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# **A TANGLED WEB**

**Polish-Jewish Relations  
in Wartime Northeastern Poland  
and the Aftermath**

**(PART ONE)**

by Mark Paul

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A tangled web: Polish-Jewish relations in wartime northeastern Poland and in the postwar period

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## Part One: Anatomy of a “Pogrom” in Ejszyszki

“Nothing a gentile has ever written or spoken  
about the shtetl has any bearing whatsoever.”  
David G. Roskies  
Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

### *Introduction*

Yaffa Eliach, a professor of history and literature at Brooklyn College and a leading exponent of the use of oral history in Holocaust studies, has had unlimited access to the U.S. media and publishing houses in recent years to publicize a “pogrom” that allegedly occurred on October 20, 1944 in her home town of Ejszyszki. (Ejszyszki is a small town between Wilno and Grodno, located on territory that belonged to Poland in the interwar period. It now part of Lithuania and is known as Eišiškės.)<sup>1</sup>

Richard Z. Chesnoff, a correspondent for *U.S. News & World Report*, has been particularly obliging in promoting her story.<sup>2</sup> Publicity peaked when the *New York Times* featured an extensive piece entitled “The Pogrom at Eishyshok” (Eishyshok or Aisheshuk is the town’s Yiddish name) on August 6, 1996, authored by Eliach herself. In it Eliach did not mince words or hold back any charges:

The pogrom at Eishyshok occurred not during the Holocaust but months after the Nazis were driven from the town on July 13, 1944. The participants were 150 Poles, 80 of whom were members of the nationalist Polish Home Army. ...

On the night of Oct. 19, the attackers stopped near the Kabacznik home. There, according to

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<sup>1</sup> The spelling of place names accords with the political boundaries in place prior to World War II. Ejszyszki is pronounced *Eh-shish-key* in Polish. In 1939, the town numbered around 5,000 people, of whom some 3,000 were Jews and 2,000 were Poles. (According to some sources, the number of Jews was closer to 2,000.) Ejszyszki was located in the *powiat* (county) of Lida, *województwo* (province) of Nowogródek. According to the 1931 census, the ethnic and religious make-up of Lida county was 79 percent Roman Catholic, almost all of whom were ethnic Poles (with Lithuanians accounting for 1.3 percent of the population), 8 percent Jews, and 12.5% Belorussians of the Eastern Orthodox faith. The preponderance of Poles in the *gmina* (township) of Ejszyszki was even greater, running at 85.6% of the population. See Aleksander Srebrakowski, “Struktura narodowościowa Kresów Północno-Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1931–1939,” in Stanisław Ciesielski, ed., *Przemiany narodowościowe na Kresach Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej 1931–1948* (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2003), 131, 133, 135. Today, approximately 80 percent of the town’s population is Polish. An important recent monograph on the topic of Ejszyszki and Polish-Jewish relations in the Wilno area is Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, ed., *Ejszyszki—Kulisy zajść w Ejszyszkach: Epilog stosunków polsko-żydowskich na Kresach, 1944–45. Wspomnienia—dokumenty—publicystyka* (Warsaw: Fronda, 2003), in 2 volumes, which contains an extensive overview in English.

<sup>2</sup> As can be seen from his numerous articles on the subject, Chesnoff has assumed the role of Eliach’s advocate, but has failed to inform his readers of this. This in turn raises questions about journalistic ethics, for he does not report fully about the criticisms of her recounting of historical memory. Chesnoff lashes out at Jarosław Wołkonowski, whose scholarship is above reproach, for being a Polish “nationalist” historian, yet himself has written about this topic from a Jewish nationalist perspective. Chesnoff’s latest foray into this field is found in his book, *Pack of Thieves: How Hitler and Europe Plundered the Jews and Committed the Greatest Theft in History* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), especially 176–79. Like Eliach, Chesnoff advances the fantastic notion that the Poles fought two wars: one against the Germans, the other against the Jews. Clearly, the author does not appreciate that Eastern Poland was invaded and occupied by the Soviet Union in 1939–1941 and that the Soviet Union occupied the entire country from 1944.

survivors who were in the house, the commander gave orders to murder all the Jews—first those in the Sonenson house “since people there are armed,” then those in the Kabacznik house. He concluded his orders with a slogan popular in the Polish Home Army: “Poland Without Jews.”

Eliach provided a detailed description of the assault on the family home during which her mother and infant brother were shot to death. She, her father and elder brother all survived undetected in a second-floor closet where they had all hidden.

Eliach also went on to accuse, without any evidence, the Polish government of deliberately attempting to discredit her as a historian. (“This Big Lie,” she writes, “was imported from across the Atlantic.”) By doing so, Eliach raised a bogus issue and discredited herself. There has been no attempt by the Polish authorities or by any mainstream Polish-American group to deny that Eliach’s mother and infant brother were killed. Rather the focus has been on the circumstances in which these events occurred. In particular, the assertion that this was a pogrom perpetrated by the Polish Home Army has been effectively challenged by many historians, including American, British, and Polish ones.

Eliach created a straw man when she pretended that the views of the Polish Historical Society, a one-man outfit based in Stamford, Connecticut, and run in tandem with and out of the premises of a similarly minded Ukrainian organization, represent the view of Poles or Polish Americans. The group has been repeatedly exposed as a front for non-Polish Holocaust revisionists.<sup>3</sup> Why do people like Eliach keep repeating the statements of this group? In whose interests is it to make all Poles look like fanatical Holocaust revisionists?

The shoddiness of her arguments were exposed in thoughtful and documented letters forwarded to the editor of the *New York Times*.<sup>4</sup> Typically, that paper refused to publish any rebuttal to the Eliach piece except for one truncated letter from the Polish Embassy in Washington, D.C., which pointed to the existence of Soviet archival documents that contradicted Eliach’s story. The *New York Times* did, however, find room for two additional letters from Jewish readers repeating and expanding on Eliach’s anti-Polish diatribe. (*U.S. News & World Report* simply refused to run any reply to Eliach or Chesnoff.)

Eliach reveals too much of her own motivations when she states that, although out of earshot, someone heard the Polish commander order the murder of all the Jews and then conclude his order “with a slogan popular in the Polish Home Army: ‘Poland without Jews.’”<sup>5</sup> Besides the fact that it is doubtful that any

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<sup>3</sup> John Radziłowski, “The Polish Historical Society,” *Polish American Journal*, December 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Among the best was historian John Radziłowski’s letter, which was published in *Zgoda* (Chicago), September 1, 1996. Radziłowski later published several reviews of Yaffa Eliach’s book *There Once Was a World: “Yaffa Eliach’s Big Book of Holocaust Revisionism,”* *Journal of Genocide Research*, volume 1, no. 2 (June 1999): 273–80; “Ejszyszki Revisited, 1939–1945,” in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, volume 15 (2002): 453–68; “Ejszyszki and Its Neighbors,” *Glaukopis* (Warsaw), no. 1 (2003): 284–300.

<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that none of the legion of critics of Poland and the Home Army, many of them Zionists, have remarked on the fact that the Zionist movement ethnically cleansed Palestine in 1948. There is a growing consensus among historians that the putting of the Palestinian Arabs to flight was premeditated, indeed, deeply entrenched in the Zionist goal of creating an overwhelmingly Jewish state in a territory overwhelmingly non-Jewish. See Norman G. Finkelstein, *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles:

commander would give his troops orders to attack a position where he believed there would be armed resistance in a place where the defenders could hear him so well, this “popular” slogan did not have currency in the Home Army and no document from that organization mentions it. In fact, the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*—AK)<sup>6</sup> condemned and punished the killing of Jews. That is not at all surprising given that hundreds of Jews served openly in its ranks, at all levels.<sup>7</sup>

Stanisław Aronson, a resident of Tel Aviv, wrote:

I served in the Home Army and fought in the Warsaw Uprising with the full knowledge of my surroundings that I was a Jew. Among my colleagues there were other persons of Jewish origin, such as Dr. A Gluziński and Lieutenant S. Likiernik. Could we have been members of the élite Kedyw [i.e., *Kierownictwo Dywersji*—the Directorate of Sabotage] formation if there was a policy of discrimination against Jews?<sup>8</sup>

Efraim Krasucki related:

In our [Home Army] company in the Old City, there were more than a dozen Jews with a distinctly semitic appearance, but no one paid attention to that. There was no case when someone like that was singled out or ill-treated.<sup>9</sup>

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University of California Press, 2005), 191. Isaac Deutscher acknowledged, already in 1968, that “From the outset Zionism worked towards the creation of a purely Jewish state and was glad to rid the country of its Arab inhabitants.” Cited in *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> The Home Army, by far the largest underground military force in German-occupied Poland, fought for an independent Poland free of foreign occupiers. It reported to the Polish government in exile located in London, England.

<sup>7</sup> Yad Vashem historian Israel Gutman wrote: “It may be assumed that hundreds of Jews also fought in the AK without revealing their Jewish identity. There were also Jews who did not hide their Jewish origins, and some of these achieved high ranks in their units.” See “Partisans—The Generalgouvernement,” Israel Gutman, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan; and London: Collier Macmillan, 1990), volume 3, 1121. For one overview see Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, *He Who Saves One Life* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971), 109–115. Among the prominent persons of Jewish origin who served in the Home Army were Julian Aleksandrowicz, Michał Reicher, Eliaasz Baran, Tadeusz Różewicz, Stefan Kisielewski, Adolf Rudnicki, Jerzy Lutowski, Lucjan Wolanowski, Michał Borwicz, Marcei Handelsman, Ludwik Widerszal, Marian Serejski, Jan Goldstein, and Benjamin Kaiser. For information about Michał Borwicz (Maksymilian Boruchowicz), who was smuggled out of the Janowska Street camp in Lwów by the Polish underground, and Julian Aleksandrowicz, see Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewin, *Righteous Among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews 1939–1945* (London: Earls Court Publications, 1969), 92–93, 244–50. Julian Aleksandrowicz published his memoirs titled *Kartki z dziennika Doktora Twardego* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1983). For information about Eliaasz Baran, from the Wilno area, see Part Two. Another Home Army member was Halina Zawadzka, who penned a memoir titled *Ucieczka z getta* (Warsaw: Karta, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> An edited version of this letter appeared in *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Warsaw), April 16–17, 1994; the original, unabridged version is found in Leszek Żebrowski, *Paszkwil Wyborczej: Michnik i Cichy o Powstaniu Warszawskim* (Warsaw: Burchard Edition, 1995), 78–80. On Likiernik, a sapper in the Kedyw unit, see Israel Gutman and Sara Bender, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust*, volume 4: *Poland*, Part 1 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), 358, and his autobiography, Stanisław Likiernik, *By Devil’s Luck: A Tale of Resistance in Wartime Warsaw* (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940–1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 172. See Efraim Krasucki’s account in Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna, eds., *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej: Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945*, Second expanded edition (Kraków: Znak, 1969), 233–

There are many more examples of Jews fighting in Home Army formations in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, including an entirely Jewish platoon.<sup>10</sup> On August 5, 1944, the “Zośka” battalion of the Home Army freed 348 Jews from the concentration camp on Gęsia Street; many of them joined their Polish liberators and fought in the uprising.<sup>11</sup> Jews also fought in the “Wigry,” “Parasol,” “Kolegium A,” and “Gozdawy” battalions of the Home Army,<sup>12</sup> as well as in the “Baszta” unit.<sup>13</sup> Captain Feliks Cywiński, who commanded the “Wigry” battalion, set up a Jewish fighting platoon under Shmuel Kenigswein, a famous Polish wrestler of Jewish origin.<sup>14</sup> Thirty Jews who escaped from the Warsaw ghetto by way of the sewers on May 30, 1943 were spirited off to the Chotomów forest in three lorries driven by members of the Home Army who posed as SS men. There, they were placed with peasant families and eventually incorporated in Home Army units (some of them served in a detachment which operated near Kraśnik).<sup>15</sup> A group of liberated Hungarian Jews fought in the “Palmiry-Młociny” regiment on the outskirts of Warsaw.<sup>16</sup> Another contingent of Hungarian Jews was accepted into a Home Army group based in the Kampinos forest near Warsaw.<sup>17</sup>

Several dozen Jews served in the Second Infantry Division in the Kielce region.<sup>18</sup> Józef Halperin, who wrote about his experiences in his memoir, was one of at least four Jews in the “Nurt” battalion of Captain

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<sup>10</sup> Edward Kossoy, “Żydzi w Powstaniu Warszawskim,” *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 147 (2004): 43–78; Bartoszewski and Lewin, eds., *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*, 764; Interview with Felix Horn, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, July 19, 1994, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Kossoy, “Gęsiówka (KZ Warschau),” *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 110 (1994): 62–73; Edward Kossoy, “The Gęsiówka Story,” in *Yad Vashem Studies*, volume 32 (2004); Edward Kossoy, “The Gęsiówka Story: A Little-Known Page of Jewish Resistance,” in Antony Polonsky, ed., *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, volume 17: *The Shtetl: Myth and Reality* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: The Litman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 353–61. See also Reuben Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Europe (with a historical survey of the Jew as fighter and soldier in the Diaspora)* (London: Paul Elek, 1974), 680; Michał Grynberg, ed., *Words To Outlive Us: Voices from the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2002), 405, 411.

<sup>12</sup> Paulsson, *Secret City*, 44, 184.

<sup>13</sup> Shmuel Krakowski, *The War of the Doomed: Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland, 1942–1944* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1984), 281.

<sup>14</sup> Gutman and Bender, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations*, volumes 4 and 5: *Poland*, Part 1, 153, Part 2, 606.

<sup>15</sup> Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Europe*, 665.

<sup>16</sup> Piotr Matusak, “Związek Walki Zbrojnej i Armia Krajowa w akcji pomocy Żydom,” in Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz, ed., *Spółczesność polskie wobec martyrologii i walki Żydów w latach II wojny światowej: Materiały z sesji w Instytucie Historii PAN w dniu 11.III.1993 r.* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 1996), 128.

<sup>17</sup> Adolf Pilch, *Partyzanci trzech puszczy* (Warsaw: Editions Spotkania, 1992), 289–92. Pilch’s unit was transferred from the Nowogródek to the Warsaw region in the summer of 1944.

<sup>18</sup> Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Europe*, 457.

Eugeniusz Kaszyński, while two Jews served in the “Barabasz” unit of Marian Sołtysik, both operating in the Kielce area.<sup>19</sup> Salomon Ries served in the “Huragan” unit, also in the Kielce area.<sup>20</sup> Others joined a Home Army unit operating near Piotrków Trybunalski under the command of Stanisław Karliński (*nom de guerre* “Burza”).<sup>21</sup> A Jew who escaped from the ghetto in Ostrowiec was accepted into the Polish underground.<sup>22</sup> The Home Army spirited Pinkus Rozenchwajg and his family out of the Lublin ghetto and Dr. Rozenchwajg served as a medic in a Home Army unit until liberation.<sup>23</sup> Emanuel Singer of Lwów, a member of a special group whose task was to receive equipment dropped in from England, was one of several Jews accepted into the Home Army by Lieutenant Colonel Igancy Lubczyński, who has been recognized by Yad Vashem as a “Righteous Gentile.”<sup>24</sup> Other Jews from Lwów who served in the Home Army were Mosze Lawi, Miriam Friedman, Alina Grelewska, and Dr. Szymon Waszyc.<sup>25</sup> Dr. Julian Aleksandrowicz (“Twardy”), an escapee from the Kraków ghetto, rose to the rank of deputy commander of a Home Army unit near Kielce.<sup>26</sup> Two young Jewish men sheltered by villagers in Zdziebórz near Wyszaków were accepted into the Home Army.<sup>27</sup> Professor Szubert was taken in by a Home Army unit under Fajkowski (“Śmiały”).<sup>28</sup> After escaping from a labour camp in Jawiszowice, Józef Prim was nursed

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<sup>19</sup> Józef Halperin, *Ludzie są wszędzie* (Warsaw: ASPRA-JR, 2002), 244, 267.

<sup>20</sup> Aleksandra Bańkowska, “Partyzantka polska lat 1942–1944 w relacjach żydowskich,” in *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i materiały*, vol. 1 (2005): 153.

<sup>21</sup> “Pamięć o getcie w Piotrkowie,” *Związkowiec* (Toronto), January 23, 1992.

<sup>22</sup> Issy Hahn, *A Life Sentence of Memories: Konin, Auschwitz, London* (London and Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 2001), 36–43.

<sup>23</sup> Museum of Jewish Heritage, A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, *To Life: 36 Stories of Memory and Hope* (Boston, New York, and London: Bulfinch Press, 2002), 89–92. See also Gutman and Bender, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations*, volume 4: *Poland*, Part 1, 466.

<sup>24</sup> Krakowski, *The War of the Doomed*, 154; Charles Kotkowsky, *Remnants: Memoirs of a Survivor* (Montreal: Concordia University Chair in Canadian Jewish Studies, 2000), Internet: <<http://migs.concordia.ca/memoirs/kotkowsky/kotkowsky.html>>.

<sup>25</sup> Arnon Rubin, *Facts and Fiction about the Rescue of the Polish Jewry*, volume 5: *The Statistics of Destruction and Rescue* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2003), 57–71.

<sup>26</sup> Gutman and Bender, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations*, volumes 4 and 5: *Poland*, Part 1, 269 and Part 2, 946–47; Krystyna Samsonowska, “Pomoc dla Żydów krakowskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej,” in Andrzej Żbikowski, ed., *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945: Studia i materiały* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej–Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2006), 851–52; Aleksandra Bańkowska, “Partyzantka polska lat 1942–1944 w relacjach żydowskich,” in *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i materiały*, vol. 1 (2005): 153.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Rev. Zdzisław Król by Krystian Brodacki, “Musimy ich uszanować!” *Tygodnik Solidarność*, December 17, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Bartoszewski and Lewinówna, eds., *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*, 1028.



back to health in the “Sosieńka” detachment of the Home Army commanded by Jan Wawrzyczek and later served in that unit under the *nom de guerre* “Śrul.”<sup>29</sup>

Many Jews joined the ranks of the 27th Volhynia Division.<sup>30</sup> Some of the rescue activities of the Home Army in the Zamość region and Volhynia have been documented by Tadeusz Sztumberk-Rychter, a Home Army commander who accepted many Jews into his ranks.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Jews joined Polish self-defence units (created to fend off attacks by Ukrainian nationalists) in a number of Polish villages in the province of Volhynia where Jews took shelter. These outposts, which were connected to the Home Army, also protected Jewish families hiding in the forests.<sup>32</sup> Three Jews from Kobryń in Polesia (Polesie) joined Kedyw “Jur” detachment of the Home Army.<sup>33</sup> About forty Jews took refuge with Polish villagers in Hanaczów (about 40 kilometres east of Lwów) from repeated assaults by Germans and Ukrainian nationalists. At least a dozen Jews, led by Abram Baum, joined a Home Army unit based in that village, under the command of Sergeant Major Kazimierz Wojtowicz (“Głóg”) and, later, Lieutenant Paweł Jastrzębski (“Strzała”).<sup>34</sup> Several Jews joined a partisan group led by Zbigniew Morawski from Dolina near

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<sup>29</sup> Aleksandra Namysło, “Postawy mieszkańców rejencji katowickiej wobec ludności żydowskiej,” in Żbikowski, ed., *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945*, 792.

<sup>30</sup> Israeli historian Shmuel Spector estimates that as many as 200 to 300 Jews participated in the Polish partisan movement in Volhynia. See his *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews 1941–1944* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and The Federation of Volhynian Jews, 1990), 257–68. See also Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Europe*, 457–58.

<sup>31</sup> Stanisław Wroński and Maria Zwolakowa, *Polacy Żydzi 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1971), 264–66.

<sup>32</sup> Wroński and Zwolakowa, *Polacy Żydzi 1939–1945*, 265 (Pańska Dolina), 392 (Przebraże); Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews 1941–1944*, 251, 259–60, 266–67 (Huta Stepańska, Przebraże, Pańska Dolina, Kurdybań Warkowicki, Bortnica, Żeniówka); Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Europe*, 390 (Kurdybań, Pańska Dolina); Isaiah Trunk, *Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution: Collective and Individual Behavior in Extremis* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 250–52 (Kurdybań Warkowicki, Bortnica, Pańska Dolina, Żeniówka); Daniel Kac, *Koncert grany żywym* (Warsaw: Tu, 1998), 183 (Przebraże, Huta Stepańska). Compare with Władysław Siemaszko and Ewa Siemaszko, *Ludobójstwo dokonane przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na ludności polskiej Wołynia 1939–1945* (Warsaw: von borowiecky, 2000), volume 1, 60 (Bortnica), 92–94 (Pańska Dolina), 107–108 (Kurdybań Warkowicki), 109 (Ziniówka or Żeniówka), 284–93 (Huta Stepańska), 650–54 (Przebraże); Shmuel Krakowski, “The Polish Underground and the Jews in the Years of the Second World War,” in David Bankier and Israel Gutman, eds., *Nazi Europe and the Final Solution* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem The Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority and The International Institute for Holocaust Research, 2003), 226 (Pańska Dolina). About a dozen Jews escaped from Równe with the assistance of the Polish underground with whom they maintained contact. See the account of Isadore Hollander in Josey G. Fisher, *The Persistence of Youth: Oral Testimonies of the Holocaust* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1991), 115. The Home Army also furnished Jews with false identity documents.

<sup>33</sup> Czesław Hołub, *Okręg Poleski ZWZ-AK w latach 1939–1945: Zarys dziejów* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991), 123–24. A number of Jews also joined a Polish group, doubtless affiliated with the Home Army, in the vicinity of Pińsk. See Aleksandra Bańkowska, “Partyzantka polska lat 1942–1944 w relacjach żydowskich,” in *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i materiały*, vol. 1 (2005): 148–49.

<sup>34</sup> Jerzy Węgiński, *W lwowskiej Armii Krajowej* (Warsaw: Pax, 1989), 77–78, 147–48, 151–52, 201; Eliyahu Yones, *Smoke in the Sand: The Jews of Lvov in the War Years 1939–1944* (Jerusalem and New York: Gefen, 2004), 227–28 (there is a further reference to some Jews who joined the Polish partisan movement in the forests near Brody, at p. 219, and to some Jews who served in the Home Army in Lwów in the Polish edition of this book, Eliyahu Jones, *Żydzi Lwowa w okresie okupacji 1939–1945* (Łódź: Oficyna Bibliofilów, 1999), 203; Jolanta Chodorska, ed., *Godni synowie naszej Ojczyzny: Świadczenia nadesłane na apel Radia Maryja* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sióstr Loretanek, 2002), Part Two, 204–207; *Na Rubieży* (Wrocław), no. 1 (20) 1997: 21; *Na Rubieży* (Wrocław), no. 59 (2002): 18; *Na Rubieży* (Wrocław), no. 73 (2004): 6–22; Henryk Komański and Szczepan Siekierka, *Ludobójstwo dokonane przez*

Stryj.<sup>35</sup> Four members the Igiel (Igel) family—Stanley, his wife Lusia, his brother Martin, and his father Gustaw—joined a Home Army unit operating near Bircza, southwest of Przemyśl.<sup>36</sup> Another Jew who had joined the Home Army (as a doctor) in Eastern Poland was Bolesław Ałapin.<sup>37</sup> The exploits of Richard Kalinowicz, a Jew who led a Home Army unit near Sambor that assisted many Jews through its network of Polish rescuers, were described in a recently published book.<sup>38</sup> Additional cases have been documented by Yad Vashem<sup>39</sup> which has recognized Bronisław Krzyżanowski, a Home Army commander in the Wilno region, as a “Righteous Gentile.”<sup>40</sup> The aforementioned Józef Halperin mentions his Jewish friend Alek, from Łódź, who worked as an interpreter for the Germans in the Wilno area but also secretly joined the Home Army.<sup>41</sup>

The Home Army also provided significant assistance to the Jewish fighters of Warsaw, and even joined in the fighting on a number of occasions. Marek Edelman, the last surviving leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943, stated: “We didn’t get adequate help from the Poles, but without their help we couldn’t have started the uprising. ... You have to remember that the Poles themselves were short of arms. The guilty party is Nazism, fascism—not the Poles.”<sup>42</sup> Apart from the Jewish underground in the Warsaw

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*nacjonalistów ukraińskich na Polakach w województwie tarnopolskim 1939–1946* (Wrocław: Nortom, 2004), 286–90, 774–78, 789–91, 798–99; Dariusz Libionka, “ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP wobec eksterminacji Żydów polskich,” in Żbikowski, ed., *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945*, 112–13. The Home Army unit also cooperated with a Jewish partisan unit in that area. The leaders of the Jewish unit (Captain Fryderyk Staub “Proch”, Isaac Braun) were decorated for their valour by the head of the Lwów district of the Home Army, and the Wojtowicz brothers (Alojzy, Kazimierz, and Antoni), local Home Army members, were recognized by Yad Vashem as “Righteous Among the Nations.” See Shmuel Krakowski, “The Polish Underground and the Jews in the Years of the Second World War,” in Bankier and Gutman, eds., *Nazi Europe and the Final Solution*, 226; Gutman and Bender, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations*, volume 5: *Poland*, Part 2, 886–87.

<sup>35</sup> *Na Rubieży* (Wrocław), no. 35 (1999): 44.

<sup>36</sup> Account of Stanley and Lusia Igiel in John J. Hartman and Jacek Krochmal, eds., *I Remember Every Day...: The Fates of the Jews of Przemyśl during World War II* (Przemyśl: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Przemyślu; Ann Arbor, Michigan: Remembrance & Reconciliation Inc., 2002), 63.

<sup>37</sup> Heather Laskey, *Night Voices: Heard in the Shadow of Hitler and Stalin* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 147.

<sup>38</sup> Irene Tomaszewski and Tecia Werbowksi, *Zegota: The Rescue of Jews in Wartime Poland* (Montreal: Price-Patterson, 1994), 144–51, and the second revised edition, Irene Tomaszewski and Tecia Werbowksi, *Zegota: The Council for Aid to Jews in Occupied Poland, 1942–1945* (Montreal: Price-Patterson, 1999), 134–40.

<sup>39</sup> Gutman and Bender, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations*, volumes 4 and 5: *Poland*, Part 1, 171 (David Czaczkes-Akselbrad), 176 (Gomoliński), 411–12 (Eliasz Baran), 449–50 (Michael Szerman); Part 2, 755 (Czesław and Józef Pankowski).

<sup>40</sup> Gutman and Bender, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations*, volume 4: *Poland*, Part 1, 411–12. Eliasz Baran was one of the Jews who fought under his command. See also Bronisław Krzyżanowski, *Wileński matecznik 1939–1944: Z dziejów “Wachlarza” i Armii Krajowej* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1979), 137–53.

<sup>41</sup> Halperin, *Ludzie są wszędzie*, 157.

<sup>42</sup> Sheldon Kirshner, “Warsaw Ghetto commander forgives tormentors,” *The Canadian Jewish News*, November 9, 1989. For detailed information about Polish assistance to the Warsaw ghetto insurgents, see Władysław Bartoszewski, *The Blood Shed Unites Us: Pages from the History of Help to the Jews in Occupied Poland* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1970), 131–52; Stefan Korboński, *The Jews and the Poles in World War II* (New York: Hippocrene, 1989), 56–62;

ghetto, which was the largest recipient of arms from the Home Army, Jewish partisans in other parts of Poland also received weapons and other forms of material assistance from the Home Army, e.g., in Białystok and the Białystok area,<sup>43</sup> in Czortków near Tarnopol,<sup>44</sup> and in Drupia near Siedlce.<sup>45</sup> According to Miles Lerman, Jewish and Polish partisans “fought shoulder to shoulder” against Ukrainian nationalist factions that attacked Polish villages in the vicinity of Lwów:<sup>46</sup> “We were in good working relationship with the AK, with the Armia Krajowa ... In our area, we were allies.”<sup>47</sup>

None of the scores of published memoirs by Jews who served in the Home Army substantiate the claim that the Home Army’s goal was to rid Poland of the Jews. A Jew who survived with the help of Poles in Eastern Galicia recalled vividly the notice he had read in *Ziemia Czerwieńska*, the underground newspaper published by the Home Army in that region, warning Poles against helping the Germans track down Jews: those who were doing this would be punished in free Poland after the war.<sup>48</sup> A Home Army commander in

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Irene Tomaszewski, “Poles helped Jews in uprising,” *The Toronto Star*, April 16, 1993; *The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Poles: The Untold Story* (9<sup>th</sup> edition, November 2002), posted on the Internet at: <[http://www.kpk.org/english/toronto/ghetto\\_revolt.pdf](http://www.kpk.org/english/toronto/ghetto_revolt.pdf)>. There are also numerous published accounts attesting to various forms of aid given to escapees from the ghetto. See, for example, Wroński and Zwolakowa, *Polacy Żydzi 1939–1945*, 399; and Tomaszewski and Werbowski, *Zegota*, 125–27, and *Zegota*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 116–18. See also Paulsson, *Secret City*, passim.

<sup>43</sup> Waldemar Monkiewicz, “Za cenę życia: O ratowaniu Żydów w Białostockiem o okresie okupacji niemieckiej,” in Adam Dobroński and Waldemar Monkiewicz, eds., *Białostoccy Żydzi*, volume 2 (Białystok: Instytut Historii Filii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego w Białymstoku, 1997), 153–55; Chaika Grossman, *The Underground Army: Fighters of the Bialystok Ghetto* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1987), 381; Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 184; Martin Gilbert, *The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2003), 5.

<sup>44</sup> Jones, *Żydzi Lwowa w okresie okupacji 1939–1945*, 198.

<sup>45</sup> Aleksandra Bańkowska, “Partyzantka polska lat 1942–1944 w relacjach żydowskich,” in *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i materiały*, vol. 1 (2005): 152.

<sup>46</sup> Miles Lerman, “Sens życia,” *Newsweek* (Warsaw), March 31, 2002, cited in Adam Puławski, “Postrzeżenie żydowskich oddziałów partyzanckich przez Armię Krajową i Delegaturę Rządu RP na Kraj,” *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, no. 2 (2003): 297 n.87.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Miles Lerman, dated July 17, 2001, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 85–86.

<sup>48</sup> Samuel Drix, *Witness to Annihilation: Surviving the Holocaust—A Memoir* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 1994), 192. Another Jew who served with the Home Army in that region, posing as a Christian Pole, stated: “I did not hear about any [negative] instructions concerning Jews.” See Yitzhak Sternberg, *Under Assumed Identity* (Israel: Hakibbutz-Hameuchad Publishing House and Ghetto Fighters’ House, 1986), 103. Two other Jews who served in the Home Army in Eastern Galicia made no mention of Polish partisans attacking Jews: Shlomo Berger in Ronald J. Berger, *Constructing a Collective Memory of the Holocaust: A Life History of Two Brothers’ Survival* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995), 57–58; and Tadeusz Vogel Jaworski in Michał Maryniarczyk, “Ja cię przechowam! Konspekt scenariusza filmu dokumentalnego,” *punkt.ca*, no. 5–6 (2006): 10–11.

A Jew who passed as a Pole in Olsztyn near Częstochowa, and was accepted into the Home Army despite the knowledge of his background, recalled a stern admonition he heard from one of the town’s leading figures at a meeting of their circle: “It was in the spring of 1943 ... Among the conservatives gathered there was a Mr. Ziemba, an ultra-rightist and a venomous anti-Semite. As usual, the conversation turned to the Jewish tragedy and the position of each participant there reflected his or her political views. There was no outright gloating over the fate of the Jews ... Mr. [Tadeusz] Jackowski interrupted Ziemba’s diatribe with the following words, which made such an impression on me that even after all these years I can still recall what he said almost verbatim: ‘Mr. Ziemba,’ he said, ‘you should be ashamed of yourself. This was absolute roguery. What you did was not patriotic, it was just the opposite. ... We, and our friends around the table here, have had enough of your ‘patriotism,’ I’m sure.’ Total silence followed Mr.

Tomaszów Lubelski near the Bełżec death camp also issued an order to his subordinates in December 1942 to punish those assisting the Germans in hunting down Jews.<sup>49</sup> A known attack on a Jewish partisan group operating near Koniecpol, to the east of Częstochowa, which maintained good relations with the local population, resulted in the court-martial and execution of the local Home Army leader responsible for the crime.<sup>50</sup>

Szymon Datner, a historian at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, noted that in 1943 the Polish underground authorities set up a special, accelerated investigative and legal apparatus to deal with those who preyed on Jews and issued more than seventy death sentences in Warsaw alone, most of which were carried out.<sup>51</sup> It is also worth noting that there is no record of Poles protesting such disciplinary measures—a sure sign that Polish public opinion, on the whole, censured the activities of the criminal margin of Polish society. Moreover, as the discussion in Part Three will show, the oft-repeated charge that Home Army Commander Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski's Order 116, which did not even mention Jews, unleashed a merciless war against Jews in the forests under the cover of fighting banditry, has been effectively discredited by historians.

Simon Wiesenthal, one of the many Jewish beneficiaries of Home Army assistance, has stated that, in his estimation, the Polish underground was amongst the most important and bravest in Europe. Not only did they find shelters for his wife, but they also provided him with two pistols and helped to hide him after he escaped from a forced labour camp in Lwów, and later accepted him into their ranks.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, instances of

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Jackowski's reprimand." See Frank Morgens, *Years at the Edge of Existence: War Memoirs 1939–1945* (Lanham, Maryland: The University Press of America, 1996), 138–39. Florian Majewski (Moshe Lajbcygier), who survived the war in central Poland (near Sulejów) as a member of the Home Army (as part of a unit that pursued collaborators), does not record any activities by the Home Army directed at Jews. See Florian Mayevski with Spencer Bright, *Flame without Smoke: The Memoirs of a Polish Partisan* (London and Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), 81–117.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Adam Puławski, "Postrzeżenie żydowskich oddziałów partyzanckich przez Armię Krajową i Delegaturę Rządu RP na Kraj," *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, no. 2 (2003): 294.

<sup>50</sup> Iranek-Osmecki, *He Who Saves One Life*, 261–62. An example of a criminal group in the Chełm area parading around as Home Army partisans and robbing both Poles and Jews is found in Barbara Stanisławczyk, *Czterdzieści twardych* (Warsaw: ABC, 1997), 161–62. The leaders of this gang were executed by the Home Army. On the other hand, scores of murders of Jews by the Communist People's Guard/People's Army (Gwardia Ludowa/Armia Ludowa) went unpunished. See Tadeusz Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic, 1918–1947* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1998), 104–105; Marek J. Chodakiewicz, Piotr Gontarczyk and Leszek Żebrowski, eds., *Tajne oblicze GL-AL i PPR: Dokumenty* (Warsaw: Burchard Edition, 1997), volume 2, 43–71, and volume 3, 13–15, 221–22. In Stalinist Poland, there were few obstacles standing in the path of wartime denuncers, common criminals and former Gestapo collaborators making a career for themselves in the security police and other state offices. See, for example, Stanisławczyk, *Czterdzieści twardych*, 262–64.

<sup>51</sup> Szymon Datner, *Las sprawiedliwych: Karta z dziejów ratownictwa Żydów w okupowanej Polsce* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1968), 30. See also Korboński, *The Jews and the Poles in World War II*, 50–51; Leszek Gondek, *Polska karząca 1939–1945: Polski podziemny wymiar sprawiedliwości w okresie okupacji niemieckiej* (Warsaw: Pax, 1988), 61–63, 123; Teresa Prekerowa, *Zegota: Commission d'aide aux Juifs* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1999), 228–54.

<sup>52</sup> Hella Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal: A Life in Search of Justice* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996), 12–13; Alan Levy, *The Wiesenthal File* (London: Constable, 1993), 49–53; Alison Leslie Gold, *Fiet's Vase and Other Stories of Survival: Europe 1939–1945* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2003), 182–88.

unit leaders and individual members of the Home Army assisting Jews are so plentiful that it would be difficult to compile a comprehensive register of such cases.<sup>53</sup> Wiesenthal added: “No Jew who survived in Poland during the war could have done so without at least some small measure of assistance from a Pole.”

No wonder Adam Michnik, a Pole of Jewish origin and editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland’s leading daily, called Yaffa Eliach’s *New York Times* article “an affront to all those who fought for a free, democratic and just Poland.” Michnik goes on to state that Eliach’s generalizations are “outrageous and unworthy of a professional historian.” He also reminds his readers that the Home Army faced two deadly enemies—Hitler and Stalin—and that the NKVD (National Commissariat for Internal Affairs, i.e., the Soviet state security organ and predecessor of the KGB) imprisoned and murdered Home Army soldiers with calculated cruelty. He takes Eliach to task for seemingly not knowing what the NKVD was all about.<sup>54</sup>

It is particularly sad that Eliach has decided to stand with those who promote hatred and division. Her suggestion that the Poles’ anti-Semitism is a root cause of the Holocaust is an outrageous attempt to shift the blame for one of the worst crimes in history onto a people who, after the Jews, suffered more under Nazism than anyone else. Polish North Americans have been deeply hurt by the continuing attempts of a small minority to place the blame for the Holocaust on Poland, and to teach this version of history in their schools. They are dismayed that so few non-Poles have come forward to challenge these slanders.

