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"Our Goal is – Forward and Not to Retreat…" – Uprisings in the Small Ghettos Located in the Territories of Eastern Poland/ Western Belarus and Ukraine – A Re-evaluation

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Abstract: The article analyses the phenomena of the revolts in small ghettos located primarely in the territories of current Belarus and Ukraine that used to be part of Poland during the interwar period. It suggests that one of the reasons for this phenomena was combined influence of life both in the interwar Poland and under the Soviet rule since september 1939 (untill the German-Nazi occupation in june-july 1941).

Keywords: holocaust in the USSR; small ghettoes; revolts in ghettos; Jewish resistance during the holocaust; Western Belarus and Ukraine; interwar Poland Jewry

This year (2023) we've marked the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.[1] This revolt became, to a large extent justified, a symbol of armed Jewish resistance in the urban area during the Holocaust (this alongside the partisan activity that existed by its very nature in the wooded and marshy countryside).[2] However, at that time there were cases of uprisings and active fighting in several small urban settlements as well as in the countryside, most of them in the territories of western Belarus and Ukraine (eastern Poland until the Soviet invasion to

1 Partial bibliography about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising – M. Arens, *Flags Over the Warsaw Ghetto*, Jerusalem 2011; M. Edelman, *The Ghetto Fights: Warsaw 1941–1943*, London 1990; G. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940–1945*, New Haven 2002.

2 Contributing to this image is the prominent place occupied by the story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the popular cinema and television – for example the film *Uprising* (2001) – https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0250798/?ref_=tt_mv_close, viewed 15.3.2023; and a reference to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the TV series *Holocaust – the story of the family Weiss* (1978) – https://www.imdb.com/video/vi3518938393/?ref_=tt_vi_i_1, viewed 15.3.2023.

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Poland in September 1939).[3] In several places these rebellions had some success in the sense that some of their participants managed to escape into the forests, join the ranks of the Jewish and/or Soviet partisans, and ultimately survive the war period, and in some cases – the rebellions were brutally suppressed.

This paper examines the phenomenon of the rebellions in the small ghettos in the territories of eastern Poland (prior to September 1939), to argue for the uniqueness of these events and the reasons why they occurred precisely in this geographical area. Although most of the historical facts regarding these revolts are known, it is still necessary to understand the events and evaluate them as part of the phenomenon of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. This paper provides an overview of what we know about the revolts in small ghettos and attempts to explain the reasons for these revolts by examining both the wartime situation in these ghettos and the prewar social and political conditions, attributing some significance to both variables for the emergence of revolts in these specific places.

The phenomenon of active (armed) resistance should be examined as part of the phenomenon of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust in a broad sense. Today it is accepted that the Jewish resistance during the Holocaust had different forms. There was resistance aimed at staying alive and preserving a human image and dignity, and there was armed resistance that came to inflict damage on the Nazis, their collaborators, and on the extermination mechanism. Resistance of the first type was non-violent and existed in various ways: attempts to smuggle people out of the ghetto, smuggling food into the ghetto, organizing hiding in bunkers and other hiding places, forging documents, not fulfilling orders and orders of the Nazi authorities, and giving bribes to soldiers or officials. Jews also tried and even took risks to bring news about the persecution of Jews and their destruction. Resistance of the second type included sabotaging the extermination operations and harming the means to carry it out, fighting in the ghettos and camps, and fighting within the frameworks of partisans and the underground against the Nazi Germans and their collaborators. Both types of resistance are important in the historiography of the Holocaust and its historical memory.[4] At the same time, the

3 In the territories of eastern Poland (western Belarus and Ukraine) 23 uprisings occurred out of a total 31 uprisings across all ghettos. Four uprising occurred in the territories of the USSR in the prior fall 1939 borders. Uprisings occurred in about 7 % of the 317 ghettos in eastern Poland, while in the territories of the General government the uprising occurred in 1.1 % of the ghettos. See – E. Finkel. 2012. "Victims' Politics: Jewish Behavior During the Holocaust." PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 54–100.

4 R. L. Einwohner, *Hope and Honor: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust*, Oxford 2022; E. Finkel, *Ordinary Jews; Choice and Survival During the Holocaust*, Princeton and Oxford 2017; B. Ginsberg, *How the Jews Defeated Hitler: Exploding the Myth of Jewish Passivity in the Face of Nazism*, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth 2013; J. M. Glass, *Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust:*

second type of resistance is of particular importance because it undermined the Nazi anti-Semitic stereotype that treated Jews as weak people who were unable to fight for their lives[5] and therefore did not deserve to live. Moreover, active armed resistance gave expression to attitudes which were shared by quite a few sorrows, especially those who were brought up in Zionist youth movements, according to which the Jews must fight for their lives and their dignity actively with weapons, whether the fighting leads to salvation or not. And if death is inevitable, it is better that it be because of fighting and not because of a humiliating execution.

What are the sources of information regarding the rebellions in the small ghettos? In some cases, all the participants of the uprisings and the residents of the ghettoes were killed, but in some cases the participants of the uprisings survived and documented what happened to them, usually after the end of the war, sometimes many years and even decades after the events had occurred.[6] In addition, information about rebellions exists due to their documentation in non-Jewish sources, such as German documents of the units that suppressed the rebellions, diary entries, or other documentation of the local people – Ukrainians, Belarusians, Poles, and others, who sometimes participated in the suppression of the rebellion or watched it from the sidelines (as bystanders), as well as in oral testimony of the locals.[7]

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moral uses of violence and Will, New York 2004; R. S. Gottlieb, "The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust", *Social Theory and Practice* 9, 1 (1983), pp. 31–49; P. Henry (ed.), *Jewish Resistance against the Nazis*, Washington 2014.

ח. דרייפוס, 'המשגת התגובה היהודית: בין עמידה להתנגדות', **דפים לחקר השואה** 35 (2022), עמ' 59-68

5 About Nazi Antisemitism see – A. E. Steinweiss, *Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany*, Cambridge 2006; Not only the Nazis believed in this stereotype, but this was a common stereotype promoted by anti-Semites among the non-Jewish population. See – I. Bloomfield, "Jewish Weakness and Failure of Perception", *European Judaism* 25, 2 (1992), pp. 38–45. In 1941, Stalin also said in a conversation with Polish representatives (including Kot, Sikorski, and Anders) that "Jews are bad fighters." See – W. Anders, *Bez ostatniego rozdziału; wspomnienia z lat 1939–1946*, Newtown 1950, p. 105–123; S. Kot, *Listy z Rosji do Gen. Sikorskiego*, London 1955, pp. 191–208.

