, Leszek Żebrowski, John Radziłowski, and Anna Ferens.

Most of these authors are historians. They operate with similar facts and sometimes also similar arguments. A variety of emotions reverberates through their essays, including anger. Michał Wołłejko, who wrote his article before the case of Ejszyszki became internationally known, was convinced that Yaffa Eliach simply did not know the background facts about the death of her mother, that is the anti-Soviet aspect of the assault on Ejszyszki. Wołłejko describes then the background of the events that culminated in the AK attack on the Sonenson household, where the “Smersh” captain was stationed. When the facts revealed by Wołłejko made no impression on Eliach, the tone of the polemic changed. Dr. Jarosław Wołkonowski, Dr. John Radziłowski, and Leszek Żebrowski displayed an entire spectrum of reactions to the opinions regarded by them as the manifestation of bad will by the Western scholar. While Wołkonowski concentrates mainly on Ejszyszki, Radziłowski and Żebrowski ponder also other controversial aspects of Polish-Jewish relations. Finally, Anna Ferens has collected all available versions and events and presented them in a journalistic manner.

The Affirming Voice

The voice missing from our compilation belongs to Adam Michnik. He affirmed the views of the New York scholar. We have already synthesized the thesis of Yaffa Eliach concerning alleged Polish collaboration in the Holocaust and putative Polish co-responsibility for the extermination of the Jews. We have also mentioned the thesis of the anti-Jewish agenda of the Home Army in collaboration with the Nazis. An alleged objective of this secret undertaking was to exterminate the remnants of the Jews. The AK put this objective into practice both during the Nazi occupation and following the return of the Soviets, when, according to Eliach, “Polish murderers… killed more than 2,000 Jews after the liberation.”


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Michnik basically embraces her theses. However, his argumentation style is different. He is not as unequivocal. On the positive side, the author presents the arguments of both sides. First, Michnik logically and rationally argues that “it is obvious that in the AK, just as in any army in the world or any society, including the Jewish community, there also were criminals and murderers, including murderers of Jews… However, projecting the crimes of individuals onto an entire, heroic, and tragic independentist organization is shocking and unbecoming of a professional historian.” The author signals here that, while the Home Army as a whole was innocent, one cannot exclude the possibility of individual rotten apples in the case of Ejszyszki. This is generally a logical line of reasoning, though not grounded in any fact in this particular case. Next, Michnik quotes Michal Wołlejko in extenso, namely that the objective of the assault was the “Smersh” captain and not a pogrom of the Jews. For a brief moment one is given the impression that Michnik agrees with the facts established by that historian (and Dr. Wołkonowski). Michnik, to be fair, then recounts an opposing point of view. However, he immediately questions its importance: “I cannot tell how air-tight this account is.” He stresses that Wołlejko’s account confirms the deaths of Zippora and Chaim Sonenson. Michnik wonders how to interpret it. After all, the circumstances of the crime define its nature. There is a big difference between accidentally running over a pedestrian and “a pre-planned cold-blooded murder of a woman and a child.”

Only following these observations does Michnik become unequivocal. He completely rejects Wołlejko’s version, which, let us stress, has been confirmed not only by the research of Dr. Wołkonowski and other historians but also by the NKVD documents discovered and published by Jerzy Surwiło already in 1992. In solidarity with Eliach, Michnik chooses the most extremist interpretation. Despite primary sources and the work of at least several historians, the editor-in-chief of Gazeta Wyborcza states: “Let us assume however that a murder motivated by anti-Semitism took place in Ejszyszki.” On what grounds should we reject the NKVD documents and the...
research of Wołejko, Wołkonowski, and others? This, we are not told. Michnik continues: „This would be consistent with what we already know about the lot of many Jews in Poland between 1944 and 1946.” However, the pundit does not support his glib statement with a scholarly citation or any statistics from a serious historical monograph about the Jews in Poland at that time. Michnik only surprises the reader with a fleeting reference to some leftist intellectuals collaborating with the Communists during the Soviet occupation after 1944. The authority of their names is to substitute for their opinions, condemning anti-Semitism, which Michnik nonetheless fails to quote at length. Then, the journalist asserts that “later the Communist censorship gagged the possibility of a fair accounting for these tragedies and crimes.”

Thus, Michnik himself admits that because of nearly half a century of Communist dictatorship, he lacks any scholarly grounds to pronounce anything profound on the initial stage of the Soviet occupation of Poland, in particular as it pertains to Polish-Jewish relations at the time. After all, he never conducted any independent research on the topic himself.