Worried about her credibility and determined to bolster a story whose deficiencies were becoming only too apparent, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., was enlisted to host a rather

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<sup>53</sup> One such Home Army leader in the Łuków region (north of Lublin) was Captain Waclaw Rejmak (*nom de guerre* “Ostoja”), who provided assistance to a large group of Jews hiding in the forest. Another was Lieutenant Konrad Bartoszewski (*nom de guerre* “Wir”), the commander of the Home Army district of Józefów Biłgorajski, who helped Jews hiding in the Sól forest (Puszcza Solska). See Wroński and Zwolakowa, *Polacy Żydzi 1939–1945*, 267. In the county of Kopyczyńce, in Tarnopol province, the regional Home Army set up a special cell charged with helping Jews; it provided them with false identity documents and arms for a self-defence unit operating in the Baworowszczyzna estate. See Jerzy Julian Szewczyński, *Nasze Kopyczyńce* (Malbork: Heldruk, 1995), 99; Jarosław Abramow-Newerly, *Nawiało nam burzę* (Warsaw: Twój Styl, 2000), 115–16. In Tarnawica Polna near Tłumacz, in Stanisławów province, the local Home Army unit engineered the escape of two Jews from a transport of Jews being led through the village and provided them with false identities and shelter for the duration of the war. See Ryszard Brykowski, “Wieś Tarnawica Polna w powiecie tłumackim i zapomniana placówka AK,” in Krzysztof Jasiewicz, ed., *Europa nieprovincjonalna: Przemiany na ziemiach wschodnich dawnej Rzeczypospolitej (Białoruś, Litwa, Łotwa, Ukraina, wschodnie pogranicze III Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) w latach 1772–1999* (Warsaw and London: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Rytm, and Polonia Aid Foundation Trust, 1999), 621. A large group of Jews (more than a score) was sheltered by a Home Army unit headed by Władysław Molenda (“Grab”). See >>>. Examples of assistance to Jews provided by Home Army members in the Wilno region are found in Tomaszewski and Werbowski, *Zegota*, 33, 118, and *Zegota*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 34, 110; Krzyżanowski, *Wileński matecznik 1939–1944*, 158–60. The assistance provided by Home Army members in Mława and Gorlice is described in, respectively, Ryszard Juszkiewicz, *Losy Żydów mławskich w okresie II-jej wojny światowej* (Mława: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Ziemi Mławskiej, 1994), 117, 120–21, and Władysław Boczoń, *Żydzi gorliccy* (Gorlice: n.p., 1998), 139–40, 147. The extensive assistance provided by Marian Halicki, a Home Army member in Lwów, is described in Sam Halpern, *Darkness and Hope* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1996), 165–68. Gitel Hopfeld credits Grzegorz Kwiatkowski, a local Home Army leader in Kraczewice near Opole Lubelskie, with sheltering her for the last year of the war. See Gitel Hopfeld, *At the Mercy of Strangers: Survival in Nazi Occupied Poland* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 2005), 2, 94–100. Many Jewish sources provide information about Home Army cells in and around Warsaw who sheltered Jews, for example: Michael Zylberberg, *A Warsaw Diary, 1939–1945* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1969), 110–11; Michał Głowiński, *Czarne sezony* (Warsaw: Open, 1998), 86. For additional accounts see Aleksandra Bańkowska, “Partyzantka polska lat 1942–1944 w relacjach żydowskich,” in *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i materiały*, vol. 1 (2005): 151–53.

<sup>54</sup> Adam Michnik, “Bezrozum fanatyzmu,” *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Warsaw), August 8, 1996.

disappointing lecture on September 5, 1996, at which Eliach repeated her—now somewhat altered—charges that the Polish government in exile had given the Home Army the order to remove *all Russians* and Jews from Poland. Curiously, the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles (though not the headquarters in Austria) also mobilized its resources in support of this cause. In the summer–fall 1996 issue of *Response: The Wiesenthal Center World Report*, under the heading “Rewriting History?” one can read this bizarre news commentary:

Of greater concern is the confirmation that Polish authorities have been involved in questioning the credibility of renowned historian and educator, Yaffa Eliach. Despite denials, Senior Correspondent, Richard Z. Chesnoff of *U.S. News & World Report* confirms that the Polish Ministry of Justice had announced an official investigation into the deaths of Eliach’s mother and baby brother at the hands of uniformed Armia Krajowa (Polish Underground) on October 20, 1944.

That the investigation and documentation of a crime undertaken by the Main Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against the Polish Nation, whose activities are by no means secret, should pose a threat to anyone is rather difficult to fathom. Even more bizarre is the charge that stems from the fact that a spokesperson for the Home Army had the audacity to take issue with Eliach’s account. This is automatically presumed, by the Wiesenthal Center in California, to be proof of an attempt to “rewrite” history and a cause for international alarm.

Subsequently, a seeming breakthrough occurred in April 1997, at a joint Polish-Jewish panel discussion on *Shtetl* at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. In the face of the overwhelming documentary evidence compiled on this topic by Poles, both the Polish and Jewish participants agreed that there had been no pogrom in Ejszyski. Undeterred, however, Eliach has continued to push her story about a “pogrom at Eishyshok.”<sup>55</sup> The media who oblige her, with few exceptions, refuse to run replies to her allegations.

The next round was the publication in October 1998 (by the prestigious publishing house of Little, Brown & Company) of Eliach’s long-announced book, *There Once Was a World: A Nine-Hundred-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok*, which repeated and enlarged on her previous charges. Its publication was heralded by the customary outpouring of laudatory reviews by critics who accepted her at her word and did not delve into her “scholarship.” Eliach’s book even became a finalist for the 1998 U.S. National Book

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<sup>55</sup> For example, in the summer of 1997, she gave a lecture entitled, “Lessons from the Holocaust” at the Chautauqua Institution in Chautauqua, New York, which was produced for broadcast by Public Radio Station WQLN-FM, in Erie, Pennsylvania. After summarily dismissing the criticism her account had received from Polish sources (“You can’t believe the attacks on me in the United States and Poland”), she repeated many of her previous charges and expanded on some of them. For Eliach, whose self-avowed mission is to teach history to the Poles, (though not for any serious scholar of the Holocaust), it is also an open question as to why the Nazi death camps were all built in conquered Poland, the implicit suggestion being that it had something to do with the attitude of the Poles themselves. While Eliach repeatedly claims that her intention is to use the Holocaust to teach “goodness,” her treatment of Poles and her selectivity in recounting historical facts belie those alleged intentions. She has found eager allies, however, in the American media and, in particular, has expressed her gratitude to the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Daily News*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and PBS for their support.

Award. But there were also unfavourable reviews—though far fewer in number—by those who were more versed in the subject matter. (Some of these are cited later on.)

### ***A Selective and Erratic Historian***

Yaffa Eliach, who is touted by some of her supporters as one of the foremost Holocaust historians, has made highly dubious claims about various aspects of the history of Ejszyszki. She has claimed repeatedly that hers was one of the five families who founded the town in the 11th century (precisely in the year 1061, according to one version), and that Jews have lived there for approximately 900 years.<sup>56</sup> According to Lithuanian chronicles, the town was founded in 1065 by a legendary Lithuanian military commander who received the lands from a Lithuanian prince after they were reconquered from Kievan Rus. The first record of Jews (Karaites) emigrating to Lithuania and settling in Ejszyszki is from the mid-twelfth century.<sup>57</sup> It is therefore unlikely in the extreme that the town was co-founded by Jews. How Eliach was able to trace her family lineage to those obscure times is in itself a marvel.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, much of Eliach's scholarship unrelated to the narrow issue of shtetl life<sup>59</sup> (a topic which this author is not in a position to properly assess) is rather shoddy. She simply does not know basic historical facts and her book is rife with error. The ruler of Kievan Rus is referred to as a "Russian"—rather than Ruthenian—prince. (*There Once Was a World*, 16.) Marshal Józef Piłsudski is referred to as the "president" of the Polish Republic (ibid., 561), a position he never held. The Wilno region was supposedly "ceded" by Poland to Lithuania at the end of October 1939, rather than assigned to Lithuania by the Soviet Union. (Ibid., 566.) A photo showing a parade is captioned "Polish Independence Day, May 3"—instead of

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, "A Tower of Faces, A Tower of Life," *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Newsletter*, March 1991; and Susan Brenna, "'The Beauty of the Life that Was Taken,'" *New York Newsday*, March 7, 1991.

<sup>57</sup> Jews arrived in Ejszyszki in the year 1171, according to Filip Sulimierski, Bronisław Chlebowski, and Władysław Walewski, *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich* (Warsaw, 1881), 2: 319; and in 1145, according to an article in the *Encyklopedia Powszechna* of 1883—see Nancy Schoenberg and Stuart Schoenberg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1991), 95.

<sup>58</sup> In *There Once Was a World*, Eliach at times appears to back away from some of her outlandish historical claims (pp. 16–19), only to revert to them later on (p. 255). She makes no effort to trace her ancestry to those remote times, but relies essentially on legend.

<sup>59</sup> From time to time Eliach discloses some interesting information about the Jewish community in Ejszyszki which tends to undermine her thesis that they were simply a powerless and downtrodden group, always at the mercy of hostile Gentiles. We learn, for example, that on market days during the mid-1930s, members of Beitar, a Zionist paramilitary organization, assisted the Polish police in keeping order and fought off violent attacks by local communists, who were for the most part Jews. Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 509. There was also a local Jewish underground gang of arsonists known as *padpalshchiki*, the "firestarters," who torched houses and then stole the valuables that were salvaged from the flames. The volunteer fire department consisted of both Poles and Jews. Ibid., 325, 563. The Kiuchefski family, apparently one of the few Jewish families in Ejszyszki who supported the 19th century Polish rebellions against Tsarist rule, obtained valuable privileges (concessions, it seems) from the newly restored Polish government after World War I. Ibid., 53. Indeed, it appears that the Jewish community had many affluent members and, economically, fared better than the Christian population. Some Jews conducted lucrative illegal activities such as smuggling saccharine from Lithuania in order to undercut the Polish state monopoly. See Ellen Livingston, *Tradition and Modernism in the Shtetl: Aisheshuk, 1919–1939. An Oral History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 61. This author also describes the activities of the local Jewish underworld, a "Sholom Aleichem-type mafia" that engaged in arson, horse thievery, blackmail, and various other criminal activities. Ibid., 90–91.

“Constitution Day.” (Ibid., 56.) Allegedly, “no AK members fought alongside the Jews” during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. (Ibid., 613.) The author is even confused about important dates, such as when World War II started, when the Home Army was formed, or when the Warsaw Uprising began. (Ibid., 678, 613.)

Neither Eliach’s *There Once Was a World* nor the Ejszyszki memorial book presents any evidence that relations between Poles and Jews in the interwar period were other than peaceful.<sup>60</sup> However, one would be

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<sup>60</sup> There are numerous Jewish accounts that attest to the fact that relations between Poles and Jews in this region were, on the whole, rather favourable, especially in small towns. In Olkieniki, where many Jews played on the local soccer team, “Relations between the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors were generally correct. Friendly relations developed with some of the peasants in the nearby villages.” See Shmuel Spector, ed., *Lost Jewish Worlds: The Communities of Grodno, Lida, Olkieniki, Vishay* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), 232. In Marcinkańce, a small town near the Lithuanian border, which was inhabited mostly by Poles and Jews, “By and large, the economic life of the Jews was prosperous. ... The attitude of the Christian population towards their Jewish neighbors was friendly.” See L. Koniuchowsky, “The Liquidation of the Jews of Marcinkonis: A Collective Report,” *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 8 (1953): 206, 208. In Dowgaliszki, a small rural community near Raduń inhabited mostly by Jews: “The road from Radun to Dowgalishok ran through villages and estates owned by Poles. Normally the way was peaceful, and when I was alone with my brother, there was almost no antagonism towards us. ... the people were not hostile. Sometimes we would get a lift from a farmer with a wagon going towards Dowgaliszok and back. Many farmers of the neighborhood knew us as the children of the blacksmith, and they would invite us to join them on their wagons.” See Avraham Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok: The Massacre at Radun and Eishishok* (Lomndon and Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), 18–19. In Oszmiana, “Jewish farms and villages were scattered like tiny islands in the sea of the native peasants. Yet between the two communities there were good neighbourly relations, there was even friendliness towards each other.” See Moshea Becker (Ra’Anana), “Jewish Farmers in Oshmana,” in M. Gelbart, ed., *Sefer Zikaron le-kehilat Oshmana* (Tel Aviv: Oshmaner Organization and the Oshmaner Society in the U.S.A., 1969), 22; an English translation is posted on the Internet at: <[www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Oshmyany/Oshmyany.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Oshmyany/Oshmyany.html)>. In Brasław, near the Latvian border, “On the whole relations between the Braslaw Jews and the peasants were normal, even friendly.” See Ariel Machnes and Rina Klinov, eds., *Darkness and Desolation: In Memory of the Communities of Braslaw, Dubene, Jaisi, Jod, Kisłowszczizna, Okmienic, Opsa, Plusy, Rimszan, Slobodka, Zamosz, Zaracz* (Tel Aviv: Association of Braslaw and Surroundings in Israel and America and Ghetto Fighters’ House and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 1986), 615. In Zdzięcioł, “we were living mixed with them [Christians]. And we were always, always friendly and so did they. ... In our little town, I would say [there was no anti-Semitism] because we had actions [dealings] with the Polish priest. He was very, very good to us ... he never let anything to with the anti-semitism or whatever. Sure there was, you know, but basically as a whole we had none. I didn’t feel it.” See Interview with Sonia Heidocovsky Zissman, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, May 25, 1995, 2. Miriam Levitan (Rosenberg) and Pnina Hayit (Potashnik) have fond memories of the Polish state schools in Wołożyn and the vast majority of the teachers: “The Powshekhna [*Powszczehna*, i.e., Public] School contained some 400 students ... One third of them were Jewish. ... Polish was the official school language. Rabbi Ele-Itskhok Shvartsberg ... taught the Jewish students religion classes (the Bible). ... The learning level was high. The teachers were excellent. ... At the beginning a liberal attitude prevailed ... The Commerce High School was created in 1934 ... Professor Zhookovski [Zukowski] from Vilna [Wilno], physician by profession served as its manager [director]. He was liberal with a positive attitude towards Jewish students. ... The teachers [at the Polish high school] were highly professional; most of them liberal, they did not show anti-Semite feelings. Except the Polish language teacher Mr. Protasevitsh [Protasewicz] ...” See Miriam Levitan (Rosenberg) and Pnina Hayit (Potashnik), “Polish Schools in Volozhin,” in E. Leoni, ed., *Wolozin: The Book of the City and of the Eitz Hayyim Yeshiva*, posted on the Internet at: <[www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/volozhin/volozhin.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/volozhin/volozhin.html)>; translation of *Wolozin: Sefer shel ha-ir ve-shel yeshivat “Ets Hayim”* (Tel Aviv: Former Residents of Wolozin in Israel and the USA, 1970), 451 ff. Leon Berkowicz, who hails from Baranowicze and was the son of a “successful businessman ... well respected in the timber industry,” recalls: “I attended a Polish government [high] school and although social contact was almost non-existent, nobody was handicapped because of his origin or his religion. The Jewish boys excelled academically, but if they were usually first in maths and science they were nearly always last in sports. Physical education was a low priority in Jewish upbringing. Somehow, I was an exception and ... the sports-master always gave me top marks. ... I was very proud when the captain from the 78<sup>th</sup> Polish infantry regiment asked me to join their soccer team and play for them in Wilno ... I had two Christian friends at school ... Our relationship was based on mutual respect and understanding. On a few occasions I went to their homes and they came to mine; I had the impression that the parents of both sides raised their eyebrows.” See Leon Berk, *Destined to Live: Memoirs of a Doctor with the Russian Partisans* (Melbourne: Paragon Press, 1992), 3–4. For a study of Polish-Jewish relations in the Wilno region in the interwar period see Jarosław Wołkonowski, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Wilnie i na Wileńszczyźnie 1919–1939* (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2004).



hard pressed to find much information about the actual state of relations with Poles in those books. Some of the problems with her approach were identified in one of the first reviews of her opus, published in the New York *Forward* (November 6, 1998), under the telling title “Can a Redemptive Elegy Also Be a Work of History?” David G. Roskies, who teaches at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, made the following observations:

Ms. Eliach’s chronicle of Eishyshok is virtually *goyimrein*, even though non-Jews made up 35% of the total pre-war population. 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 ... Nothing a gentile has ever written or spoken about the *shtetl* has any bearing whatsoever.

Therefore, we need to look to other sources to fill in these important gaps. Based on extensive interviews with former Jewish residents of Ejszyszki, oral historian Ellen Livingston writes:

Survivors of Aisheshuk [Ejszyszki] almost unanimously claim that relations with the local Gentiles were “good” to “excellent.” ...

The relationship between Jews and Catholic peasants was essentially an economic one, and thus, of necessity, favorable. As one resident put it, “In general, the Gentile people and the Jewish people in Aisheshuk were very friendly, because they needed each other. He had to buy in your store; you had to buy potatoes from his garden. We needed each other. We lived together.” Another Aisheshker found relations with the Christians “not so bad. Where I used to live in Aisheshuk the neighbors were Gentiles. We used to be close to them like you have a neighbor near your house. When I was there, we had a good relationship.” In sum, “we used to live nice with the Polish people.” One resident plainly asserted that “the relations between the Gentile and the Jew in the shtetl of Aisheshuk were excellent.” ...

Furthermore, Jewish children who attended the Polish [state] school often befriended Polish children, though most claimed that all their close friends were Jews. “I used to go to school with them. They used to treat us the same, the same way,” one woman recalled. “In fact, they used to go on Saturdays to school. The Jewish kids, we didn’t go in Saturdays, so we used to get the homework from them, to make up for Monday.”

Relations with the local authorities generally assumed a similarly cordial tone. “The government management in the small towns—you could get along with them. You could get along with them very well because they always took smear, you know? And that would solve all the problems. Even with the police chief there wasn’t any problems.” Another resident agreed: “We had all kinds of *vuyts* [*wójt*, township mayor]. Sometimes you had a liberal man and sometimes you had an anti-semitic. The majority were not bad.” Likewise, the Jews patronized a local Polish lawyer, the Polish doctor, and entrusted their babies to a Gentile midwife. ...

Most residents, even after the Holocaust, recalled such tensions as isolated and exceptional occurrences. No one could recall a pogrom or ever hearing about a past pogrom from parents or grandparents. No one was ever afraid to walk on the streets alone at any hour of the night. No one could recall any blood libels. In fact, one resident noted that the farmers ate almost as much *matzoh* as the Jews during Passover because “they used to think it was a holy bread.” Most residents only recalled the Gentiles coming into the main *shul* [synagogue] on *Kol Nidre* evening at the start of Yom Kippur to marvel at the musical skill of the *chazzan* [cantor] and his choir. “They were giving respect for this night,” one resident said.<sup>61</sup>

Interviewed in 1996, a former Jewish resident of Ejszyszki recalled:

Q: Did you have Polish friends, did your family have contact with Polish people?

A: Yes. It used to, first of all we had school. We had to get the homework for Saturday to prepare for Monday. So we was with them, in contact. They used to live, they were all neighbors, not far

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<sup>61</sup> Livingston, *Tradition and Modernism in the Shtetl*, 94–97. Some of Livingston’s interlocutors go on to describe a marked increase in anti-Semitism from 1936, after the death (in 1935) of Poland’s dictator, Marshal Józef Piłsudski. It is important to note her empirical refutation of historian Celia Heller’s very gloomy portrayal of the state of the Jewish community in interwar Poland (expounded in *On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1977]): “The evidence suggests that most of the Jews of Aisheshuk felt that latter-day anti-Semitism was something qualitatively different from the attitude held by the Gentiles toward them under Piłsudski, and even earlier. In the earlier years of the interwar period ... most Aisheshker viewed their Gentile neighbors as cordial—albeit distant—members of a different society. Their paths crossed only when necessary, but did so pleasantly. Heller’s definition of the Jewish culture of the period molded directly by constant fear of persecution and an omnipresent atmosphere of anti-Semitism simply does not accord with the facts. Changes in Jewish lifestyle in those years were the result of a number of factors—economic, physical, political. Anti-Semitism, which encouraged the Jewish desire to found a homeland in Palestine, was only one among many such factors. The final refutation of Heller’s thesis, however, comes from a close analysis of communal life in Aisheshuk in the interwar years. Anti-Semitism and fears of persecution did not give way to the societal decay Heller describes. Despite fragmentation and a discernible generation gap, the community, as we have seen, remained a cohesive, ‘tenacious social organization.’” *Ibid.*, 98–99.

Moreover, most of the violence in Ejszyszki appeared to be politically based and not carried out by the Poles. The Jewish community library “was the ‘bone of contention’ and constant battleground of the two camps: the Hebrews and the Yiddishists. Meetings for the election of the library management often ended in blows. Torn shirts and bloody noses were a frequent result of this language battle.” See Livingston, *Tradition and Modernism in the Shtetl*, 66. “The Communists considered the government of Poland their enemy, and made violent attacks on the Polish police. When members of Betar assisted the Polish police on market day during the mid 1930s, the Communists sometimes fought with them, too. Occasionally hostilities spilled over into other venues, including, at least once, the synagogue.” See Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 509. Indeed, violent street brawls among various Jewish student, political and cultural factions (including Zionists, Bundists, and Communists), disruption of each other’s meetings, and ransacking of their opponent’s premises were a constant feature of the increasingly radicalized interwar period. See Daniel Pater, “Żydowski Akademicki Ruch Korporacyjny w Polsce w latach 1898–1939,” *Dzieje Najnowsze*, no. 3 (2002): 12–16; Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918–1955: Współmieszenie—Zagłada—komunizm* (Warsaw: Fronda, 2000), 91–96 (various localities); Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, eds., *Wokół Jedwabnego* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej–Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2002), volume 2, 269 (Radziłów); David Shtokfish, ed., *Sefer-yizkor Ostrow-Lubelski—Yisker bukh Ostrow-Lubelski* (Israel: Association of Former Residents of Ostrow-Lubelski in Israel, 1987), account of Mechi (Mischa) Eckhaus, posted on the Internet at: <<http://nizkor.org/hweb/places/poland/ostrow/>> (Ostrów Lubelski); Naftali Dov Fuss, *The Imposter* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 1992), 35–36 (Tarnów); Jack Pomerantz and Lyric Wallwork Winik, *Run East: Flight from the Holocaust* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 12 (Radzyń Podlaski). In Brańsk, reportedly “‘there was no Saturday or holiday that passed without a fight.’ Party meetings were disrupted by the acolytes of all the other parties, and resulted in ‘bloody fights’ that spilled into the streets.” See Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 180–81.

from us. And the parents, my father used to make work for the people, for the Polish people, so he knew them, a lot of them. ...

Q: So you had decent relationships?

A: Yes, yes, I wouldn't say no, yes. They used to come, every place was like a market, they used to come, the Polish people, to sell things like eggs, butter, cheeses, food, all kinds of things and we used to buy from them, a lot of things.

Q: So you weren't afraid of them?

A: No, no, no. We used to live with them fairly, you know, I would say, close with them.

Q: One more question, do you remember, certain things your parents taught you, values, or when you were being abused in school, what did they teach you, how did they help you?

A: Well it wasn't really abuse like in the school, they never talked about it, they never talked about it. In the beginning we was going to a Hebrew school, so it was only Jewish people ... But then when I went to the Polish school, they was nice too, the Polish teachers, they were nice. They didn't never see the difference between a Jew or a Polish student, we was the same by them.<sup>62</sup>

At the same time, the Jewish community lived to a large extent in isolation from the surrounding Polish population, except for business dealings and occasional personal contacts. Leon Kahn (Leib Kaganowicz), who hailed from a Yiddish-speaking environment and, like most Jewish children, attended a Jewish school attached to the synagogue in Ejszyszki, recalled:

There, with all the other Jewish children of the town, I learned my lessons in Hebrew. Polish, the language of all the countryside around Eisiskes, was only taught for a couple of hours each week as if it was a foreign language. Within our tight little community we could manage with very little command of Polish, but by paying so little attention to the language of the country, we isolated ourselves even more from its people.<sup>63</sup>

Separation was not something that was imposed by the Poles or the Polish authorities. As an oral history of Ejszyszki succinctly summed it up,

Whatever other identities they had, Aisheshker considered themselves Jews above all else, and they looked upon their town, at rock bottom, as a *Jewish* town. ...

The Jews of Aisheshuk persistently thought of themselves as morally and intellectually superior to the Catholic farmers in the area—a belief sometimes shared by the peasants themselves.

Chauvinism served as a binding force in the Jewish community of Aisheshuk.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Dora Kramen Dimitro, Transcript of oral history interview by Randy Goldman, July 18, 1996, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

<sup>63</sup> Leon Kahn (as told to Marjorie Morris), *No Time to Mourn: A True Story of a Jewish Partisan Fighter* (Vancouver: Laurelton Press, 1978), 13–14.

<sup>64</sup> Livingston, *Tradition and Modernism in the Shtetl*, 68, 85. The claim that Catholic farmers viewed the Jews as *morally* superior is highly dubious.

The Jews' separation and aloofness was often quite apparent. Rarely did they participate in the public observances of national holidays, such as the Third of May. Only Jewish children attending the public school marched in the parade.<sup>65</sup> Visiting the Catholic church was anathema: "Jews never set foot in the Yourzdiki [Juryzdyka, an adjacent town] church, even out of curiosity, because 'they said if you went in a church you were forty days in *herem* [ban or excommunication].'"<sup>66</sup> Abraham Lipkunsy, who grew up in the nearby village of Dowgaliszki, a small settlement inhabited for the most part by Jewish farmers, recalled a "deep-rooted custom" from his childhood:

At every crossroad and before every village there were crosses protected by little sloping roofs, with icons of Jesus or the Madonna hanging beneath them. For some reason, we children were under the impression that Jews were forbidden even to glance at a cross, but our childish curiosity got the better of us and I would quickly and guiltily snatch a glance at the cross while repeating the short prayer 'thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it, for it is a cursed thing' (Deuteronomy 7: 26), spitting in the direction of the alleged cursed thing, but seeing to it that no one should see me doing so. Heaven forbid! Like the spitting after the saying of the prayer: 'It is our duty to praise the Lord, since he hath not made us like the nations of different countries, nor placed us like the families of the earth.'<sup>67</sup>

Then came the war and the Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland. While acknowledging that some Jews suffered at the hands of Jewish Communists and Communist sympathizers in the period from September 1939 to June 1941, Eliach conveniently forgets that many more Poles than Jews were targeted by Jewish collaborators. Thousands of Poles were murdered by their non-Polish neighbours in September 1939 throughout Eastern Poland and, with the assistance of local collaborators, the Soviets perpetrated widespread atrocities against members of the Polish army, police, state officials, and large landowners.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>67</sup> Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok*, 19.

<sup>68</sup> For an in-depth treatment of this topic, see the forthcoming study by Mark Paul, *Neighbours on the Eve of the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Relations in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland, 1939–1941* (Toronto: PEFINA Press, 2006), posted on the Internet in an abridged edition at <<http://www.kpk.org/english/toronto/sovocc.pdf>>. That book is a much expanded revision of an earlier essay by Mark Paul, "Jewish-Polish Relations in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland, 1939–1941," in *The Story of Two Shtetls, Brańsk and Ejszyski: An Overview of Polish-Jewish Relations in Northeastern Poland during World War II*, Part Two (Toronto and Chicago: The Polish Educational Foundation in North America, 1998), 173–230. Two Israeli historians have written extensively on this topic: Ben-Cion Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews under Soviet Rule: Eastern Poland on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry Under Soviet Rule, 1939–1941* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995). The most comprehensive treatment of this topic in Polish is found in the following publications: Ryszard Szawłowski, *Wojna polsko-sowiecka 1939: Tło polityczne, prawnomiedzynarodowe i psychologiczne; Agresja sowiecka i polska obrona; Sowietkie zbrodnie wojenne i przeciw ludzkości oraz zbrodnie ukraińskie i białoruskie* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition—Warsaw: Neriton, 1995; 3<sup>rd</sup> revised and expanded edition—Warsaw: Antyk–Marcin Dybowski, 1997); Jerzy Robert Nowak, *Przemilczane zbrodnie: Żydzi i Polacy na Kresach w latach 1939–1941* (Warsaw: von borowiecky, 1999), which is summarized in his article, "Antypolskie

Soviet terror, which was directed primarily at Poles, continued throughout the Soviet occupation, when that part of Poland was incorporated into Lithuania and Soviet Belorussia.<sup>69</sup> With the assistance of local collaborators, in the space of less than two years, the Soviets managed to deport at least one-half million Polish citizens from Eastern Poland to distant and probable death in the Gulag. About 120,000 Poles were deported from the Wilno region alone.

One of the earliest and most heinous crimes was the murder of as many as fifty Poles in the village of Brzostowica Mała near Grodno. Around September 20, 1939, before any Soviets arrived in the area, a pro-Communist band composed of Jews and Belorussians wearing red armbands and armed with blades and axes, led by a Jewish trader named Zuzko Ajzik, entered the village and the nearby landed estate, dragged people out of their houses, and cruelly massacred the entire Polish population. Among those killed that day were Count Antoni Wołkowicki and his wife Ludwika, his brother-in-law Zygmunt Woynicz-Sianożęcki, the county reeve and his secretary, the accountant, the mailman, and the local teacher. The victims of this paroxysm of violence were tortured, tied with barbed wire, pummelled with sticks, forced to swallow quicklime, thrown into a ditch and buried alive. The paralyzed Countess Wołkowicka was dragged to the execution site by her hair. The order for the killings was given by Motyl Żak (Motel Zhak), who headed the revolutionary committee in Brzostowica Wielka which was composed of Jews and Belorussians. Typically, the culprits were never punished by the Soviet authorities. On the contrary, the NKVD praised them for their “class-conscious” deeds. Ajzik became the director of the local cooperative and several others were accepted into the Red militia. The racist aspect of the crime is, however, undeniable: only members of the Polish minority perished at the hands of their non-Polish neighbours.<sup>70</sup>

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wystąpienia na Kresach Wschodnich (1939–41): Wystąpienia żydowskie (1939–41),” in *Encyklopedia “Białych Płam”* (Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2000), volume 1, 169–76 (a much expanded treatment of this topic by that author, in two volumes, is forthcoming); Bogdan Musiał, “Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na Kresach Wschodnich R.P. pod okupacją sowiecką (1939–1941),” *Biuletyn Kwartalny Radomskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego*, volume 34, no. 1 (1999): 103–125; Bogdan Musiał, *Konterrevolutionäre Elemente sind zu erschließen: Die Brutalisierung des deutsch-sowjetischen Krieges im Sommer 1941* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2000); Bogdan Musiał, *Rozstrzelać elementy kontrrewolucyjne!: Brutalizacja wojny niemiecko-sowieckiej latem 1941 roku* (Warsaw: Fronda, 2001), 35–62; Marek Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Białorusini w zaborze sowieckim: Stosunki polsko-białoruskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej pod okupacją sowiecką 1939–1941* (Warsaw: Volumen, 2000); Marek Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim: Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II RP pod okupacją sowiecką (1939–1941)* (Warsaw: Fronda, 2001); Andrzej Żbikowski, ed., *Archiwum Ringelbuna: Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy*, volume 3: *Relacje z Kresów* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny IN-B, 2000).

<sup>69</sup> In the spring of 1940, 3,800 Polish citizens were murdered in prisons in Western Belorussia for alleged counter-revolutionary, anti-Soviet, and nationalist activities. Several thousand Polish political prisoners were executed by the Soviets during the evacuation of local prisons on the eve of the German entry in June 1941. See Zygmunt Boradyn, Andrzej Chmielarz, and Henryk Piskunowicz, eds., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródzczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1997), 9.

<sup>70</sup> The events in Brzostowica Mała, which are under investigation by Poland’s Institute of National Remembrance, are described in Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Białorusini w zaborze sowieckim*, 70–72; Szawłowski, *Wojna polsko-sowiecka 1939*, volume 1, 370; Wojciech Wybranowski, “Musieli zginąć, bo byli Polakami,” *Nasz Dziennik*, September 4, 2001; Wojciech Wybranowski, “Są pierwsi świadkowie,” *Nasz Dziennik*, September 8–9, 2001; Wojciech Wybranowski, “Komuniści przyszli nocą,” *Nasz Dziennik*, September 23, 2001; Wojciech Wybranowski, “Kłopotliwe śledztwo: Dochodzenie w sprawie mordu na Polakach w Brzostowicy Małej utknęło w martwym punkcie,” *Nasz Dziennik*, October 2, 2002; Wojciech Wybranowski, “Dochodzenie IPN po publikacji ‘Naszego Dziennik’: Sprawców nie wykryto,” *Nasz Dziennik*, February 24, 2005. Ajzik was reportedly executed by the Germans in June 1941 on the site of

In Berdówka near Lida, a Red militia consisting of Jews and Belorussians set upon and murdered a number of officers and soldiers of the Frontier Defence Corps (*Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza*–KOP), who were preparing their defence against the Soviet invaders.<sup>71</sup> There were numerous such incidents in the area including full-fledged rebellions against the Polish authorities in Grodno and Skidel.

Countless eyewitnesses have reported on conditions in Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland. Among them was the legendary Polish courier Jan Karski, who was honoured by Israel for his efforts to inform an unresponsive West about the realities of the Holocaust. Karski paints a stark and alarming picture of what he witnessed—one that has generally eluded Western historiography. In a report filed in February 1940, before the massive deportations of civilians to the Gulag—as well as the Holocaust—got underway, he wrote:

The Jews have taken over the majority of the political and administrative positions. But what is worse, they are denouncing Poles to the secret police and are directing the work of the Communist militia from behind the scenes. Unfortunately, one must say these incidents are very frequent.

British historian Norman Davies summed up conditions in Eastern Poland rather aptly in an exchange published in the *New York Review of Books*:

What I wrote, and can confirm, amounts to this: firstly, that among the collaborators who came forward to assist the Soviet security forces in dispatching huge numbers of innocent men, women, and children to distant exile and probable death, there was a disproportionate number of Jews; and secondly, that news of the circumstances surrounding the deportations helped to sour Polish-Jewish relations in other parts of occupied Poland.<sup>72</sup>

We know from eyewitness reports that conditions in Ejszyszki were similar. The town fell into Soviet hands in September 1939. The Soviet Union awarded that area to Lithuania at the end of October 1939. However, in June 1940 Ejszyszki reverted back to the Soviets together with all of now “Soviet” Lithuania. According to Polish reports,

The vast majority of the town’s Jewish population welcomed the invading Soviet Army with open arms, actively demonstrating their joy at the Soviet “liberation.” From the outset Jews took over the majority of the positions in the local administration and security police.<sup>73</sup>

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the massacre of the Wołkowickis.

<sup>71</sup> Kazimierz Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej: “Nów”—Nowogródzki Okręg Armii Krajowej* (Warsaw: Pax, 1997), 6.

<sup>72</sup> “Poles and Jews: An Exchange,” *New York Review of Books*, April 9, 1987.

<sup>73</sup> Witold Andruszkiewicz, “Holocaust w Ejszyszkach,” *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 120 (1997): 84, reprinted from *Głos Polski* (Toronto), February 1, 1997, where it appeared under the title “Holocaust Żydów w Ejszyszkach.”

A Soviet State Security Department report from that period confirms the information about a mass demonstration in Ejszyszki. Some 200 persons are said to have participated, most of them local Jews. Although this number is more modest than suggested by Polish reports, it still represents a sizeable portion of the town's Jewish adult population. The speakers at this event expressed their joy about being liberated by the Red Army and the incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union.<sup>74</sup>

The Soviets set up a local revolutionary committee under the leadership of Hayyim Shuster, which immediately began a purge of all prewar institutions, both Polish and Jewish. Local communist leaders seem to have been almost entirely Jewish. They drew up lists of local Poles to be deported to the Soviet interior.<sup>75</sup> Although some Jews were also deported, the Sonenson family, despite being one of the town's well-to-do inhabitants, was spared thanks to the personal ties between Eliach's father, Moshe Sonenson, and a leading local Jewish Communist official. Sonenson became a keen participant in local Communist celebrations.<sup>76</sup> Eliach describes the situation as follows:

Under Soviet rule a regional revolutionary council known as the Revkum [Revkom] was established, which was responsible for Eishyshok and all the towns and villages in its vicinity. Headed by Hayyim Shuster, the Revkum began its program by attacking all the "reactionary" Zionist organizations and activities within the shtetl. ...

On June 15, 1940, the Soviet army crossed the Lithuanian border. ... This time around, during the second Soviet occupation, the local Jewish Communists—those who remained—had more of an opportunity to implement their Marxist ideology.<sup>77</sup>

Among the rather numerous Communists in this small town, Eliach mentions Moshe Szulkin (and his family), Moshe's sister Elka Jankelewicz (and her family), Hirshke and Fruml Slepak, Hayyim-Yoshke Szczuczynski, Luba Ginunski, Meitke Bielicki (Hayyim Shuster's girlfriend), Ruvke Boyarski di Bulbichke, Velyke Katz, and Pessah Cofnas.<sup>78</sup> Eliach continues:

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<sup>74</sup> Alfonsas Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust* (Vilnius: Institute of International Relations and Political Sciences Vilnius University, and Versus Aureus, 2003), 145.

<sup>75</sup> Memoir (typescript) of Witold Andruszkiewicz (no date), 30–31. Among those deported were the families of former Polish policemen.

<sup>76</sup> Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 572–74. That Moshe Sonenson had a predisposition to ingratiate himself with the Communists is readily apparent: "Unlike most of his fellow balebatim, he showed up at the firehouse for parties given by the Communists in honor of special days on their political calendar." *Ibid.*, 573.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 565–66, 571.

<sup>78</sup> According to Eliach, "The majority of the shtetl Communists survived the Holocaust, having either fled to the Soviet Union or been exiled there by the time the Germans arrived. In a stunning reversal, they who had once denounced Zionists, who had sought to reform what they saw as the parochial ethnicity of shtetl life so that the Jews could move beyond that stunted identity to the Communist ideal of a universal brotherhood, ended up as staunch Zionists and fierce defenders of their Jewish, shtetl roots. For them ... life in the Soviet Union proved the best antidote of all to their Communist fervor ... Taking advantage of a post-World War II repatriation act, most of them left the Soviet Union and returned to Poland, from whence they were eventually able to make their way to Canada, the United States, and Israel."