6 For example – D. Farfel, *In the Nesvizh Ghetto and Naliboki Forest*, Ramat-Gan 2018.

7 For a different perspective regarding the testimonies of non-Jews who witnessed the events of the Holocaust, see – S. Kopralski, "Jews and the Holocaust in Poland's Memoryscapes: An Inquiry into Transcultural Amnesia", T. Sindbaek Andersen and B. Tornquist-Plewa (eds.), *The Twentieth Century in European Memory: Transcultural Mediation and Reception*, Leiden and Boston 2017, pp. 170–197; A. Walke, *Pioneers and Partisans: An oral History of Nazi Genocide in Belorussia*, New York 2015; A. Walke, "Split Memory: The Geography of Holocaust Memory and Amnesia in Belarus", *Slavic Review* 77, 1 (2018), pp. 174–197; J. E. Yong, *The Changing Shape of Holocaust Memory*, USA 1995. As an example of extensive use of the testimonies of non-Jews, see the documentaries of Boris Mafzir – https://holocaustinussr.com.

In general, uprisings in the small ghettos began in mid-1942. Some were pre-organized, and some were spontaneous. Spontaneous cases of resistance by Jews in the ghettos happened as early as the summer of 1941, following the Nazi invasion of the USSR and the beginning of the murder of the Jewish population, for example in the town of Pasvalys in Lithuania,[8] but these were isolated cases, the success of which was little to zero, and there is little information about them. The uprisings occurred in response to rumors (sometimes – confirmed information) of massive deportations of Jews from nearby settlements or their murder, or in response to attempts by the Germans to carry out extermination actions, or news/rumors about such actions. First, I will briefly and concisely review the main revolts in the small ghettos according to the chronological order, emphasizing their common patterns, and finally I will show their uniqueness in historical context.

1 Rebellions in the Small Ghettos in Western Belarus and Ukraine – A Chronological Review

Below is a brief and concise overview of the main rebellions in the small ghettos, in the territories of Reichskommissariat Ostland and Reichskommissariat Ukraine (according to Nazi administrative divisions[9]).[10]

May 1942 – *Radun (Radin)* – today Belarus. On May 8, 1942, the ghetto and its gates were blocked. On May 10, about 100 Jewish men were taken to dig pits outside of Radun. During the digging, following the signal from the blacksmith Meir Stoler, the Jews attacked the guards with their shovels and began to flee; 17 of them managed to escape, and the rest were shot. About 1,000 of the ghetto

8 "Pasvalys", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1103–1104.

9 P. Eberhardt, *Political Migrations on Polish Territories (1939–1950)*, Warsaw 2011, pp. 23–36.

10 The overview is based on Yad Vashem's online encyclopedia of ghettos – https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/he/research/ghettos_encyclopedia/index.asp, as well as on an encyclopedia of camps and ghettos published by the Holocaust Museum in the USA – G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012; also see – Y. Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, Lincoln and Jerusalem 2009, pp. 482–516; M. Zeitlin, "The Last Stands of Jews in the Small Town Ghettoes of German-Occupied Poland, 1941–1943", Z. Baber, J. M. Bryant (eds.), *Society, history, and the global human condition: essays in honor of Irving M. Zeitlin*, Lanham 2010, pp. 33–70; M. Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44*, New York 2000, pp. 78–104; B. Klibansky, "Jewish resistance in provincial Lithuania in 1941", *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 26, 1 (2020), pp. 38–61; L. Smilovitsky, "Righteous Gentiles, the Partisans, and Jewish Survival in Belorussia, 1941–1944", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11, 3 (1997), pp. 301–320.

residents were taken to the pit and shot, while about 300 craftsmen and their families were left in the ghetto. During this event, about 300 Jews managed to escape or hide. The ghetto ceased to exist about a month later when the Jews who remained alive or survived in hiding were transferred to the Szczecin ghetto.[11]

June 1942 – *Disna* – today northern Belarus. On June 14 or 15, 1942, large forces of Germans and local collaborators surrounded the ghetto and opened fire. The residents of the ghetto, numbering about 2,200 people at the time, reacted by throwing bricks and various objects, and tried to escape from the ghetto with the help of the Judenrat, who set the ghetto houses on fire to create a situation that would facilitate their escape. Most of the Jews were captured and murdered. Of the few who managed to escape, some reached the Hlubokoye ghetto, and some managed to escape to the forests and join the partisans.[12]

June-July 1942 – *Slonim* – today Belarus. The revolt was prepared in advance, and tunnels leading outside the ghetto had been dug. In the morning of June 29, 1942, families went down to the bunkers. The underground activists, led by David Epstein, fired at the German soldiers and the auxiliary police. At least five Germans were killed, and some were wounded. There were Jews who fled to the forests and several dozens of them formed a fighting partisan group. The Nazis set the ghetto on fire. The destruction of the ghetto took place between June 29 and July 15, 1942. Estimates of 8,000–13,000 Jews were murdered in their homes, on the streets and in the pits. Wilhelm Kube mentioned that about 55,000 Jews were murdered on the spot.[13]

June-July 1942 – *Druya* – today Belarus. At the end of June (according to other information on July 2) 1942. During the event, the residents prepared for resistance – they set their houses on fire, and when the fire was extinguished, which had spread outside the ghettos as well, they opened fire on the Germans. In the end, the two ghettos were liquidated and about 1,100 of their inhabitants were murdered near the Jewish cemetery, along with 125 Jews who were brought there from the nearby

11 "Radun", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1266–1268; Z. Barmatz, *Heroism in the Forest: The Jewish Partisans of Belarus*, Israel 2013, pp. 89–92; S. Cholawsky, *The Jews of Bielorussia during World War II*, Amsterdam 1998, p. 216.

12 "Dzisna", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1189–1190; A. Abram, The Light After the Dark, Scarborough 1997, pp. 1–38; M. Iofis, *The tragedy of our hometown: Holocaust in Disna*, New Jersey 2012.

13 "Slonim", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1273–1277; D. Ozacky-Stern, "Destruction and Resistance in the Western Belarus: The Ghettoes of Slonim, Zetel (Dyatlovo), and Mir During the Holocaust", *Tsaytshrift* 14, 9 (2023), pp. 148–165; N. Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry: the story of the Jews of Slonim During the Holocaust*, New York 1989.

town of Leonopole. About two hundred Jews managed to escape during the liquidation of the ghettos and some of them joined the partisans.[14]

July 1942 – *Niesvizh* – today Belarus. The ghetto underground began to organize in December 1941. The members of the underground, which also included some members of the Judenrat, produced home-made cold weapons and even smuggled some firearms into the ghetto. On July 21, 1942, the Jews of the ghetto were called to a gathering, but following the news that the Jews of the nearby town of *Horodeya* had been massacred, they rebelled and set fire to the houses which spread beyond the territory of the ghetto. The Germans in response opened fire on the ghetto; most of the Jews were killed during the fighting, and several dozen Germans and Lithuanians were also wounded and killed. About 25 Jewish fighters, including the future historian Shalom Holavsky, managed to escape into the forests and joined the partisans.[15]

July 1942 – *Kletsk* – today Belarus. The *Kletsk* ghetto was liquidated on July 21, 1942 by the local auxiliary police under German command. When the Germans tried to round up the Jews of the ghetto, members of the underground under the command of Moshe Fish, and with the cooperation of the members of the Judenrat, set fire to their houses according to an agreed signal. Some of the Jews perished in the fire, others were shot and killed by the Germans and the local police, but in the chaos that ensued, about 400 Jews managed to escape into the woods, and about 25 of them survived until liberation.[16]

August 1942 – *Torchin* – today northwestern Ukraine. The *Torchin* ghetto was liquidated on August 23, 1942. Some Jews tried to resist. The blacksmith, Moshe Zoberman, grabbed a rifle from the hands of a Ukrainian policeman and hit him but was shot and killed. Several dozen Jews fled. Some of them returned to *Torchin* and joined the 33 professionals who were left alive. Three days later, when the Nazis came to liquidate them, seven of them escaped and armed themselves.