Nonetheless, Michnik insists that the case of Ejszyszki is a political issue of the same caliber as, say, the case of Kielce (even though the official investigation of that massacre still continues). About the events in Kielce “the words of truth… were spoken by Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek and Prime Minister Włodzimierz Cimosiewicz.” Thus, according to Michnik, the case of Ejszyszki should be treated the same way. One must apologize, regardless of the facts. Otherwise we are threatened with the prospect of “fanatical hatred” which “always bears tragic fruit.”

The editor-in-chief of Gazeta Wyborcza seems to disregard the fact that the case of Kielce has been researched extensively. The evidence shows that a group of civilian Polish population and members of the Communist terror apparatus participated in an attack on the Jews in Kielce on July 4, 1946. The records further suggest that the background of the attack was unequivocally anti-Jewish. However, scholars have yet to locate the key

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125 See Adam Michnik, “Bezrozumny fanatyzm,” Gazeta Wyborcza, 8 August 1996, 7. This is also a very curious opinion in itself. Was the fact that some leftist intellectuals were permitted to issue officially-sanctioned appeals synonymous with the prevalence of general freedom of speech? After all, the independentists of the Home Army, the National Armed Forces, and the Polish Peasant Party were not permitted to speak out freely on those topics. However, the leftist collaborators and the Communists were able to excoriate the AK, NSZ, and PSL, accusing them with impunity and at will of murdering Jews, unleashing anti-Semitism, and other abhorrent practices.

126 See Adam Michnik, “Bezrozumny fanatyzm,” Gazeta Wyborcza, 8 August 1996, 7. It is difficult not to notice that a similar sort of reasoning was at work during the so-called Jedwabne case.
NKVD dispatches necessary for a comprehensive, and definitive conclusion about the events in that town.\(^{127}\)

As far as Ejszyszki is concerned, we have the NKVD reports, testimonies by the AK soldiers and Jewish witnesses, and two competing interpretations. One interpretation arose as a result of extensive research about the Home Army in the area by Polish historians. The other was put forward by Yaffa Eliach, as David G. Roskies put it, an author whose work is haunted by a “ghost” that “bedevils” it reflecting a “personal trauma of 7½-year-old Sheinele Sonenson.”\(^{128}\) Which interpretation does Michnik select? As noted earlier, he writes: “Let us assume however that a murder motivated by anti-Semitism took place in Ejszyszki.” Thus, without offering any clear justification, he completely rejects an empirical account based on scholarly research. The pundit further claims that “the truth about that time has returned to [haunt] us. We must look it straight in the eyes.” The truth in this instance means an account based principally on the tragic recollections of the daughter of an accidental victim. Now it becomes obvious that the enigmatic title of Michnik’s editorial, “Mindless Fanaticism,” refers to the AK action in Ejszyszki. The author concludes that “each nation has black cards in its history. Those are the moments when reason falls asleep and the monsters are awaken.”\(^{129}\)

We fully concur with Adam Michnik in this regard.\(^{130}\) We would like very much for reason to remain awake and alert at all times. Therefore we have resolved to share with the public uncensored sources concerning the Ejszyszki epilogue to Polish-Jewish relations as well as the opinions of the historians on those events. Only after a thorough research based on the primary sources an impartial person be in a position to arrive at an informed opinion on a topic.

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Finally, a word about the rules. A square bracket [ ] in the text signifies the intervention of the editor of the present work. Ellipses in the

\(^{127}\) The anti-Jewish background of the Kielce events is assumed in all possible interpretations, including even that this was an anti-Semitic provocation by Soviet security forces, rather than a spontaneous pogrom by the local Poles. See Chodakiewicz, Żydzi i Polacy, 1918-1955, 445-46, 655-56.


\(^{130}\) When the emotions regarding Ejszyszki subsided, Michnik permitted the publication of divergent interpretations of the events in that town without endorsing any of them. See Anna Ferens, “Głowy na wietrze”, Gazeta Wyborcza, 27-28 May 2000.
text – …. – signify that a fragment of the text was excised. A few documents were paraphrased and are noted accordingly. A few essays and recollections were cut a bit. The English translation was done mostly by Marek Jan Chodakiewicz; the Russian (into Polish) by Jerzy Surwiło and Jarosław Wołkonowski. The recollections and the NKVD documents were edited by M.J. Chodakiewicz, who also wrote a general introduction to the work as well as, separately, to its second part.

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