Deportation to Siberia was another threat issued to the well-to-do, and to whoever else was thought to “pose a danger to Communism.” ... Within Eishyshok itself, the shtetl Communists had prepared a list of people to be deported, but as a personal favor to Moshe Sonenson, Luba Ginunski removed the names of the Sonenson family as well as those of their friends the Kiuchefskis, for Moshe had helped the Ginunski family through some hard times.<sup>79</sup>

Unfortunately, Eliach, who is preoccupied with the fate of the Jews at the hands of their co-religionists, ignores the impact that the measures undertaken by the local Jewish Communists had on the fate of the non-Jewish population. Poles, however, recollect a popular rhyme composed by local Jews that encapsulated the communal sentiments toward their Polish neighbours:<sup>80</sup>

Szlachta do wywozu  
chłopi do kolchozu.

The gentry for deportation  
the peasants to the kolkhozes.

Even though one can safely assume that Poles suffered the most at the hands of local Jews in the service of the Soviets, through arrests, denunciations, deportations, etc., in Eliach’s estimation, their fate does not merit a single word.

A similar situation prevailed throughout this region. According to Yitzhak Arad, a historian at the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, who hails from Świąciany, a town north of Wilno, “There were also many Jews who had shifted ground and become enthusiastic Communists; for ideological reasons they were quick to inform the authorities of all Zionist activity.”<sup>81</sup> Arad states that Jews “constituted a fairly large

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Ibid., 511–12. As one oral history study recounts, “Because of the relatively high membership of Jews in the KPP [Polish Communist Party], it is hardly surprising to find a fairly large contingent of Jewish communists—roughly thirty—in Aisheshuk [Ejszyszki—these would have been adults, out of a population of under 2,000 Jews—*M.P.*] ... It was quite obvious ... that a number of Aisheshker had been communists. Even the memorial book admits this. However, not one interviewee would admit that he or she had ever had even the slightest sympathy with communism. ... The fact is that a good number of the people I interviewed *were* communists—or at least sympathizers—and escaped the destruction of Aisheshuk by fleeing into the Soviet Union or by joining the Soviet army. ... When they left the Soviet Union at the war’s end, they arrived in a United States mired in McCarthyism. In order to get entrance visas, they signed sworn affidavits that they had never been communists nor had they ever set foot in the Soviet Union. ... Some have not told their spouses, and most have not told their children of their former political allegiances.” See Livingston, *Tradition and Modernism in the Shtetl*, 51, 107–108. One should not assume that the local Communists were anything but an integral part of the interwar Jewish community. According to Ellen Livingston “Even communists observed Jewish laws and customs and sent their children to Jewish schools.” Ibid., 93.

<sup>79</sup> Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 572.

<sup>80</sup> Account of Antoni Jundo (in the author’s possession).

<sup>81</sup> Yitzhak Arad, *The Partisan: From the Valley of Death to Mount Zion* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1979), 25.



proportion of those in local government and in the Communist party.”<sup>82</sup> He describes conditions he witnessed thus:

During the night of June 14, 1941, the town was shocked when NKVD and militia members took hundreds of people from their houses and placed them under arrest. Most of the arrested had been officials of the Polish government, landowners, officers in the Polish army—men who had been wealthy or active in political parties (excluding the Communist party). That night similar raids took place throughout Lithuania; close to 30,000 people, entire families among them, were arrested and deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan. ... Jews played a relatively large role in the Communist party apparatus that was behind the action.<sup>83</sup>

Eliach used her 1997 Chautauqua lecture to accuse the local Polish population of collaborating with the Germans in the murder of 3,000 Jews in Ejszyski on September 22, 1941, by willingly driving them in carriages to the killing fields and by preparing lists of pretty Jewish girls to be raped. Some of these charges were repeated in a modified form in *There Once Was a World*, others she backed away from.<sup>84</sup> Of course, she does not shy away from advancing new charges,<sup>85</sup> or reverting to discredited old ones first advanced in

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<sup>82</sup> Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, and Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith in New York, 1980), 27.

<sup>83</sup> Arad, *The Partisan*, 26–27.

<sup>84</sup> For example, Eliach writes (at p. 59) that “many of the Polish townspeople assisted in transporting their neighbors to the killing fields.” Later on, she acknowledges that most of the “collaboration” was rather dubious and often “forced”: (1) “The entire population of the shtetl as well as all the Catholic worshippers from the Juryzdyki [Jurysdyka] church were ordered to gather on the west side of the market square to witness the special form of humiliation the Germans had devised as punishment.” (At p. 577.) (2) “Besides being assigned the odious task of requisitioning their fellow Jews’ valuables, the men of the Judenrat [Jewish Council] were also supposed to follow up on information about their community that the local Poles eagerly provided. The Germans wanted lists of the prettiest girls, the best tailors, the wealthiest balebatim; they wanted to know who the local Jewish Communists were, who had overseas relatives.” (At pp. 579–80.) See also p. 586, where she claims the list was supplied by local Poles. (3) Local Poles warned Jews of news they had heard about Jews being murdered in the vicinity. (At p. 581.) (4) “To hasten the proceedings, some of the Jewish men were taken away on carriages driven by local Poles.” (At p. 588.) This too was done on orders from the German and Lithuanian henchmen, and we later learn (at pp. 590–91), that one of the drivers later returned to help the remaining Jews. As for the charge that Poles were asked to prepare lists of various kinds including tailors, wealthy householders and pretty girls, clearly the “eager” Poles would not know much of this information, though members of the Jewish council would. Besides, the Germans and Lithuanians needed no assistance to identify females they took a liking to, so the charge is simply grotesque. Moreover, sexual relations with Jews were officially outlawed and punishable (the *Rassenschade* mandated state punishment for Germans who engaged in sexual relations with “subhumans”), so it is highly unlikely that the Germans would divulge their designs to the Poles, whom they generally regarded as untrustworthy. In his correspondence dated September 23, 1999, Witold Adruszkiewicz calls this charge “rubbish.” Leo Kahn, whose uncle headed the Judenrat and who himself was part of a Jewish work gang composed of young men and women who were abused (the girls sexually) by German soldiers, does not even mention Poles in this regard, nor does Shalom Sonenson (Yaffa’s uncle). Unlike Eliach, Kahn is also highly critical of some members of the Jewish council. See Kahn, *No Time To Mourn*, 28, 30, 33; account of Shalom Sonenson (Szalom Zonenon), dated July 25, 1945, Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), record group 301.

<sup>85</sup> Eliach’s treatment of the local Catholic clergy is particularly shoddy. While acknowledging that a priest (presumably, Father Bolesław Moczulski, the pastor of Ejszyski) had openly disapproved of the killing of the Jews, and in fact admonished those who looted Jewish homes (at p. 594), and while acknowledging that the Sonensons’ principal benefactor, Kazimierz Korcuć, portrayed this priest as “a compassionate individual, sensitive to Jewish

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suffering” (at p. 745 n.11), Eliach nonetheless lambastes the priest for his “anti-Semitic sermons” (at pp. 595, 621), which she interprets as justifying the murder of the Jews and the Jews’ punishment as “well deserved.” She also accuses (at p. 624) Father “Maczulski” [sic, Moczulski] of delivering a sermon from the pulpit in February 1944 which “proved a death sentence” for most of the Jews still in hiding in the vicinity, although its content is never revealed, and claims that Father Moczulski’s two young assistants (in fact he had but one vicar) of taking part in a meeting on January 25, 1944, convoked to resolve “the Jewish question” before the end of the war. (There is more about this fictitious meeting later in the text.) Suffice it to say there are no credible accounts of Polish priests approving of the “Final Solution.” Priests in rural areas were ordered by the Germans to read notices warning Poles not to help partisans and Jews. Where the priests complied for fear of retaliation, these notices were generally read at the end of the mass. See Chodakiewicz, *Polacy i Żydzi 1918–1955*, 185. In some regions there was resistance to reading any German notices in church. See *Kościół katolicki w Jasielskiem 1939–1945* (Brzozów-Stalowa Wola, 1991), 19, 88, 103, 211–12; Jerzy Adamski, Mieczysław Ligonowski, Franciszek Oberc, and Tadeusz Śliwa, *Kościół katolicki w Brzozowskiem i Sanockiem 1939–1945* (Brzozów-Przemyśl, 1992), 202; Witold Jemielity, “Diecezja łomżyńska,” in Zygmunt Zieliński, ed., *Życie religijne pod okupacją 1939–1945: Metropolie wileńska i lwowska, zakony* (Katowice: Unia, 1992), 74.

Clearly, Eliach does not comprehend the theological ramifications of the traditional Judeo-Christian concept of accepting the “will of God,” to which many rabbis also attributed the calamities that befell the Jews. Leon Wells, a Jewish survivor from Lwów, explains the background as follows:

I read the Lubavitch in '43, '44—it's not proper to mention—Soloveitchik and all the others, they said the Holocaust was sent from heaven and did good because it is the time of the coming of the Messiah. Even the Lubavitch in '43, I have here the document where he said enjoy, enjoy, because the Messiah is coming. And he said that Haman does not come by himself. He's sent by God. I said to a major Jewish theologian recently, 'Why are you only condemning the Pope? Or about what Cardinal O'Connor in New York said about the Holocaust?' I said, 'Didn't the Lubavitch and others say the same, that it's God's will and we should believe it? It is only cleansing, because of our sins. God threw us out from our land because of our sins.' And he said, 'Yes, if you are a religious man and if I would be the Pope, I couldn't behave differently because I cannot say it's not God's will because he can stop everything.' I said, 'Fine. So why don't you as a leading Jewish theologian come out and ask why are we jumping so much about the Pope and all?' He said, 'What should I do? It is the people, it is their will. They know what they want to hear and I know what I want.' And I said to myself, it is theological, they have no other choice. There is no other choice. If you believe in a God, then it's the will of God. We'd have to change the whole religious outlook in order to see it differently. But as of the moment, we believe in God's will.

See Harry James Cargas, *Voices from the Holocaust* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 91–92.

Rabbis throughout Poland were inclined to attribute the calamities that befell the Jews to the “will of God,” whether they are seen as retribution, as the path to redemption, or simply as an unfathomable design. Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman of Baranowicze viewed the Nazis as a tool in the Divine punishment of the Jews for not adhering strictly to the Torah and pursuing secular ideologies such as Zionism, socialism, communism and liberalism. See Yehuda Bauer, “Jewish Baranowicze in the Holocaust,” in *Yad Vashem Studies*, volume 31 (2003): 99–100. In the face of their imminent annihilation, Rabbi Shimon Rozovsky said to the Jewish community leaders of Ejszyszki: “Jews, you see our end is approaching rapidly ... God did not want us to be saved. Our destiny has been decided, and we must accept this.” See Perets Alufi and Shaul Kaleko (Barkeli), eds., *Eishishok, koroteha ve-hurbanah: pirke zikhronot ve-'eduyot (be-tseruf temunot)/liket* (Jerusalem: Committee of the Survivors of Eishishok in Israel, 1950); translated into English by Shoshanna Gavish, “*Aishishuk*”; *Its History and Its Destruction: Documentaries, Memories and Illustrations* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1980), 62. Rabbi Rozovsky had been hidden by a Polish peasant for three days before coming out of hiding to be with the Jews on the day of their annihilation. See the account of Shalom Sonenson (Szalom Zonenon), dated July 25, 1945, Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw) archive, record group 301. The rabbi of Sokoly near Białystok instructed the Jews in the following words:

Perhaps it will be our fate to die as martyrs and in sanctification of G-d's name. We must prepare for this in our thoughts and persevere spiritual tranquility, as much as possible, because everything comes from G-d, the Creator of the world. Nothing in the world is done without Him. 'A person doesn't hurt his finger unless it is decided in Heaven.' Therefore, every Jew has the obligation to accept everything with love and fulfill the commandment of 'and you shall love the L-rd your G-d will all your heart and all your soul,' even if He takes your soul ... We must not ponder the attributes of G-d. We will never be intelligent enough to understand the ways of the Eternal. We must believe that the Master of the World is merciful.

It is the fate of the completely righteous to bear suffering; this apparently appears contrary to the attributes of G-d. Nevertheless, we must understand that G-d is conducting His world towards high,

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elevated purposes, bringing us closer to complete redemption, the coming of the *Moshiach* and the revival of the dead.

See Michael Maik, *Deliverance: The Diary of Michael Maik. A True Story* (Kedumim, Israel: Keterpress Enterprises, 2004), 94.

As one scholar observes, “There are many such stories in the literature, describing rabbis who encouraged their followers on the way to execution by singing, reciting psalms, even dancing, so as to prepare themselves spiritually for the great honour and privilege that God had given them—to die for *kidush hashem*.” See Jonathan Webber, “Jewish Identities in the Holocaust: Martyrdom as a Representative Category,” in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, volume 13: *Focusing on the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (London and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000), 140. Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapira, a prominent Hasidic leader, wrote in the Warsaw ghetto: “We must persist in our belief that whatever God does is exactly what must be done.” See Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapira, *Sacred Fire: Torah from the Years of Fury 1939–1942* (Northvale, New Jersey and Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 2000), 306.

Religious Jews were inclined to believe that Nazism was God’s punishment for the Jews’ straying away from their faith, particularly the German Jews. See Jakub Bukowski, *Opowieść o życiu* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2002), 30. While confined in the Wilno ghetto, Zelig Kalmanovich, the wartime voice of the Orthodox community, kept a diary that is replete with scriptural and rabbinical quotations. Why, Kalmanovich asks, did God allow the Jews of Wilno to be destroyed? Because the destruction would serve as a sign (1) that what was once a proud Jewish community was already rotting, crumbling from within, and (2) that future generations—unaware of this decay and left only with the detritus of the external destruction—would have something useful, even inspiring, to remember.

God’s purpose in destroying the community of Vilna [Wilno] was perhaps to hasten the redemption, to alert whomsoever might still be alerted that there is neither refuge nor hope for life in Exile. ...

But if we take a hard look we can see that it was necessary for the destruction to come from without. The fortress had already been destroyed and laid waste from within. Vilna had put up no resistance to the assimilation and the obliteration of the Jewish character, had not stood up to the spiritual destruction decreed by the Red conquerors. ...

And these undesecrated stones will serve as a memorial to our Exile, for their merit was not to have been desecrated through the hands of their own children, by those who had once built the walls, but rather, through the hands of a savage nation, acting as the emissary of God.

See David G. Roskies, “Jewish Cultural Life in the Vilna Ghetto,” in Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, *Lithuania and the Jews: The Holocaust Chapter. Symposium Presentations* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004), 36–38.

In the face of this cataclysm, religious Poles also endeavoured to rationalize these horrific events and found explanations that in fact had little, if anything, to do with any real malice toward the victims. Historian Andrzej Bryk explains:

For the average Polish peasant, Jews were an integral part of the landscape ... He might not have liked them, might have maintained only the most superficial trading relations with them, but their disappearance was unimaginable. They were part of God’s universe, even if an inferior part, viewed with suspicion. [As shown in the appendix, this was, essentially, the mirror image of traditional Jewish attitudes toward Christian Poles.—*M.P.*] The complete extermination of his neighbours in a small town or village was for that peasant not only a crime in human terms but a fundamental violation of the universal order, of God’s order. It was such a monstrous and absurd deed, that it could have been possible only through the will of God himself. Had he not, after all, been taught that Jews were guilty for the death of Jesus, the death of God? So, perhaps, this was the sentence for that deed? Hence the fatalism in perceiving the Holocaust, a certain self-defence through rationalisation against the madness of a deed equal only to the anger of God. Of a deed which must have been inspired by some hidden logic. The extermination was so terrible, surpassing human imagination to such an extent, that there had to be some hidden meaning in it.

See Andrzej Bryk, “The Struggles for Poland,” in *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies*, volume 4 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell for the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies, 1989), 378. Some religious Poles also embraced a similar theological explanation for their own wartime fate. The conservative Catholic author Zofia Kossak, a co-founder of the wartime Council for Aid to Jews—*Żegota*, wrote in her postwar diary that the suffering and humiliation of Polish women she witnessed as a prisoner in Auschwitz was God’s punishment for enjoying themselves before the war, for wearing lipstick and silk stockings. See Władysław T. Bartoszewski, *The Convent in Auschwitz* (London: The Bowerdean Press, 1990), 19.

her book *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*, where she claimed the mass execution of the Ejszyszki Jews was carried out “with the encouragement and help of the local population.”<sup>86</sup> There is no independent confirmation of any of these assertions (the author was no more than four years of age at the time), no sources are cited, and the Ejszyszki memorial book does not even mention them.

There is ample documentation from Jewish sources to dismiss the first part of her accusation as sheer invention. The Jews of Ejszyszki were murdered without any voluntary participation of the local Polish population whatsoever. Almost all of the Jews were herded to the old Jewish cemetery on foot by Lithuanian auxiliaries who were brought in especially for this task; the latter were assisted by the local Lithuanian police, who are said to have raped many women in the process.<sup>87</sup> Jews had been tricked into digging pits (their graves) in the Jewish cemetery.<sup>88</sup> Afterwards, the Lithuanians rounded up some Poles and took them, at gunpoint, to the cemetery to deepen them. As the Jews were marched from town to the outlying cemetery they were warned by townspeople of the fate that awaited them.<sup>89</sup> Well over a hundred Jews managed to escape from Ejszyszki and, with the help of many Poles along the way, made it to the town of Raduń.

We also know from Jewish testimonies the effect that such forced, marginal participation and the witnessing of horrible atrocities had on the Polish population. Michael Katz, a Jew from Nieśwież, recalls a conversation he had with a Polish benefactor of his who had been put into such a predicament:

The Germans ordered several local farmers to the two sites, he among them and had them dig the pits. ... They would return each day, and make the hole bigger until finally ordered to stop and leave the site. Before they left, Ukrainian and Lithuanian soldiers arrived in trucks filled with gypsies and cripples and killed them all. Their bodies were thrown into the pit as one would dispose

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<sup>86</sup> Yaffa Eliach, *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 53–54.

<sup>87</sup> Kahn, *No Time To Mourn*, 40; account of Shalom Sonenson (Szalom Zonenon), dated July 25, 1945, Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw) archive, record group 301; transcript of an interview with Dora Kramen Dimitro (by Randy Goldman), July 18, 1996, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. Dora Kramen Dimitro recalled:

Q: Who were the people responsible, were they Germans, were they Lithuanians?

A: They was working together. The Lithuanians, they helped them. The Germans was maybe two or three people all together for them. But the rest was the Lithuanians, and they was very bad, very bad people.

Q: And some of them were people you knew before?

A: No. No. They were Lithuanians, they came from Lithuania, we was Polish, we had the Pollacks.

<sup>88</sup> According to one source, in Ejszyszki, on September 24, 1941, “the Nazis circulated a rumor that they needed young men to dig holes for a fence to be erected around the area in which the Olkieni Jews would be housed. A group of youngsters volunteered, unaware that they were being taken to dig their own graves. The Nazis took the group to the killing site, stood the young Jews on the edge of the pits they had dug, shot them, and dumped their bodies in the holes.” See Spector, *Lost Jewish Worlds*, 235. Jews were also ordered to perform this task in nearby Raduń. See Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 602. Shalom Sonenson, however, maintains that it was the Poles who had willingly dug the graves under implausible circumstances: “Before they started digging, the Poles had been promised all of the victims’ belongings.” See the account of Shalom Sonenson (Szalom Zonenon), dated July 25, 1945, Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw) archive, record group 301.

<sup>89</sup> Andruszkiewicz, “Holocaust w Ejszyszkach,” *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 120 (1997): 90–91.

of a worthless carcass. The farmers were unprepared for what they saw and some screamed hysterically. Others went into shock, their minds unable to accept the barbarism of what they had witnessed. Others went mad.<sup>90</sup>

If the Poles are to be regarded as “collaborators” for this reason then, using Eliach’s logic and measure, the Jews themselves were much more complicit by virtue of the activities of the Jewish councils (Judenrats) and ghetto police, which played a far more active role in facilitating the destruction of the Jews and, in the opinion of many survivors, stand condemned for that reason.

### *Sheltered by Poles*

Although openly acknowledging that the Sonenson family (Sonenson was Yaffa Eliach’s maiden name)—consisting of her father Moshe, her mother Zipporah, her elder brother Yitzhak, and herself—received various forms of assistance from a number of Poles in several localities,<sup>91</sup> and ultimately survived

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<sup>90</sup> Alvin Abram, *The Light After the Dark* (Scarborough, Ontario: Abbeyfield Publishers, 1997), 59–60. A Jewish farm hand who concealed his true identity recalled that farmers in the village of Zareby were ordered to bring their carts to the nearby town of Zambrów—as they there learned—to transport Jews: “Zaremba returned long after nightfall. He handed me the horse’s reins without a word, not even glancing at me. When I got back to the kitchen, his mother and Marie were staring at him, motionless, silent, petrified. Zaremba was drinking straight from the vodka bottle. I flung myself at him and snatched the bottle from his hands. He didn’t even resist. ‘You’re right, Mietek. Why drink?’ ‘Was it the Jews from the ghetto?’ He nodded, then he began to speak slowly, in his normal manner. From time to time he brushed away his tears with the back of his hand, saying, ‘What could I do, Mietek? There was nothing to be done, except obey.’ He’d seen the SS and the guards surround the ghetto, forbidding the inhabitants to leave; he’d heard the shots; he’d seen women jump out of windows; old men lying on the ground, arms stretched out, killed one by one with a bullet in the neck; children cut down by bursts of automatic rifle fire, girls dragged into yards by the Germans. ... Then the Germans, with rifle butts, had forced the Jews up onto the peasants’ carts and the convoy had moved off towards some old barracks on the outskirts of Zambrów. Zaremba had heard screams and shots before leaving for the village. ... But no, Zaremba said, ‘What could I have done, Mietek? I couldn’t do anything, I let them kill the children. Do you hear, Mother, the children, the old people?’ We remained silent. His mother was praying, Marie was kneeling in front of the crucifix. I got up and laid my hand on Zaremba’s shoulder, Zaremba who was twice my age, but who’d only met savagery for the first time that day. ‘That’s the way it goes, boss. You couldn’t have done anything. You must get some sleep.’ I went out to the barn where I slept. I had been helpless, like Zaremba: I had let it happen. All night I tortured myself, accused myself of failing to convince people, of failing to fight, of failing to even rescue Sonia.” See Martin Gray with Max Gallo, *For Those I Loved* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1972), 169–70. An account from Przemysł states: “The Germans used to take the [conscripted] *Baudienst* labor brigade men to dig the ditches in the places of execution. After having dug the ditches, they had to stand down in them, with their backs against the ditch walls. Then the Germans would stand the naked Jews at the edge of the ditch and execute them. When the dead bodies fell into the ditch, the labor brigade men were supposed to arrange them in even rows. ... I know about it from my *Baudienst* friends’ reports. Of course, as it was, none of them would have been able to bear it, it was unimaginable. That’s why the Germans usually had a bucketful of vodka ready and forced every workman to drink a mug of vodka to minimize the shock. Every few days the labor brigade men were replaced by others.” See the account of Apoloniusz Czyński in Hartman and Krochmal, eds. *I Remember Every Day...*, 203. Leon Dziedzic, one of some twenty Polish peasants ordered by the Germans to bury the Jews killed in the town of Jedwabne near Łomża, recalled: “I got sick and vomited several times. To this day I cannot free myself from that nightmare.” See Andrzej Kaczyński, “Nie zabijaj,” *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw), July 10, 2000. The Poles who were conscripted to dig graves for Jews murdered outside Brześć on the River Bug were simply executed: “They were then also murdered so that there would not be any witnesses.” See Asher Zisman, “Pages from a Diary,” in E. Steinman, ed., *Brisk de-Lita* (Jerusalem: The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora, 1958), volume 2, 593ff., translated as *Brest Lit(owsk)*, Internet: <<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Brest2/Brest2.html>>.

<sup>91</sup> Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 583, 585, 589–91, 595, 598–601. When the Sonenson family fled to Raduń, they received help from the Polish mayor of that town and from some Poles serving in the local police force, as well as from a Catholic priest and a mill supervisor. The account found at page 585, however, should be compared to an earlier one provided shortly after the war. As a 10-year-old girl, Yaffa recalled receiving the following assistance from Poles:

the war thanks to a Catholic Pole by the name Kazimierz Korcuć,<sup>92</sup> the family's principal benefactor, Eliach contends that the enemy they feared most while in hiding were the "White" Poles, the term used by the Soviets for members of the Polish Home Army.<sup>93</sup> In *There Once Was a World*, Eliach in fact contends

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"Before leaving my father told us that if we managed to avoid the [Lithuanian] policemen, we should escape to a goy who was a good acquaintance of ours, who would hide us. When evening came, and the village was quiet we left the hut and made our way through the fields and gardens to the house of Yashka Elyashkovitz [Aliszkiewicz] who was a worker in our tannery. His house was located at the edge of the village. He received us kindly and dressed my brother in the clothes of a christian [sic] boy. There we found the children of David Moshtzenik, the girl Mira, her younger brother Neir and some other Jews. Yashka calmed us and we fell asleep from tiredness and fear. Towards morning the goy woke us and transferred us to the house of another christian located at the end of Pig's street. ... In the afternoon a young christian came and told us he had been sent by father to take us to him to the village 'Dumbliyah' [Dumbla]. That night the christian put me on his shoulder and took me and my brother, who was dressed in the attire of a christian shepherd, to Dumbliyah. There we found father and the family of Sarah Kabatznik. For five days we hid in a barn belonging to a peasant lady who was an acquaintance of ours. At night she brought us food. During the day we dared not expose ourselves. On the sixth day, the christian lady told us that she was too scared to hide us any longer for fear we would be discovered on her ground. She transferred us to her brother's house in the village of Paradoon [Poraduń]. ... We did not trust him and we decided to leave his house. At night my father, brother and myself made our way through fields and woods to the village Vasilishok [Wasiliszki] ... We found refuge in the house of a polish [sic] acquaintance. But he demanded that my father go register with the police—or else he would be too afraid to keep us in his house. ... Meanwhile we learned that mother and the baby had safely reached Radon [Raduń]. My mother disguised herself as a christian and with the help of a christian acquaintance, who said my mother was her sister, was allowed by drunken Lithuanian police to cross the border." See Alufi and Barkeli, "*Aishishuk*"; *Its History and Its Destruction*, 65–66.

<sup>92</sup> According to Shalom Sonenson (Moshe Sonenson's brother),

I left the ghetto [in Raduń] with my daughter, one of my brothers [Moshe] and his family and my older brother [Avraham]. On May 20, 1942, we went into the forest, but we could not stay in the woods because we did not want to part from my brother's children, so we went to look for a place to stay. We met a peasant named Kazimierz Korcuć, a Pole who gave us shelter in the village of Korkuciany, near Ejszyski. The peasant divided us into groups and found us places to stay with several Christians, who took us in for money. ... We stayed with the peasants for 12 months.

See his account dated July 25, 1945, Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw) archive, record group 301. For Jewish accounts attesting to Korcuć's widespread assistance to Jews, including providing arms to them, see Wroński and Zwolakowa, *Polacy Żydzi 1939–1945*, 318–19, and Gutman and Bender, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations*, volume 4: *Poland*, Part 1, 374–75. According to Jarosław Wołkonowski, a Polish historian from Wilno (now Vilnius), Kazimierz Korcuć, who along with his mother helped dozens of Jews to survive the war, was a member of the Home Army. See Wołkonowski's report, "Ejszyski—zniekształcony obraz przeszłości," *Kurier Wileński* (Vilnius), September 6, 1996; reprinted in *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Warsaw), September 26, 1996. (His nephew, Czesław Korcuć, certainly was.) On the other hand, Eliach maintains that, near the end, Korcuć "was on the AK's most-wanted list" and had to flee the area for his safety because of the help he had given to the Jews. See Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 679, 683. It is unfortunate that Korcuć did not, to our knowledge, leave his own account of these events, because, as Eliach herself acknowledges, he appears to have disagreed significantly with her assessment of other important events. *Ibid.*, 745 n.12. Moreover, in her submission to Yad Vashem in support of an award for Korcuć's farm worker, Antoni Gawryłkiewicz, as a co-rescuer of the Sonenson family, Yaffa Eliach advanced a novel claim that she never mentioned in her book *There Once Was a World*: "Suspected of hiding Jews, Antoni was apprehended by a Polish underground unit, and sustained severe beatings for refusing to disclose the presence of hidden Jews. As a result, he remained bedridden for days, recovering from the wounds." This account is posted on the Yad Vashem web site at: <[www.yad-vashem.org.il/righteous/bycountry/poland/antoni\\_gawrylkiewicz.htm](http://www.yad-vashem.org.il/righteous/bycountry/poland/antoni_gawrylkiewicz.htm)>. Gawryłkiewicz, on the other hand, does not confirm this story. Rather he refers to an incident that occurred in September 1948, when an unknown Lithuanian group attacked his family, who were residing in Gumbiszki at the time, and murdered his father and brother. According to the rumour mill, this was allegedly for protecting Jews. See Anna Ferens, "Głowy na wietrze," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Warsaw), May 27–28, 2000. Strangely, the deposition that Eliach had prepared for Gawryłkiewicz's signature at the Yad Vashem Institute in Israel is written in Hebrew, a language he does not know, even though depositions in Polish are commonplace at that institution.

<sup>93</sup> See, for example, Eliach's authorized autobiography found in André Stein, *Hidden Children: Forgotten Survivors of the Holocaust* (Toronto: Viking/Penguin, 1993), at p. 62, where Yaffa Eliach refers to the murder by "White" Poles of

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13 Jews, including her uncle Avraham Sonenson, as well as their Polish benefactor, Mrs. Bikiewicz. This event occurred while the Sonenson family was sheltered in Lebedniki by another Polish family identified in *There Once Was a World*, at p. 622, as that of Fredik Kodish. According to Eliach's statement in the PBS documentary *Shtetl* (script, at p. 40), Mrs. Bikiewicz was betrayed by her son, who belonged to the Polish partisans. The partisans allegedly tied them all to a fence, poured gasoline on them and incinerated the Jews together with Mrs. Bikiewicz and her entire farm. In *There Once Was a World*, at pp. 622–23, Eliach presents an embellished version of this incident, pinpointing it to February 20, 1944 and identifying the leader of the assassins as "Krisha" (Lieutenant Jan Borysewicz, *nom de guerre* "Kryisia"), the local Home Army commander, who had them all executed by a firing squad. The number of Jewish victims is given alternatively as 9 and 13, with one survivor who hid in a pile of wood. The murdered Polish rescuer is referred to as "Aneza Bikewiczowa" and is said to have been shot when one of the assailants slammed his gun against the table and it discharged accidentally. Allegedly, two of her own sons were Home Army members, though it is not clear if they were implicated in these events. The Sonensons were supposedly able to see and hear the execution from the nearby Kodish farm, but how Yaffa Eliach was able to reconstruct the events so vividly remains a mystery (she states that Fredik reconstructed them). According to Shalom Sonenson, "White" Poles killed 10 Jews in the village of Lebedniki, among them his older brother Avraham, who had been hiding with a woman named "Ana Bekewiczowa"; their rescuer was also burned alive, along with her property, but no details are provided to establish that this was the work of the Home Army. See his account dated July 25, 1945, Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw) archive, record group 301. Miriam Kabacznik Shulman, whose cousins perished in the inferno, places the event on a Sunday in January and notes that the widow's (Bikiewicz's) two sons were away that day, but that her two young daughters, who were at home, survived. She claims that the assailants kept one of her cousins alive for three days to extract information about the whereabouts of her family, who was known to have hidden money and other valuables: "they thought that where we are, we have the money with us. So they were going for money." This account strongly suggests that the motive was robbery, rather than the work of Home Army members who were unlikely to have burned down the home of its members. See the testimony of Miriam Kabacznik Shulman, recorded July 23, 1996, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum archives. This incident is also noted summarily in Waclaw Bielawski, *Zbrodnie na Polakach dokonane przez hitlerowców za pomoc udzielaną Żydom* (Warsaw: Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce–Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 1987), 15 (Entry 46), where the crime is placed in the fall of 1943 and attributed to the Nazis; the rescuer's name is given as Jadwiga Bikiewicz. Antoni Gawrylkiewicz, who was worked as a farmhand for Kazimierz Korcuć and was also awarded by Yad Vashem for his role in rescuing the Sonenson family, questions Eliach's claim and the Sonensons' ability to have witnessed the event from their distant hideout. He further doubts that Mrs. Bikiewicz's son would have instigated his own mother's murder and the destruction of the family home. See Anna Ferens, "Głowy na wietrze," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Warsaw), May 27–28, 2000. A field report by the government in exile's delegate for the Nowogródek district which may refer to this incident indicates that, in February 1944, a Jewish band raided a number of farms near Ejszyszki, including the estate of Countess Umiastowska in Kowaliszki, where they burned some buildings down. The band eventually fell into the hands of the Lithuanian police (in the service of the Germans) and was liquidated. See Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej*, 136, based on Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw, Delegatura Rządu collection, sygnatura 202/III–121, karta 244. It is quite possible that the Sonensons and the others were in contact with Jewish partisans from Nacza or Rudniki forest, such as the group led by Shlomo Brand who marauded in the vicinity of Ejszyszki and were responsible for the massacre of Polish civilians in Koniuchy on January 29, 1944. According to the testimony of Yaffa's brother Yitzhak, Home Army members allegedly came looking for Jews at Kazimierz Korcuć's farm on one occasion but they did not find any hideouts. Korcuć's nephew, a Home Army officer who had met the hidden Jews on his visits to his uncle's home, allegedly accompanied the Home Army men but did not divulge the Jews' hiding place. See Yad Vashem archive, 03/2743, testimony of Yitzhak Sonenson (Icchak Sonensohn), taken on February 2, 1965. However, *There Was Once a World* does not corroborate this version of events. According to that source, "Kryisia's" Home Army unit was simply billeted at Korcuć's farm for about nine days in March 1944, using it as a temporary base in between military excursions. Korcuć's nephew, Czesław, was also present but did not betray the Jews. *Ibid.*, 626–27. Antoni Gawrylkiewicz has also questioned the veracity of this aspect of Eliach's account. See Ferens, "Głowy na wietrze," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Warsaw), May 27–28, 2000.

Other accounts proffered by Eliach are equally problematic, and often inconsistent. For example, in the PBS documentary film *Shtetl*, she referred to the fate of the Rogowski family, five sons and a daughter, who went to a farmer who gave them honey and then, "The minute they walked out from the house, he took a gun and shot and killed. He killed four. One escaped. So from the entire Rogowski family one son survived. I interviewed him extensively." (*Shtetl* script, 41.) In *There Once Was a World*, at p. 612, however, we learn that three Rogowski brothers (there are now only four siblings who escaped from the Grodno ghetto) went to the home of a Lithuanian family by the name of Shiemaszka, along with a friend; there, "in the midst of a dinner-table conversation, at very close range, one of the young Shiemaszkas opened fire on the Rogowskis." The youngest brother, Hillel, was apparently killed, while the other three Jews, one of whom was wounded, managed to escape to another farmer's house. *Ibid.*, 614. In due course, after joining the Lenin triad (the Lenin Komsomol Brigade mentioned later?), Niomke Rogowski avenged the death of his murdered brother by killing Shiemaszka and burning his farm to the ground. *Ibid.*, 644. Eliach's book is also replete with descriptions of murders of individual Jews, invariably attributed to the Home Army, which are short on specific dates, but contain all sorts of detail that only eyewitnesses (who were generally non-existent) could provide. Even Jews

that the “major target” of the Home Army in the vicinity of Ejszyski, “as in many other areas of Poland, was not the Germans but the Jews. ‘Polska bez Żydów [Żydów]’ (Poland without Jews) was adopted as the slogan of the White Poles.”<sup>94</sup>

In her authorized autobiography, Eliach also describes how, during the liquidation of the ghetto in Raduń, her infant brother had been killed in their hiding place in the attic of a barn by fellow Jews who feared the child might cry out and betray them to German soldiers who were passing nearby. In that version, the brother was smothered by the people who held him as hostage to ensure the children’s silence<sup>95</sup>; in another version, he was reportedly strangled in his mother’s arms.<sup>96</sup>

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who died in 1939, before the Home Army was formed, were, according to Eliach, killed by the Home Army. *Ibid.*, 402. Moreover, any fallen Jewish partisan is automatically the victim of cold-blooded killing by the Home Army, without recognition that the Soviet partisans, in whose ranks the Jewish partisans served, had unleashed a war on the Home Army. Corresponding Home Army casualties are simply not acknowledged. When she doesn’t know how a particular Jew was killed, Eliach sometimes attributes their death to multiple agents. For example, under the photograph on page 604, she writes: “Israel and his wife were murdered in the forest ... by local collaborators, Lithuanians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, and Poles.” On the following page, the photograph caption reads: “Pinhas [Lipkunski] was killed by Poles, Germans, and neighbors near his home in the village of Dugalishok [Dowgieliszki].” Yet, later on (at p. 614), she attributes Pinhas’s death to an ambush by the Raduń police, organized by a Lithuanian. Furthermore, while admitting that one German raid in the nearby Nacza forest (a 16-day assault which started on June 16, 1943) took the lives of 70 Jews from the “Todras” family camp alone, Eliach does not hesitate to charge, without any proof, that the number of Jews killed at the hands of local collaborators and the Home Army (she equates these two groups in other contexts) exceeded the number killed by the Germans during military missions and other kinds of clashes. *Ibid.*, 638, 650. The information she provides about the “Todras” partisan group, led by Elke Ariowitch from Raduń, is also interesting. Based in the Nacza forest, to the south of Ejszyski, that group took in many Jewish escapees who had survived in the forest thanks to the assistance of many Polish farmers they knew in the vicinity. *Ibid.*, 631, 636. Jewish women were especially vulnerable to being raped by Soviet partisans in the area. On the other hand, the farmers in nearby villages were “generally speaking ... hospitable” to the Jewish group, while others, whose food was “confiscated by force,” were hostile. Executions of “hostile” farmers were not unheard of. *Ibid.*, 637. Ariowitch eventually fell afoul of a Soviet partisan group, the Lenin Komsomol Brigade. (This group is referred to in Part Two in the context of an attack—described by Leon Kahn—by the Home Army around October 26, 1943.) Lieutenant Anton Stankevich, the newly arrived leader of the brigade, succeeded in recruiting able-bodied Jewish men and some young women from the “Todras” group, including Leon Kahn (Leibke Kaganowicz). (According to Eliach, “Jews were eager to join ... [as] it was an opportunity to fight the Germans and the AK, and to settle scores with local collaborators.” *Ibid.*, 642.) Ariowitch reportedly had many enemies in the Lenin Komsomol Brigade, including “several hard-core Jewish Communist partisans who disapproved of Todras’s devoting so much energy to the welfare of his followers.” *Ibid.*, 637. During Stankevich’s absence, Todras was arrested and found guilty by a military court of taking food by force from some nearby villages. He was demoted, removed from his camp, and his people were disarmed. A few days later Ariowitch was tortured and then executed by the Communist partisans. *Ibid.*, 638. The Jewish partisans in Stankevich’s group continued to be “terrorized ... sometimes with the help of the Jewish Communists.” They also executed Yitzhak Botwinik, a Jewish partisan caught sleeping while on guard duty, and raped and murdered Jewish women. *Ibid.*, 645.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 613. Eliach repeats these charges throughout the book, not allowing the reader to forget for one moment that a “crucial component” of the Home Army’s plan for the future of Poland was “the extermination of all the Jews within its borders.” *Ibid.*, 624.