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14 "Druja", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1180–1182.

מ. נייטשט (עורך), **ספר דרויה, וקהילות מיור דרויסק וליאונופול**, תל-אביב תשל"ג

15 "Nieswiez", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1244–1246; S. Cholawski, *Soldiers from the ghetto*, San Diego and London 1980; D. Farfel, *In the Nesvizh ghetto and Naliboki forest*, Ramat-Gan 2018.

16 "Kleck", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1207–1209.

They acted against the local Nazi collaborators, carried out acts of sabotage, and later joined a Soviet partisan unit.[17]

August 1942 – *Turisk* – today northwestern Ukraine. The *Turisk* ghetto was liquidated on August 23, 1942. Some of the Jews were killed while trying to resist the Germans: Berish Segal seized a German submachine gun and hit several policemen before being shot to death; two women attacked the German commander and managed to injure him before being shot. About half of the ghetto houses were set on fire.[18]

August 1942 – *Nova Vyzhva* – today northwestern Ukraine. At the end of August, on the eve of the massacre, Jews set fire to a few houses and dozens of Jews fled, but only a few managed to escape and survive.[19]

August 1942 – *Kostopil* – today Ukraine. The ghetto in the town was liquidated on August 25, 1942. On the same day, the Germans held a headcount in a labor camp that operated in the town. The prisoners, anticipating the possibility of elimination, organized themselves under the leadership of Gedaliah Breyer to break out of the camp and flee to the woods. Most of them were captured by Ukrainians and Germans, and murdered. A few were saved with the help of Poles, or joined Soviet partisan units.[20]

August 1942 – *Sarny* – today northwestern Ukraine. In June 1942, an underground group was organized in the ghetto, one of whose activists was Yona Margalit, the chief of the Jewish police. On August 27, 1942, the Jews of the ghetto were concentrated in the Poleska camp where about 13,700 Jews inhabited. When the Germans led the Jews to the pits, two members of the underground group, Tendler and Yosef Gendelman, cut the barbed wire fence, ordered the barracks to be set on fire, and called the Jews to flee. Thousands obeyed the call and fled; many were shot when they tried to pass through the fences and into the streets of the town. Several hundred managed to reach the forests, and some survived until liberation.[21]

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17 "Torczyn", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1484.

18 "Turzysk", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1486–1487.

19 https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/he/research/ghettos_encyclopedia/ghetto_details.asp?cid=312, entry 25.3.2023.

20 "Kostopol", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1387–1388.

ש. ברייר, **המרד בקוסטופול: לא הסכמנו ללכת כצאן לטבח**, תל-אביב תשנ"ו; א. לרנר (עורך), **ספר קוסטופול: חייה ומותה של קהילה**, תל-אביב תשכ"ז

21 "Sarny", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1463–1465; S.

September 1942 – *Lakhva* – today Belarus. Following the information about the mass murder of Jews, in January 1942, a group of five people was organized under the leadership of Yitzhak Rokhchin, head of the underground Beitar movement in the town. Later, 30 young men organized themselves into groups of five people, gathered cold weapons, and made contact with partisans from Lakhva and the Judenrat for the purpose of purchasing weapons. On September 3, 1942, Germans and the local auxiliary police surrounded the ghetto. Rokhchin called on the members of the underground and wanted to break through the fences immediately, but Judenrat chairman Berl (Boris) Lopatin asked him to wait until the morning. When it became clear that this was an event to destroy the ghetto, Lopatin set fire to the Judenrat house and sent young men to set fire to the other ghetto houses and warehouses. Members of the underground started an armed resistance. Rokhchin killed a German and was shot dead. Lopatin was wounded but managed to reach the forest. Six German policemen and eight policemen from the auxiliary police were killed, and some were wounded. About 1,000 Jews broke through the ghetto fences. About 400 of them were killed during the escape, and about 600 reached the forest. A group of about 120 Jews asked to join the partisans in the area but were rejected, and instead formed a Jewish unit that included 25 fighters. This unit operated until January 1943 when its members joined Soviet partisan units. Ninety of the escapees survived until the end of the war.[22]

Summer 1942 – *Dubno* – today Ukraine. In the fall of 1942, an underground group was organized, one of whose initiators was Yitzhak (Izia) Wasserman. Among other things, the group worked to punish collaborators with the Germans and thus helped deter the local population from harassing any Jews in hiding, and handing them over to the Germans. At the end of summer 1943, a battle with the Germans broke out. In the professionals' ghetto, some young people organized and equipped themselves with weapons that they obtained from weapons depots and workshops of the German army; on August 22, 1942, twenty-two of them went into the forest, and on

Spector, "The Jews of Volhynia and their reaction to extermination", *Yad Vashem Studies* 15 (1983), pp. 159–186.

22 "Lachwa", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1400–1402; K. Kolpanitzky, *Sentenced to Life: the story of a survivor of the Lahwah ghetto*, London 2007.

י. חן, **האור בקצה היער**, חיפה 2011, ח.א. מיכאלי ואחרים (עורכים), **ראשונים למרד: לחווא**, ירושלים ותל-אביב תשי"ז

October 3, 1942, the rest joined them. Sixteen of these fighters survived until liberation.[23]

September 1942 – *Tuchin* – today northwest Ukraine. In July 1942, the head of the Judenrat, Getzel Schwarzman, and his deputy Meir Himmelfarb, organized themselves with young men from Tuchin for an uprising: they collected weapons, prepared flammable materials, and organized groups of fighters. The fighters had rifles, pistols, hand grenades, and some ammunition. On September 24, 1942, German policemen and the officers of the local auxiliary police surrounded the ghetto and started shooting at it. The fighters fought back, and the Jews set fire to all houses in the ghetto as well as the synagogues, which were used by the Germans as warehouses, and the fence was breached in several places. About 2,000 ghetto residents fled to the nearby *Pustomyty* forest. Two Ukrainian policemen and several Germans were killed in the fighting, and a few more were wounded. About 1,000 of the escapees were caught within three days, and murdered; about 300 women and children returned to the ghetto on their own initiative because of conditions in the forest. On September 26, 1942, Schwarzman and Himmelfarb appeared before the Germans, presented themselves as the organizers of the revolt, and asked to be allowed to die in the Jewish cemetery. Both were shot. Almost all those remaining in the forest, some 600–700 people, died, were captured, or murdered by the locals. Some of the young people joined Soviet partisan units.[24]

December 1942 – *Lutsk* – today Ukraine. The Lutzk ghetto was liquidated on September 3, 1942, in an event during which about 2,000 Jews were murdered. Few Jews remained in the labor camp. On December 11, 1942, the Jewish "camp elder" learned that the following day that Nazis would exterminate the camp's Jews. The prisoners began to organize resistance and prepared axes, knives, iron bars, bricks, and acid, as well as several pistols and a short-barreled rifle. On December 12, 1942, when German and Ukrainian policemen entered the camp, they encountered resistance, and some of them were injured, including the German commander whose face was deformed with acid. The police retreated and called in reinforcements of armored personnel carriers, which opened fire on the camp.