<sup>95</sup> Stein, *Hidden Children*, 59. The Jews in the attic of the barn did not want to accept any more Jews, especially those with children, into the hiding place. They finally acceded to Moshe Sonenson’s earnest threat: “You’d better let us come in, or I’ll let the Germans know that there are sixteen Jews up there.” The story continues: “Finally, they made a deal. The sixteen people would let the family come up but the children would be their hostages. If any of them made a noise, they would be silenced.”

<sup>96</sup> In *There Once Was a World*, at 602, Eliach states that the Jews in the hiding place, an attic hayloft above a carriage house, did not even want to accept the Sonenson family initially, especially since they had a baby, and that Moshe Sonenson managed to force his way in “after an ugly struggle.” At 605, we learn that baby Shaul, who started to whine, was killed after one of the elderly Jews threw his coat over the child, put his hand on the coat and motioned to the other Jews in the hideout to do the same. According to Leon Kahn, Moshe Sonenson took part in the conference that decided



While sheltered by the Korcuć family, Eliach's mother gave birth to another son, named Hayyim, in June 1944. Passed off as a Polish child born out of wedlock, he was placed with—depending on the version—a Catholic priest or nun or even a peasant family. This child was safely returned to the Sonensons after the Soviet entry in July 1944, only to be killed in the October 1944 assault on the Sonenson home. It is not clear whether, at some point, Moshe Sonenson left the hiding place and established contact with Soviet-Jewish partisans in the nearby Nacza forest (Puszcza Nacka) or Rudniki forest (Puszcza Rudnicka) who frequently foraged in the environs of Ejszyszki.<sup>97</sup>

As Wiktor Noskowski, a Home Army member, points out,

Only a few Jews joined the Home Army. On the other hand, they rushed to enter the Soviet otriads in Rudniki forest outside Wilno, which formed around the underground committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania ...

This was not an especially large group. It did not engage in battles with the Germans ... but rather concentrated on gathering intelligence on the cells of the non-Soviet underground formations in the area ... Thus, not endangered by anyone, it set up its camp consisting of huts and dug-outs ... almost at the gates of Wilno ... near the Solcza, Wysinca, and Merezanka rivers and nearby lakes. It was there, after hiding out in some villages, that the Sonensons spent their exodus. ... The nearby villages, relieved by the Home Army of the presence of Germans ... became an easy target for the ruthless, plundering units of the Soviet-Jewish partisans, who stole not only food, but also clothing, footwear, bedding, and livestock ...

The residents of thoroughly pillaged villages often left their farms and tried to relocate in settlements removed further from the forest. ... Harassed by robbery and banditry, out of desperation, the residents of larger villages armed themselves in order to ward off the night-time robbers. But they didn't manage to defend themselves, and some of them met with a bloody response from the Soviet-Jewish partisans.<sup>98</sup>

This topic will be expanded on in Part Two of this book.

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the fate of the infant. See Kahn, *No Time To Mourn*, 66. Recalling this, and scores of similar Holocaust stories, compels the honest observer to look at incidents of frightened Poles sending away their Jewish charges, or even delivering them to the Germans, in a different light. See also Leon Wells's account in Saul S. Friedman, *Holocaust Literature: A Handbook of Critical, Historical, and Literary Writings* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), 149.

<sup>97</sup> Moshe Sonenson's name does not appear in the extensive list of Jewish partisans found in Isaac Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe: The Story of a Jewish United Partisan Organization* (New York: Central Guide Publishers, 1969), 405–407: "List of Jewish Partisans in the Rudnicki Wilderness." Nor is this episode mentioned in *There Once Was a World*. However, in the account Yaffa Eliach wrote when she was ten for the Ejszyszki Memorial Book published in 1950, she states: "And once again we were forced to leave our hideout and escape to the forests. We joined the partisans who began appearing at that time. We lived there in danger and suffering till the Russians came and we returned to Aishishok [Ejszyszki]." See Alufi and Barkeli, "Aishishuk"; *Its History and Its Destruction*, 68.

<sup>98</sup> Wiktor Noskowski, "Czy Yaffa Eliach przeprosi Polaków?" *Myśl Polska* (Warsaw), July 20–27, 1997. Noskowski's account is reproduced in Chodakiewicz, *Ejszyszki—Kulisy zajść w Ejszyszkach*, volume 1, 181–93.

### *Yaffa Eliach's Conflicting Accounts*

The conflicting accounts of what happened in Ejszyszki are not—as Eliach contends—the result of some dark Polish plot to murder the truth. These “revisions” are largely due to Eliach’s own statements. Eliach is infamous for giving multiple and conflicting accounts of events she claims to have witnessed. Likewise, her remarkable omniscience turns out to be illusory.

The April 3, 1995 issue of *U.S. News & World Report* carried an article by Richard Z. Chesnoff, entitled “The Beginning of Redemption,” which describes the assault on Ejszyszki of October 20, 1944 as follows:

Four months after liberation, a gang of Polish partisans, accompanied by a neighbor, stormed the family house. Yaffa, then 7 years old and hiding in a closet, watched through a crack in the closet as her mother held Yaffa’s infant brother in her arms and pleaded: “Kill me first, not my baby.” In reply, the partisans fired nine bullets into the baby’s body before pumping another 15 rounds into Yaffa’s mother.

Eliach has given somewhat different versions of the same incident. Edward T. Linenthal recorded the following:

On October 20, 1944, another baby brother—who had been born to Eliach’s mother while they were in hiding—was murdered along with his mother as they hid from Polish partisans who wanted to finish the work of killing Jews. When they discovered their hiding place, Eliach recalled, “there was my mother with the baby in her arms. She stood up, walked out ... and I was just in back of her. And she said, ‘Have mercy on my baby. Please kill me first.’ She didn’t ask for her life. ... At that moment he shot my baby brother ... and he shot my mother. ... She fell back on me and my brother, and my father. And they sprayed with the machine gun, but she protected us with her body, and the bullets went into her body. They shot very low, but her body got all the bullets ... and I was covered with blood, and they left.” Eliach’s father was arrested a few days later by the Russians and sent to Siberia.<sup>99</sup>

Yet another version, found in the November 12, 1982 issue of *Publishers Weekly*, has the father’s mysterious arrest taking place a few months later because he was a political criminal (a “Zionist”). He was reportedly not seen again until 1960.

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<sup>99</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1995), 176.

The “definitive” account was supposed to be the one Yaffa Eliach wrote for the *New York Times*.<sup>100</sup> According to that version, a 150-strong Polish Home Army unit invaded Ejszyski and attacked the Sonenson house around 11 p.m. on October 19, 1944, while she and her brother Yitzhak were sleeping in the downstairs bedroom. They were awakened by something crashing through the window and ran upstairs. Unidentified people who were upstairs jumped out of the windows as shots were fired. They managed to escape to a nearby apple grove. The Sonenson family, however, hid in a “small attic-like closet” off a second-floor room. The father crawled to the very back near the edge of the attic. Yaffa’s brother Yitzhak sat in front of their father, and Yaffa sat in front of her brother. The mother sat directly in front of the door with the child in her arms.

According to this version, it wasn’t until sometime after midnight that the partisans, many of whose voices her parents recognized, made their way to the closet. Apparently, they were attracted there by a scratch on the floor made by her father when he dragged a large wooden chest to block the door. The partisans moved the chest and opened the door. Yaffa’s mother emerged carrying the baby in her arms. The murderers included Anton Sharavei, Wladyslaw Duszinski, and the Sonenson’s 17-year-old neighbour and his 22-year-old brother. (Although the local Polish murderers were “well known” to them, some of them are given strange Russian-sounding names and others are not identified by name.<sup>101</sup>) Yaffa’s mother told Sharavei to kill her first. Nine bullets were pumped into the child and then another fifteen into her mother. The mother fell back on Yaffa and Yitzhak but somehow the partisans didn’t notice them. The partisans continued their fusillade as they left.

Many aspects of this account are inherently implausible. For example, how could “people upstairs” manage to elude a company of 150 well-armed partisans by jumping from the second-floor window and hiding in an apple grove, if indeed the partisans’ mission was to murder all of the town’s Jews? How could Yaffa’s father, who hid at the back of a tight, crowded closet, have positioned the chest in front of the closet door? How could the partisans have pumped nine bullets into the child held in Yaffa’s mother’s arms and another fifteen into her mother without harming the others who hid directly behind her? How could the same partisans who noticed a scratch on the floor in the middle of the night have failed to notice Yaffa and her brother if her mother had fallen back on top of them?

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<sup>100</sup> Yaffa Eliach, “The Pogrom at Eishyshok,” *New York Times*, August 6, 1996. An astonishing article by Nancy Q. Keefe, “Students glimpse horror of Holocaust,” appeared in the April 25, 1996 issue of *New Rochelle Standard Star* and in other New York State publications with a radically different version of these events. Addressing students at a Holocaust commemoration in a Yonkers high school, Eliach reportedly stated that she and her family, except for her father who had been sent to Siberia, had to hide from the Germans in a cave under a pigsty. “In the cave,” she related, “my mother taught me how to read and write by tracing my fingers on the wall to show me the Hebrew letters.” Then their hideout was found out. Her mother and a brother were taken away by the Nazis, killed and dumped into what she calls the killing field in their town. She and another brother hidden farther back in the cave went undetected. A Catholic woman found her and took her in. Eliach subsequently repudiated this version.

<sup>101</sup> It should be noted that Polish names get distorted when transliterated into English from the Russian, which is the language of official Soviet documents. Moreover, Jewish sources routinely misspell Polish names. Some of the various spellings that appear in this text reflect those distortions.

The version of the story found in André Stein's *Hidden Children* contains a bit more detail and alludes, vaguely and enigmatically, to the presence of Soviet soldiers at the scene of the pogrom. Part of the animus for the attack was, allegedly, a business rivalry: the son of a local Polish pharmacist (Sharavei) was upset over the Sonensons' return, fearing they would reopen their grandmother's store.

On October 20, there was a great party at the Sonensons' house to honour [her baby brother's] return from his Catholic home [where he had been sheltered during the German occupation]. ... Everybody was there, even some Russian soldiers. Then they all went to bed, the parents upstairs, and the children downstairs in their room.

In the middle of the night, Yaffa was awakened by a noise that could have been a knock on the window next to her bed. She and Yitzhak leaped up and ran out of the room. The moment they crossed the threshold, a grenade crashed through the window and exploded.

By the time the two children made it upstairs, Moshe and Zipporah and their guests were up, screaming and running around. Everyone else jumped out of the second-storey windows, but Yaffa's parents could not jump: they had the baby. ...

There was a closet in the master bedroom. ... The sloping ceiling allowed only for Zipporah to sit on the floor with her baby in her arms. Yaffa sat behind her. For Yitzhak and Moshe there was room only if they lay flat on the floor behind them. After having dragged a piece of furniture in front of the closet door, Moshe squeezed past it and hid with his family. ...

They could hear loud voices coming closer to the stairs. Yaffa recognized the voice of the pharmacist's son, accompanied by the white Partisans. "He came accompanied by some of his comrades who still wanted Poland free of Russians and Jews," Yaffa explains.

Then she heard another voice: "There's no point looking for Sonenson and his wife. They must have escaped with the others."

And another one said, "Let's just check upstairs."

Upstairs they touched nothing. They were not interested in money or things. They wanted to kill Russians and Jews.

"Look at the floor here!" Yaffa heard from inside the closet. "There's a fresh scratch on the floor from dragging a piece of furniture. Let's just see where it leads."

They followed the scratch to the closet, moved the piece of furniture and opened the closet door.

Inside they found Zipporah sitting on the floor with her head touching the ceiling. In her arms, she was holding the baby. She rose to her feet immediately and stepped into the room. The pharmacist's son had a gun.

"Kill me first, not my baby!" she said calmly. She knew why he had come.

But they shot the baby first. They put nine bullets into his tiny body. And then fifteen into the mother. ...

Zipporah's body fell back into the closet, on top of Yaffa. The child stumbled back under her mother's weight. ...

Yitzhak and Yaffa survived the carnage without being hit. Their mother and baby brother's bodies took most of the bullets. One that got past them, grazed Moshe's ear ...<sup>102</sup>

In the documentary *Shtetl*, Eliach alleges that her father "was a little bit wounded in his leg." Curiously, her father does not mention the injuries he allegedly sustained.

How do the Russian soldiers fit in? What happened to them? Yaffa Eliach is silent about such matters, though in that account she speaks of "White" Poles who wanted a "Poland free of *Russians* and Jews." Eliach also claims that her father remained in Ejszyszki to find the alleged assassins. "Since they were all local people, he had an easy task. But as soon as they were arrested, they were released again, since all were related to the chief of police."<sup>103</sup>

Yaffa Eliach's account of the assault by Poles on her family home in Ejszyszki was also featured in Marian Marzyski's 1996 PBS documentary *Shtetl*. There Eliach recalls that, at the time of the assault, "there were Russians also *living* in our house"—actually "two Russian *officers* ... were sleeping downstairs." In fact, she reveals casually that these were *Soviet officers of the dreaded NKVD*. However, nowhere did she turn her mind to the significance of this fact or its possible bearing on why the Home Army targeted this particular home.

In her 1997 Chautauqua lecture, Yaffa Eliach provided more details about the circumstances of the "pogrom." She stated that after the Russians had left town, on October 18, 1944, a good Christian friend warned the family of an impending attack. Her father and Meier Kabacznik went to Wilno to ask the Russians for protection. A Soviet captain arrived in Ejszyszki on October 19 to investigate. The assault took place that night, at 11 p.m., at her grandmother's two-storey brick home, one of two houses occupied by Jews (the other was the Kabacznik home). Despite the fact that the Polish partisans threw a grenade and were shooting machine guns, everyone except for the Sonenson family and the Soviet captain, who was captured, managed to jump out the windows and run away. The partisans, consisting of a pharmacist's son and two other neighbours, then proceeded upstairs to "get rid of" the Sonenson family.

### ***Yet Another Version***

The events of October 1944 were portrayed again somewhat differently in Yaffa Eliach's opus *There Once Was a World*,<sup>104</sup> where all sorts of new elements and players are introduced. The relevant charges found in the book were succinctly summarized by historian John Radziłowski as follows:

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<sup>102</sup> Stein, *Hidden Children*, 64–65.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. In a previous version Yaffa Eliach stated: "The Russians arrested most of the participants in the October pogrom, and they were brought to trial in Vilnius before an N.K.V.D. military tribunal, sentenced to prison and exiled to Siberia." See Eliach, "The Pogrom at Eishyshok," *New York Times*, August 6, 1996.

<sup>104</sup> The events are described in Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, at 624, 663–68, 673, 679–80.

At the heart of Eliach's claims are five points. First, Poland was a land of unremitting and virtually eternal antisemitism and that antisemitism was exported abroad, i.e. to Lithuania (pp. 23–6). Secondly, the AK was an antisemitic organization dedicated almost exclusively to killing Jews. She writes: 'Anti-Semitism took precedence over all other goals. ... Despite the loyalty of many Jews to Poland, they—not the Germans and not the Russians—bore the brunt of AK attacks as the enemies of Poland.' (P. 613.) Thirdly, in north-eastern Poland the AK made a formal alliance with the Nazis for the purpose of killing Jews and communists (pp. 629, 746 n.1). Fourthly, in 1944 'the AK began to plan for the future of Poland, a crucial component of which was the extermination of all the Jews still within its borders'. According to Eliach, the local AK with the help of the Church convened a sort of Ejszyski Wannsee conference to plan the killing of the region's remaining Jews (p. 624). Fifthly, the killing of her mother and brother was part of this 'Polish final solution'; that is, the attack on Ejszyski was an unprovoked pogrom directed against Jews and part of a systematic plan to murder all Jews (pp. 663–67).

Many of these claims are presented without evidence or with citations so tendentious as to make them untenable, even without using outside sources. For example, on the allegation of the AK being a pro-Nazi organization devoted to slaughtering Jews, Eliach cites as her source two entries in Israel Gutman's *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*. She then, incredibly, writes: 'Unfortunately, these entries omit all mention of the hostility of the AK toward the Jews.' (P. 745 n.5.)<sup>105</sup>

Thus the genesis of the events is now cast nine months into the murky past, to a Wannsee-like conference,<sup>106</sup> allegedly convened on January 25, 1944 by the local Home Army commander, Lieutenant Jan Borysewicz (*nom de guerre* or code name "Kryśia"),<sup>107</sup> and the local pharmacist Sharavei (actually Antoni Serbej). The meeting was supposedly held in the home of Dr. Shemitkowski (actually Siemiątkowski) and attended by "all the Polish elite" of Ejszyski:

Dr. Shemitkowski [sic], the veterinarian, in whose home the meeting was held; Jan Gurak, former principal of the Polish school in Eishyshok ... ; Stanislaw Katowietski [sic], the former chief of police in Eishyshok; Dr. Lehr, a longtime resident ... ; a miller named Krolowitz [sic] ... ; and two young priests, assistants to Father Maczulski [sic] at the Juryzdyki [Juryzdyka] church.<sup>108</sup>

A "crucial component" of the Home Army's "plan" for the future of Poland, Eliach assures us, was "the extermination of all the Jews within its border. A 'Poland without Jews' was the only way to ensure a free

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<sup>105</sup> John Radziłowski, "Ejszyski Revisited, 1939–1945," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, volume 15 (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002): 455–56.

<sup>106</sup> The Wannsee conference, held in the Berlin suburb of the same name on January 20, 1942, was convoked by Reinhard Heydrich to discuss the implementation of the last and key stages of the "Final Solution."

<sup>107</sup> In Russian sources Borysewicz is referred to as "Krys"; Eliach refers to him as "Krisha." According to Eliach, Borysewicz "hated Jews even more than he hated the Germans and Russians, and so did the men under his command." See Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 614.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 624.

Poland.” The “agenda” of the January 25<sup>th</sup> meeting in Ejszyszki was allegedly delineated in very clear terms: “how to resolve ‘the Jewish question’ in time for the return of the London-based government-in-exile at the end of the war, which was now felt to be imminent.”<sup>109</sup> (Eliach’s logic should strike even a novice as being terribly flawed: at that time it was the return of the Soviet army that was imminent and widely anticipated and dreaded, not the Polish government’s.) According to Eliach,

The decision was that all Poles now needed to make a renewed effort to ferret out and kill every Jew in hiding or in the forest. To make sure the message got out to as wide an audience as possible, they forced Father Maczulski [sic] to present it in a sermon from the pulpit in Juryzdyki. ... The sermon that was duly delivered on a Sunday in February proved a death sentence for most of those two hundred [Jews still in hiding in the vicinity].<sup>110</sup>

The content of the sermon, however, is not revealed, nor are the names of any witnesses. It is reasonable to assume it never occurred.

The source of this information is an infamous but mysterious document that Eliach does not actually possess, nor has she ever seen. During a 1966 lecture at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Eliach claimed it was shown to her father by the Soviet secret police, and she more or less repeats this version in an endnote.<sup>111</sup> Yet, Eliach contradicts herself in the text, noting that her father himself discovered the incriminating document while taking part in an NKVD raid against the Home Army.<sup>112</sup>

As pointed out by John Radziłowski,

The fact that no serious scholar would dare cite a non-existent or lost document as the sole basis for such a controversial claim, let alone provide two conflicting accounts of its provenance in the same book, only shows the lengths to which Yaffa Eliach will go to make a case that is not scholarly but ideological.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 624. Leon Kahn, a Jew from Ejszyszki who fought with the Soviet partisans, makes similar claims: “One group of partisans, however, sometimes fought on the side of the Germans. They were Polish farmers by day and partisans by night who carried out the orders of the exiled Polish government in London. These orders specifically stated that in addition to ridding themselves of their German conquerors, all Poles were to see to it that no Jews remained in Poland after the war. Their slogan was ‘Polska Bez Żydów’ or ‘Poland Without Jews’. These were the men of the Armia Krajowa or ‘Home Army’ ... At the beginning, they had a special status with the Germans because they carried on the work of exterminating the Jews and Communists.” For good measure, Kahn also casts the blame more broadly: “Most of these murders stemmed from centuries of hatred nurtured by the Catholic Church and the Polish educational system.” See Kahn, *No Time To Mourn*, 119.

<sup>110</sup> Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 624.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 745 n.12: “The decisions made at this meeting were put in writing. Moshe Sonenson saw the signed document in the files of the NKVD in Eishyshok in the fall of 1944.”

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 671: “During an NKVD raid on AK headquarters ... Moshe discovered minutes from the January 1944 meeting where it was decided that all the still-surviving Jews who were hiding in the vicinity should be tracked down and murdered.”

<sup>113</sup> Radziłowski, “Yaffa Eliach’s Big Book of Holocaust Revisionism,” *Journal of Genocide Research*, volume 1, no. 2

Moreover, the document is of such pivotal importance that it surely would have formed a key piece of evidence in the subsequent trials of Home Army men and, if it existed, should still be in the Soviet archives. Yet no one has located it.

Interestingly, Eliach presented another version of this account at the Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference held in Jerusalem in October 1985, where she identified Józef Wojciechowicz, the prewar township reeve (*wójt*), as another participant of this infamous meeting.

Under the leadership of the pharmacist Sharavei, a meeting took place in January 1944 at the home of Dr. Shemitowski, a veterinarian, and was attended by the *shtetl's* Polish elite. Present were Sharavei, the host, Dr. Shemitowski, Wicechowich, the town's mayor, Lehr, a physician, Girak, the Polish school principal, two young priests, the chief of police, Stanislav Kotowicki, Krolowicz, who worked at the mill, and Krisha, the hit man of the "White Poles." They issued a proclamation stating that since Hitler had helped Poland to rid itself of its Jews, it was the holy duty of the Polish people to eliminate all the Jews still in hiding, so that not a single Jew would remain alive. The new Poland of post-World War II must be free of Jews and Communists. The Proclamation was read at the local church in Jurizdicki. The document was seen by Moshe Sonenson in the fall of 1944, in the NKVD Headquarters in Eishyshok. From the reading of the Proclamation until the liberation, about 182 Jews in hiding, Eishyshkians and others, were murdered by local Poles and the "White Poles." This does not include partisan casualties.<sup>114</sup>

Eliach also claims to have seen, but does not reproduce, a list of the Jews murdered by White Poles found in the pocket of her father's trousers the day he died.

This entire matter has been clarified by Witold Andruszkiewicz (*nom de guerre* "Agawa"), commander of the Ejszyszki II Home Army outpost.<sup>115</sup> Andruszkiewicz had never heard of any such meeting and, strangely, was not even mentioned as one of the participants, even though he was a local Home Army leader and lived just some 500 metres away from where it allegedly took place. Although the house in question belonged to Dr. Siemiątkowski, he had left Ejszyszki in 1940; after the arrival of the Germans in June 1941, his house was taken over and turned into the local headquarters of the *Saugumo policija*, the Lithuanian security police, an adjunct of the Gestapo. This house was, therefore, the most unlikely place in Ejszyszki to have convened a conspiratorial meeting—possibly a *séance*—of the Home Army.

Nor can the mysterious minutes or proclamation referred to by Eliach be adjudged authentic for other reasons. Home Army meetings took place not in Ejszyszki (concerning which there are no records in any

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(June 1999): 278.

<sup>114</sup> Yaffa Eliach, "Survivors of a Single *Shtetl*. Case Study: Eishyshok," in Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf, eds., *She'erit Hapletah, 1944–1948: Rehabilitation and Political Struggle. Proceedings of the Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, October 1985* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990), 495.

<sup>115</sup> The following is based on correspondence with Witold Andruszkiewicz, dated June 19, 1999 (in the author's possession).



archival source), but in the outlying estate of Rakliszki. Minutes of meetings setting out resolutions in the form alleged, containing detailed lists of participants including their true identities and specifying the actual location of the meeting, were simply not the practice for conspiratorial activities during the war. (If required, a succinct report was drawn up with perhaps some code names and an anonymous location such as “*postój*”.) Dr. Siemiątkowski is not the only participant who was not present in Ejszyszki at the time of the alleged meeting. Stanisław Gotowiecki (not Katowietki), who was formerly chief of the volunteer fireguards (and not the police chief), had been arrested by the Soviets in September or October 1939, and his fate is unknown. (He was likely deported to the Gulag or executed.)

As usual, most of the names of local people given by Eliach are incorrect: “Krysia” (not “Krysha” or “Krisha”); Serbej (not Sharavei); Siemiątkowski (not Shemitkowski); Ludwik (not Jan) Gurak (not Girak); Stanisław Gotowiecki (not Katowietki or Kotowicki); Kotowicz (not Krolowitz or Krolowicz); and Rev. Bolesław Moczulski (not Maczulski). Moreover, Rev. Moczulski, the local pastor, had but one vicar (assistant) at the time, not two. It is also worth noting that Ludwik Gurak, one of the alleged participants, had in fact stood up for the Jews during the German occupation. Unfortunately, his attempt to rescue Sabina Goldberg (née Maiberger), by telling the Lithuanian police that she was a Catholic Pole, was unsuccessful. The pharmacist and doctor who allegedly attended this infamous meeting subsequently saved the lives of several Jews who had consumed a toxic substance.<sup>116</sup>

Thus, if a document concerning the alleged January 25, 1944 meeting ever existed, one can only surmise that it was concocted by Moshe Sonenson himself and was such a crude forgery that even the Soviets would not use it. More likely, it was figment of his imagination. What is clear, however, is that within days of the alleged conference, it was not the Home Army but rather the Soviet and Jewish partisans in the area who perpetrated a heinous blood bath of innocent civilians. On January 29, they massacred the population of Koniuchy, a Polish village near Bieniakonie, located just north of Ejszyszki, and burned the village to the ground. (The circumstances of that massacre are dealt with in Part Three.)

Another bizarre claim found in the 1985 Yad Vashem article which Eliach does not repeat in her book is that the local residents turned photographs of Jews into religious icons.

The Polish population now lived in Jewish homes ... Even among the Holy Icons hanging on the walls in every house, Jewish faces were to be found. A halo had been painted above the head of Alter Katz, a handsome woman, transforming her into the mother of Christ. A cross was tied around the neck of a good-looking bearded Talmudic scholar, turning him into St. Joseph. Scores of smiling Jewish children joined the Holy Family as infant Christs and cherubs.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> According to Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 663, the pharmacist Sharavei (Antoni Serbej) and the doctor (likely Dr. Edmund Lehr) actually saved the lives of several Jews who lived in the Kabacznik house in September 1944, after they had consumed some detergent which they believed to be baking soda.

<sup>117</sup> Yaffa Eliach, “Survivors of a Single *Shtetl*. Case Study: Eishyshok,” in Gutman and Saf, eds., *She'erit Hapletah*, 496.

Suffice it to say that no Catholic has ever laid eyes on photo-icons of the Holy Family. One wonders whether it was Eliach or the editor of her subsequent book who prudently laid that gem to rest.

As we shall see, Eliach is also not forthcoming about the activities of her father on his return to Ejszyski after its “liberation” by the Soviets in July 1944. Eliach contends that, in the fall of 1944, because of rumours of an impending attack on the Ejszyski Jews (it is not clear whether these rumours related to Jews in general or those who were the mainstay of Communist authority), Moshe Sonenson and his cousin Shepske Kabacznik journeyed to Wilno to appeal to the Soviet military headquarters for protection. At about five o’clock in the afternoon, on October 19, 1944, three Red Army men—a captain, who was a member of the counter-intelligence “Smersh”; his assistant, a sergeant; and their driver—arrived in town and installed themselves in the Sonensons’ home. Another Red Army man (perhaps two—the accounts are not consistent), who was requisitioning potatoes for troops stationed nearby, (though Eliach said these troops were far away at the front), also spent the night in town at the home of a Christian woman.

In addition, staying at the Sonensons’ that night, allegedly for “security” reasons, were a number of people. Eliach had previously described some of them as ordinary residents of that home: Alter Michalowski, who was one of the four-member local Soviet-appointed armed militia, and possibly his wife Masha, Zvi Michalowski (whom Eliach also has staying in the Kabacznik home that night), Moshe Edelstein, Dobke Kremin Dimitrowski, and Esther Kaufman.

There is not a peep about the earlier reported “great party” held that evening in honour of the return of Eliach’s baby brother from his Catholic rescuers. The theme of the baby’s rebirth (i.e., his restoration to his Jewish family) and simultaneous death had been underscored in her authorized account found in André Stein’s book. One can now safely dismiss that aspect of her story as a melodramatic fiction.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> The threads of this fiction run deep. In other accounts, we are told that baby Hayyim was named after the baby brother who was suffocated by fellow Jews in the family’s temporary hideout in Raduń. According to *There Once Was A World*, that child was named Shaul, and the new baby brother, we are told at p. 628, was so named in memory of Moshe Sonenson’s mother, Hayya, and because that word means “life.” James E. Young provides some valuable insight into Yaffa Eliach’s genre of historical writing: “what might have remained a relatively benign oversight in a collection with less than scholarly pretensions assumes problematic proportions in Yaffa Eliach’s *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*. ... In failing to distinguish the shape her own narrative hand has given Hasidic experiences from that of the original storytellers, Eliach betrays a surprisingly ingenuous approach to what are in effect her own works of fiction, written in Hasidic mode. ... even as she acknowledges several layers of structuring, translating, and conforming to genre, she insists on an untenable historicity in these tales: they are simultaneously history and legend, documentation and art. ... For in fact, many of these stories are clearly legendary, anchored firmly in the rich tradition of Hasidic storytelling, often merely re-emplotted to encompass elements of the Hasidic survivors’ horrible experiences. ... But they are not documents of fact amenable to historical verification and analysis, as their author guilelessly insists in her foreword. ... Even the author’s own story—that of a little Jewish girl bundled into hiding—buried deep in the pages of others’ tales, seems to fall somewhere between the apocryphal and the autobiographical. ... Eliach is as much a part of these tales as they are now a part of her.” See James E. Young *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 40–43. Historian Mark Mazower expresses similar reservations about Eliach’s most recent book: “*There Once 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.” See Mark Mazower, “Distant voices, other lives,” *New Statesman*, May 31, 1999. In Richard Z. Chesnoff’s provocatively titled piece, “On Holocaust day, remember this tiny town,” *Daily News*, April 23, 1998, however, Eliach assured us: “I tell only the truth.” Eliach’s most recent project is

We are told that the “Smersh” captain ordered his driver to sleep outside in their truck which was parked in the stable, while the captain took the front room near the main entrance to the house. It is not clear where his assistant, the sergeant, slept. Yitzhak and Yaffa Sonenson slept in the room at the end of the dining room. Moshe and Zipporah Sonenson, along with their baby Hayyim, Shalom and Miriam Sonenson, Alter Michalowski, and all the other guests retired to bedrooms on the second floor. In all, there were twelve or thirteen Jews staying in the Sonensons’ house that night.

The other Jews in Ejszyszki—about twenty of them—were staying nearby in the Kabacznik house. It was Miriam Kabacznik who, sometime after eleven that night, allegedly heard a voice giving orders in Polish to attack the Sonenson house, and then the Kabacznik house. “Polska bez Żydów” [“Poland without Jews”] was supposedly the “rallying cry” trumpeted to the Polish partisans. Miriam Kabacznik alerted the large Kabacznik household, who fled and took cover outside without apparently attracting anyone’s attention.<sup>119</sup> Miriam Kabacznik’s own testimony, which was recorded in 1996, does not mention ever having heard the infamous “rallying call” that allegedly led the attack.<sup>120</sup>

The Sonenson household was soon startled by the loud noise of a grenade crashing through the window of the room occupied by Yitzhak and Yaffa Sonenson. They were awoken and fled to their parents’ room on the second floor. The grenade that landed on Yaffa’s bed exploded and people began fleeing from the house, some of them by jumping from the second-floor windows. Alter Michalowski and Moshe Sonenson fired machine guns through the second-floor windows, though how it was that the latter came into possession of a machine-gun and learned how to use it is not explained. (Eliach insists that her father became “an insider at the NKVD station” in Ejszyszki only *after* the October 1944 events.) Nor is the reaction of the “Smersh” captain recorded. Soon, however, everyone escaped from the building leaving the Sonensons behind.

Since his wife Zipporah would not jump from the second-storey window and leave their baby behind, Moshe Sonenson directed his entire family to a hiding place in “an atticlike closet above the steps and off a second-floor room.” He hoped to camouflage the doorway to the closet by pulling a piece of furniture against it. Once inside the closet, Moshe crawled to the back of it “where the sloping roof met the floor, and lay flat.” Yitzhak sat in front of Moshe, while Zipporah sat facing the door, with Yaffa in back of her and the baby in her arms.

The Home Army men seized the “Smersh” captain and “tore the house apart” looking for the Sonensons,

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the reconstruction of her shtetl of Ejszyszki in Israel as a theme park. See Michael Widlanski, “It takes a shtetl,” *The Jerusalem Post Internet Edition*, Mat 25, 2000 (February 23, 2000), posted on the Internet at: <<http://www.jpost.com/Editions/2000/02/18/Features/Features.2897.html>>; Ron Csillag, “Survivor spearheading effort to build replica shtetl in Israel,” *The Canadian Jewish News*, July 27, 2000.

<sup>119</sup> Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 664.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Miriam Kabacznik Shulman, recorded July 23, 1996, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum archives. Miriam Kabacznik Shulman professes to have overheard some of the conversation of Polish partisans outside her home who were discussing which building to attack first. They chose the Sonenson house “because there are the Russians and they can take their documents and their ammunition.”

“cursing every time they mentioned Moshe Sonenson’s name.” Why they would’ve thought that Moshe Sonenson stayed behind, while all the other men had fled, and why their rage was directed at this one man is not clear from this account. However, the reason for their dislike of the local militia becomes apparent when we learn about their activities after the Soviet “liberation,” courtesy of Alter Michalowski and others. The Home Army men eventually made their way upstairs where someone noticed the “telltale scratch that had been etched into the floor” leading to the closet hiding place.

The composition of the murderers—allegedly all “well known” to the Sonensons—is quite different from the *New York Times* version. Anton Sharavei (Antoni Serbej), the pharmacist’s son and principal assailant, is still among them. (Anton, the name by which Eliach calls the pharmacist’s son, was actually the father’s name, and, as we shall see, he had no son. Nor is it clear that he was a pharmacist.<sup>121</sup>) Instead of Władysław Duszyński (Władysław Duszyński) and the two sons of the Sonensons’ *neighbour*, we now have Stanisław Bułhak (Stanisław Bułhak) and the Merzuk (Mieźuk) brothers, Ivan (sic, Jan) and Waclaw (Wacław), the sons of Moshe Sonenson’s former *employee*. Zipporah Sonenson is now said to have addressed the murderers Anton (Sharavei) and Stanisław (Bulgak) by name, even though the former (the pharmacist’s son) did not exist and the latter was never mentioned by Eliach before.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, the Mieźuks did not hail from Ejszyski, but from the village of Nowosady.<sup>123</sup> Even more strangely, in his statements to the authorities, Moshe Sonenson never identifies Sharavei (Serbej) or, it seems, Bułhak (Bułhak) as culprits.<sup>124</sup> How does one account for all this confusion?

The “Smersh” captain reportedly disappeared without a trace together with all the official documents he was carrying. It was later learned that he had been taken prisoner by the Poles along with his assistant, the sergeant, and shot, though his body was never found. (Moshe Sonenson believed erroneously that, although wounded, the captain survived and was taken to a hospital.) The captain’s driver was captured while trying to escape, undressed, and disarmed. He was either released or fled and made his way to the town of Orany (Varėna, in Lithuanian), where he called on the militia for help. Alter Michalowski, who had escaped through a window, also went for help to the town of Raduń. The members of the Kabaczniak household all

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<sup>121</sup> The 1929 business directory (*Księga adresowa Polski dla handlu, przemysłu, rzemiosł i rolnictwa*) lists neither Serbej nor Kac (Yaffa Eliach’s mother’s maiden name) nor Sonenson as pharmacists. Two persons by the name of Kac operated a drugstore (*skład apteczny*), which did not sell prescription drugs but other related items. According to a Jewish source, one of Yaffa Eliach’s grandmothers ran a bakery. See Livingston, *Tradition and Modernism in the Shtetl*, 89.

<sup>122</sup> Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 666.

<sup>123</sup> “Przyczynek do dziejów AK na Wileńszczyźnie po lipcu 1944 r.,” *Kurier Wileński*, July 21, July 22, July 23, and August 28, 1992.

<sup>124</sup> In his statement to the investigators, Moshe Sonenson identifies the following culprits: (1) Walicki, (2) Władysław Dużyński, (3) Maszlanko, (4) Masalski, (5) Masiuk, (6) Olszewski, (7) Urbanowicz, (8) Buczak [Bułhak?], (9) Józef Chorościn, and (10) Mungiało. See *Kurier Wileński*, August 5, 1992. At the trial, in which he was a key witness, the following persons are identified: (1) Walicki, (2) Dużyński, (3) Maszlanko, (4) Masiuk, (5) Józef Chorościn, and (6) Mungiało. See *Kurier Wileński*, August 8, 1992. The names Sharavei (Serbej) and, possibly, Bułhak (Bułhak) are conspicuously absent.

escaped injury, but the house itself was ransacked. The number of assailants was estimated at 150, 80 of whom were said to be “sworn” members of the Home Army.

The search for the culprits then began employing the resources that were firmly in place:

Those [Jews] who had fought in Russian partisan units were able to help by working with the NKVD (the Russian secret police) and the militia. Considered a great asset by the [Soviet] military [security], since they were so familiar with the local language, populace, and countryside, many of the Jewish partisans were drafted into prominent positions where their knowledge of local politics and personalities could be put to use. ... It was men like these whom the Russians trusted to identify and track down their mutual enemies: members of the anti-Communist White Poles ... Now trying to reassert their authority over the area, the Soviets established an NKVD post in Eishyshok.<sup>125</sup>

Moshe Sonenson, Israel Dimitrowski, Zvi Michalowski, Israel Shmerkovich, and Reuven Paikowski joined in the search in an “unofficial” capacity and accompanied the NKVD on “various” and “numerous” missions into the countryside. They became aware that they “were not welcome members” of the community to which they had returned. They also encountered ambushes and face-to-face battles with the remnants of the Home Army.<sup>126</sup> Soviet reprisals proved to be swift and brutal:

The dead bodies of the AK ... were put on public display on the market square. The rows of frozen corpses remained there for weeks, growing longer and longer as new truckloads of bodies were added. ... One winter day the body of Krisha [“Kryisia”, i.e., Lieutenant Jan Borysewicz], the AK commander of the northern group was brought in.<sup>127</sup>

According to Eliach’s 1985 Yad Vashem article,

a number of survivors, mostly young partisans and a few who were in hiding, avenged the deaths of their families. Individuals who murdered Jews during the war and after the liberation were killed; a total of about twenty. This number does not include reprisals by partisans during the war, nor

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<sup>125</sup> Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 669–70.

<sup>126</sup> Eliach bemoans the fact that when Reuven Paikowski and Israel and Yekutiel Shmerkovich went to a “repatriation” office in Orany that winter, “they almost never made it, because the three heavily armed former partisans” were—not surprisingly—ambushed by the Home Army. Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 679.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 672. Lieutenant Jan Borysewicz (“Kryisia”) became the commander of the northern group of the Home Army district of Nowogródek in August 1944, when that district was divided in two (the southern half was under the command of Captain Stanisław Szabunia). He was killed in an NKVD ambush on January 21, 1945. His body (clad only in ersatz underwear) was put on display in several towns and villages in the Lida region with great fanfare and people were chased out of their homes to view and identify it. This barbarous practice also attracted its share of gloaters from among the Soviet supporters, but was actually carried out as a warning to the populace who was horrified at this gruesome spectacle. See Grzegorz Wąsowski and Leszek Żebrowski, *Żołnierze wyklęci: Antykomunistyczne podziemie zbrojne po 1944 roku* (Warsaw: Volumen and Liga Republikańska, 1999), 46; Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej*, 621.

Germans killed after liberation. The reprisals took place with the full cooperation of the NKVD and the Russian army.<sup>128</sup>

None of the Soviet documents that Eliach refers to, save perhaps one, actually corroborates her assertion that the attack that killed her mother and brother was an anti-Jewish pogrom. The testimony of AK member Michał Iwaszko given to the NKVD is relied on to show that the Jews were the target of a “Polish pogrom,” but no passages from this key document are set out so one cannot be sure as to what it actually contains.<sup>129</sup> Before turning to this document, the comments of historian John Radziłowski (written before the actual text of the document became known) are worth noting:

There is yet another set of documents that Eliach claims proves her case and which she cites many times to prove her assertion that the attack that killed her mother and brother was an anti-Jewish pogrom: trial documents of AK members taken prisoner by the NKVD. Reliance on the good name of Soviet military justice is a cruel joke at best. Leaving aside the countless and well documented instances of torture, coercion, trickery, and intimidation inherent in these trials, and the fact that the basic rights of defendants were non-existent, these were political show trials of members of an organization the Soviet security forces were murdering or deporting to Siberian gulags by the tens of thousands. Membership of the AK or any other related Polish organization was a crime in Soviet eyes. Thus, to cite such documents in this case without any corroboration begs the question.

Nevertheless, let us assume for the sake of argument that such documents accurately reflect reality. The passages Eliach cites in the text contradict nothing of what serious Polish and Polish-American scholars and commentators have been saying all along. That is, that Eliach’s mother and brother were killed during an attack by the AK, but that this attack was not a pogrom, but a military operation against a house that was giving shelter to Soviet officers involved in the persecution and murder of Poles. As to Eliach’s oft-repeated claim that the Poles marched into town shouting slogans calling for a Poland free of Jews, she can apparently find no documentary evidence. ... In sum Eliach has been able to find only a single citeable document, the testimony of one Michał Iwaszko to the NKVD, to show that the Jews were the target of a “Polish pogrom” during which her mother and brother were killed. Not having seen this document, the reviewer cannot comment on its nature; however, it is clear that Eliach has failed to examine a whole range of other relevant source material: Polish, Jewish, and Soviet. In short, the author has utterly failed to present hard evidence to back up her revisionist claims and seems only remotely conversant with the norms of scholarly research and communication.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Yaffa Eliach, “Survivors of a Single *Shtetl*. Case Study: Eishyshok,” in Gutman and Saf, eds., *She’erit Hapletah*, 497.

<sup>129</sup> Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 673, 747 n.21.

<sup>130</sup> Radziłowski, “Yaffa Eliach’s Big Book of Holocaust Revisionism,” *Journal of Holocaust Research*, volume 1, no. 2 (June 1999): 278.

In fact the copious archival documents from the extensive investigation found in the former KGB archives in Vilnius (Wilno) provide scant evidence of an “anti-Semitic” pogrom. More than 40 Home Army members stood trial for the attack on Ejszyszki held in Wilno in April and May 1945. Out of this number six received death sentences; the others received terms of imprisonment ranging from five to twenty years for various crimes involving “anti-Soviet” activities. All of the accused were interrogated under torture to extract confessions,<sup>131</sup> yet the references to crimes directed specifically at Jews are surprisingly scarce and do not indicate that the target of the attack were the town’s Jews.

From “confessions” elicited from apprehended participants, we learn that the stated purpose of the attack on Ejszyszki was to steal official seals, which were subsequently to be used to forge documents. We also learn that one of the AK commanders was Józef Chiniewicz (*nom de guerre* “Grom”), reputedly a Muslim Tartar by origin, who had recruited local young men in response to the escalating Soviet terror.<sup>132</sup> Chiniewicz, who headed the unit allegedly responsible for looting the Jewish homes, was accused of “personal participation” in the attack and, more specifically, of robbing the tannery and the state grain storage and killing some servicemen and civilians. Moreover, he was accused of organizing his subordinates to fight against the Soviets and distributing counter-revolutionary literature.<sup>133</sup>

According to the statement of Anton Mezhuk (Antoni Mieżuk), “Before the attack ‘Grom’ had said that our goal was to rob the tannery, the mill and the Jews in order to supply our outpost with shoes, clothing and food.”<sup>134</sup> The only “confession” that mentioned the killing of Jews was that of Michał Iwaszko, who said in response to a leading question and under torture: “The goal stated by ‘Grom’ [Józef Chiniewicz] was that we were to rob the mill and tannery and kill the Jews.” It must be borne in mind, however, that it had become a staple of Soviet propaganda—despite their own ignoble record of persecuting various national groups including Poles—to accuse the Home Army of fascism, collaborating with the Germans, and murdering Jews.<sup>135</sup> Elsewhere Iwaszko stated: “During our attack on Ejszyszki no one from our group

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<sup>131</sup> For descriptions of beatings and torture, see *Kurier Wileński*, August 19, 1992. Of those convicted and punished, four (Rev. Mikołaj Tapper, Henryk Golimont, Józef Nowicki, and Tomasz Antropik) were executed; five (Stanisław Gąsowski, Alfons Iwaszko, Antoni Korszul, Michał Iwaszko, and Antoni Mieżuk) received prison terms of twenty years (hard labour); twelve received prison terms of ten years; thirteen received prison terms of seven years; and eight received prison terms of five years. See *Kurier Wileński*, August 26 and 27, 1992. Separate trials were held for others accused of participating in the attack on Ejszyszki. One of those wrongly convicted, Jan Mieżuk, who was “mistaken” for another person by the same surname who had already been convicted of the very same crime, petitioned for and was granted rehabilitation by the Soviet authorities in 1978. See *Kurier Wileński*, August 28, 1992. According to Witold Andruszkiewicz, who was among those arrested in Ejszyszki on December 19, 1944, Polish prisoners were routinely beaten and mistreated. The most hostile of the three judges presiding at his show trial in Łukiszki prison in Wilno was a Jewish captain. Some of the persons accused of taking part in the assault on Ejszyszki were executed in Ponary. See Andruszkiewicz’s memoir (typescript), 33–46.

<sup>132</sup> *Kurier Wileński*, July 18, August 11, August 13, 1992.

<sup>133</sup> Obvinitelnoe zakliuchenie po sledstvennomu delu N85, Lithuanian Special Archive (former KGB archive), document no. P–18850, volume 1, 46.

<sup>134</sup> Protokół doprosa Antona Mezhuka, January 15, 1945, Lithuanian Special Archive, document no. P–18850, volume 2, 258a.

<sup>135</sup> The same held true in postwar Stalinist Poland. For example, on April 19, 1946, at an official state commemoration

killed anybody, however, in the Ejszyszki outpost, which took part [in the attack] together with us, there was Stanisław Bułhak, who killed a Jewish woman, whose name is not known to me, and her child.”<sup>136</sup> At the time of Iwaszko’s interrogation, Bułhak was dead or missing, and hence a convenient scapegoat to blame for the shooting.<sup>137</sup>

Thus, according to Iwaszko, those were allegedly ordered to kill Jews did not do so, and indeed about 30 Jews were unharmed during the assault, while Zipporah Sonenson and her young child were allegedly killed by a member of the local outpost. Moreover, the Sonenson house, where resistance was offered by Soviet military officials and local militiamen, was the only place in Ejszyszki where there was a significant armed confrontation with the Home Army. So how accurate are Eliach’s accusations against the Home Army? Mysteriously, the documents pertaining to the “Smersh” captain who stayed in the Sonenson house were removed from the KGB files, so the purpose for his coming to Ejszyszki cannot be definitively established. Was it because of Moshe Sonenson’s request for protection or did it have to do with a report he was filing regarding local supporters of the “White” Poles?

Although he was himself arrested and was facing charges (about which there is more later), Moshe Sonenson testified against a “number of AK members” at one of several such trials in May 1945.<sup>138</sup> As we know from Eliach’s account in André Stein’s book, *Hidden Children*, and from her own words in the documentary *Shtetl*, her father played a significant part in tracking down the “local people” responsible for the deaths of her mother and brother: “The police came, the KGB came, the NKVD came and my father gave them all the names of the people that were there.” As mentioned earlier, in the former account, Eliach had claimed that “as soon as they were arrested, they were released again, since they were all related to the chief of police.”<sup>139</sup> There is no basis in fact for that statement.

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of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, a colonel of the Communist army delivered a speech stressing that “The [Nazi] air force, the SS, German tanks, Polish hooligans, Polish reactionaries, and, in fact, the Home Army—they all fought against the [Jewish] insurgents. Quoted in Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert and Rafał E. Stolarski, eds., ., “*Bijące serce partii*”: *Dzienniki personalne Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, volume 1: 1945–1947 (Warsaw: Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, and Adiutor, 2001), 382.

<sup>136</sup> Protokół doprosza Mikhaila Ivashko, January 15, 1945, Lithuanian Special Archive, document no. P–18850, volume 2, 241, 241a.

<sup>137</sup> Stanisław Bułhak (“Błyskawica”) escaped during the AK assault on the NKVD prison in Ejszyszki on December 7, 1944 to free captured Home Army members. See *Kurier Wileński*, July 25, 1992. A member of a detachment led by Czesław Stankiewicz “Komar,” Bułhak was killed in a confrontation with Soviet forces in Rudniki forest on January 6, 1945. See Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej*, 621 n.30, 693. It is not clear whether Bułhak was actually from Ejszyszki; according to one source, he was an occasional resident of the town.

<sup>138</sup> *Kurier Wileński*, August 12, 1992.

<sup>139</sup> Stein, *Hidden Children*, 66. As we have seen, this does not prevent Eliach from stating in other versions that the culprits were brought to trial, sentenced to long prison terms and exiled to Siberia.



### ***Other Accounts***

Yaffa Eliach's older brother, Yitzhak (Icchak) Sonenson, who was 13 years of age at the time of the assault, provides a somewhat different account of the events in Ejszyszki. Martin Gilbert, a prominent British historian, sets out that story based on testimony deposited for Yad Vashem in Israel on February 2, 1965:

'We kept together,' Sonenson later recalled, 'we took a few flats in neighbouring houses. ...' But on October 20 [1944] disaster struck. Polish Home Army men, known as 'White Poles' attacked the Jewish houses [and started to rob, according to that deposition—*M.P.*]. Sonenson's mother and baby brother were killed, as well as two Soviet soldiers.

'The Jews wanted revenge,' Sonenson recalled. 'They got hold of arms and attacked the Poles. But the Soviets arrested these Jews, among them my father, who wanted to avenge the death of his wife and child.' Sonenson's father was imprisoned by the Soviets in Kazakhstan, for five years.<sup>140</sup>

Significantly, Yitzhak Sonenson refers to two Soviet soldiers being killed during the assault on the Sonenson home, an important point that Yaffa Eliach neglects to mention in her various and varied accounts. However, he becomes rather enigmatic when he refers to local Jews obtaining arms and their subsequent arrests. Who were these people? From whom did they get these weapons? Whom exactly did they attack and when? Did they inflict any casualties? Why were they arrested? For possession of illegal arms?

In another account, Leon Kahn (Leib Kaganowicz), who hails from Ejszyszki and became a Soviet partisan and later served with the Soviet police in that area (he was stationed in Orany), reveals a little more of the background information about which Eliach is so sketchy. He also contradicts her account (and her brother's) in several key respects. (Oddly, it was Eliach who drew attention to Leon Kahn's largely hearsay account as fully supportive of her own version.<sup>141</sup>)

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<sup>140</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1986), 759, based on Yad Vashem archives, 03/2743. Actually, in the Yad Vashem deposition of February 2, 1965, Yitzhak Sonenson refers not to a "baby brother," but to a "baby sister." The U.S. edition of Gilbert's book (published by Henry Holt, New York, in 1987) book correctly refers to a sister being killed at that time. Yitzhak Sonenson has also sought to embellish his father's bravado during the German occupation, by putting forward a story that even his sister, Yaffa Eliach, does not mention in her opus: "According to Itchele, his father Moshe went to the rabbi together with others, and asked permission to set fire to the town, but the rabbi refused." See Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok*, 78.

<sup>141</sup> In *There Once Was a World*, at p. 747 n.14, Eliach strategically, but not too squeamishly, backs away from this "problematic" account: "note that Kahn's version of the sequence of events is inaccurate ... Also the account that Moshe Sonenson and his two older children fled, leaving Zipporah and the baby behind, is inaccurate." So it seems that even Kahn can confirm nothing of the facts surrounding this incident. Like Yaffa Eliach, Kahn does not mince words or let the facts stand in the way in assigning blame for the Holocaust: "the German nation alone was not totally responsible for the destruction. They could never have succeeded as well as they did without the wholehearted support of the Poles ... and thousands of other Jew-hating, pro-Nazi collaborators. Nurtured for 2,000 years on the seeds of anti-semitism fed to them by the Catholic church and the educational system, they were more than willing to co-operate with the Germans in the liquidation of the towns and ghettos, the operation of the execution squads, and in the running of the death camps." (In fact, the Poles did not co-operate in *any* of these activities.) Kahn continues: "Lastly, I believe it is absolutely imperative to mention the responsibility of the Roman Catholic church and its clergy for their part in the wholesale and unprecedented slaughter of Middle Eastern European Jewry." *Ibid.*, 3–4.

On a number of occasions we [i.e., the Soviet police] combined forces with the green hats [i.e., the NKVD border police] to halt the activities of the Polish renegades and the Lithuanian partisans. One day we received a call to go to the rescue of a small Russian garrison in Eisiskes [Ejszyszki] who were under siege by the Polish partisans.

In a battle with a large group of Poles, the Russians had captured forty or fifty of them and imprisoned them in the old Eisiskes post office which had been converted into a jail. The Russians then retired to their own quarters directly across the street, but very soon the remaining Poles laid siege to these quarters. Under cover of the renewed battle, they released their comrades from the jail.

Once liberated, they roamed the streets looking for blood. Most of the people of the town were Polish and had little to fear from them, but some of Eisiskes' Jews had returned home determined to build their lives again. Among these were Moishe Sonenzon [sic, Sonenson] and his wife, Faigl.

...

*Moishe grabbed the other children and ran.* Faigl picked up her baby and fled to the attic, but the Poles heard the baby's cry and dragged Faigl and her child downstairs again. Then Faigl recognized one of her captors, a pharmacist who had known her father who was also a pharmacist. The man pretended not to know her.

"Antony, please!" she pleaded. "You *know* me! We've been friends since we were kids!"

He turned away and the others shot her and the child.

Two truckloads of green hats and our police group drove the twenty miles to Eisiskes, but we had been called too late. The A.K.'s had fled. We entered the Sonenzon house and I stared down at the floor stained with the blood of the poor victims. We entered the Sonenzon house and I stared down at the floor stained with the blood of its poor victims. A large blotch marked the place where Faigl had died and beside it was a smaller one, that of her baby. ...

Young Yitzhak Sonenzon, one of the boys [Benjamin] Rogowski and I had "adopted", had returned to Eisiskes with us and stayed now to comfort his father. The rest of us searched from house to house to learn who had helped the murderers. One man, a good friend to the Sonenzons, gave us information which led us to the discovery of the Poles' arsenal. We confiscated the arms and executed the owner of the house, but we never found the murderers ...<sup>142</sup>

How Leon Kahn was able to reconstruct the circumstances of the murder of Yaffa's mother and her young child remains a mystery, seeing that, according to Kahn, the other family members (i.e., Moshe Sonenson, Yaffa and her brother Yitzhak) had fled from the home. We also learn that there was a Soviet garrison in Ejszyszki and that the local jail held captured Polish partisans. However, the intended targets of the rampage of liberated Polish prisoners, i.e., the Soviet officers stationed in Ejszyszki (some of who were quartered in the Sonenson home), disappear from Kahn's confused scenario. Strangely, he doesn't detect

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<sup>142</sup> Kahn, *No Time To Mourn*, 184–85.

much more than the makings of an anti-Semitic pogrom, even though the rescue call his police unit was dispatched to answer was the Soviet garrison's.

We also learn from Kahn's account that Yaffa's older brother, Yitzhak Sonenson, was somehow taken under the wing of Jewish members of the Soviet police stationed in Orany<sup>143</sup> (he is shown with Kahn and two other Jewish policemen in a photograph reproduced between pages 120 and 121 of Kahn's book), and supposedly returned to Ejszyszki with Kahn only after the assault on the Sonenson home (though this is not entirely clear from this rather muddled account). If this is the case, it would go a long way toward explaining why Yitzhak's description of the October 20 assault lacks the type of detail one would expect from an eyewitness who almost lost his life in the encounter.

Another memoir, written independently by a family friend from the nearby town of Lida who lived with Moshe Sonenson during his exile in the Soviet interior, provides information similar to Kahn's about the circumstances of Yaffa's mother's death. According to Joseph Kuszelewicz, who joined the Jewish partisans in Naliboki forest and served in the Soviet army after the liberation, before he too was sentenced and deported to the Gulag for smuggling goods and money from Poland,

a little after [the Sonensons returned to Ejszyszki], bands of Poles of the AK, who still pursued the surviving Jews, had broken into their home in order to massacre them. Moshe had grabbed his two children and all three of them had escaped by jumping out of the window. His wife doubtless hoped for clemency from the Polish murderers because she held her baby in her arms, but she was shot down on the stairs with her child. After that great misfortune, Moshe entered the services of the NKVD (the secret Soviet police that became the KGB) in order to track down the Polish nationalists. They knew all of them and, pressed by his desire for vengeance, he committed serious abuses when he encountered them. The NKVD noticed that and he was tried and sentenced to 10 years in the Gulag. After 5 years, he was freed for good behaviour.<sup>144</sup>

Thus it appears unlikely that Moshe Sonenson or Yaffa or Yitzhak actually witnessed the killing of Yaffa's mother and her infant child. The circumstances in which they were shot remains unclear.

News of these events soon spread to Jews in the area and beyond, and they took on yet another dimension. Ruzhka Korczak (Reizl Korchak), who was a member of the Jewish partisans in Rudniki forest responsible for the massacre of Polish villagers in Koniuchy, claimed in her memoir that Poles murdered five Jews in Ejszyszki and placed notes in their pockets warning that "This will be the fate of all surviving Jews."<sup>145</sup> No Jewish eyewitness, however, makes such an assertion.

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<sup>143</sup> Kahn, *No Time To Mourn*, 175.

<sup>144</sup> Joseph Kuszelewicz, *Un Juif de Biélorussie de Lida à Karaganda: Ghetto–Maquis–Goulag* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), 110.

<sup>145</sup> Reizl Korchak, *Levahot ba-efer* [Flames in the Ashes], 3<sup>rd</sup> edition ([Tel Aviv]: Moreshet, bet 'edut 'al shem Mordekhai Anilevits, 1965), 305, as cited in Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York: Radom House, 1970), 15; and Stuart E. Eizenstat, *Imperfect Justice: Looted Assets, Slave Labor, and the Unfinished Business of World War II* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 11.

What are we to make of these various accounts?

### ***Soviet Documents***

Still another version of the events, perhaps the most reliable thus far, emerges from an archival document—an undated NKVD report (a date of February 20, 1945 was later added)—which is part of a large collection of documents regarding these events found in the former Party Archive of the Lithuanian SSR housed in Vilnius (Wilno).<sup>146</sup> This account indicates that the town of Ejszyszki was the scene of a pitched battle between Soviet forces and Polish partisans, but the sequence of events is markedly different from that found in the Jewish accounts.

On the night of the 19th and the morning of the 20th of October, 1944, several groups of armed bandits, with a total strength of up to 150 men, carried out an assault on the town of Ejszyszki, in the county of Troki. They broke into the building of the “volispolkom,”<sup>147</sup> destroyed all the official documents it held and set the building on fire. ...

At the time of the assault on the town, the bandits attacked the residence of citizen Sonizon [sic, Sonenson] where they shot his wife and their one-month-old child. A captain of the counter-intelligence “Smersh,” who came to Ejszyszki as part of an official delegation and whose name has not been established, was [lodged] in the residence. He was captured along with all his secret operational documents, including investigative reports, and taken away by the bandits. His fate is still not known.

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<sup>146</sup> Fond 3377, Opis 55, Box 216, Polish Home Army, 278. This report was published in *Kurier Wileński*, no. 151 (August 5, 1992) and no. 153 (August 7, 1992). The following issues of *Kurier Wileński*, a Polish weekly published in Vilnius, reproduced Soviet archival documents pertaining to the events in Ejszyszki under the heading “Przyczynek do dziejów AK na Wileńszczyźnie po lipcu 1944 r.”: July 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, and August 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28. A selection of these documents are found in Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, ed., *Zajścia w Ejszyszkach: Epilog stosunków polsko-żydowskich na Kresach, 1944-1945. Wspomnienia–dokumenty–publicystyka* (Warsaw: Fronda, 2002). They consist primarily of records from criminal case no. 3710/822. None of the documents refer to a pogrom, nor was any such charge advanced by the Soviets. The documents focus exclusively on the anti-State (i.e., anti-Soviet) aspect of the assault on the town. The charges included betraying the Soviet “fatherland” by joining the Home Army, a “counter-revolutionary nationalist organization,” and engaging in armed combat with the Soviet authorities in order to restore an independent Polish State within its 1939 borders, i.e., the sovereignty and borders violated by the Soviet Union when it invaded Poland in September 1939 jointly with Nazi Germany. See *Kurier Wileński*, August 14, 1992. The Home Army and the Polish government in exile were accused of being formed to fight not the Germans and fascism, but the “legitimate” Soviet authorities. See *Kurier Wileński*, August 22, 1992. The participants who were interrogated about the aim of the October 1944 operation said that it was to capture official seals in order to forge documents. See *Kurier Wileński*, July 18, August 8, and August 13, 1992. Since an NKVD captain had just arrived in town to investigate and question some people, his appearance would have likely incensed the Home Army members, who would have been quite correct in suspecting that Moshe Sonenson was an active informer. See *Kurier Wileński*, August 8, 1992. It does not appear that townspeople were actually part of the operation, and only Sonenson identified some of the local people as culprits. The documents also refer to allegations of beatings, torture and forced confessions. These charges seem to be supported by how the admissions unfolded (stories changed overnight) and by the fact that one of those convicted (Jan Miežuk) was formally rehabilitated in 1978. In 1945 he had admitted, under duress, to the false charges levelled against him, even though another person by the same surname had also been charged and convicted of the same crime. See *Kurier Wileński*, August 19 and 28, 1992.

<sup>147</sup> The “volispolkom” was the commune executive committee, which usually contained the district jail and police station.

At the same time a group of bandits broke into the residence of citizen Jarkiewicz where they found and shot a senior sergeant of the Red Army whose name has not been established. ...

Besides that, on the road leaving Ejszyski in the direction of the town of Troki, the bandits disarmed and shot a Red Army soldier whose body was taken away. The name of this soldier has not been established. ...

On the night of the 6th and the morning of the 7th of December, 1944, a group of bandits led by "Kryś" [i.e., Lieutenant Jan Borysewicz "Kryśia"] carried out an armed assault on the guarded premises of the jail in the town of Ejszyski in order to liberate bandits who had been arrested, including their commander Babul ("Gaj"). The bandit group opened fire and threw hand-grenades ... which resulted in the capture of the guarded premises ... and the freeing of 31 arrested bandits, who were taken away by the bandit group. A list of the liberated bandits is attached.

During this assault the bandit group ... also besieged the local Red Army garrison and the militia building for several hours. In the course of this assault a Red Army soldier was wounded.<sup>148</sup>

From this report, it is apparent that Leon Kahn hopelessly confused and commingled two distinct events: the October 20 action, in which a senior "Smersh" was captured, and the December 7 assault on the Ejszyski jail, carried out for the purpose of liberating Home Army members captured by the Soviets.

More importantly, the report does not confirm the alleged pogrom, nor that Polish partisans came searching for Jews during either of their two assaults on Ejszyski. While Yaffa Eliach and her brother Yitzhak have Polish partisans scouring the town looking only for Jews and attacking Jewish homes, according to all credible accounts the actual targets of the assault were Soviet outposts and officials. The *only* Jewish victims were those who had hosted Soviet officials in their homes, even though presumably the local partisans would have been well aware of where the other Jews lived and could have easily located them if they had wanted to.

### ***Contemporaneous Testimonies***

The NKVD report cited above was doubtless based on information provided by local officials and residents of Ejszyski. During questioning that took place soon after these events, Moshe Sonenson made the following statement:

Sometime around 11 p.m. on the night of October 19, 1944, while I was sleeping with my family—my wife and three children, shots were fired and grenades were thrown at my house by bandits. That night a Red Army captain and sergeant, whose names I don't remember, spent the night in our house. The captain's chauffeur was sleeping in his vehicle near my house. During that attack we

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<sup>148</sup> According to an unverified account, a Soviet major captured during the December 7, 1944 assault was released by Lieutenant Borysewicz ("Kryśia") because he had not mistreated Polish prisoners. In a state of disbelief, the major allegedly stated: "Only Poles are capable of the kind of magnanimous gesture I have met." See Edmund Banasikowski, *Na zew Ziemi Wileńskiej*, Second revised edition (Bydgoszcz: Towarzystwo Miłośników Wilna i Ziemi Wileńskiej, Oddział w Bydgoszczy, 1997), 397–98.

ran to the second storey of the house. The bandits made it up to the second storey, to my room, where I hid under the stairs which led to the attic. The captain and sergeant jumped out of the second storey window. Apart from them, my brother Sholem Sonenson and the policeman Michajłowski [Michalowski], who also jumped out of a window and escaped, were spending the night there. *My wife sat by the window with our 4-month-old child.* They were killed. The chauffeur who spent the night in the truck near my home escaped to Orany. The following day Captain Ratner arrived from Orany with 5 or 6 Red Army soldiers in order to investigate the circumstances of the bandit attack. Ratner told me that the captain had been injured in the leg and taken to the hospital by army men. The sergeant managed to escape. ...

The bandits took from the captain his automatic firearm, his pistol, documents from his suitcase and pocketbook, and his party identification. ... During this attack, the bandits killed one Red Army soldier, a private or sergeant whose name I don't remember. He was in Ejszyski regarding acquisition of potatoes and spent the night at a certain woman's place whose name I don't know ...

The captain, along with the sergeant and chauffeur, had come to Ejszyski in order to question some people. No one had yet been summoned however. He arrived at 5 p.m. on October 19, 1944. I had never seen them before.

At the same time, the bandits attacked the building of the commune executive committee where they destroyed all the official documents and set fire to the premises. However, the fire was extinguished.<sup>149</sup>

This account differs from that of Yaffa Eliach's in several important respects. The Polish partisans did not make an announced, boisterous entrance into the town, a fact that is also confirmed in other eyewitness depositions taken by the Soviets.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, the entire Sonenson family was not hidden in a closet as Eliach contends. There is no mention that Moshe's wife and child were deliberately murdered or that this was a pogrom directed at Jews. Nor is there any mention that the Soviet captain had come to investigate the threat of an attack on the Jews by "White" Poles. It is not known whom the captain had come to interrogate, though one can safely assume that local functionaries (including Moshe Sonenson) had supplied the names. Finally, we learn that both the Soviet captain and sergeant who were staying in the Sonenson house were captured by the Polish partisans.

When asked to identify the assailants, Moshe Sonenson replied:

Among the participants of that armed attack, I recognized: (1) Walicki, given name unknown, from Ejszyski, (2) Władysław Dużyński [Duszyński], (3) Maszlanko [Maślanko], given name unknown, (4) Masalski, given name unknown, (5) Masiuk [Mieżuk], (6) Olszewski [Witold Olszewski], (7) Urbanowicz [Wacław Urbanowicz], (8) Buczak [Stanisław Bułhak?], (9) Józef Chorościn, (10)

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<sup>149</sup> This statement was also published in *Kurier Wileński*, August 5, 1992.

<sup>150</sup> Akhmed Iangareiev, a Bashkir employed in the Troki militia department, stated: "Around 11 o'clock the night of October 19, 1944, while I was standing near the building of the township militia department, a group of unknown bandits *suddenly* opened fire from automatic weapons and rifles on Ejszyski." See *Kurier Wileński*, August 4, 1992. See also the statement of Nazar Golovchenko in the text.

Mungiało [Czesław Mungiało], given name unknown. All of them, except for Mungiało, are residents of Ejszyski and members of the armed organization of “White Poles.”

In the early morning hours of December 7, 1944, a group of unknown bandits staged an armed attack on the jail in Ejszyski and freed several arrested people. During the attack a few of the bandits were killed. Their bodies were taken by the assailants. On our side, one Red Army soldier who was guarding the jail was wounded. I can’t say anything more about this matter.<sup>151</sup>

Strangely, Moshe Sonenson does not mention Anton Sharavei, the pharmacist’s son—the man whom Yaffa Eliach claims her mother recognized and addressed by name just before she was killed; the man who pumped nine bullets into her baby brother and fifteen more into her mother while her father was just a few feet away. The reason for this is because there was no such person. Antoni Serbej, the local pharmacist, had no son.<sup>152</sup> The omission is glaring given that Moshe Sonenson appears to have been rather well-versed about the “White” Poles’ network in the area.

Another witness who was called to testify during the investigation of the Ejszyski incidents was Nazar Golovchenko, a native of the Ukrainian SSR. He provided the following statement on March 27, 1945:

In September 1944, the county police department in Troki assigned and directed me to head the district police department in Ejszyski. On October 19, a captain from the state security office whose name I don’t know arrived in Ejszyski and asked me to help him by bringing witnesses in for questioning. I don’t remember the names of these witnesses. I promised him I would bring these witnesses, after which I returned to the police department around 7 p.m. Besides me, Jaigirejek [Akhmed Iangareiev], the district constable, and two police officers, Michajłowski [Alter or Aron Michalowski] and Rukowicz, were at the police department. Officer Rukowicz and constable Jaigirejek were on duty and charged with keeping order in Ejszyski. They went to patrol the city because, at that time, there was no military garrison in Ejszyski. At the request of the captain, I assigned officer Michajłowski to act as his personal bodyguard. In addition to officer Michajłowski, the captain had his own sergeant or company sergeant—I don’t remember which now, I don’t know his name.

The chairman of the Ejszyski commune executive committee, the party secretary, the representative of Troki county (I do not remember their names) and I were at the police department where we decided to rest. Around 10 to 11 p.m. on October 19, Jaigirejek and Rukowicz came running to the police department with the news that bandits had attacked Ejszyski. I sounded the alarm and got the people who were resting there up on their feet. Armed, Rukowicz and I left the police building onto the street and proceeded to the back of the building where Rukowicz spotted a

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<sup>151</sup> *Kurier Wileński*, August 5, 1992.

<sup>152</sup> Correspondence with Witold Andruszkiewicz, dated June 19, 1999 (in the author’s possession). According to Andruszkiewicz, Walicki and Maślanko (transcribed as Maszlanko) were one and the same person, and he knew no one by the name of Władysław Duszyński (transcribed as Dużyński). His correspondence, dated September 23, 1999, is in the author’s possession.

group of bandits consisting of three people. Within a few minutes the bandits let off a barrage of fire and threw grenades. Rukowicz and I decided to move away from the building ... We went about 200 metres and hid in the bushes where we weren't spotted by the bandits and lay there until seven o'clock the next morning ... Afterwards I went to the executive committee where a fire had broken out as a result of the shooting. I found burned documents and a burned out floor in one of the rooms. After examining the commune committee building I went to the NKVD County Office in Troki to report what had happened. ...

The state security captain was in the home of Sonenson, a resident of Ejszyszki. ... I don't know anything about what happened to him. While on my way to Troki I came upon a soldier, whose name I don't know, who was with the captain in Ejszyszki. He told me that the bandits stripped him of his clothes and he managed to escape. I don't know how he did that. The soldier told me that the bandits took the captain with them, but he couldn't say what had happened to him. ...

As to the number of people who participated in the assault, I don't know. I heard from residents of Ejszyszki that there were anywhere from about 100 to 150 persons armed with machine guns, automatic weapons, and grenades. ...

I don't know where the state security captain came from or what happened to the sergeant that accompanied him. There were no casualties on the part of the police.<sup>153</sup>

From this account, we learn that, apart from the premises of the commune executive committee, the prime target of the October 20 assault on Ejszyszki was a captain from the state security office, who had come to conduct an investigation. There is no indication of a pogrom directed at the town's Jewish residents.

### ***Why Was the Sonenson Home Attacked?***

Why, according to Yaffa Eliach, was her home attacked? In the extensive article Eliach published in the *New York Times*, as mentioned, the presence of Soviet officials in Ejszyszki is not even acknowledged. Rather it was allegedly a case of Poles always wanting to rid Poland of Jews, even before the war. They were now continuing the Holocaust according to the agenda of the Home Army and were determined to finish the job the Nazis had started. Eliach has stated repeatedly that the only reason for the attack was that Poles, and in particular the Home Army, wanted to murder all the remaining Jews simply because of their blind hatred of them.

Eliach's views have been reported by many reporters. In an extensive article that appeared in *New York Newsday*,<sup>154</sup> Susan Brenna writes: "That night local Polish partisans from the area, enraged that Jews had returned, staged a grenade attack on the house." Richard Chesnoff stresses that

The murders were not part of a retaliation against informers. They were motivated by anti-Semitic anger that Professor Eliach's family had returned to its village alive—and by greed (according to

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<sup>153</sup> *Kurier Wileński*, August 5, 1992.

<sup>154</sup> "The Beauty of the Life That Was Taken," *New York Newsday*, March 7, 1991.



Professor Eliach, the Polish neighbor who led the killer band to the family home had been a pre-war business competitor of her father's).<sup>155</sup>

In the autobiographical account found in André Stein's *Hidden Children*, the answer that unwittingly emerges presents a more complex, but still far from complete picture: the Sonensons' greedy, anti-Semitic Polish neighbour "came accompanied by some of his comrades who still wanted Poland free of Russians and Jews. ... They wanted to kill Russians and Jews."<sup>156</sup> She thus introduces a new element: the Soviet factor, veiled under the guise of Polish hatred of "Russians." The "Russian" and even "Soviet" theme soon recedes into the background in subsequent versions, however, as the incident is recast as an anti-Semitic pogrom pure and simple.

There is nothing, however, about Polish partisans being rounded up and scarcely any significance is given to the fact that an NKVD officer is lodged in her home. This enormous human tragedy which was unfolding before Eliach's eyes, in which Poles were targeted by invading forces simply because they wanted freedom for their country, disappears from the annals of Holocaust literature.