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23 "Dubno", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp.1353–1356.

ש. ספקטור, **שואת יהודי ווהלין**, ירושלים תשמ"ו, י. עדיני (עורך), **דובנא: ספר זיכרון**, תל-אביב תשכ"ו

24 "Tuczyn", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1485–1486.

ש. חולבסקי, 'פרשת טוצ'ין', **ילקוט מורשת** 90 (תשע"ב), עמ' 94–73; ד. לוי וא. שדה (עורכים), **יהודי טוצ'ין וקריפה מול רוצחיהם: עשרים וארבע עדויות**, תל-אביב 1990.

After a battle lasting several hours, almost all the Jews of the camp either fell in battle or were murdered. Before the liquidation of the camp, dozens of Jews went into hiding with the help of locals: Poles, Ukrainians, and Czechs, and even German soldiers who were stationed in the town. Some of them later joined Soviet partisan units.[25]

April 1943 – *Shventziany* – today Lithuania. In February 1942, an underground group of dozens of young people began to organize in the ghetto. The members of the group obtained weapons and smuggled them into the ghetto. On March 5, 1943, about 50 members of the underground fled to the *Naruch* forests and later joined a partisan unit in the area. On April 4, 1943, the ghetto was liquidated. About 500 of its residents, required professionals, were transferred to the Vilnius ghetto. The rest of the Jews, whom the Germans promised to transfer to the Kovna ghetto, were taken to the Punar execution site. When the deceit was discovered, Jews began a struggle; about 600 of them were killed during the this, and dozens managed to escape. The rest were murdered.[26]

June 1943 – *Zavorov* – today western Ukraine. A Jewish underground operated in the ghetto under the command of Levi Remer. Its members collected weapons and maintained contact with partisans. The last killing action in the ghetto began on June 5, 1943. Germans and policemen of the auxiliary police surrounded the ghetto and began to search its houses. Members of the underground called for the Jews to flee, opened fire on the Germans, and caused their withdrawal from the ghetto. The Germans set fire to the houses in which the fighters were barricaded, and after suppressing the centers of resistance, completed the liquidation of the ghetto. On June 15, 1943, the Germans destroyed the "open" camp. On June 23, during the liquidation of the "closed" camp, there were attempts at resistance and escape into the woods, and the Germans, who feared that these attempts would succeed, locked the 600 prisoners in a barracks and set it on fire.[27]

May 1943 – *Brody* – today Ukraine. In 1942, an underground group was established in the ghetto under the leadership of Shmuel Weiler and Jacob Linder. The

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25 "Luck", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1411–1414.

י. פרידמן (עורך), **ספר לוצק**, תל-אביב תשס"ז

26 "Swieciany", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1127–1129.

ש. קאנץ (עורך), **ספר זכרון לעשרים ושלוש קהילות שנחרבו באזור שונציאן**, תל-אביב תשכ"ה

27 "Zborow", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part A, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 848–849.

Brody ghetto was forcibly liquidated on May 22, 1943, when the last of its inhabitants, more than 2,000 people, were deported to the Sobibor extermination camp. During this event, the German police encountered armed resistance from the underground and were even forced to retreat for a while from the ghetto to reorganize, but in the end, they set fire to the ghetto houses and murdered several hundred Jews who remained in hiding.[28]

August 1943 – *Hlubokaye* – today Belarus. From 1942, underground groups of young people operated in the ghetto, some of which joined the partisans. On August 15, 1943, at a meeting of the underground leadership headed by Motka Lieberman, it was decided to rebel, blow up government buildings in the town, and use the chaos that would ensue to escape the ghetto. The operation was coordinated with the partisans in the area. On August 17, 1943, the partisans attacked the Germans in Dukšice and Karolwszczyzna, and approached *Hlubokaye*. The Germans brought tanks, artillery, and soldiers to the town, and on August 18, 1943, after a battle in which they also used airplanes, the partisans were forced to retreat and the Germans surrounded the ghetto. On August 19, when the Germans tried to enter the ghetto in the morning to locate Jews in hiding places, the underground started shooting at them. Some armed Jews tried to escape from the ghetto, but the Germans opened fire on them with machine guns and artillery and most of them were killed with only a few managing to escape. According to data from the partisans, about 100 Germans were killed in these battles. On August 20, 1943, the ghetto was bombed from the air, and many were killed. Almost all the Jews who remained in the ghetto, including Lieberman, were murdered on the spot during the killing action. The few survivors joined the partisans.[29]

2 Common Patterns of Action During the Uprisings in the Small Ghettos

What do all the revolts in the small ghettoes in western Belarus and Ukraine have in common? Holocaust researcher (and a partisan who fought the Nazis as a teenager)

28 "Brody", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part A, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 757–759.

א. מלצר (עורך), **נר תמיד – יזכור לברודי: ספר זכרון לקהילת ברודי וסביבתה**, ירושלים תשנ"ד

29 "Glebokie", G. Megargee (gen. ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettoes, 1933–1945*, vol. II, part B, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2012, pp. 1190–1193; M. Etkin (ed.), *Despite everything – I have won: Michael Etkin's life story*, Israel 2007; I. Kopchenova, M. Krutikov (eds.), *The Belarusian Shtetl: history and memory*, Bloomington 2023, pp. 115–170.

the late Yitzhak Arad insisted on the similar characteristics to all the ghettos in which revolts had occurred – "*organizing and setting the ghetto on fire, breaking through the fences and through the ghetto gates and escaping into the woods. These ghettos were characterized by the participation of the Judenrats and the Jewish police in the underground organizations and rebellions.*"[30] This must be understood against the background of the fact that most of the buildings in the villages, towns and field cities in the relevant area were made of wood and could be set on fire relatively easily. The tactic of arson was essential for creating panic (among the Jews who had to flee for their lives and among the Germans and the non-Jewish population who feared that the fire would spread to their residential areas) and masking the smoke use the smoke to hide their escape from the built-up areas to the forests.

The method of revolt, in most cases, was to take advantage of the panic and use the smoke as a screen while they broke through the ghetto walls or fences, and flee to the forests in the hope of finding shelter with Jewish and/or Soviet partisans. Due to the circumstances in which the rebellions broke out, the Jews' understanding that the alternative to rebellion and an attempt to escape, which may lead to greater chances of survival, was extermination, the rebels prepared for an armed struggle – in some cases also using firearms (mainly pistols and rifles), but in most cases using cold and improvised weapons (knives, axes, metal rods, sometimes stones, work tools that were converted to use as fighting tools, and various objects capable of causing damage through stabbing or cutting). It is understood that these weapons might have been effective in close combat and only at short range, but they were not effective in a situation where the Nazis used automatic rifles, machine guns, and even artillery. And this, it must be remembered, when most of the rebels were without military training (although there were people among them who had undergone military training as part of their service in the Polish army and in other military training settings), and lacked experience in guerrilla warfare and warfare in general.

The characteristics of the revolts in the small ghettos can be divided into objective and subjective. Among the objective ones – the topographical aspect – proximity to wooded areas to which it was possible to escape and conduct guerrilla warfare from; the tactical aspect – most of the small ghettos were characterized by small, one-story wooden houses, which usually did not allow for concealment and were not suitable for urban warfare, but could be set on fire with relative ease to cause chaos from the blaze, which could spread beyond the ghetto area, for the purposes of breaking out of the ghetto and escape en masse into the wooded areas.[31] The subjective characteristics are related to the motives of those Jews who took part in active resistance which will be discussed below.

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30 י. ארד, **תולדות השואה בברית-המועצות והשטחים המסופחים**, כרך ב', ירושלים תשס"ד, עמ' 882.

31 י. ארד, **תולדות השואה בברית-המועצות והשטחים המסופחים**, כרך ב', ירושלים תשס"ד, עמ' 875.

The pattern of action in the uprisings in the small ghettos and even their goals were very different from the acts of resistance of the Jewish underground in the ghettos in large urban spaces (such as Krakow, Vilnius, Minsk, Lviv, Bialystok and of course during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising). The underground activity in some of these centers was aimed at eroding the military and governmental capacity of the Nazi Germans, as well as preparing for active defense when the ghettos came to an end. In several places there were practical preparations for the uprising, but with the exception of the Warsaw Ghetto, underground activity did not develop into an actual armed uprising, and its goals in the large urban centers were aimed more at transmitting to the Jewish and general world the idea that Jews also knew how to defend themselves, to fight back and die with dignity, and less at rescue efforts through revolt,[32] while the main effort of the rebellions in the small ghettos was aimed at maximum possible survival (under the existing conditions and circumstances) through active armed rebellion, even though considerations of standing up for honor against the Nazis were also present. These differences can be a function of objective reasons – for example, topographical conditions (proximity of forests that may be used for hiding and shelter or the absence of such forests), the existence of an infrastructure on which to base oneself after escaping to the forest (both in the physical sense and in the organizational sense – the existence of an anti-partisan movement – a Nazi operating in the area) – or the lack thereof. It can also be a reflection of the perception of the threat and the internalization of the radicalism of the Nazi approach that sought the total extermination of the Jewish population.[33]

3 The Uniqueness of the Rebellions in the Small Ghettos in Their Historical Context

In the next part, I will try to explain why most of the uprisings happened precisely in eastern Poland/western Belarus and Ukraine. In this explanation, I will focus on three aspects: the motivation for active resistance and fighting, the effect of living under Polish rule for about two decades, and the effect of living under Soviet rule for nearly two years.

32 E. Zohar, "Jewish subterranean operations in major east European ghettoes", *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 26, 1 (2020), pp. 1–37.

33 As an example of this, see the findings of the study that examined the threat perception (in retrospect) of the survivors of the ghettos in Piotrokow, Tarnow and Lakhva and the relationship between the threat perception and survival strategies – M. Soyer, "'We Knew Our Time Had Come': The Dynamics of Threat and Microsocial Ties in Three Polish Ghettos Under Nazi Oppression", *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 19, 1 (2014), pp. 47–66.

3.1 Motivation for Active (Armed) Resistance

What motivated the rebels towards active resistance? Referring to the characteristics of the Jewish partisan movement, the Holocaust researcher (a partisan in his youth) the late Shalom Holevsky listed the characteristics that made it difficult for the Jews to integrate into the activities of the partisan movement. The objective reasons included: the fact that the Jews were "*a national minority, strangers in their surroundings, disconnected from nature, who don't know the territories and the roads…*"; a lack of weapons; having to deal with anti-Semitism on the part of the non-Jewish population; the growth of anti-Semitism as a result of Nazi propaganda; the very limited time to escape the ghetto and join the partisans before the Nazi murder; and the disconnect between the different ghettos. The subjective characteristics were: the perception of the "sanctification of life" as an obstacle to active resistance; the illusion that extermination wasn't total; mistrust of the forest and a non-Jewish environment; the absence of a tradition of fighting; Judenrats as an obstacle to active resistance; commitment to the family; the dilemma of death in the forest versus death in the ghetto; the dilemma of fighting besieged in the ghetto versus fighting in the forest; collective responsibility; and a lack of authoritative leadership.

Alongside the complicating factors, it is necessary to place the dimension of hope in the active resistance – hope of survival and rescue, and equally hope of revenge, and sometimes the weight of the aspect of revenge was greater than the weight of the aspect of survival and rescue.[34] This analysis by Holevsky examined the characteristics of the Jewish partisan movement is also true to a large extent as a characteristic of active Jewish resistance in western Belarus and Ukraine in general and rebellions in the small ghettos. The willingness to fight arose from an inner desire to die while actively fighting, and not to be passively killed. This is how David Farfel, who took part in the uprising in the Niesvizh ghetto, wrote in his memoirs: "*Two slogans stood before us, one: 'we will not go like sheep to the slaughter.' The second: 'Let my soul die with the Philistines!'…*"[35] However, it seems that at least in some of the rebellions a link was made between the rebellion as a possibility of survival, even if only for a few, and this salvation in turn opens possibilities for acts of revenge. Thus, for example, in the words of Yitzhak Rokhchin, one of the leaders of the revolt in Lakhva, to a group of activists who led the active revolt – *"We need to go first without fear… not retreat, those who caused their luck to fall into a void will be comforted by paving the way for others to life… we have nothing to lose, it is better to*

34 ש. חולבסקי, **מרי ולוחמה פרטיזנית: יהודי בילורוסיה במלחמת העולם השנייה**, ירושלים ותל-אביב תשס"א, עמ' 43–46.
35 ד. פרפל, **בגיטו נייסוויז' וביערות נליבוקי**, רמת-גן תשנ"ה, עמ' 57.

fall running from a bullet than to run to the grave. We have chances that some will manage to escape and avenge the blood of the dead. Our goal is forward and not retreat…."[36]

In my opinion, it is possible to offer an additional explanation on the scholarly explanations mentioned above. This explanation is related to almost two decades of life as part of Poland, and to the confrontation of the Jewish population in the areas of eastern Poland (until the fall of 1939) – western Belarus and western Ukraine (from the fall of 1939), with the processes of Sovietization that the population which lived in the area went through in general, and particularly the Jewish population. I will discuss these aspects below.