Part of the mystery, and Eliach's deliberate obfuscation of these events, has been clarified through archival research and on-the-scene investigation by Polish historians. Jarosław Wołkonowski, whose report was referred to earlier, was able to locate several eyewitnesses who remember seeing Moshe Sonenson, Eliach's father, in an NKVD uniform (senior lieutenant) soon after the Red Army arrived in July 1944. Other local Jews were also identified as being in the service of the NKVD. Wołkonowski confirmed the Home Army assault of October 20, 1944, which, according to Soviet sources, was led by Second Lieutenant Michał Babul (*nom de guerre* "Gaj"). He encountered a Polish woman (Józefa Bacewicz) who was also accidentally shot in the leg during the ensuing crossfire. The names of some of the townspeople mentioned by Eliach in the *New York Times* are not recognized by the residents of Ejszyszki, nor do they appear in the detailed lists of perpetrators prepared by the Soviets.

Michał Babul was captured by the Soviets on December 4, 1944. On the night of December 6–7, the AK staged a second attack on the town, this time freeing 31 captured comrades. Babul, however, was not among them. As far as can be told, no Jews were killed in this raid. Soon afterwards, the NKVD conducted more raids rounding up 57 Home Army members suspected of taking part in the second attack on Ejszyszki.<sup>157</sup> In the early part of 1945, a military tribunal in Wilno sentenced Babul and other Home Army

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<sup>155</sup> Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust*, 92.

<sup>156</sup> Stein, *Hidden Children*, 65.

<sup>157</sup> According to an NKVD report, as a result of a hunt carried out between December 17–29, 1944 (with the assistance of local policemen and members of the "destruction battalions" or *istrebitelnye batal'ony*), 16 members of the Home Army were killed in the Ejszyszki area, 6 were wounded, and 360 others were captured. Moreover, a second operation conducted on January 7, 1945, with the aim of liquidating Polish partisan groups in Rudniki forest, resulted in 106 partisans being killed. See *Kurier Wileński*, August 7, 1992. Most of those arrested were villagers who had simply assisted the Home Army, and not actual partisans. See Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej*, 616. See also Banasikowski, *Na zew Ziemi Wileńskiej*, 390; Arūnas Bubnys, "Walka NKGB-NKWD z polskim podziemiem na Litwie w drugiej połowie 1944 r.–na początku 1945 r.," in Jarosław Wołkonowski, ed., *Symposium historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie": Wilno 30 czerwca–1 lipca 1994r.*, (Warsaw: Biblioteka "Kuriera Wileńskiego," 1996), 201.

members to death. Their executions soon followed. Residents of Ejszyszki recall that Moshe Sonenson actively participated in NKVD operations against Poles before and after the October 1940 assault on Ejszyszki.

### ***The Account That Yaffa Eliach Suppressed***

Shortly after the war a group of survivors from Ejszyszki struck a committee to collect and publish a commemorative book about their lost shtetl. The Ejszyszki Memorial Book was published in Israel in 1950. One of the contributors was Alter Michalowski, a close colleague of Moshe Sonenson's from Ejszyszki. The book was translated into English in 1980, but that translation is not mentioned in Eliach's book *There Once Was a World*. In fact, there is no trace of an important account provided by Michalowski. This is not surprising, though it is unacceptable for someone holding herself out to be a scholar.<sup>158</sup> It runs counter to what Eliach writes about her father and goes a long way toward explaining why he and others of his ilk were not looked on favourably in the Ejszyszki area after the Soviet "liberation."

It turns out that, although the Home Army had not personally harmed Moshe Sonenson or his family, and in fact at least one of its members (Kazimierz Korcuć) assisted him, Sonenson embarked on an all-out vendetta against Home Army members. To do so he willingly joined the ranks of the Soviet security forces to further their—and his own personal—goal: the liquidation of the remnants of the Home Army. That this conduct would have, in turn, brought down the wrath of the Home Army should not come as a surprise to anyone. Alter Michalowski, who had been in the Soviet militia and then joined the Soviet partisans, writes about all of this quite openly.

After Lithuania was annexed to Soviet Russia [in June 1940], I served for four months as Militia commander of Aishishok [Ejszyszki]. When the Germans entered the town, I was of course forced to go into hiding for I did not manage to escape with the Red Army [in June 1941]. ...

When the Russians returned [in July 1944], I went back to Aishishok. There I found Shalom Sonenzon [Sonenson], his brother Moshe and his wife Zipporah and their children, the family of Zirl Yurkensky and Sara Kebetznik.

*I enlisted in the N.K.W.D. [NKVD] troop which operated in Aishishok and the vicinity to purge the area of the Hitler and White Polish partisans who we had learned to know during our "hot" "encounters" with them in the forests. Moshe Sonenzon [sic] and myself, thirsty for revenge belonged to an armed unit which, while pretending to search for Germans and traitors took reprisals on the evil goys as they richly deserved.*

We terrorized the goys. We collected many articles and clothes robbed from Jews we had known and made those goys pay, if only a fraction for what they had done to us and our children. We also caught Germans who had fled in small groups to the woods during the big retreat, and "framed"

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<sup>158</sup> Yisrael Gutman, director of the Center of Holocaust Research at the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, has gone on record to state that he has "no fondness for this author—Eliach is not an authority on the Holocaust." See Israel Gutman, "Uczmy się być razem," *Znak* (Kraków), June 2000: 66.

them. ... Once we captured six Germans, one of which was an S.S. officer. Moshe Sonenzon, myself and some other Jews took them to the old cemetery [sic] where the Aishishok Jews had expired in terrible torture. We placed the officer to one side and told him: "You will remain alive!" "Yes, since I have a wife and sons in Germany", he said and a flicker of hope lit his extinguished eyes. The rest of the Germans stood pale, trembling with fear.

We did not prolong settling our account with them. A volley of bullets was fired and the contaminated bodies rolled on the ground by the big mass grave of our brothers. A small revenge for their crimes. "Now its your turn, dirty murderer", Moshe shouted. The officer was palid [sic] with terror and realized that his end had come. He threw himself to the ground and started kissing the earth at our feet, crying and whimpering: "Good Jews! Pity me—I have a wife and children, I did you no wrong."

"You have a wife and children, do you?" Moshe shouted, "and we, didn't we have wives and children? You had no pity for our families and all that was clear [sic] to us—you filthy murderer! You want to live?! You won't live—you'll die like dogs!" While he was speaking he lifted his rifle butt and smashed the skull of the loathsome German. ... He then raised his hands, and cried in a terrible voice, "Here, my hands have spilled this defiled blood! For the sake of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters—for my baby son who was strangled by unhappy Jews—because of you, you murderers, you scum of the earth! ..."

Thus, we continued to terrorize the "German collaborators" and those who had "enjoyed" the spectacle of Jewish murder. The Russian army had meanwhile left the village on its way and only three militiamen remained in the village. Rumours reached us that a group of White Polish partisans were preparing to attack us while the goys of the village were expectantly waiting for a sign to destroy us. We were informed that the attack was to be launched one night soon. ...

A Russian captain passed through Aishishok and we told him of the danger awaiting us and we requested that he dispatch troops of soldiers to the village. He tried to allay our fears by saying we had no reason to fear for our lives for under Russian rule such a predicament was impossible. He then continued on his way.

We all decided to gather in the house of Sonenzon which was a brick house. That night the calamity struck. 80 White Polish partisans accompanied by a mass of the native Aishishok goys surrounded the house and started shooting. We defended ourselves bravely and prevented their approach. But we ran out of bullets and the crowd broke in the house. I jumped out the attic window to the garden behind the house. There I found Moshe son of Marayshel Yurkansky and we both fled to the river behind "Pig's Street". All night we lay among the bushes. When morning came and the partisans had returned to the forests, we went back to the town and heard of the calamity. Moshe Sonenzon, his wife Zipporah and their year old baby daughter were hiding in the room. They recognized the voices of some local goys—the pharmacist, the medical aid, and others. Zipporah said: "I will go out and beg for our lives. They know us. The pharmacist used to come to our pharmacy. He was father's friend ... Maybe they will have pity on us and our baby ... They will find us here anyway!" Moshe agreed. No sooner had Zipporah opened the door and faced them, than they shot her and her baby killing them on the spot. The goys left the house after plundering and ravaging everything.

We ran to Radon [Raduń] and brought a troop of Soviet soldiers. A search was held in the goys homes and we found many of our belongings. 50 were arrested. A few days later the partisans attacked the prison at night (the prison was the house of Kyotzevsky) and freed all the prisoners. All night there were gunshots between the attackers and the soldiers who dared not emerge from the house in which they were fortified. ...

We felt we could not return to the life as it had been. The hatred of the goys for us was fierce and unconcealed and we decided to leave our home town—the town which was the cemetery [sic] of our dear and loved ones. The police officer also hinted to me that I should leave soon because the goys were planning to prosecute us for “taking the law into our own hands”—which in Russia constituted a grave offense.<sup>159</sup>

Michalowski thus presents yet another variation of how the October 1944 assault on the Sonenson home unfolded. Many of the details are obviously inaccurate: he even claims the Soviet captain left town before the incident. However, his description of the events leading to the confrontation between some of the local Jews and the Home Army is far more plausible than Eliach’s, acknowledging as he does that they would have just cause to want to retaliate against him and Moshe Sonenson. In a documentary film titled *There Once Was a Town*, produced by WETA Washington, D.C., and aired on PBS in October 2000, Yitzhak Sonenson describes vividly his father’s NKVD connection:

My father joined the Russian police, the NKVD and when they traveled to look for Polish people he went with them. There were days that they killed about fifteen to twenty people and brought them to the Eishyshok market. And they put them in the middle of the market to let other people see what is going to happen. It was like that for a month and a half without mercy.

What Moshe Sonenson’s actual position was, is not entirely clear. Was he a militiaman or an NKVD officer, as the accounts seem to suggest, or an NKVD auxiliary—a member of the *istrebitelnye batal’ony* (commonly called *istrebiteli*) or “destruction battalions” attached to the NKVD?<sup>160</sup>

### ***Polish Eyewitness Accounts***

Lest undue credence be given to Yaffa Eliach’s far-fetched theories of all manner of villains plotting against her unusually upstanding and righteous father, it is worth citing the independent testimony of another native of Ejszyszki, a Pole by the name of Witold Andruszkiewicz. Andruszkiewicz joined the Home Army in March 1942 (his *nom de guerre* was “Agawa”), rising to the rank of commander of the Ejszyszki II outpost, and remained in the area until December 19, 1944, when he was arrested by the

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<sup>159</sup> Alufi and Barkeli, “Aishishuk”; *Its History and Its Destruction*, 78–81. It should be noted that the murder of prisoners of war constitutes a war crime under Article 6(b) of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg Charter) for which there is individual responsibility.

<sup>160</sup> The activities of the *istrebitelnye batal’ony* (destruction battalions), who eagerly joined in the brutal hunt for members of the anti-Communist underground in this region, are described in an earlier note.

NKVD and deported to the Gulag. On his return to Ejszyszki after its “liberation” he ran into Moshe Sonenson, whom he knew from before the war. Sonenson had just emerged from hiding and could be seen on the streets of Ejszyszki.

Around July 20–25, 1944, while I was in the town, dressed of course in civilian clothes ... I came upon a small convoy. A Soviet soldier led a group of five exhausted and despondent German prisoners of war ... to headquarters, where they were collected in larger groups and sent to POW camps. Moshe Sonenson appeared on the scene. He was very impulsive and started to scream in Yiddish that he had lived through the murder of the Jews and had to take revenge on these prisoners. He screamed: “I have to wash my face and hands in German blood.” ... Moshe Sonenson brought over two more Soviet soldiers, paid them and told them to lead these prisoners out of the town ... The convoy stopped beyond the built-up area near a field of rye. ... The Soviet soldiers, who had been paid by Sonenson, shot to death the five defenceless German prisoners. Immediately after the shots were fired Moshe Sonenson threw himself on their still quivering bodies and started to wash his face and hands in their warm blood, chanting some verses in Hebrew that sounded like a prayer.

The situation of Poles in the Wilno region became ever more tragic. NKVD repressions increased almost from day to day. There were more and more arrests and deportations. Particularly aggressive in his pursuit of Poles was a local Jew by the name of [Alter] Michałowski, who served in the NKVD. ... He had been with the Soviet partisans in Rudniki forest from 1941 to 1944.<sup>161</sup>

Another Home Army member from Ejszyszki, Wiktor Noskowski, supplements the information about Moshe Sonenson and his cohorts, who became the mainstay of the Stalinist apparatus of terror in the area.

With the return of the Soviet Army in July 1944, the [Soviet] partisans were directed to auxiliary battalions (the so-called *istrebiteli*) to continue the “struggle.” A group of Jews who survived in Rudniki forest, emboldened by their broad partisan liberties, returned to Ejszyszki armed and became the core of the Soviet regime installed there. Moshe Sonenson, the father of Yaffa Eliach, already a full-time collaborator of the NKVD, was honoured with the rank of a Soviet officer and given the code name “Sanizov.” ... The residents of Ejszyszki remember how, near the Kul estate, a patrol of Jewish “istrebiteli” murdered two men who could not be recognized because their entire bodies were riddled with bullets. Aron [Alter] Michałowski, lawlessly and without cause, executed in Ejszyszki a man by the name of Chorościn. Another [Jew], known popularly as “Bulboczka,” was the plenipotentiary for indoctrination of the masses and an unrelenting goader for the Soviet youth organizations.

When 13-year-old Jadzia [Jadwiga] Strukowska refused to join the “Pioneers,” “Bulboczka”

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<sup>161</sup> Andruszkiewicz, “Holocaust w Ejszyszkach,” *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 120 (1997): 94–95. Andruszkiewicz’s account is reproduced in Chodakiewicz, *Ejszyszki—Kulisy zająć w Ejszyszkach*, volume 1, 168–81. Alter Michałowski states that he joined the Bielski partisans, whose base was in Naliboki forest. The Bielski partisans, however, later moved westward toward Rudniki forest as the Soviet front advanced.

denounced her as an enemy of the people and of Soviet authority, as someone who exerted a destructive influence on the school environment. Jadzia, her father Piotr, and her mother Zofia were promptly deported to the far eastern reaches of the Soviet Union. Jadzia's brother Marian and her sister Helena had already been sentenced to the labour camps for their membership in the Home Army during the "trials" held after the assault on Ejszyszki. A similar fate met many Polish families in the borderlands.<sup>162</sup>

Yaffa Eliach, however, casts her family in an entirely different light:

A constant flow of German prisoners was brought into town by Russian soldiers. They were beaten, dirty and unshaven. As they passed, they begged for mercy and flashed pictures of their wives and children, but the Russians kept no prisoners. Whomever they captured, they shot. One soldier invited Yaffa and her family to spit and throw stones at the Germans' corpses. Zipporah wouldn't hear of doing such a thing. "If we went, we'd be no better than they were," she insisted.<sup>163</sup>

But unlike other Jews who killed the White Poles when they caught them, Moshe Sonenson influenced local members of the NKVD to bring the murderers to trial instead.<sup>164</sup>

Wiktor Noskowski's detailed account<sup>165</sup> contains the answers to many unclear aspects of the events of October 20, 1944.

In Ejszyszki, Soviet state and party institutions had been functioning for three months, along with the infamous NKVD, whose armed faction was composed of more than a score of Jews who had survived the Holocaust as Soviet partisans and joined the so-called "istrebiteli." Willingly and with great commitment they ... took up the role of NKVD helpers in installing the Soviet order and stamping out the Polish element in the Soviet-occupied territories.

A significant role ... was played by Moshe Sonenson, Yaffa Eliach's father, who was already at that time honoured ... with the uniform and insignias of a Soviet officer. ... Continuous military formations of border patrol and NKVD, assisted by the "istrebiteli," combed the length and width of the area arresting any male they encountered. Those who fled were shot at like wild animals during a hunt.

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<sup>162</sup> Wiktor Noskowski, "Czy Yaffa Eliach przeprosi Polaków?" *Mysł Polska*, July 20–27, 1997. Eliach mentions one Ruvke Boyarski, who was known popularly as "di Bulbichke"; however, it is not clear whether this is the same person referred to by Noskowski as "Bulboczka."

<sup>163</sup> Stein, *Hidden Children*, 64.

<sup>164</sup> Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 672–73.

<sup>165</sup> Wiktor Noskowski, "Czy Yaffa Eliach przeprosi Polaków?" *Mysł Polska*, July 20–27, 1997.

While searching for people in hiding, houses were demolished, stoves were destroyed, and floors were ripped up. Every pile of hay and straw was searched from every side with sharpened iron rods. Grenades were thrown into less accessible places.

Those who were seized were inducted into the Red Army and immediately sent to the front. Others were shipped off to prison camps ... Deportations to remote regions of the Soviet Union, which had been halted when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, resumed. ...

Those at risk, especially the desperate youth, tried to save themselves by forming small, armed self-defence groups whose activities were also directed at helping those who had been arrested. ... four regional self-defence commands were created in the Nowogródek voivodship.

The command that encompassed the county of Lida was headed by Ludwik Nienartowicz (*nom de guerre* "Mazepa"), the former commander of the Nowogródek district of the Home Army and plenipotentiary of the government in exile's voivodship Delegate's office, which was no longer in existence.

One of the actions undertaken at this command's level was the October 19–20, 1944 sally into the town of Ejszyszki in order to recover the archives of the Nowogródek [Home Army] Regional Command's Office of Information and Propaganda, which had been seized by the NKVD in the nearby village of Butrymańce in July 1944 ... and to liberate local Poles captured in round-ups and jailed in Ejszyszki. This action was not in any way aimed at Jews, as Yaffa Eliach claims, let alone at the Sonenson family.

The archives were not found in the NKVD headquarters as they had been shipped to Moscow. However, one of the interrogated guards indicated that the person responsible for this operation, a captain of the Soviet secret service, was residing in the Sonenson home. Thereupon, without exerting any force, the self-defence patrol broke into the house with the intention of capturing the "Smersh" functionary.

The captain, most likely a Jew, began to offer resistance. The exchange of fire which ensued resulted in the unintended fatal shooting of Zipporah Sonenson and her infant son Hayyim, i.e., the mother and brother of Yaffa Eliach. It is not clear whose shots killed them.

Yaffa Eliach presents these same events in an obviously concocted manner, with absolutely unbelievable details. The important circumstance of the capture of a Soviet captain in the Sonenson home and the accompanying fusillade are totally overlooked. Instead, she claims that the assault on the town was undertaken with the intention of murdering all the Jews in Ejszyszki. ...

Eliach suggests that residents of Ejszyszki took part in the assault. However, that couldn't have been the case because, in view of the inevitability of being exposed, a unit made up of people from outside the commune of Ejszyszki was employed in the operation.<sup>166</sup> ... the house in which the Sonensons lived and where their tragedy unfolded is still standing and constitutes material proof

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<sup>166</sup> Kazimierz Krajewski, the foremost historian on the Home Army in this area, states that a unit of the Home Army, under the command of Second Lieutenant Michał Babul ("Gaj"), mobilized from the regional network, took part in the October 20, 1944 attack on Ejszyszki. See Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej*, 619.

that there was no “attic” or “second floor” where they were supposed to have hidden, nor “stairs” which the assailants climbed to the hiding place—it was a one-storey wooden dwelling.<sup>167</sup>

No one, not even the elderly residents of Ejszyszki, has ever heard of or known Władysław Duszynski, the alleged neighbour of the Sonensons, or Anton Sharavei (which sounds Russian), who was supposed to have killed Mrs. Sonenson and her child. Nor was there anyone by that name in the Ejszyszki unit of the Home Army. ... Nor do these names appear in the KGB archives in Wilno where there is a list of the more than 360 arrested and an additional 162 wanted ...

The Soviet version of these events, based on a report by Bartašiūnas, the People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Lithuanian SSR, and forwarded to the NKVD headquarters in Moscow, reads as follows:

“After midnight on October 20, 1944, the combined forces of several counter-revolutionary organizations, in the strength of about 150 men armed with machine guns, rifles and grenades, led by Tapcer [sic, Tapper] and with the participation of Iwaszko, Mieżuk, Gonsowski, Chiniewicz, Babul and others, carried out an assault on Ejszyszki, in the county of Troki. They broke into the building of the commune executive committee and destroyed the official documents of the committee. Other members broke into the residence of citizen Sanizov [sic, Sonenson] and captured a captain of the counter-intelligence ‘Smersh,’ who had with him secret operational documents. They shot the wife of Sanizov and his one-month-old child. The wartime tribunal sentenced Babul and nine other participants to the death penalty by execution, and the remaining to terms of imprisonment ranging from 10 to 25 years.”

In response to the events in Ejszyszki, the NKVD carried out massive arrests of local Poles suspected of Home Army involvement as the presumed participants in the assault on the local Soviet authorities. ... In a series of trials of the first 47 arrested, launched without any semblance of due process in Wilno on Easter Day in 1945, no one was acquitted of the charge of taking part in the assault on the town, even though there was no proof of this and despite the serious doubts that must have been raised by the occurrence of a second bold assault and break-out of prisoners in December 1944, which took place after the arrest of the alleged organizers.

Seven people, among them Rev. Mikołaj Tapper, the vicar of Ejszyszki, Henryk Golimont, Michał Babul [“Gaj”], Antoni Mażuk [Mieżuk], Józef Chiniewicz [“Grom”], Józef Nowicki, and Tomasz Antropik, received death sentences and the rest long terms of imprisonment in labour camps.<sup>168</sup> On May 25, 1945, in the on-going trials, an additional eleven people were sentenced.

A hideous crime, one that is in no way excusable, was the murder, as a result of a court verdict, of Rev. Mikołaj Tapper, who wasn’t even indirectly linked to these events. He was found “guilty” because his surname was similar to Jerzy Tapper’s, a sought-after member of the Home Army, a former platoon commander ... Michał Babul, a local school teacher, and Henryk Golimont, a landowner, were both murdered even though there was no proof of their participation in or leading

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<sup>167</sup> There is some confusion about the house. A photograph of the single-storey house, from the September 26, 1996 issue of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, is reproduced in *The Story of Two Shtetls*, Part Two, 166. A different house is shown in Eliach’s *There Once Was A World*.

<sup>168</sup> Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej*, 616 n.10.



the assault on Ejszyszki, simply because under the German occupation they were platoon commanders of an active partisan battalion.

### ***The Aftermath and the Framing of Moshe Sonenson***

The dénouement of the October 1944 events have been aptly described by historian John Radziłowski:

Following the attack, Soviet reprisals were swift and brutal. As the account above notes, local Jewish NKVD men executed local Poles and displayed their bodies in the town square, sometimes as many as fifteen or twenty a day. Other Poles were captured and held in the local gaol. Many of those killed and arrested had no connection with the events of 20 October 1944. On the night of 6–7 December 1944 the AK staged a second attack on the town, this time freeing thirty-one captured comrades. Despite this temporary success, independent Polish forces in the area were decimated, their members tortured, killed, or sent to the gulags, whence many would never return. ...

After the death of his wife and son Eliach's father intensified his activities in the NKVD. At some point, however, the Soviet authorities, having used the local Jews to defeat the Poles, had little further use for men like Sonenson. Local Jewish militiamen were disarmed and some arrested. The Soviets could now use the very crimes committed on behalf of the NKVD as a means to get rid of the perpetrators, exploiting local hostility towards the Jews (which they had played a key role in fomenting) as a pretext.<sup>169</sup>

Why was Yaffa Eliach's father arrested and imprisoned after these events? At one point, it was allegedly because he was a Zionist. According to the authorized account found in André Stein's book, her father was arrested by the NKVD soon after the October 1944 assault on Ejszyszki and charged "with all kinds of crimes against the state." In December, he was sent to prison "to await his fate." In the summer of 1945, he was sentenced to forced labour in Kazakhstan "for life." However, this was not because of his greedy, anti-Semitic Polish neighbours, about whom we hear so much in Eliach's various accounts. It turns out that this was the deed of

accusers from among the twenty-nine Jewish survivors of our *shtetl*. It was a banal case of settling accounts, animated by competition and business jealousy. Before the war, they were my father's business competitors in the leather business, so they had him deported ... Those were not sentimental times.<sup>170</sup>

However, according to another account in *New York Newsday*, "her father was arrested and sent to Siberia by the Russian liberators on phony charges of stealing his brother's coat."<sup>171</sup> Yet another version

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<sup>169</sup> Radziłowski, "Ejszyszki Revisited, 1939–1945," *Polin*, volume 15 (2002): 466.

<sup>170</sup> Stein, *Hidden Children*, 66.

<sup>171</sup> Brenna, "'The Beauty of the Life That Was Taken,'" *New York Newsday*, March 7, 1991.

has the coat belonging to a Pole. Her brother Yitzhak, as we have seen, suggests that the arrest had something to do with local Jews arming themselves and attacking the Poles. Joseph Kuszelewicz, who was close to Moshe Sonenson in exile, also maintains that Moshe fell into disfavour for abusing the local population.

In her 1985 Yad Vashem article Eliach stated:

However, as time went on, the relationship between the Jews and the Russians deteriorated. As the liberating units were replaced with more permanent staff, the Russians began to side more and more with the local Poles, despite the fact that among them were the murderers of Russian soldiers and Red partisans. Three Eishyshkian Jews were even arrested—Moshe S., Zvi M., and Israel D. Some survivors cooperated with the anti-Semitic Russians and Poles against their own fellow survivors, in order to settle pre-war feuds. The Jews were tried in Vilna [Wilno] on economic charges and found guilty. Two managed to escape, but Moshe Sonenson, after repeated denouncements by a fellow Jew, was exiled to Siberia.<sup>172</sup>

In *There Once Was a World*,<sup>173</sup> Eliach describes these events as stemming from a long-standing feud (“ancient rivalries and animosities”) between the Sonenson-Kabacznik clan and the Yurkanskis, another Jewish family. The immediate clash was allegedly instigated by a local Jew-hater who offered the Yurkanskis a large sum of money to denounce Moshe Sonenson as a bandit who robbed civilians during the NKVD forays in search of Home Army members. As a result, not only Moshe Sonenson, but also Israel Dimitrowski, Zvi Michalowski, and several Soviet personnel were arrested, while their NKVD commander, who had been replaced in the meantime, was demoted and removed from his post. One of the charges supposedly had to do with a coat, originally belonging to Moshe Sonenson’s younger brother, that somehow fell into the possession of a Pole during the war and that Moshe seized after the war.

For some reason, likely anti-Semitism, Eliach (who at the time was attending a state-run Yiddish academy in Wilno where the closet Zionist teachers were fearful of dedicated Jewish Communists) believes that the Soviets decided to treat this group of Jews from Ejszyszki as “serious political offenders” and turned their trial into a major event, perhaps even a “show trial.” A plot cooked up in March 1945 to enable Moshe Sonenson to escape from jail in Wilno was foiled by friends of the Yurkanskis who, once more, betrayed him.

In the final weeks of June 1945, Moshe Sonenson and his cohorts were put on trial. The Soviet personnel, including the demoted local NKVD commander, received commuted sentences of three years, whereas the Jews—Moshe Sonenson, Dimitrowski and Michalowski—were sentenced, respectively, to ten, eight and six years of hard labour in Siberia. In the meantime, Yaffa left for central Poland, and Yitzhak did so the following year. Moshe Sonenson was deported to Siberia and was not released until 1953. Michalowski

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<sup>172</sup> Yaffa Eliach, “Survivors of a Single *Shtetl*. Case Study: Eishyshok,” in Gutman and Saf, eds., *She'erit Hapletah*, 496.

<sup>173</sup> Eliach, *There Once Was a World*, 674–81.

managed to escape from detention in Wilno and arrived in Poland, while Dimitrowski avoided deportation and his wife secured his release in 1949.

What is one to make of this hodgepodge? Without verifying his NKVD file we can never be sure how, and why, Moshe Sonenson met his downfall. It is most unlikely, however, that Poles had anything to do with it.

### ***Statement of the Polish Home Army***

In response to the allegations made by Eliach, the World Federation of Soldiers of the Home Army issued the following statement in August 1996:<sup>174</sup>

The action on Ejszyszki, in reality the two actions of October 19/20 and December 6/7, 1944, are known to historians studying the history of the Wilno District of the Home Army: Dr. Jarosław Wołkonowski, Dr. Henryk Piskunowicz of the Institute of Military History (Wojskowy Instytut Historyczny), and Dr. Kazimierz Krajewski of Warsaw. They are also reflected in memoirs and documents. ... All of these differ fundamentally from the account of Professor Eliach, at that time a seven-year-old girl. Furthermore, Professor Eliach confuses her facts, joining two distinct actions as one event.

As we know, after the Wilno region fell under the control of the Red Army in July 1944, soldiers of the Home Army began to be persecuted. Home Army units, including those who had taken part in the “Ostra Brama” operation [i.e., the liberation of Wilno] along with the Soviet Army, their supposed ally, were surreptitiously disarmed and their members sent to camps in the interior of the Soviet Union, imprisoned, shot, or, at best, forcibly inducted into the Soviet army. The socially and politically active segments of the Polish population suffered a similar fate.

These actions sparked the spontaneous emergence of Polish self-defence units which were subsequently suppressed by NKVD units in which thousands served and which employed an ever growing network of informers. The repressions also forced many endangered soldiers of the Home Army back into the forests. In his extensive monograph about the Wilno District of the Home Army, Dr. Krajewski writes: “In the early morning hours of October 20, 1944, a unit of the Home Army mobilized from the regional network, under the command of Second Lieutenant Michał Babul (*nom de guerre* “Gaj”), took control of Ejszyszki. The documentation found in the ‘selsovet’ was destroyed, seals and blank forms which the Home Army cell issuing false documents needed to save endangered Poles were taken, and the official documents of the Regional Executive Committee of VKPB [“volispolkom”] were also destroyed. ... A much sought after captain of the NKVD—an agent of the army counter-intelligence SMERSH, who organized a network of informers in the region—was also captured. (He was later executed.) During this action, a sergeant of the NKVD was killed and a Red Army soldier was disarmed. In the crossfire that took place

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<sup>174</sup> Tadeusz Filipkowski, press spokesman for the Head Executive of the World Federation of Soldiers of the Home Army, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 11, 1996; reproduced in *Głos Polski* (Toronto), August 23, 1996, under the title “Pogrom, którego nie było.”

during the disarming of the SMERSH officer, two civilians were killed in the home where the officer was living, a Mrs. Sonenson and her young child. (Mrs. Sonenson was the wife of an NKVD officer.) The fact that this NKVD officer and Mrs. Sonenson were both Jews by nationality did not play any part in this action.”<sup>175</sup> ... Dr. Wołkonowski, referring to various documents,<sup>176</sup> relates a similar unfolding of events.

That the events in Ejszyszki clearly had a military purpose, typical of partisan warfare—yet one that entailed a tragic and dramatic episode and not a planned “pogrom,” as alleged by Professor Eliach—is attested to by this simple fact: of the over 30 Jews living in the besieged [town], no one perished or was wounded apart from Mrs. Sonenson and her child.

While sympathizing with Yaffa Eliach over the tragedy that befell her family, the statement goes on to point out that soldiers of the Home Army were being hunted down like animals by the NKVD, just as Jews had been under the German occupation. In the fall of 1944, the Home Army in the Wilno region was defending itself from extermination and was engaged in a desperate battle no longer for Poland’s freedom but for their members’ lives. There was no pogrom in Ejszyszki. There was a military confrontation with the NKVD, not with the Jews. Unfortunately, it also engulfed some innocent victims, which is a hazard of such conflicts the world over, up to the present day.

### ***What Transpired in Ejszyszki?***

Soviet-infiltrated eastern Poland became the scene of a horrific conflict that was played out across a broad range with few clear heroes or villains. Following the entry of the Soviet Army in mid-1944, the NKVD began to round up countless thousands of Polish partisans. Most had been fighting the Germans for years and had even helped the Soviets liberate these areas, often fighting side by side with the Red Army. Thousands of these Polish partisans were executed and their bodies dumped into mass graves, as part of the Soviet attempt to eliminate all non-Communist forces. In 1944–1946, large parts of Poland were the scenes of a massive and bloody guerrilla war between Communist and anti-Communist forces.

Having regard to the contextual backdrop described later in this study, the following conclusions emerge as to what transpired in northeastern Poland and, specifically, in Ejszyszki.

(1) In the late summer and fall of 1943, on instructions from Moscow, Soviet partisans launched an unprovoked war against the Polish underground with the intention of eradicating it as a military force. It is

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<sup>175</sup> Krajewski, *Na ziemi nowogródzkiej*, 619. The Wilno regional office of the Polish government in exile’s Delegate, in his report of October 30, 1944, was critical of the activities of the Home Army in Ejszyszki because of the harsh retaliatory measures taken by the Soviet authorities against the civilian population. See Centralne Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych, Warsaw, sygnatura CA MSW I/16.

<sup>176</sup> Wołkonowski, “Ejszyszki—zniekształcony obraz przeszłości,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, September 26, 1996. According to Michał Wołłejko, an official NKVD document states that a captain of the Soviet “Smersh,” whose prime objective was to liquidate the Polish underground, was in the Sonenson house. During the assault of October 19/20, 1944, he was wounded and taken prisoner by the AK (according to the NKVD document, his secret archive also fell into AK hands). After a hearing by a Polish underground field court, he was sentenced to death and executed. See Michał Wołłejko, “Opowieści chasydzkie,” *Gazeta Polska*, August 10, 1995.

an undeniable fact that Jewish partisans took part in these assaults on Polish partisans, both as integrated Soviet partisans and as “aligned” formations. As was to be expected, Polish partisans struck back.

(2) Concurrently, Soviet and Jewish partisans were engaged in widespread “economic” actions, i.e., plundering of provisions and items of all description from the civilian population, and employed arms and force to carry this out. Often, these amounted to no more than common robberies that literally stripped the peasants of most of their possessions and were carried out more brutally than the requisitions by the Nazis. Those who took part in these relentless raids knew the risks they ran.

(3) When the terrorized population armed itself in an attempt to fend off the relentless assaults, they met with harsh reprisals. On occasion, entire villages were burned to the ground and their population massacred, such as Koniuchy—located not far from Ejszyszki—which was “pacified” in January 1944. Although Holocaust memoirs and historians have attempted to cast “Polish anti-Semitism” as the primary, and often the only factor at play, in fact, it was the least important consideration. There is scant, if any, evidence that Poles were engaged in a war against the Jews as such. Assertions to the contrary simply do not take into account the broader context of a complex and much larger struggle that was being played out. By the time the Polish underground became a significant force in late 1943, the number of Jews in the forest had been severely reduced both by German raids and at the hands of Soviet partisans, and the Jews who remained had entered into a tenuous alliance with the Soviets.

(4) The struggle intensified after the “liberation” of this territory when, as we shall see, on July 14, 1944, Stalin ordered the all-out liquidation of the remaining Polish underground forces. The arrests, torture, deportations, and executions of thousands of Polish Home Army members and their supporters ensued and resulted in counter-retaliations against the Soviet forces and their local collaborators. Their henchmen in Ejszyszki included Moshe Sonenson, Yaffa Eliach’s father, and Alter Michalowski.

(5) The assault on Ejszyszki on October 19/20, 1944 targeted primarily Soviet officials in that town, particularly a captain of “Smersh” (Soviet military counter-intelligence), who directed activities aimed at crushing the remnants of the Home Army. This interpretation is entirely consistent with all of the sources including Jewish ones—except for Yaffa Eliach’s accounts—which readily acknowledge the presence of an important Soviet officer and an active network of Soviet auxiliaries in the town.

(6) Soviet officials were lodged in the Sonenson home at the time of the raid. (Why were they there? Would they have stayed with someone they did not consider trustworthy?) The sought-after NKVD officer, described as a “Smersh” captain, was in fact captured and later executed by the Poles, as was his assistant (a sergeant). The Sonenson house was the only place in Ejszyszki where a serious clash between the Home Army and resisting Soviet officials took place. (The other place, or perhaps two, where visiting Soviet soldiers were billeted fell into partisan hands without resistance: one Soviet soldier was shot while drunk in bed and another managed to escape.) It was that NKVD officer who was undoubtedly the prime target of the assault on the Sonenson home. Moshe Sonenson, who himself was closely connected to the NKVD in some capacity, may well have been sought out in the attack but, according to Eliach, hid in a closet behind his wife and children, thereby exposing them, rather than himself, to danger.

(7) Yaffa Eliach's mother and youngest sibling were killed in the ensuing skirmish, likely the victims of crossfire, as was the case of another Polish woman who was wounded in the town. The details of this skirmish and who shot them cannot be established with certainty from the available evidence. Eliach's accounts of how she eluded detection by the assailants are inconsistent and implausible. Is it likely that the mother and baby would be detected, but not the father and the other two children hiding in the same closet? Two independent accounts indicate that Moshe Sonenson had escaped from the house together with Yaffa and Yitzhak before the shooting occurred (either downstairs or on the stairs). Soon after the events in question, her father, Moshe Sonenson, stated that, while he hid under the stairs that led to the attic, his wife sat by a window with their young child. This statement strongly suggests that they died in the fusillade that took place during the storming of the house.

(8) Although there were civilian casualties in the assault on Ejszyszki, this was not a case of anti-Semitic Poles embarking on a wanton killing spree of Jews. It was most certainly not a pogrom. If the Poles had wanted to kill the Sonensons simply because they were Jews, they did not have to wait several months after the "liberation" to do so. Furthermore, apart from Eliach's mother and baby brother, none of the other thirty or so Jews in the town were harmed. They managed to survive the supposed pogrom even though they were grouped in two or three buildings and outnumbered by the Home Army five to one.

(9) The circumstances of Eliach's father's arrest also remain shrouded in mystery. Why would he suddenly fall into disfavour with those he had worked for wholeheartedly and whom he received as welcome guests in his home? For possession of illegal arms, which he intended to or did use against Poles (as Yitzhak Sonenson intimates)? For mistreating civilians (as Kuszelewicz suggests)? Would he have been so harshly sentenced simply for stealing a coat (as Yaffa Eliach suggests in one version)? Why would his fellow Jews instigate his arrest? Was it simply a "banal case of settling accounts, animated by competition and business jealousy" (as Eliach contends in yet another of her accounts)? Perhaps Soviet documents will emerge one day to shed light on this matter.