3.2 Two Decades Under Polish Rule and Their Impact on the Ideological and Organizational Infrastructure for Revolts

One of the factors influencing the creation of an ideological and organizational infrastructure for revolts in the small ghettos is related to the nearly two decades in which the area was under Polish rule. During this period, there was vital and dynamic Jewish life in the area, and in particular a flourish in the field of Jewish-Zionist education, both formal and informal. In the context of formal education, the position of the Hebrew Zionist school network "*Tarbut*" became very strong. This network, although it was secular, wasn't anti-religious and gave a place of respect practice of traditions and the curricula of its institutions. It maintained constructive relations with political parties and youth movements from all over the Zionist political spectrum. The main activity of the "Tarbut" network in Poland between the wars was in eastern Poland – western Belarus and Ukraine (in the districts of Vilna, Nowhardok, Bialystok, Polesia, and Wahlin).[37] The reasons for this lie in the demographic composition of the population in the area, which was characterized by ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, and, in fact, without the presence of a dominant national-ethnic group, even Jews in the area therefore didn't experience

36 ח. מיכאלי ואחרים (עורכים), **ראשונים למרד לחווא**, ירושלים ותל-אביב תשי"ז, עמ' 203.

37 Most of the schools of "Tarbut" were concentrated in eastern Poland between the world wars. For example: in the school year 1927–1928, there were 173 schools in this area, which made up 73.9 % of all institutions in Poland. And in the school year 1935 (1934–1935), there were 207 schools, which made up 77 % of all institutions in Poland. Between 70 % and 80 % of all "culture" schools in Poland were concentrated in eastern Poland (Vilnius, western Belarus, and western Ukraine).

נ. פניאל, **לתולדות מוסדות החינוך של "תרבות" בפולין**, ירושלים תש"ז, עמ' 118, 511 (טבלה ו'); ש. רוזנהק, 'על מערכת החינוך היהודי בפולין בין שתי מלחמות העולם', י. היילפרין (עורך), **בית ישראל בפולין – מימים ראשונים ועד לימות החורבן**, ירושלים תש"ח, עמ' 144

oppression from a dominant culture and language; in addition, the fact that the Jews in the area had no special incentive and motivation for Polish acculturation (and even the time frame – about two decades – made it difficult to assimilate the Polish language and culture) enabled an orientation towards the Hebrew language and Jewish tradition and identity. Other educational networks also operated alongside "Tarbut" – the religious-Zionist network "Yavneh", the ultra-Orthodox networks "Horev" and "Beit Ya'akov", Tsisha of the "Bund" party,[38] "Shul-Cult" (Poaley-Zion C.S.), and more. However, the prominent presence of "Tarbut" indicates a clear Zionist tendency. As a result of this educational-cultural activity, a generation with political and ideological awareness, an affinity for traditional Jewish culture (even if they didn't lead a halachic lifestyle), and the Hebrew language, grew up in the area. Below is an example which has an interesting, and one could even say tragic, representation, even if it isn't possible to establish at this stage the claim that it is representative. These are the letters of Yosef Levin, born in 1926, from the town of *Lipnishki* (*Lipnyshuk*), to his older brother Avner who repatriated to Israel and managed to keep these letters. The letters were written when he was about 10 years old, and in almost fluent Hebrew the boy discussed in a very mature manner the situation of the Jews in Poland in the second half of the 1930s, while emphasizing the experience of anti-Semitism and hostility from the Polish population (and, to be fair, he also expresses hostility towards it) – *"…it is not pleasant for me to study surrounded by the Poles who hate us… Everywhere we are beaten and driven from place to place… What do the cruel ones want from the Jewish people scattered all over the world? Do they want to erase the name of Israel from under the sky? … It will not be possible for them to corrupt and cut it down. The people of Israel will live forever. Because this small nation with a hard back is and should not be discouraged…."* He is also well versed in the political and security realities of settlement in the Land of Israel (mandatory Palestine) at that time, events of the period of 1936–1939,[39] and even expresses hope and confidence in the fulfillment of the Zionist enterprise – *"… The Land of Israel must be the only center for the Hebrew people. In it we will establish a Hebrew state that will bring about the unification of the people made up of many parties that weaken our hands. Then our situation will be better even in the Diaspora.*

38 The central organization of Jewish schools in the Polish Republic. These institutions, which had a political connection to the "Bund" as well as to the "Left Poaley-Zion" ideologically operated in the Yiddish language.

39 The events of 1936–1939 – a term used in Zionist historiography for what the Arabs and the British called the "Great Arab Revolt" – incidents of terrorism and violence directed by the Arabs of Mandatory Land of Israel (Palestine) towards the Jewish population and towards the British Mandate authorities. The demand of the Arabs was the cessation of the Zionist enterprise. The rebellion was severely suppressed by the mandatory government.

Because unity is the main thing for the people…."[40] Of course, it can be argued that this is an exceptional or unrepresentative case, but Dr. Ido Bassok has already shown in his studies that students of institutions belonging to the "Tarbut" network in the eastern parts of Poland, until the fall of 1939, were characterized by a high level of Hebrew, and the reasons for this lie not only in the central place of Hebrew studies in the institutions of "Tarbut", but also in the characteristics of the Jewish towns in the area, which were *"a relatively strong stronghold of the preservation of ethnic-national values, both in their religious manifestations and in their new – Zionist or Bundist interpretation."* Referring to youths who wrote essays as part of the writing competitions, he noted that "…*some of the writers studied their basic studies in their towns but continued in the Hebrew gymnasiums of 'Tarbut' in Rovno and Vilnius, which explains, at least partially, the relatively high level of Hebrew.*"[41] And by combining these two aspects, it can be said that the letter quoted above may reflect a trend of mindset among the younger generation in the towns and cities of the countryside in eastern Poland between the world wars.

Alongside the frameworks of formal education and to one degree or another of integration with them, until the fall of 1939 there was a framework of informal ideological education – youth movements and organizations that represented the political spectrum that existed among the Jewish population. Youth movements were not a phenomenon unique to eastern Poland or to Poland in general, but "… *in the lives of children, and especially in the lives of youth and young people during this period, they played a unique role in their totality, strength, diversity and educational effects*…", a role that cannot be compared to that played by youth movements in other parts of the world and even in the Land of Israel during the period of the British mandate and during the first decades of Israel's existence.[42] Despite the ideological differences between the various movements, differences that are usually emphasized in the historiography, there was much similarity in the concept of the self of their members, in their priorities, and in the commitments they undertook. However, it seems that in eastern Poland the activity of the various youth movements and organizations took on a less centrifugal ideological character than elsewhere in Poland. It is possible that this was due to the traditional backgrounds of their operatives: so many of the operatives of the "*Hechalutz Hatzair*" were from small towns mainly in eastern Poland (the districts of Bialystok, Vilna, Novhardok, Polesye,

40 א. לוין (עורך), **ספר זיכרון של קהלת ליפנישוק**, תל-אבי תשכ"ט, עמ' 116, 120–119.