In any event, even assuming the worst (but unproven) case scenario, namely, that Polish partisans deliberately shot Yaffa Eliach's mother and baby brother, how does this tragedy differ from that of scores of others such as Naliboki and Koniuchy, where—as we shall see—hundreds of innocent Polish children, women and men were gunned down in cold blood or burned alive by Soviet and Jewish partisans? Why are some victims better than others? Why do some get unlimited publicity in the Western media as martyrs, while others are relegated to oblivion or ill fame? Some observations on this perplexing issue will be put forward in Part Four of this study.

## *Afterword*

Within several months of the appearance in 1998 of *The Story of Two Shtetls, Brańsk and Ejszyski*, two books were published by Jewish historians that deal, to a large extent, with the events described in the essay, “Anti-Semitic Pogrom in Ejszyski?: An Overview of Polish-Jewish Relations in Wartime Northeastern Poland,” which constitutes the rudiments for the present book. One was Yaffa Eliach’s long-awaited *There Once Was a World: A Nine-Hundred-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998); the other was Allan Levine’s *Fugitives of the Forest: The Heroic Story of Jewish Resistance and Survival during the Second World War* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1998).

Even though Soviet archives have been open to historians for a number of years, and countless documents have been published in various languages, Yaffa Eliach and Allan Levine, who pretend to be producing serious studies about Jewish partisans in this very area, virtually ignore them. Levine, for example, dismisses them sight unseen—an inexcusable flaw given that the Jewish partisans became entirely subservient to the Soviets. Instead, he prefers to rely exclusively on Jewish anecdotal literature, often written many years after the fact, as the sole basis of his scholarship on the issue of Polish-Jewish relations in this region. “Despite the flaw in such remembrances,” he states, “the survivors’ recollections are at least (or more, I suggest) as valuable a historical source as any written Nazi or Soviet documents of the era, which were often composed with bias and according to a preconceived agenda.” (*Fugitives of the Forest*, xiv.)

In Eliach’s case, she refers to several documents from one file found in the Vilnius archives regarding the October 1944 assault on Ejszyski, but does not cite any passages from them, so it is impossible to know if she summarizes their content accurately. This is a crucial shortcoming, given that she relies on one document in particular, namely the testimony of Michał Iwaszko, to prove that a local Home Army unit was given a “special mission” during the assault on Ejszyski to “kill the Jews and loot their homes.” (*There Once Was a World*, 673.)

Furthermore, both these historians ignore relevant Polish archival sources, historical writings and memoirs altogether, and demonstrate at best a superficial knowledge of the activities of the Home Army.<sup>177</sup> In Levine’s case, an important document he cites about conditions in the Soviet-occupied eastern part of Poland in 1939–1941, namely Jan Karski’s report from February 1940 (reproduced in the following essay), is purged of a key passage referring to extensive denunciation of Poles by Jews and Jewish collaboration with the Soviet organs of repression. Instead, he cites one of Karski’s speculative impressions about future revenge—a “repayment in blood” which by and large did not occur even though the Poles had ample

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<sup>177</sup> In her bibliography, Eliach does refer to one title by Jarosław Wołkonowski, but even if she has read it, it is apparent that it had no impact on her assessment of Polish–Jewish relations. There is no reference to any Polish source dealing with the Home Army in the endnotes.

opportunity to carry one out when, in June 1941, the Soviets fled before the invading German forces<sup>178</sup>— and whitewashes Jewish conduct under Soviet rule. (*Fugitives of the Forest*, 13–16.)

The use of German documents is also problematic, especially in Eliach's case. She refers to all of one document from the German federal archives in Koblenz, again without directly citing any passage from it and without any discussion of its background, context or implementation. The reader cannot be sure what it ultimately contains and establishes, but Eliach relies on it absolutely to buttress her claim that the local Home Army, who allegedly "did not want to fight against the Germans," reached an agreement of major proportion with the Germans: Poles would receive arms and supplies in return for hunting down and killing Jews and Communists. (*There Once Was a World*, 629.)

There are many problems with this theory. First of all, there was no independent Jewish partisan movement in this region and, in talks entered into with the Germans, Jews weren't even mentioned by name. A close scrutiny of the documents found in Bundesarchiv Koblenz file R 6/369, fol. 1–25, especially the memorandum of Dr. Horst Wulff, the Gebietskommissar of the Wilno region, dated January 18, 1944, contradicts Eliach's claims and interpretation of this document. It is not an official agreement by the Home Army with the Germans, but an internal German report. Moreover, Wulff states that "nothing concrete was agreed to with the Polish bands" and complains of incessant Polish attacks on German and Lithuanian outposts. He also makes it abundantly clear that an agreement of a political nature was never contemplated. Indeed, both the Polish government in exile and Home Army high command strictly forbade agreement with Germany. The unauthorized decision of some Home Army commanders in this region, who were set upon by the Soviet partisans, to accept arms from the Germans was a purely tactical and temporary expedient.

This entire matter of contacts between the beleaguered Home Army and the German military in the Wilno area has an extensive, scholarly literature. It has been dealt with by Jarosław Wołkonowski in his book *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945*,<sup>179</sup> which Eliach cites in her

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<sup>178</sup> Most of the serious acts of revenge were, in fact, perpetrated by Ukrainians. See Andrzej Żbikowski, "Lokalne pogromy Żydów w czerwcu i lipcu 1941 roku na wschodnich rubieżach II Rzeczypospolitej," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce*, no. 2–3 (April–September 1992): 3–18, and the abridged English version, "Local Anti-Jewish Pogroms in the Occupied Territories of Eastern Poland, June–July 1941," in Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock, eds., *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 173–79. See also Cholawsky, *The Jews of Bielorussia during World War II*, 271–73. It is to be noted these incidents often occurred in localities that had not witnessed anti-Jewish incidents in September 1939, and therefore constituted retaliation against Jewish collaborators with the Soviet invaders rather than anti-Semitic outbursts. Moreover, the Polish population did not, by and large, succumb to provocations directed against the Jewish population at large in the immediate aftermath of the Germans' exposing Soviet atrocities, in which local Jews had taken part. In Głębokie, for example, the local council spoke out against Jew-baiting and called upon the population, consisting of many faiths and nationalities, to unite and make peace among themselves. The punitive actions that followed nonetheless, were not random but targeted those who were closely connected to the Soviet regime: "At first the Gestapo, with the help of the local police and some other local Christians, began to search for Communists and their cohorts who had worked for the Soviet occupation forces, or served them in some capacity. Almost immediately, 42 persons were arrested. ... There were also a few Christians ... All of those arrested, except for the few, above mentioned merchants, had been officials of the Communist regime during the Soviet occupation." See *Memorial Book of Gluboke* (Canton, New York, 1994), 27, 37, a translation of *Khurbn Glubok...Koziany* by M. and Z. Rajak (Reiyak), originally published in 1956 in Yiddish by the Former Residents' Association in Argentina.

<sup>179</sup> Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945*, 171–84.



bibliography but evidently doesn't know. It is also dealt with in important works such as Kazimierz Krajewski's *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej*<sup>180</sup> and Zygmunt Boradyn's *Niemen—rzeka niezgody*,<sup>181</sup> the only solid scholarly studies in any language of the interaction of Polish and Soviet partisans in the Nowogródek area that take into account recently released Soviet archival documents. The topic has also been treated in English, though less extensively, in Tadeusz Piotrowski's *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic, 1918–1947*.<sup>182</sup> There has also been important research done on this topic by German historians.<sup>183</sup>

Hence, the fact that Poles had sporadic contacts with the Germans is neither a revelation nor, contrary to what Eliach contends, did it entail a broad-based military alliance. In fact, German overtures from high-ranking officials were repeatedly rejected by the regional and national Home Army leadership. As John Radziłowski points out,

The history of eastern Poland during this era is extremely complex, making simplistic judgements easy and easy to accept by those unfamiliar with the literature. Eliach's refusal to discuss this context leads her to dangerous distortions. The Soviet role in the mass murder of Poles and their attempts to wipe out or take control of Polish partisan units meant that Poles in the Wilno-Eishyshok region faced two enemies. At times they cooperated with Soviet units, such as when Polish AK forces spearheaded the joint Polish-Soviet liberation of Wilno (during the same period Eliach claims Poles were fighting on the German side). Although there is no evidence that the Poles ever cooperated with German forces, the fact that there were contacts has been long known. Whereas the Germans sought to turn the Poles toward fighting exclusively against Soviet partisans, the Poles sought to gain intelligence on German morale and preparedness and perhaps to acquire some badly needed weapons. At times the Poles were able to acquire arms and the two sides observed an occasional ceasefire. Yet, no evidence has yet emerged to suggest that Jews were ever the suggested target of such talks or that the AK ever carried out any actions at the Germans' behest or conducted any systematic attacks on Jews. To the contrary, during the period under discussion the AK region leader Aleksander Krzyżanowski ("Wilk") issued explicit orders that no ethnic group, including the Jews, should be mistreated. It should be noted that these talks were with the regular German military (Abwehr), not the Gestapo, and that Krzyżanowski rejected the idea of a formal agreement. AK commanders who tried to enter into unauthorized agreements with the occupiers were disciplined by Polish underground authorities and all reputable specialists agree that the AK never collaborated with the Nazis.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej*, 173–89.

<sup>181</sup> Boradyn, *Niemen—rzeka niezgody*, 173–82.

<sup>182</sup> Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust*, 88–90.

<sup>183</sup> For example, the research of Michael Foedrowitz is summarized in Polish in "W poszukiwaniu 'modus vivendi': Kontakty i rozmowy pomiędzy okupantami a okupowanymi dotyczące porozumienia niemiecko-polskiego w czasie II wojny światowej," *Mars: Problematyka i historia wojskowości* 2 (1994): 165–80.

<sup>184</sup> Radziłowski, "Yaffa Eliach's Big Book of Holocaust Revisionism," *Journal of Genocide Research*, volume 1, no. 2 (June 1999): 277.

Eliach claims that the AK entered into an ‘official local agreement with the Germans in Lida’, and further notes that although ‘the official document refers to Bolshevik gangs, the Jews quickly became the main target of the White Poles’. Although her book treats this as a startling revelation, in reality contacts between the AK and the German Sicherheitsdienst (military police) and Abwehr in December 1943 and January 1944 in north-east Poland have generated extensive research in both Polish and German archives. The proposed agreement would have created a de facto truce between the two forces. The Poles would concentrate their forces against the Soviet partisans in exchange for weapons, ammunition, and medical supplies. Little came of these contacts. No formal agreement was ever signed, although the Germans apparently allowed the AK to ‘capture’ some arms and reduced attacks and reprisals in AK-held areas. Yet the AK command and the government in exile rejected the very idea of talks with the Germans. Nor was this idea accepted by all the factions of the German hierarchy, for at least one German official was executed by the SS for giving arms to the Poles. Nor, for that matter, did these contacts inspire the Poles to undertake extra actions against the Soviets, let alone the Jews.<sup>185</sup>

Eliach, and to a lesser extent Levine, both succumb wholeheartedly to the crude charges and arguments that abound in Jewish (and Stalinist) historiography about the Home Army and its alleged collaboration with the Nazis and anti-Semitism. The most incriminating passage that Levine can manage to unearth about the Home Army’s activities in the Wilno area, courtesy of Israeli historian Shmuel Krakowski, a former political commissar in the military in Communist Poland, is from a novel by Tadeusz Konwicki, written during the Stalinist era when diatribes against the Home Army, then branded a pro-Nazi reactionary force, reached their peak. (*Fugitives of the Forest*, 192.)

According to one source, at the age of eighteen Konwicki joined the Home Army in the Wilno region in July 1944, that is after the Soviet entry, and remained in an underground unit until the following spring. According to Ryszard Kiersnowski, cited below, Konwicki’s period of active service may have been considerably shorter: several months from around February to the end of April 1945. Convinced of the justness of the Party line, however, Konwicki soon switched allegiance and became a Communist. As an apologist author he dedicated his first stories to the heroic workers who were building socialism. Konwicki’s first novel, *Rojstry (Marshes)*—from which Krakowski cites in (his) Chapter 4 of the co-authored *Unequal Victims*<sup>186</sup>—was written in 1947, at a time when tens of thousands of members of the anti-Communist underground were being rounded up, jailed, tortured, executed and dispatched to camps in the Gulag. To justify these measures the Stalinist regime portrayed them as “fascists” and “anti-Semites.”

The author and literary historian Czesław Miłosz has pointed out that Konwicki’s novel “is comparable in its bitterness to the literature of ‘settling accounts.’ ... It presents the dramas of young men deceived by their well-intentioned, anti-Soviet patriotism.”<sup>187</sup> Moreover, as historian Ryszard Kiersnowski, who served in the same unit as Konwicki, relates, Konwicki took considerable liberties with the events he describes,

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<sup>185</sup> Radziłowski, “Ejszyski Revisited, 1939–1945,” in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 15 (2002): 461–62.

<sup>186</sup> Gutman and Krakowski, *Unequal Victims*, 131.

<sup>187</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 499–500.

embellished them with fictitious accounts, and presented the Home Army in an ideologically skewed manner. After the downfall of Poland's Communist regime in 1989, Konwicki distanced himself from his early writings and confessed: "I was a Stalinist, I wrote disgracefully."<sup>188</sup> In short, Konwicki's "testimony," which was written in furtherance of a hostile ideological attack on the Home Army, is of highly questionable value and authenticity. But none of this stops Krakowski, or Levine for that matter, from attempting to elevate a quotation from a work of fiction to the level of an allegedly objective and well-informed eyewitness account.

A similar tactic is again employed when Levine is faced with a vacuum of documentary evidence but feels compelled, as a historian with a partisan mission, to push a particular theory. Although no one has proven the existence of such an order, Jewish historiography insists (as did wartime Soviet propaganda) that the Polish partisans in the Wilno region received instructions from the Home Army leadership and the Polish government in exile in London to unilaterally declare war on the friendly, well-intentioned, and better armed Soviet partisans and their Jewish allies. This theory is put forward in Levine's book through the perspective of a Jewish partisan as unquestioned gospel:

At first, recalled Jacob Greenstein, AK partisans in the Naliboki Forest were willing to work side by side with Jewish and Soviet fighters. Then, in December 1943, the Poles received an order from London "to get rid of the Red partisans, especially the Jews." (*Fugitives of the Forest*, 191.)

Armed with this "hard" evidence, Levine can now progress to generalities, which, it must be noted, are not necessarily consistent with his earlier findings.

The arrival in the area in late 1942 of the Polish Home Army, or AK, which declared war on the Nazis, Soviets, and Jews, made life difficult for both the fighters and members of the family camp. In particular, taking food from uncooperative peasants who were now protected by AK soldiers became a dangerous challenge. (*Ibid.*, 207.)

These factions [AK soldiers] were intent on using the end of the war and the chaotic conditions that accompanied it to rid their respective territories of both Soviets and Jews. (*Ibid.*, 294.)

Ignoring Jewish testimonies that challenge this interpretation (e.g., Oswald Rufeisen's) and having dismissed out of hand Soviet archival documents which he didn't even bother to investigate, Levine (as does Eliach) fails to grasp what recently released Soviet documents readily admit, namely, that treacherous assaults and massacres of allied Polish partisans occurred in the latter half of 1943, in which Jewish partisans joined, with predictable consequences. However, there is a deafening silence about such matters in a book which relies exclusively on Jewish anecdotal literature to interpret this period. Not knowing

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<sup>188</sup> Ryszard Kiersnowski, *Tam i wtedy: W Podweryszkach, w Wilnie i w puszczy, 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Editions Spotkania, 1994), 173–92; Stanisław Nowicki, *Pół wieku czyśćca: Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim*, 3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1990), 42.

Polish sources, Levine does not grasp that copies of authentic Soviet orders from that period were published in the West decades ago. In a word, his writings about Polish-Jewish relations are extremely shoddy. As scholarship, his ruminations about the Home Army are virtually worthless.<sup>189</sup> They repeat an all-too-familiar pattern: once one accepts that all Polish behaviour is governed by an irrational and endemic anti-Semitism, chronology, causal connections and even pivotal events become largely irrelevant as a tool to analyze the complexities of inter-ethnic relations.

Moreover, Levine glosses over the most unsavoury aspects of the “economic actions”—although he does admit that “most of the young men” in the Bielski camp “were kept occupied on *bambioshki*” (Ibid., 253) and that “so many provisions were taken from farmers around the Narocz Forest, for instance, that by the middle of the winter of 1943, their shelves and storerooms were bare” (Ibid., 221)—as well as the full impact of the “revenge actions” directed at villages, such as Koniuchy, which formed self-defence groups to ward off incessant and increasingly violent partisan raids.

As such, Levine’s *Fugitives of the Forest* did not necessitate any amendments to the original essay on Ejszyszki.<sup>190</sup> None of this, however, has prevented the Canadian mainstream media from publishing lavish

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<sup>189</sup> There is no obstacle in the way of historical works of this ilk receiving lavish funding from government sources in Canada. Levine’s book, for example, was subsidized both by the Canada Council for the Arts and the Manitoba Arts Council. (The former council has in the past rejected worthy projects by Polish Canadian authors.) The Canadian Polish Congress voiced meritorious objections to Levine’s book which were summarily dismissed by the Canada Council’s chairman, Jean-Louis Roux, as advocating censorship. The following points were made by the Canadian Polish Congress:

“[*Fugitives of the Forest*] advances the thoroughly discredited contention that the Polish Home Army unilaterally declared war on the Soviet partisans and Jews. (See especially pages 189–91, 207 and 294, where it is falsely claimed that “the Poles received an order from London ‘to get rid of the Red partisans, especially the Jews’” and that “in late 1942 ... the Polish Home Army ... declared war on Nazis, Soviets, and Jews”). This thesis has been firmly abandoned by historians from countries of the former Soviet Union (Russia, Belarus and Lithuania) now that the Soviet archives are open and contain numerous documents proving that it was just the reverse, i.e., the Soviet partisans were in fact given instructions to eliminate the Polish partisans and initiated a murderous assault on them.

“Surprisingly, Allan Levine simply ignores the existence of these archives, as well as Polish sources, and relies exclusively on Jewish memoirs. Earlier this year The Polish Educational Foundation in North America published a book dealing with this very same topic (namely, Jewish partisans in the northeastern provinces of prewar Poland—see *The Story of Two Shtetls*, Part Two, especially pages 40–61), in which the relevant archival documents are cited.

“There is *no* excuse for any historian worth his salt to ignore important archival material that is readily available and to push views that have been discredited. Nor is it a matter where “facts” are reasonably open to interpretation. The facts are clear and the existence of Soviet orders are not in doubt. On the other hand, the “order” that the Polish Home Army allegedly received to initiate such a confrontation is a fiction. It does not exist. No one has been able to cite such a document even though the Polish archives in London have always been open to historians. ...”

“Messrs. [André] Stein and Levine are free to publish their historical musings privately, but certainly the taxpayers of Canada, among them hundreds of thousands of Polish origin, should not be financing books with content of the type we brought to your attention.”

<sup>190</sup> Levine is equally poorly informed and tendentious in his more general observations about Polish-Jewish relations. For example, he refers to the “complex and deep-seated anti-Semitism propagated for generations” by Catholic clergy and “passed down as gospel by uneducated peasants to their children.” (Ibid., 33.) First of all, one wonders what is “complex” about Levine’s black-and-white scenario, and secondly, why is he oblivious to the role of traditional Jewish attitudes toward Polish Christians, a topic that is dealt with in Part One of *The Story of Two Shtetls*, at 183–190. Another example is his ascribing to the Polish “Blue” police some significant role in the Holocaust. (Ibid., 34.) Szymon Datner, a longtime director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, has stated that the Polish police “were employed in a very marginal way, in what I would call keeping order.” See Małgorzata Niezabitowska, *Remnants: The Last Jews of Poland* (New York: Friendly Press, 1986), 247. Raul Hilberg, the leading historian on the Holocaust, has portrayed them in a different light than Levine: “Of all the native police forces in occupied Eastern Europe [and to this we could readily add the French police—*M.P.*], those of Poland were least involved in anti-Jewish actions. ... The

reviews about Levine's book by his colleagues whose knowledge of this topic is, one can safely assume, non-existent.<sup>191</sup> Levine exposed another unsavoury side of himself when he decided to go public with his views about the Canadian Polish Congress's protest regarding Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's decision not to invite Polish Canadians to accompany him on his pilgrimage to Auschwitz during his state visit to Poland in January 1999. While responsible members of the Jewish community decried this unseemly omission,<sup>192</sup> Levine launched into a series of anti-Polish tirades in *The Globe and Mail* and for Canadian Press (a national press agency), in which he falsely accused the Canadian Polish Congress of being "insulted" by the Prime Minister's "publicly acknowledging the terrible suffering of Jews at Auschwitz" and of being animated by religious-based bigotry. In fact, the Canadian Polish Congress had publicly applauded the Prime Minister's decision to invite a Jewish delegation to accompany him to Auschwitz, and, according to one media report, the animation and opposition came from the other side: "Many Jewish leaders say deep-seated anti-Semitism in Poland during the war made it easy for the Nazis to round up Jews and send them to Auschwitz and other death camps." Levine's vitriolic remarks were imbued with the theme of Polish collaboration in the Holocaust and charges of "atavistic" anti-Semitism.<sup>193</sup>

In Eliach's case, another important factor is the suppression of information emanating from *Jewish* sources that go contrary to her portrayal of what transpired in Ejszyski. In particular, she ignores Alter Michalowski's important and detailed account, written a few years after the war, which contradicts what she writes about her father's activities after the Soviet "liberation" in July 1944. Eliach's *There Once Was a World* is a sprawling volume which aspires to serious scholarship, but fails to deliver in almost every respect. Some of the problems with her approach were identified in one of the first reviews, published in the *New York Forward* (November 6, 1998), under the telling title, "Can a Redemptive Elegy Also Be a Work of History?" David G. Roskies, who teaches at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, offered the following noteworthy comments:

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Germans could not view them as collaborators, for in German eyes they were not even worthy of that role. They in turn could not join the Germans in major operations against Jews or Polish resisters, lest they be considered traitors by virtually every Polish onlooker. Their task in the destruction of the Jews was therefore limited." See Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York: Aaron Asher Books/Harper Collins, 1992), 92–93. Notably, the Polish police did not carry out the deportation of 250,000 Jews from the Warsaw ghetto to the Treblinka death camp in the summer of 1942. That ignoble task, larger than the deportations from France and Holland combined, fell principally to the Jewish police.

<sup>191</sup> Sharon Abron Drache, for example, hailed it as a "must read" for those who wonder about organized Jewish resistance to the Holocaust, in her review, "Attack of the Jewish partisans," *The Globe and Mail*, January 2, 1999.

<sup>192</sup> Michael Marrus, a leading Holocaust scholar and dean of graduate studies at the University of Toronto, for example, stated: "My sense is that the Polish Canadians have a case. ... Some 140,000 Poles, we estimate, were kept in the camp of Auschwitz and more than half of them were murdered there. Now, this camp has importance for the Polish memory of a war in which some three million non-Jewish Poles died at the hands of the Nazis. ... Surely that's enough to qualify as victims. What more does one need? What more price does a nation have to pay?" See "Michael Coren Live," CTS—Crossroads TV (Toronto), February 1, 1999. Norman Spector, a former Canadian ambassador to Israel and former editor of *The Jerusalem Post*, stated that the Prime Minister's office had "erred" by forgetting about the Canadian Polish Congress.

<sup>193</sup> For the various exchanges see Jeff Sallot, "Polish Canadians vent anger at PM," *The Globe and Mail*, January 23, 1999; Allan Levine, "The Prime Minister, Auschwitz and the battle for memory," *The Globe and Mail*, January 26, 1999; Bernard Wisniewski (Executive Vice-President, Canadian Polish Congress), "What the Polish Christian stake is in Auschwitz," *The Globe and Mail*, February 8, 1999; Canadian Press, "Polish group still smarting over trip," *The*

Ms. Eliach's chronicle of Eishyshok is virtually *goyimrein*, even though non-Jews made up 35% of the total pre-war population. 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 ... Nothing a gentile has ever written or spoken about the *shtetl* has any bearing whatsoever.

Ms. Eliach seems to enumerate all the instances of Jew-hatred going back to the very beginning of *shtetl* time, and not for a single chapter in 700 pages of text does she let the reader forget the horrible fate that awaits those Jews who remained in Eishyshok until the bitter end. Whatever her subject may be ... the spectre of the Holocaust hangs over them all. ...

Ms. Eliach consistently rejects perspectives and sources critical of the *shtetl*. ...

When all is said and done, Ms. Eliach's chronicle has all the strengths and weaknesses of its implicit model, the communal yizkor [memorial] books. Like them, it is an internal history, partisan and partial. ... Like a yizkor book, its primary purpose is to work through the collective trauma of the Holocaust. As in a yizkor book, the gentiles are a faceless mob of peasants who appear and disappear on market day. Jewish-gentile relations are recalled in the context of pogroms, anti-Jewish boycotts, murders and the Holocaust.

As we know from Ellen Livingston's study of interwar Ejszyszki, however, Polish-Jewish relations during that period were, on the whole, quite proper.<sup>194</sup>

Another reviewer, Irene Tomaszewski, writing in the Toronto *Globe and Mail* ("A lament for the death of a shtetl," January 16, 1999), who looked at the book from a Polish perspective, was equally critical:

Even more striking is the exclusion of the gentile world. ... Poles are crude, drunken, sadistic, anti-Semitic and largely stupid. Eliach makes it quite clear that she holds Poland and the Polish people, especially the Polish underground, responsible for the Holocaust, as much as, if not more than, the Germans. This is a serious and irresponsible distortion of history. ...

Eliach does not recognize Germany's murderous policies toward Polish Christians. Believing a statement that "Hitler is searching for Jews to kill, not Poles," she ignores all documented history to show "the good fortune of the local Poles." I assume that Hitler's policy toward Poland is too well known to spend more time on this.

Important critiques of Eliach's *There Once Was a World* are found in three well-researched and penetrating reviews by John Radziłowski: "Yaffa Eliach's Big Book of Holocaust Revisionism,"<sup>195</sup> "Eishyshok Revisited, 1939–1945,"<sup>196</sup> and "Ejszyszki and Its Neighbors."<sup>197</sup> Some of the important points

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*London Free Press*, January 28, 1999; Bernard Wisniewski, "How could that offend?" (letter), *The London Free Press*, February 9, 1999.

<sup>194</sup> Ellen Livingston, *Tradition and Modernism in the Shtetl: Aisheshuk, 1919–1939. An Oral History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986).

<sup>195</sup> *Journal of Genocide Research*, volume 1, no. 2 (June 1999): 273–80.

<sup>196</sup> In *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 15 (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002), 453–68.

made in the former review have been incorporated into the revised essay on Ejszyszki. Others are noted below:

Summing up Eliach's feelings about various ethnic groups is easy and it shows how simplistic and partisan she is. All Jews are good, especially those from Eishyshok who are all intelligent, handsome/beautiful, brave, generous, and their children are all above average. On the few occasions they do anything wrong, it is usually by mistake caused by the stress of living among all those Polish murderers. Lithuanians were good, until they came under the influence of Christian Poles, whereupon they became antisemites. With a couple of exceptions all Poles are bad. They are all antisemites, and most are drunks, fanatics, degenerates, betrayers, murderers, and more or less subhuman. The author contrives to say something bad about Poles on almost every page.<sup>198</sup>

The Poles, according to Eliach, collaborated with the Nazis in just about everything. There is no mention of Poles ever having fought against the Germans. Rather, Jews are shown as bravely fighting for Poland in the Polish army, only to be hamstrung and undermined by their Jew-hating fellow soldiers. The Poles always run away or collaborate. The Jews stay and fight (see pp 565–566, 613).

The two periods of Soviet terror are glossed over in a few pages, with only brief mention of local Jews (among them her own father) who collaborated with the Soviet security forces who persecuted their neighbors. There is only one passing mention of the murder and deportation to Siberia of tens of thousands of ethnic Poles from the region around Eishyshok (p 598), which is also the only mention of non-Jewish victimization in the entire book (save those allegedly killed by the AK for helping Jews). ... Poles are consistently described as cheering the murder of Jews and even Poles who rescue Jews are portrayed as making statements supportive of genocide.

The gist of Eliach's story is that the AK was an antisemitic, pro-Nazi organization whose goal was to hunt down and kill Jews and righteous Gentiles, and very secondarily communists. In one of the most calumnious statements yet penned about the Poles in World War II, Eliach writes of the AK "Anti-Semitism took precedence over all other goals" and "Despite the loyalty of many Jews to Poland they—not the Germans and not the Russians—bore the brunt of AK attacks" (p 613). For the former statement, the author's endnote cites Israel Gutman's work as the source, but then promptly criticizes Gutman for not sharing her bizarre view of the AK. For the latter statement, not even Eliach can invent a credible source. It is frequently unclear how the author knows that a particular person is an AK member or that a particular massacre in which there were no survivors was committed by the AK, but evidence is not something Eliach is much concerned over.<sup>199</sup>

Clearly, Eliach is not competent to discuss the history of the AK or east European history in general. In her heavily padded bibliography, Eliach lists only one secondary work on the AK (which is never cited in the footnotes). She also lists an AK regional archive as one of her sources

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<sup>197</sup> *Glaukopis* (Warsaw), no. 1 (2003): 284–300.

<sup>198</sup> Radzilowski, "Yaffa Eliach's Big Book of Holocaust Revisionism," *Journal of Genocide Research*, volume 1, no. 2 (June 1999): 273.

of primary documents, but cites not a single document from this collection in her notes (p 753). She is apparently unaware of large bodies of relevant primary and secondary source material, including published AK documents relevant to the wartime history of Ejszyszki. This incompetence extends to other areas of wartime Polish history.<sup>200</sup>

Although Polish and Soviet partisans cooperated until September 1943, in the wake of the revelation of the Katyń massacre and the subsequent collapse in Polish-Soviet relations, the Soviets began a campaign to destroy the AK in Eastern Poland. Western accounts lay the blame for this conflict on the Poles, either the local command or the Polish government in exile. Documents that have come to light since the collapse of the USSR, however, show that the conflict was initiated by orders from the Soviet command, certainly at the highest levels. The fact that the Soviets initiated this action is also demonstrated by the way it was carried out: Polish partisan leaders were invited to conferences with their Soviet counterparts to which they came, unsuspectingly. The Polish leaders were most often disarmed, tortured, and executed. Lower-ranking AK partisans were incorporated into Soviet units, killed, or later in the war deported to Siberian gulags. There is little question that Jewish partisans, both as individuals in regular Soviet partisan units and as members of specifically Soviet-Jewish partisan formations took part in these actions.<sup>201</sup>

Eliach's book raises many questions, few of which are answered. The role of her father, for example, seems to be a key to the story and to her own attitudes. At the end, he emerges as a bitter and deeply cynical man (p 697). His collaboration with the NKVD is an important detail whose full impact on the course of events the author does not consider. Indeed, the failure to consider the murderous role the Soviets played in wartime eastern Europe is a serious problem throughout much of the English-language literature. Furthermore, as painful as it may be, the role of Jews in collaborating with the Soviets and Germans must not be ignored any more than the collaboration of Poles or any other group. Such considerations are lost on Eliach.

Perhaps the most troubling question concerns the whole field of Holocaust studies. That is, how could such an error-prone book be released by a major publisher and nominated for a book award when responsible organizations and individuals had challenged the author publicly and contacted the publisher with their concerns at least two years ago? Clearly, the concerns and questions raised by Poles (as well as many non-Poles) are being systematically and deliberately ignored and this is severely impoverishing the scholarship. The production of books like *There Once Was a World* and the current effort to pretend it is some sort of unquestionable gospel of truth, will, in the end, only play into the hands of Holocaust deniers.

The tendency to play fast and loose with the facts regarding Polish-Jewish relations and the Holocaust is not confined to Yaffa Eliach. Yet, this is an author who has consistently courted publicity and made extremist statements to the media, a fact that cannot be ignored in such an error-laden book. The author has sought controversy as the means to advance an agenda that has nothing to do with scholarship. Her incredible claim that everything in the book is correct, accurate, and

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 275–76.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 276.



fully documented is sheer hubris. The fact that she is writing on the most difficult of subjects—the Holocaust—raises troubling questions about her motives.<sup>202</sup>

A companion review by Lithuanian historian Šarūnas Liekis that appeared in volume 15 of *Polin* is rather problematic and at times even bizarre.<sup>203</sup> Despite assurances to the contrary, the depth of Liekis's research is not at all apparent and his treatment of key issues is superficial. Having glossed over the 1939–1941 period, which included such pivotal events as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet invasion and occupation of Eastern Poland, the massacre of almost 15,000 Polish officers in Katyn and elsewhere, and the deportation of about one half million Poles to the Gulag, as well as the significant political developments in the early part of 1943, which included the unilateral decision by the Soviet Union to break off relations with the Polish government in exile (a staunch anti-Nazi ally), Soviet orders to destroy the independent Polish partisan movement, and Soviet war aims in general, incredibly Liekis turns his focus to the Poles' refusal to accept "the Polish-Soviet frontier decided [sic] at the Tehran conference in December 1943."

Liekis also doesn't seem to appreciate that the Polish forces entered Wilno in July 1944 in a coordinated action with the Soviets to liberate the city from the Germans, so they could not, as he suggests, have provoked the Soviets to disarm them. His ultimate balance of Polish-Soviet relations in the aftermath of the war is also curious to say the least: "the intention of both the AK and the NKVD were clear to all. Each aimed at the annihilation of the other," seemingly forgetting that it was the Soviet Union who had invaded Poland in 1939 and was intent on occupying Poland, and not vice versa. Liekis then goes on to blame the Poles for lacking political realism and thus prolonging the struggle. Allegedly, it was the Home Army (AK) that "refused to compromise with its opponents. This created a struggle to the death, with little compassion for the enemy or even for innocent civilians." Unfortunately, Liekis doesn't spell out what the nature of that compromise was supposed to have been and how exactly things would have worked themselves out amicably. Doubtless, the Soviet leadership would have been surprised to learn then, as we know all too well now not to be the case, that they were interested in a compromise with the Poles (other than their Communist lackeys). Moreover, Polish retaliations were not aimed at Russians *per se*, but at Soviet henchmen.

While acknowledging that atrocities were committed by both sides in the struggle between the Soviet partisans (in which the Jews fought) and the Polish Home Army, and thus indirectly by Jews too, Liekis puts a strange spin on those events by pointing out that Jews "suffered enormously from this antagonism," and stressing that violence against non-combatants and indiscriminate killings of whole families or villages were committed by both sides." He then adds, "Who started the vicious circle of killing and revenge between Jewish partisans and the AK is difficult to establish." Evidently Liekis does not know or

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<sup>201</sup> Radziłowski, "Ejszyski and Its Neighbors," *Glaukopis*, no. 1 (2003): 289.

<sup>202</sup> Radziłowski, "Yaffa Eliach's Big Book of Holocaust Revisionism," *Journal of Genocide Research*, volume 1, no. 2 (June 1999): 278–79.

<sup>203</sup> "The New Jew Hitler Has Fashioned Into Being," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 15 (2002): 445–53.

appreciate the significance of events such as the massacre of some 130 civilians in the town of Naliboki carried out by Soviet and Jewish partisan units in May 1943. There is no evidence that the Home Army ever attacked the Jewish family camps in Naliboki forest. Liekis then attempts to dismiss the heinous murder of the civilian population of Koniuchy by Soviet and Jewish partisan units in January 1944 (for which there is no Home Army equivalent directed at Jews) in various ways. First, he erroneously suggests, against all evidence, that this was a Lithuanian village. In his view, this incident was part of the “small local wars that are not related directly to the issues at the heart of this chapter,” constituting as it were “confrontation ... between Soviet partisans and Lithuanians.” The village Koniuchy was about 25 km from Ejszyszki and, as we have seen, the same Jewish partisans who took part in that massacre raided Polish villages on the outskirts of Ejszyszki. Those victims of Koniuchy were no different than hundreds of other Polish civilians cut down by the Soviet and Jewish partisans elsewhere in the Nowogródek region. Liekis also minimizes the number of Polish victims, which was higher than the figure of 35 he gives, and then misreads John Radziłowski’s reference to Koniuchy claiming that “Radziłowski’s argument is based exclusively on AK reports from the area.” In fact, it is based primarily on Jewish sources.

Although admitting that Soviet “documents do not confirm Professor Eliach’s assertion that the attack [on Ejszyszki] was planned to kill Jews,” and that “there was a history of confrontation and revenge between the soldiers of the AK and the Jews of Eishyshok [many of whom had ties to the Soviet regime], and deep resentment persisted from the period of guerilla warfare during the war,” again Liekis focuses solely on the Poles’ alleged sinister motives: “The AK clearly felt deep hostility towards Jewish former partisans and their family members [Liekis neglects to mention the NKVD ties of many of them], *and was undoubtedly willing to murder them.*” But the facts show that just the opposite was the case. The Home Army did not murder the Jews of Ejszyszki despite the fact that they had clear opportunities to do so in October and December 1944. On the contrary, it was the Jews with Soviet ties who joined in on the assault of Home Army members and their family members from July 1944 on and butchered scores of them in Ejszyszki and the surrounding areas.

To appreciate where Liekis is coming from, one has to step back to his prolonged digression about how *the Poles* and the Home Army—but no other players—held ideologically stereotypical views of everyone around them, and perceived the conflict around Nowogródek and Wilno “as a ‘war of nationalities.’” First of all, as we have seen, this region was ethnically mixed, Poles were often in a minority, and Polish predominance had been short-lived (1920–1939). Moreover, the attitude of Poles cannot, as Liekis would like it, be neatly divorced from that of other nationalities toward Poles. Studying interethnic relations entails looking at *mutual* interaction and attitudes in *context*, and not just those of one side. Furthermore, Liekis doesn’t bother to explain why it was “in the eyes of the local AK command, ... all Germans were fascists, and all Russians ... were communists.” What other kind of Germans and Russians did the Poles encounter in the Wilno region (and elsewhere) except for *invaders* carrying out Fascist and Communist imperialistic and genocidal policies? Could there be any doubt that both the Germans and Russians were set

on annihilating Poland, murdering her élites, and enslaving her population? Didn't both of them already have an abysmal track record of dealing with the Polish minorities in their respective countries?