41 ע. בסוק, 'רשת החינוך העברי 'תרבות' בפולין בין שתי מלחמות העולם', **הד האולפן החדש** 100 (תשע"ג), עמ' 41–35. To substantiate the claim, one can read the newsletters of the students of the "Tarbut" network – "*Olami Hakatan*" – https://www.nli.org.il/he/newspapers/yol.

42 ע. בסוק, 'נעורים וערכי נעורים בתנועות הנוער בפולין שבין מלחמות העולם', י. ברטל, י. גוטמן (ערוכים), **קיום ושבר: יהודי פולין לדורותיהם ב' (חברה, תרבות, לאומיות)**, ירושלים תשס"א, עמ' 573.

Vohlyn), with a traditional background.[43] Beitar had an activist-military emphasis and engaged in self-defense activities against anti-Semitic elements, an activity that also characterized the members of the "*Bund*" and "*Left Poaley Zion*."[44] With reference to the eastern Poland (until 1939), the youth movements frequently used the Hebrew language. Hebrew, which represented both the past (i.e. the religious tradition) as well as the present and the future (Zionism and the Land of Israel), was an essential element in the culture of the Zionist youth movements beyond an ideological dimension. Furthermore, the study of Hebrew and its use did not show gaps between generations, between the young and their elders, and in some Hebrew towns it was even used by the Jewish population in their day-to-day life. In this space, even in distinct secular youth movements, modern Zionism was not perceived in terms of a revolution but as a continuation and continuity, the fulfillment of the "dream of the generations".[45] It could be another explanation for the popular and multi-generational nature of the uprisings in the small ghettos in western Belarus and Ukraine.

3.3 The Influence of Almost Two Years of Soviet Rule About Two Years Under Soviet Rule and Their Influence on the Ideological and Organizational Infrastructure for Rebellions

Another explanation related to challenge of the processes of Sovietization that the population that lived in western Belarus and Ukraine, and particularly the Jewish population, went through during almost two years. The Soviet government exerted pressure on Jews both on apparent class grounds, on cultural and religious grounds, and on political grounds. These pressures included, alongside intense propaganda, economic and occupational pressure, prison, deportations, and the recruitment of activists in various settings as agents of the Soviet security services. However, Sovietization was not total, instead it is more correct to say that it didn't reach the point of totality due to the relative short duration of Soviet rule. In practice certain Jewish activities became possible in an underground, while certain aspects of Jewish life that had almost disappeared among the Jews of the USSR, continued to exist in

43 Ibid, p. 582.

44 Ibid, p. 585.

45 On the characteristics of the Jewish youth movements in Poland between the World Wars, see – I. Bassok, 'Jewish Youth Movements in Poland between the Wars as Heirs of the Kehilah', A. Adler and A. Polonsky (eds.), *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry 30 (Jewish Education in Eastern Europe)*, Liverpool 2018, pp. 299–320.

western Belarus and Ukraine in a legal way – for example, elements of religious and traditional life. Nevertheless, as time passed although as time passed the pressure from the Soviet authorities did increase.[46] This pressure led to the fact that activity with political-ideological characteristics moved underground, and led to a certain unification patterns of the activity while blurring ideological differences, reducing political polarization and actually laying a conceptual and practical foundation for working together, which, in addition to personal acquaintance and friendships between people, allowed the creation of a certain infrastructure to actively oppose the policy of the Nazi exterminator after the occupation of the area by the German army.[47] If so, the Sovietization vector brought together to a considerable extent various political and ideological elements that in the pre-Soviet period used to clash with each other.[48]

The Jewish population accepted the Soviet regime ambivalently; on the one hand most Jews preferred the Soviet regime over the Nazi regime, and Jewish individuals even took advantage of the situation for personal social advancement through integration into the mechanisms of the new Soviet government, while on the other Soviet policy led to discontent among parts of the Jewish population who reacted to what the late Dov Levin called "dissatisfaction" and even manifestations of opposition that were expressed in strict adherence to elements of Jewish tradition, criticism of the regime that was expressed via jokes, maintaining contact with abroad and passing on information, and more. Within this reality and these attitudes, youth movements and organizations and what remained of political parties adopted methods of operation that were characterized by underground activity and secrecy, and among other things engaged in organizational and ideological activity whose purpose was to foster ideological continuity, and to increase the resilience and ideological resilience of the members and activists of the movements and organizations in the face of the Soviet doctrine and the vigorous propaganda of the Soviet

46 On the damage to traditional and communal Jewish life, Zionist activity, Jewish education, and religious life by the Soviet authorities in Lakhva, see –

ק. קולפניצקי, **נגזר לחיים: מרד גיטו לחווא**, אור יהודה תשנ"ט, עמ' 34–36.

47 The impact of Sovietization on the Jewish population in western Belarus was discussed by researcher Yanina Karpenkina – Я. Карпенкина, *Советизация еврейского населения Западной Беларуси (1939–1941 гг.) – диссертация на соискание ученой степени кандидата исторических наук НИУ ВШЭ*, Москва 2018.

48 E. Finkel, "Victims' Politics: Jewish Behavior During the Holocaust" – PhD diss, University of Wisconsin-Madison 2012, pp. 54–100; B. Musial, "Jewish resistance in Poland's eastern borderlands during the second world war, 1939–41", *Patterns of Prejudice* 38, 4 (2004), pp. 371–382; for the experiences of members of Zionist youth movement in eastern Poland/western Belarus and Ukraine during 1939–1941 under the Soviet rule see –

ר. פרליס, **תנועות הנוער החלוציות בפולין הכבושה**, תל-אביב תשמ"ז; ש. קלס, **פעילות השומר הצעיר במשטר הסובייטי: ספטמבר 1939 – יוני 1941**, תל-אביב 1999.

regime.[49] This activity also contributed to the creation of an organizational and ideological infrastructure that enabled active rebellion in the face of the extermination policy during the Nazi occupation.

Another aspect that must be considered is the reduction of the space of uncertainty and illusion regarding the intentions of the Nazis towards the Jews, which was an obstacle to active resistance. In this reduction process, some key points can be described. One of them is the arrival of refugees from the territories of central and western Poland that were under German control to the territories of western Belarus and Ukraine that were under Soviet control.[50] They described the German behavior towards the Jews, which at that time did not yet include a policy of extermination but included elements of oppression and humiliation.[51] The second key point was the inability to flee en masse to the USSR due to the closure of the old border (prior to September 17, 1939) that prevented the residents of western Belarus and western Ukraine from crossing to the eastern border after the outbreak of Operation Barbarossa and the Nazi invasion of the USSR.[52] In addition to this, in many occupied places there was a wave of murders in which a part of the Jewish population was eliminated, or there were incidents of near-murder that were avoided at the last minute, for example, in Lakhva on September 5, 1941, there was almost a mass murder event avoided at the last minute thanks to Berl Lopatin's lobbying combined with bribery.[53] In other words, there was a combination of circumstances and events that greatly reduced the space of uncertainty and reduced the tendency to delusion regarding the Germans' intentions. Unlike at the beginning of the Nazi invasion of the USSR, and similar to the beginning of the deportations of the Jews residents of the Generalgouvernement to the extermination camps as part of Operation Reinhardt,[54] the genocidal intentions of the Nazis were not clear enough, and it was during the second and third waves of murders in the occupied territories of the USSR that the

49 D. Levin, *The lesser of two evils: East European Jewry under Soviet Rule, 1939–1941*, Jerusalem and Philadelphia 1995.

50 Over 120,000 refugees from Poland arrived in the territories of Soviet Belarus alone – Я. Карпенкина, *Советизация еврейского населения Западной Беларуси (1939–1941 гг.) – диссертация на соискание ученой степени кандидата исторических наук НИУ ВШЭ*, Москва 2018, с. 70–71.

51 On Jewish refugees from Poland in the USSR during World War II see – E. Adler, *Survival on Margins: Polish Jewish Refugees in Wartime Soviet Union*, Cambridge 2020; K. Friedla, M. Nesselrodt, *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939–1959): History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival*, Boston 2021.

52 41 ,עמ' ,ט"תשנ ,אור-יהודה ,**נגזר לחיים: מרד גיטו לחווא** ,קולפניצקי .ק.

53 Ibid, p. 48.

54 About Operation Reinhardt see – Y. Arad, *The Operation Reinhard Death Camps, Revised and Expanded Edition: Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka*, Jerusalem 2018.

murderous intentions of the Nazis was much clearer, along with information about what was happening in the surrounding cities and towns.[55]

4 In Conclusion

The area where the uprisings in the small ghettos took place was part of Poland between the world wars, but from September 1939 it became part of the USSR. This means that the Jewish population in this area was influenced, some would say paradoxically, both by the tendencies and trends that prevailed among the Jewry of eastern Poland between the wars,[56] and at the same time was influenced by a degree of Sovietization that included persecutions on religious and political grounds that didn't allow open Jewish and Zionist activity, but rather required these activites to move underground, which created a certain infrastructure for self-organizing, at least in some places. However, this Sovietization was short-lived, and did not fundamentally change many aspects of Jewish life nor their state of mind,[57] which remained to a large extent an affinity to tradition, to Hebrew, to Zionism, as well as to all-Jewish solidarity, certainly in times of distress. Geographical conditions, such as proximity to the forests, also had significance for making decisions about rebellions and rescue options. However, it seems that another aspect that was unique to the uprisings in these places was the popular characteristic of the uprisings. For the most

55 Y. Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, Lincoln and Jerusalem 2009, pp. 125–340.

56 In his doctoral thesis, Yevgeny Finkel from USA offers an idea according to which one of the reasons for the outbreak of uprisings specifically in the territories of eastern Poland/western Belarus and Ukraine was the high political involvement of the inhabitants of this region during the period between the world wars. He reaches his conclusion based on an examination of voting patterns for the elections to the Polish Parliament in 1928 as well as the elections to the Zionist Congress in 1937 and 1939. This is in addition to the ability to organize underground that was acquired during approximately two years under Soviet rule (like the claim of this article). He also examines additional influencing factors such as: self-selection into political groups, regional variation in the levels of militancy, imperial legacies, rough terrain, Nazi anti-Jewish policies, and information about them, and concludes that these factors were not significant influencing factors. See – E. Finkel, "Victims' Politics: Jewish Behavior During the Holocaust" – PhD diss, University of Wisconsin-Madison 2012, pp. 54–100.

57 In the USSR, because of approximately two decades of oppressive rule at an ever-increasing level and extremely severe damage to civil society, the ability to organize independently "from below" without guidance "from above" was severely damaged. See – E. Finkel, "Victims' Politics: Jewish Behavior During the Holocaust" – PhD diss, University of Wisconsin-Madison 2012, pp. 54–100; on the repressive policies of Soviet regime see – S. Courtois and others (eds.), *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, London 1999.

part, they were not activists with a distinct political-ideological profile (such as that which characterized a significant part of the Warsaw Ghetto rebels, for example), but they were people from all strata of the Jewish population whose motives for the revolt were less "colored" with declared ideological beliefs and stemmed more from an existential need and accumulated life experience – an expression of popular Jewish activism (as distinguished from ideological activism). Yitzhak Arad stressed the point "… *in most of the small ghettos… there was no organization of members of political or movement currents, but an organization based on personal acquaintance and a willingness to fight.*"[58]

I mentioned above the words of David Farfel who spoke about the idea of "we will not go as sheep to slaughter" and the biblical Samson's choice of death, as motivations for the willingness to fight and actively resist the Nazis. Later he writes – "*We did not go like sheep to the slaughter, and among the ranks of the murderers there were those who fell from the firm stand of the ghetto fighters…. A small and isolated group of Jews dared to raise the flag of the rebellion. The echoes of the Jewish uprising spread throughout the area….*"[59]

The bottom line is the words of Shalom Cholawsky that the active Jewish resistance during the Holocaust can be explained "*by the fact that the Jewish man took on unusual mental strength from the abyss of suffering… and by the fact that we had young people with a soul… thanks to whom the longing became a reality,*" are correct to a large extent.[60]

As part of a re-evaluation of the revolts in the small ghettos, it is appropriate to place them in a more central place in the narrative and ethos of the active Jewish resistance to the Nazis during the Holocaust, to make them a more significant part of the historical – Jewish and generally human – memory of the Holocaust. Studying these rebellions, the people who led them, and the Jews who survived because of them can lead to conclusion that even in moments of particularly significant challenges and even under seemingly impossible conditions, it is possible and even appropriate to act actively to change and shape the reality in a more correct and appropriate manner to hold in the present.

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58 י. ארד, **תולדות השואה בברית-המועצות והשטחים המסופחים**, כרך ב', ירושלים תשס""ד, עמ' 876.

59 However, Farfel believed that Samson's choice did come true – "*The verse came true: 'My soul shall die with the Philistines'… The fire consumed everything. The flames of the fire spread throughout the city, outside the ghetto and caused damage.*"

ד. פרפל, **בגיטו ניסוויז' וביערות נליבוקי**, רמת-גן תשנ"ה, עמ' 61–62.

60 ש. חולבסקי, **מרי ולוחמה פרטיזנית: יהודי בילורוסיה במלחמת העולם השנייה**, ירושלים ותל-אביב תשס"א, עמ' 48.