Germany rounded up its Polish citizens and imprisoned thousands of them in concentration camps even before unleashing its fury and wreaking destruction on the Polish nation in September 1939.<sup>204</sup> Already on August 28, 1939, explosives planted at a train station by an ethnic German citizen of Poland killed a score of Poles in Tarnów. From the very outset of the war the German army massacred Polish civilians and prisoners of war by the thousands.<sup>205</sup> A score of Poles were murdered in Kałdowo and another score in

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<sup>204</sup> Czesław Pilichowski, ed., *Zbrodnie i sprawy: Ludobójstwo hitlerowskie przed sądem ludzkości i historii* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1980), 188, 194–95. One can still encounter the baseless charge that the German minority was persecuted in interwar Poland, even though the evidence overwhelmingly discredits this claim. In fact, the German minority enjoyed full political and civil as well as minority rights including the right to education in German, unlike the Polish minority in Germany. The situation for minorities in Poland was rather favourable even compared to many Western European countries. In Italy, in 1922, the use of German in public was forbidden in South Tyrol and in 1923 German place names were replaced with Italian ones. The use of German in classrooms was restricted, being banned completely in 1924. In 1926 all German-language newspapers were closed. Teachers who were caught teaching German were imprisoned and afterwards banished to convict islands or remote areas of southern Italy. All German teachers were relieved of their duties or were moved to the Italian provinces; all German officials were fired, replaced by a policy of “Italians only.” All German economic associations (workers’ and farmers’) and all German clubs and societies (alpine, gymnastic, etc.) were dissolved and their property confiscated. All public announcements, signposts, signs and shop names had to be in Italian. These brutal measures of Italianization pressured 78,000 ethnic Germans to leave Italy for Austria. The treatment of the 300,000 strong Slovene minority was even more abysmal. The Fascists launched institutionalized, ideological warfare against the “barbarous” Slavs, and Mussolini decided to “energetically cleanse” the Trieste area of Slovenes. The headquarters of the Slovene movement was sacked and Slovenes were attacked on the streets. A well-functioning Slovenian school system (counting some 500 schools) as well as the Slovenian press and publishing houses were dissolved, teachers and priests were deported or dismissed from their posts, and the use of the Slovenian language in public was forbidden. The Italianization of family names was implemented without the permission of those affected by it. Special courts pronounced 19 death sentences on Slovene resisters between 1930 and 1942. See Klaus Bochmann, “Racism and/or Nationalism: Minorities and Language Policy under Fascist Regimes,” *Racial Discrimination and Ethnicity in European History*, CLIOH Notebook, Internet: <<http://www.stm.unipi.it/Clloh/tabs/libri/book7.htm>>; R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life under the Dictatorship, 1915–1945* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 155–58, 179; Regional Dossiers for German (South Tyrol), Internet: <<http://mercator-education.org>>. In France, the German language was eliminated from schools in the German-speaking province of Alsace, and was re-introduced as a school subject for two of three hours a week only in 1927. German instruction was completely banned again following Second World War. See the Regional Dossier for German (Alsace), Internet: <<http://mercator-education.org>>. Other Mercator dossiers for France note that minority languages such as Occitan and Breton were suppressed since at least the French Revolution and that the number of speakers of those languages dwindled dramatically in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, to the extent that the French state has been criticized as conducting a campaign aimed at eradicating Breton. As late as the 1950s official warning signs were posted in schools declaring: “No spitting on the ground or speaking Breton” France still refuses to this day to ratify the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. After the Spanish Civil War, not only was the use of Catalan forbidden in public, at first it was even punishable with the death penalty. All cultural and educational institutions were closed down, entire libraries and all Catalan publications were destroyed, and the Catalan school system, publishing industry and press were eliminated. Writers and journalists emigrated or went into exile, when they were not murdered or did not become the victims of war. See Klaus Bochmann, “Racism and/or Nationalism: Minorities and Language Policy under Fascist Regimes,” *Racial Discrimination and Ethnicity in European History*, CLIOH Notebook, Internet: <<http://www.stm.unipi.it/Clloh/tabs/libri/book7.htm>>. The notion that linguistic and ethno-cultural minorities fared better in Western Europe than in East-Central Europe during the interwar period is simply fallacious.

<sup>205</sup> Szymon Datner, *Crimes Committed by the Wehrmacht during the September Campaign and the Period of the Military Government* (Poznań: Institute for Western Affairs, 1962); Szymon Datner, *Crimes against POWs: Responsibility of the Wehrmacht* (Warsaw: Zachodnia Agencja Prasowa, 1964); Szymon Datner, *55 dni Wehrmachtu w Polsce: Zbrodnie dokonane na polskiej ludności cywilnej w okresie 1.IX.–25.X.1939 r.* (Warsaw: Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, 1967); Pilichowski, ed., *Zbrodnie i sprawy*, 262–75, 285; Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Marcin Libicki and Ryszard Wryk, eds., *Zbrodnie niemieckie w Wielkopolsce w latach 1919–1945* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2004), 30–42, 81–104.

Szymankowo, in Pomerania, on September 1, 1939,<sup>206</sup> thus belying the propaganda claim that it was Polish atrocities against the Germans that led to German reprisals. Well over 20,000 eager fifth columnists were recruited from among Poland's ethnic Germans to take up arms against Poles, engage in sabotage, and compile lists of Poles slated for liquidation.<sup>207</sup> Ethnic German citizens of Poland flocked to the Selbstschutz (so-called self-defence units) by the thousands and were responsible for the execution of thousands of Poles in the fall of 1939.<sup>208</sup> As Hitler made clear even before the German invasion of Poland,

The destruction of Poland is our primary task. The aim is not the arrival at a certain line but the elimination of living forces. ... Have no pity! Be brutal! ... It is necessary to proceed with greatest brutality and without mercy. ... The war is to be a war of annihilation.<sup>209</sup>

Wanton destruction—such as the Luftflotte attack on the county town of Frampol near Lublin on September 13, 1939—was the order of the day.

Frampol was chosen partly because it was completely defenceless, and partly because its baroque street plan presented a perfect geometric grid for calculations and measurements. Its eighteenth-century town hall, which stood at the centre of a broad, regular square, appeared to the bomb-aimers as an ideal 'bull's-eye' target. For several hours, 125 planes dropped 700 tonnes of bombs, obliterating 90 per cent of Frampol's buildings and killing almost half of its 3,000 inhabitants. For good measure, German fighters practised their strafing techniques as would-be escapees attempted to flee the inferno.<sup>210</sup>

The Soviet Union invaded Poland in September 1939 in violation of the Treaty of Riga of 1921 and the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1932. In the 1930s it had already executed or deported to the Gulag hundreds of thousands of its Polish citizens,<sup>211</sup> before embarking on mass deportations of even more Poles

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<sup>206</sup> Piotr Semków, "Martyrologia Polaków z Pomorza Gdańskiego w latach II wojny światowej," *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, nos. 8–9 (2006): 46.

<sup>207</sup> Andrzej Szefer, "Mniejszość niemiecka w Polsce w koncepcjach politycznych Trzeciej Rzeszy lat trzydziestych," in Grześkowiak-Łuczyk, ed., *Polska, Polacy, mniejszości narodowe*, 171–75; Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*, 14–16; Tomasz Chinciński, "Niemiecka dywersja w Polsce w 1939 r. w świetle dokumentów policyjnych i wojskowych II Rzeczypospolitej oraz służb specjalnych III Rzeszy, część 1 (marzec–sierpień 1939 r.)," *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, no. 2 (2005), 159–95, and Tomasz Chinciński, "Niemiecka dywersja w Polsce w 1939 r. w świetle dokumentów policyjnych i wojskowych II Rzeczypospolitej oraz służb specjalnych III Rzeszy, część 2 (sierpień–wrzesień 1939 r.)," *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, no. 1 (2006), 165–97.

<sup>208</sup> Christian Jansen and Arno Weckbecker, *Der "Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz" in Polen 1939/40* (München: Oldenbourg, 1992; Pilichowski, ed., *Zbrodnie i sprawy*, 504–518. In the district of Radom alone, the Selbstschutz counted some 4,500 members comprised mostly of ethnic Germans from that area. They took part in the pacification (destruction) of thirty-one villages. See Krzysztof Urbański, *Zagłada Żydów w Dystrykcie Radomskim* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, 2004), 51, 58.

<sup>209</sup> Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*, 4; Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*, 9.

<sup>210</sup> Norman Davies, *Europe At War, 1939–1945: No Simple Victory* (London, Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan, 2006), 297.

<sup>211</sup> Poles were the first group targeted purely on ethnic grounds. At least 36,000 Poles (but perhaps as many as 60,000) were deported to Kazakhstan in 1936 from regions of the Ukrainian SSR adjacent to the Polish border. In 1937 and 1938, in the so-called Polish operation, 144,000 people were arrested, which constituted about nine percent of the 1.6 million Soviet citizens arrested during the Great Purge. (Not all of those arrested in that operation were Poles; Poles

from Eastern Poland in 1939–1941. Its aim was the total subjugation of Poland. In fact, both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union conducted intensive propaganda campaigns that vilified the Polish people and denigrated the Polish state, and both of those conquerors incited the surrounding population against the Poles.<sup>212</sup> Why should the Poles have regarded the German and Russian invaders as anything other than evil-doing Fascists or Communists?

And how about the Lithuanians, whose treatment of the Polish minority in interwar Lithuania was also abysmal? While pivotal role of Lithuanian collaborators in carrying out the Holocaust has come under close scrutiny in recent years,<sup>213</sup> it is a little known fact outside of Poland that Lithuanians also carried out pogroms and mass executions of Poles (for example, some 1,500 Poles were murdered in the vicinity of Nowe Świąciany in May 1942), and actively persecuted the Polish population and its institutions. Hundreds of members of the Polish Catholic clergy were arrested and imprisoned in concentration camps.<sup>214</sup>

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accounted for 118,000 to 123,000.) Of these, 140,000 were sentenced administratively, and 111,000 (or 79%) executed. Thus, almost one fifth of the Polish population (which numbered 636,000 according to the 1937 census) were executed or imprisoned in camps in 1937–1938. In addition, several hundred thousand Poles were deported from Soviet Ukraine and Soviet Belorussia to the interior. Historians Aleksandr Gurianov and Andrzej Paczkowski estimate that Poles accounted for almost ten percent of the total number of victims of the Great Purge, and for around 40 percent of the victims of purges directed against national minorities. Amir Weiner points out that by 1939, the 16,860 Poles in Gulag camps accounted for 1.28 percent of the inmate population, while their share in the entire Soviet population was only 0.37 percent. With the exception of Russians, the 0.91 percent gap was the largest among the ethnic groups in the Gulag system. See Aleksander Gurjanow [Aleksandr Gurianov], “Sowieckie represje wobec Polaków i obywateli polskich w latach 1936–1956 w świetle danych sowieckich,” in Jasiewicz, *Europa nieprawincjonalna*, 972–76; Andrzej Paczkowski, “Poland, the ‘Enemy Nation,’” in Courtois, *The Black Book of Communism*, 366–67; Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 142–46; Stanisław Ciesielski, Grzegorz Hryciuk, and Aleksander Srebrakowski, *Masowe deportacje ludności w Związku Radzieckim* (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2003), 22, 184–93. See also Mikołaj Iwanow, *Pierwszy naród ukarany: Polacy w Związku Radzieckim 1921–1939* (Warsaw and Wrocław: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991), 324–78; Stanisław Morozow, “Deportacje polskiej ludności cywilnej z radzieckich terenów zachodnich w głąb ZSRR w latach 1935–1936,” *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu–Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, no. 40 (1997–1998): 267–81; Józef Lewandowski, “Rosjanie o Europie Wschodniej i Polsce,” *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 126 (1998): 180–82.

<sup>212</sup> On the little-known anti-Polish policy of the Soviets see Ewa M. Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenpoint Press, 2000), 163–81; Ewa M. Thompson, “Nationalist Propaganda in the Soviet Russian Press, 1939–1941,” *Slavic Review*, volume 50, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 385–99. Thompson points out: “For about a month after the Soviet invasion of Poland, virtually every issue of each major Soviet Russian newspaper contained at least one hostile article or poem about Poland and Poles, with a height of thirty-nine in *Pravda* on 19 September 1939. Poland was presented as a country of inept, brutal people who had somehow managed to survive between two highly civilized nations, Germany and Russia. ... Against this assortment of Polish targets an abusive vocabulary was used in articles, poems, and stories, written by Russians of otherwise spotless reputations. ... Poland was presented as a place where a small group of Polish nobles brutalized millions of Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Jews.” On the other hand, the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia on August 23, 1939 “eliminated any further criticism of Nazi Germany. The word ‘fascist’ disappeared, and literally overnight the press adopted a pro-Nazi point of view regarding Europe.” Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge*, 166–68.

<sup>213</sup> Since the Germans had only a small occupation force in Lithuania, they relied heavily on many thousands of Lithuanians who served in various formations to carry out the murder operations. Lithuanian collaborators were also deployed in Belarus, Ukraine, and Poland. See the following essays in Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Stefan Schreiner, and Darius Staliūnas, *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004): Yitzhak Arad, “The Murder of the Jews in German-Occupied Lithuania, (1941–1944)” (pp. 175–203); Arūnas Bubnys, “The Holocaust in Lithuania: An Outline of the Major Stages and their Results” (pp. 205–221); “Lithuanian Participation in the Mass Murder of Jews in Belarus and Ukraine, 1941–44” (pp. 285–96).

<sup>214</sup> Piotrowski, *Poland’s Holocaust*, 167–75; Stanisława Lewandowska, *Życie codzienne Wilna w latach II wojny światowej*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised and expanded edition (Warsaw: Neriton and Bellona, 2001), 62–77; Stanisława Lewandowska, *Łosy wilnian: Zapis rzeczywistości okupacyjnej. Ludzie, fakty, wydarzenia 1939–1945*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Warsaw: Neriton

Thousands of Poles perished at the hands of Lithuanian auxiliaries in the killing fields of Ponary.<sup>215</sup> Aryeh Wilner, like many other observers, could not help but notice the attitude of the Lithuanians, who had directed their rage primarily at the Poles already in the summer of 1941:

In the interval between the withdrawal of one army [the Soviets] and the entry of the other [the Germans], the city underwent some difficult moments, because the Lithuanians began to loot ransack everything [“carry out pogroms and rob everyone and everything”] that was not Lithuanian. Ostensibly this campaign was directed only against Poles but in fact the Jews also suffered badly. The Lithuanian authorities, intoxicated with this unexpected booty, at first looked on without reacting but after some time—apparently under Soviet pressure—took action to stop the riots. However the disturbances erupted once more a few days later and assumed a more ‘legal’ character: it soon became apparent that the government not only tolerated but actually supported them unstintingly. The official persecution took the form of ousting people from their positions and their work: within a short time, huge numbers of Polish workers, who lived on their wages from their office or factory jobs, were made penniless ... The unofficial persecutions—as I have mentioned—i.e., the pogroms and the looting were organized on a large scale by the chauvinist party of Szaulism [Shaulists]. Once during a Polish-language radio broadcast by loudspeaker, they surrounded the square, severely beat up everybody there and afterwards organized a large procession—a demonstration that involved the removal of anything that might be taken as a Polish emblem or symbol—the eagles, banners, etc. It is interesting to note that a Jew who was attacked by demonstrators was able to save his skin by calling out that he was not a Pole but a *Zhidas* [žydąs—Lithuanian for Jew].

What an irony of fate!<sup>216</sup>

Even the political groups which formed the “democratic” Lithuanian independence movement, the so-called Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (*Vyriausiasis Lietuvos išlaisvinimo komitetas*), did not include the issue of minorities or dialogue with other nationalities in their proposed vision of

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and Instytut Historii PAN, 2004), 65–66, 68–78; Cyprian Wilanowski, *Konspiracyjna działalność duchowieństwa katolickiego na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1939–1944* (Warsaw: Pax, 2000), 29, 32, 38, 47–52; Jarosław Wołkonowski, “ZWK-AK a problem mniejszości etnicznych na Wileńszczyźnie,” in Piotr Niwiński, ed., *Opór wobec systemów totalitarnych na Wileńszczyźnie w okresie II wojny światowej* (Gdańsk: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2003), 45–46.

<sup>215</sup> In addition to tens of thousands of Jews, Lithuanian auxiliaries also murdered many thousands of Poles in Ponary outside of Wilno. See Helena Pasierbska, *Wileńskie Ponary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition (Gdańsk: n.p., 1996); Kazimierz Sakowicz, *Dziennik pisany w Ponarach od 11 lipca 1941 r. do 6 listopada 1943 r.* (Bydgoszcz: Towarzystwo Miłośników Wilna i Ziemi Wileńskiej, 1999), translated as Kazimierz Sakowicz, *Ponary Diary, 1941–1943: A Bystander’s Account of a Mass Murder* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005); Christina Eckert, “Die Mordstätte Paneriai (Ponary) bei Vilnius,” in Vincas Bartusevičius, Joachim Tauber, and Wolfram Wette, eds., *Holocaust in Litauen: Krieg, Judenmorde und Kollaboration im Jahre 1941* (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), 132–42; Marek Robert Górniak, “Ponary,” *Encyklopedia “Białych Plam”* (Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2004), volume 14, 243–45. On the persecution of Poles and Jews by Lithuanian collaborators and nationalists see also Piotrowski, *Poland’s Holocaust*, 163–76. Both German reports and Jewish chronicles from the period refer frequently to anti-Polish measures taken by the Lithuanians. See, for example, Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania*, 84; Nikžentaitis, et al., eds., *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, 180.

<sup>216</sup> Aryeh Wilner’s account, “Mon retour de l’URSS,” recorded in October 1941, is found in English translation in *Yalkut Moreshet: Holocaust Documentation and Research* [Tel Aviv], volume 1 (Winter 2003): 81–93, especially at

Lithuania. The Lithuanian underground press spoke of Jews in a “neutral” vein, providing only statistics on their massacres, while the Poles continued to be regarded as the true potential enemies of Lithuania.<sup>217</sup> Indeed, as historian Yitzhak Arad notes, “the Lithuanian underground nationalist press endeavored to wash its hands of Lithuanian complicity in the murder of Jews and to place the blame on the Poles.”<sup>218</sup> And yet in spite of this, the Polish underground did not agitate or mount attacks against the Lithuanian population.<sup>219</sup>

If the Home Army was busy conducting a war against Belorussians (as opposed to Belorussian nationalists allied with the Germans or Belorussian Communists with the Soviets), as Liekis suggests, how was it that at least one third of the Home Army’s strength in this region consisted of Belorussians and Polish partisans could generally count on the support of the Belorussian countryside? One would be hard pressed to find explanations to account for such factors in Liekis’s text. The pro-German Belorussian nationalist movement did not have broad-based support among Belorussians and for the most part Poles and Belorussians coexisted without serious flare-ups during the German occupation. Nor were Poles as anxious to be “repatriated” to Poland after the war from Soviet Belorussia as they were from Ukraine, where they continued to face annihilation, or from Lithuania, where they faced widespread hostility. As we know, in times of war and upheaval, the social fabric of even the most peaceful and democratic societies can break down overnight. The American and Canadian governments, with the widespread approval of its citizens, uprooted immigrants of Japanese origin from the West Coast, confiscated their property and interned them in concentration camps for the duration of the war, even though they posed no real or apparent threat to those countries. After the war Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians were not allowed to return to their homes and regain their property, but were dispersed throughout the country.

As for the Jewish population, had the Poles regarded them all as Communists and with universal contempt,<sup>220</sup> as Liekis suggests, it is difficult to comprehend how that can be reconciled with the regional

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86–87; for the Polish, see Andrzej Żbikowski, ed., *Archiwum Ringelbluma: Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawskiego*, volume 3: *Relacje z Kresów* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny IN-B, 2000), 437.

<sup>217</sup> Linas Venclauskas, “Lietuvos įvaizdžiai antinacinėje lietuvių spaudoje” [The Vision of Lithuania in the Lithuanian Anti-Nazi Press], *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, no. 1 (15), 2004.

<sup>218</sup> Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 355–56. An underground newspaper, *Laivė* (“Liberty”), issue no. 9 of May 25, 1943, stated: “Over 80 percent of the Jews of Lithuania have already been shot. The Germans conducted these executions, and they were carried out by Germans and all kinds of *Janeks* and *Jasieks* (Poles) in Lithuanian uniform.”

<sup>219</sup> Wanda Krystyna Roman, “Litwini, Białorusini, Żydzi i Rosjanie w raportach komendanta wileńskiego okręgu SZP–ZWZ,” in Michał Gnatowski and Daniel Boćkowski, eds., *Polacy–Żydzi–Białorusini–Litwini na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski a władza radziecka (1939–1945): W kręgu mitów i stereotypów* (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2005): 177–93, here at 185.

<sup>220</sup> Impartial observers of conditions in German-occupied Poland also dispel the notion that Poles regarded all Jews as their enemies. General Johannes Blaskowitz, commander of the Eighth German Army during the September 1939 campaign and subsequently Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Territories, wrote to Field Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the German Army, in his report of February 6, 1940: “The acts of violence carried out in public against Jews are arousing in religious Poles [literally, “in the Polish population, which is fundamentally pious (or God-fearing)”) not only the deepest disgust but also a great sense of pity for the Jewish population.” See Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Reiss, *Those Were the Days’: The Holocaust through the Eyes of the Perpetrators and Bystanders* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), 4; Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham eds., *Nazism 1919–1945: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*, volume II: *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 939. Chaim Kaplan, an otherwise harsh critic of Poles, admitted: “We thought that the ‘Jewish badge’ would provide the local population with a source of mockery and ridicule—but we were wrong. There is no attitude of disrespect nor of making much of another’s dishonor. Just the opposite. They [the Poles] show that they commiserate with us in our humiliation. They sit silent in the street cars, and in private

Home Army commander's instructions to the field (which Liekis cites) to treat "local people regardless of differences in nationality or faith ... equally and justly. No abuse of power is to be allowed. Their lives and possessions are to be protected by the Polish Army." Was this nothing more than fluff? If so, why didn't the Poles turn on the Jews spontaneously already in September 1939? Why didn't the Soviet and Jewish partisan movements issue such internal directives to their members? And how about the testimonies of virtually every Jewish survivor from this area attesting to the fact that without the help of many villagers, in each case, they would never have survived?

Weren't Jewish attitudes also characterized and conditioned by a measure of hostility toward Poles? Jewish Holocaust memoirs certainly suggest that was the case. How did the other ethnic minorities view the Poles? Did the Lithuanians, whom German reports frequently describe as staunchly anti-Polish, Belorussians, and Ukrainians also not succumb and hold on to prejudicial stereotypes? What was their attitude toward the Jews? Liekis ignores such questions when dealing with the issue of interethnic relations in this area.

Moreover, already in September 1939, when the Soviets invaded Eastern Poland, it became apparent that by and large the Jewish community perceived that its interests did not coincide with those of the Poles and started to pursue its own, independent political path. Solidarity with the Poles, who were the primary target of Soviet repression, was a commodity very much in short supply. Ultimately, for the most part, Jews who escaped from the ghettos aligned themselves first with the Soviet partisan movement or the "Polish" Communist underground, both of which were strongly opposed to the pro-London Polish underground, which the vast majority of Poles supported.

Wartime testimonies of Jewish refugees who took refuge in the Soviet zone in 1939–1941 (collected in the so-called Ringelblum Archives in the Warsaw ghetto) demonstrate that the categories of "one's own" and the "other" characterized the entire gamut of interethnic relations in Eastern Poland, including Jewish attitudes, and that undivided loyalty was considered to be owed only or primarily to one's own group.<sup>221</sup> Aryeh Wilner, who later was to become a hero of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, described, albeit with some exaggeration, how civic ties disintegrated under Soviet occupation and how the constituent national groups polarized:

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conversation they even express words of condolence and encouragement. "Better times will come!" See Abraham I. Katsh, ed., *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan* (New York: Macmillan; and London: Collier-Macmillan, 1965), 82. On February 1, 1940, Kaplan wrote: "But the oppressed and degraded Polish public, immersed in deepest depression under the influence of the national catastrophe, has not been particularly sensitive to this [pervasive Nazi anti-Semitic] propaganda. It senses that the conquerors are its eternal enemy, and that they are not fighting the Jews for Poland's sake. Common suffering has drawn all hearts closer, and the barbaric persecutions of the Jews have even aroused feelings of sympathy toward them. Tacitly, wordlessly, the two former rivals sense that they are brothers in misfortune; that they have a common enemy who wishes to bring destruction upon both at the same time." Ibid., 114.

<sup>221</sup> Andrzej Żbikowski, "Kilka słów o pułapkach w badaniach nad stosunkami polsko-żydowskimi pod okupacją sowiecką w latach 1939–1945," in Jolanta Żyndul, ed., *Rozdział wspólnej historii: Studia z dziejów Żydów w Polsce* (Warsaw: Cyklady, 2001), 305–307. This impression is based on an anonymous account by a refugee from Łódź published in Żbikowski, *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, volume 3, 667–73, especially at p. 670–71.



Four national groups which [“mutually”] detested each other lived in the occupied territories: Jews, Poles, Ukrainians and Belorussians. However, under the heavy boot of Bolshevik laws, that hatred could not erupt into open conflagration, but was suppressed and kept alive as barely a flicker. The group that was most active in this sense was the Ukrainians. Before the arrival of the Russians, they used to stage pogroms against the Poles (above all they liked to take their revenge on Polish soldiers just back from the front, and massacred many of them) and showing considerable talent in this respect, they organized tens, if not hundreds of partisan gangs who would use the opportunity to attack Jews as well, even though—I would like to emphasize once more—they preferred to concentrate their attacks on Poles. These gangs were so cocksure and insolent that they did not cease their activities even long after the Bolshevik forces entered the area and the Soviets were to encounter the greatest difficulties before they could eliminate them.

The Jews made the most of the changing circumstances to extract moral compensation [“strike back at”]—as they liked to put it—from the Poles for all their suffering before the war.<sup>222</sup>

The Polish population generally could, and did, differentiate between those Jews who openly supported the Soviet regime and those who did not. Moreover, they did not by and large succumb to German provocation, such as the publicity given to the huge number of corpses found in Soviet jails where gruesome executions of prisoners had taken place on the eve of the Soviet retreat in June 1941.<sup>223</sup> In the town of Głębokie, for example, according to Jewish sources, after the Germans revealed recent Soviet atrocities in the prison in nearby Berezwezc (where a few local Jews had also been held), “the provocation was not accepted by the local Christian population” which was comprised mostly of Poles. The local council spoke out against Jew-baiting and “called upon the population of all faiths and nationalities to unite and make peace among themselves.” The few punitive actions that followed nonetheless were not random but targeted those who had been closely connected to the Soviet regime:

At first the Gestapo, with the help of the local police and some other local Christians, began to search for communists and their cohorts who had worked for the Soviet occupation forces, or served them in some capacity. Almost immediately, 42 persons were arrested. ... There were also a few Christians ... All of those arrested, except for the few, above mentioned merchants, had been officials of the Communist regime during the Soviet occupation.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Aryeh Wilner, “Mon retour de l’URSS,” *Yalkut Moreshet: Holocaust Documentation and Research* [Tel Aviv], volume 1 (Winter 2003): 84; Żbikowski, *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, volume 3, 435.

<sup>223</sup> The descriptions of these massacres are truly horrific. “In Bóbrka, many inmates were scalded with boiling water; in Berezwezc, people’s noses, ears and fingers were cut off, and there were also children’s corpses in the prison compound; in Czortków, female prisoners’ breasts were cut off; in Drohobycz, prisoners were fastened together with barbed wire; in Łuck, a drum lined with barbed wire stood next to one of three mass graves unearthed in the prison yard; in Przemyślany, victims’ noses, ears, and fingers were cut off and their eyes put out; similarly in Sambor, Stanisławów, Stryj, and Złoczów.” Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 181. This topic has been examined recently by Bogdan Musiał in his study *Konterrevolutionäre Elemente sind zu erschießen*, which analyzes how Soviet atrocities escalated the brutalization of the German-Soviet war and their impact on the local violence against Jews. According to that author, the total number of prisoners deported to the Soviet interior was 16,340, and the number of those murdered was close to 10,000. *Ibid.*, 200–210.

<sup>224</sup> M. and Z. Rajak, *Memorial Book of Gluboke* (Canton, New York, 1994), 27, 37; a translation of *Khurbn*

The average Pole had no involvement in the persecution or harassment of Jews in Eastern Poland, nor did they support Nazi German genocidal policies.<sup>225</sup> When rumors of impending measures set off panic among the Jews of *Stonim*, large numbers of Jews sought shelter with their Christian acquaintances every night.<sup>226</sup> A friendly attitude toward Jews, on the part of Poles, as opposed to that of the Lithuanian population, prevailed in the Wilno area, as many Jewish accounts written during that period attest to.

6 km from Wilno we encountered a cart belonging to a Pole on his way to the town. I and my companion, an elderly Jew, asked him to take us. He did it gladly, even though he knew we were Jews. ...

We found ourselves near a village 15 km from Ejszyski. We went to the village and entered the first cottage looking for a place to sleep. A very friendly peasant let us stay overnight and gave us some food. We told him we were Jews. ...

He told us that in Ejszyski the Lithuanians had taken all the Jews—men, women, and children—to the Jewish cemetery, undressed them and shot them. Recounting the details of the events in Ejszyski he started to cry profusely. He especially mourned the rabbi. ...

The next night we set out [for Raduń]. The peasant led us all night through fields, forests, and streams. ... He brought us to within 7 km from Raduń and returned home.<sup>227</sup>

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*Glubok...Koziany* (Buenos Aires: Former Residents' Association in Argentina, 1956). We also learn that the few Jews from Głębokie who had been imprisoned by the Polish authorities before the war were not targeted randomly, but were in fact members of an underground communist cell and thus part of a subversive organization that did not recognize the legitimacy of Polish rule. *Ibid.*, 5. On the whole, the Jewish community had been quite prosperous: "The Jewish Community Executive Committee in Gluboke was a rich one. It owned a lot of land... The Jewish bank, which was held in high esteem, did a colossal volume of business. For both the large and small merchants, the bank would grant aid in the development of their undertakings. In volume, the Jewish bank outdid the local Polish Government Bank. A very important institution, was the 'Free Loan Society'. They would lend out money, for a long term, without charging interest, and the repayment would be made in installments. Hundreds of craftsmen and small shopkeepers were put back on their feet by the Jewish 'Free Loan Society'." *Ibid.*, 3–4. At the beginning of the German occupation, in July 1941, many Christians were arrested for anti-German underground activities and brought in smaller and larger groups to town, only to be executed in the Borek forest. "In the early days this had a horrible effect on the Jews. ... They couldn't reconcile themselves to the fact that people could be taken and shot without any recourse to justice or a trial. The women and children were certainly innocent! Afterwards they became used to it. They became indifferent! They would simply tell about it, passing it on from mouth to mouth, that before dawn so many and so many people were taken into the Borok [sic] to be shot." *Ibid.*, 44. The initial assistance provided to the thousands of Soviet prisoners of war captured by the Germans soon dried up too. "At the beginning, people didn't know that giving a prisoner a piece of bread or a little water to drink, was a crime, and people were bold enough to throw bread, vegetables and other food items to the passing prisoners. Immediately, announcements were posted stating that anyone caught giving bread to a prisoner, would be shot to death! Understandably, such an announcement frightened people off, and so they restrained themselves from helping the prisoners. There were some, whose pity for the wretched prisoners weighed so heavily upon them, that they could not help themselves from secretly throwing them bread, thereby putting their lives in jeopardy. ... Among the prisoners there were also traitors, which made it even more difficult to flee and to receive any help in one form or another. ... Of the 47,000 Red Army prisoners brought to Berezvetch [Berezwezc], almost none were left alive, except for the few who had managed to flee." *Ibid.*, 28–30. The similarities and parallels in behaviour patterns of the various ethnic groups under both the Soviet and German occupation are again striking. Reports from other towns are similar.

<sup>225</sup> Hanna Świda-Ziemia, who hails from Wilno, describes the stunned and sorrowful reaction of the Polish population to the mass murder of the Jews carried out in Ponary by the Nazis' Lithuanian henchmen, in her article "Hańba obojętności," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, September 23, 1998.

<sup>226</sup> Żbikowski, *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, volume 3, 175.

As for the attitude of the Poles to the Jewish population, it has become very favourable of late. Many Poles conducted themselves in the spirit of the instructions of the [Polish] government in exile and helped Jews; many changed their attitude out of compassion. That more favourable attitude manifested itself in the assistance that Poles gave to Jews looking for lodging outside the ghetto; they sheltered them free of charge, sold them food, and helped them obtain Aryan documents, etc.<sup>228</sup>

Relations between Poles and Jews are good.<sup>229</sup>

In the vicinity of Wilno the peasants, who were Poles, showed a great deal of kindness to the Jews in this difficult time.<sup>230</sup>

In conjunction with the ransom imposed on the Jews [in Wilno by the Germans], Polish society actively helped the Jews. ... The peasants really helped us very often unselfishly [i.e., free of cost]: we entered cottages where often they refused to take anything from us when they offered us milk, bread, etc. In addition they showed us sympathy and were indignant at all [the misfortunes] that had befallen the Jews. ...

I wanted to leave the reach of the activities of the Lithuanian sentries, as I was advised to do by the Poles whose hospitality I had partaken of along the way. From the lips of peasants I heard about the mass murders perpetrated on Jews in an analogous fashion to the execution I had endured. ... It is important to stress that I encountered exceptionally sincere warm-heartedness from Catholic peasants and Polish landlords. I was comforted and helped with money, food, and a place to sleep.<sup>231</sup>

A German police report from Wilno from September 1941 refers to the “protection” extended to Jews by the Poles (though not by the Lithuanians), and speaks of the “close cooperation” between these two communities.<sup>232</sup> Herman Kruk, the chronicler of the Wilno ghetto, describes the reaction of the ordinary, largely Polish population of that city, which had been a hotbed of Bolshevism among significant segments of the Jewish population, to the enforced ghettoization of the Jews in September 1941 and later events.

Today [September 8<sup>th</sup>], at Ostra Brama [in the chapel located above this ancient gate was the holiest Catholic shrine in Wilno, which contained the icon of the famous Ostrobramska Madonna—*M.P.*], there was a prayer in honor of the martyrdom of the Jews. People say that Jews are now bringing in full bundles, which they got in the city as gifts from Christians in the street.

In the street, at a Maistas [meat cooperative established by the Soviet authorities], masses of

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<sup>227</sup> Żbikowski, *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, volume 3, 337, 345.

<sup>228</sup> Żbikowski, *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, volume 3, 416.

<sup>229</sup> Żbikowski, *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, volume 3, 456.

<sup>230</sup> Żbikowski, *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, volume 3, 461.

<sup>231</sup> Żbikowski, *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, volume 3, 471–72, 473–74.

<sup>232</sup> Report no. 5 on the Activities and Situation of the SP and SD Operational Groups in the USSR for September 15–30, 1941, in Wojciech J. Muszyński and Marek J. Chodakiewicz, “W cieniu ‘Barbarossy’: Wybór niemieckich

Christians brought packages of meat and distributed them to the Jewish workers marching to the ghetto.

The sympathy of the Christian population, more precisely of the Polish population, is extraordinary.

[September 15<sup>th</sup>] Christians come to the ghetto. People say that Christian friends and acquaintances often come. Today a priest came to me, looking for his Jewish friends.

[May 6, 1942] From Vilna [Wilno] and the whole area, masses of young men are being taken for work in Germany. Yesterday one of those groups was led through Szawelska Street and a lot of Jews saw them. In the street, guarded by Lithuanians, they stormily sang the national battle song [actually, the Polish national anthem—*M.P.*], “Poland Is Not Yet Lost,” and as they approached the Jewish ghetto, they shouted slogans:

“Long live the Jews!...”

A mood I only want to note here.<sup>233</sup>

Historian Nathan Cohen found that other contemporary diaries reinforced Herman Kruk’s observations:

It is possible to find in diaries ... quotes such as “Christians came to help,” “Good friends came to give a hand ...,” “Christians were helpful, they bought things for us, sold our possessions outside the ghetto (and brought us the money),” “Christians are crying more than Jews,” etc. It is significant that these sayings refer to “Christians.” Who were these “Christians”? Herman Kruk answers this question by saying: “The sympathy shown by the Christian population, to be more precise, by the Polish population, is excellent.” Dr. [Lazar] Epstein expressed himself with almost the same words.<sup>234</sup>

Pola Wawer, a doctor from Wilno who received extensive assistance from Poles (including members of the Home Army) in Wilno and the surrounding countryside, where she survived the war together with her mother, takes issue with the contention that relations between the various ethnic groups was dominated by ingrained hatred.

The Germans probably counted on the efficacy of the principle *divide et impera* by enflaming national animosity in the area inhabited by the Poles, Jews, Belorussians and Lithuanians. Fortunately, in principle they did not succeed ...<sup>235</sup>

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dokumentów policyjnych maj 1941–kwiecień 1942,” *Glaukopis* (Warsaw), no. 1 (2003): 254.

<sup>233</sup> Herman Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps, 1939–1944* (New Haven and London: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and Yale University Press, 2002), 109–110, 112, 280–81.

<sup>234</sup> Nathan Cohen, “The Attitude of Lithuanians Towards Jews During the Holocaust As Reflected in Diaries,” in Zingeris, ed., *The Days of Memory*, 215.

<sup>235</sup> Pola Wawer, *Poza gettem i obozem* (Warsaw: Volumen, 1993), 31.

It is surprising how any historian who has access to this documentation can simply persist in adhering to entrenched, but simplistic and analytically flawed explanations that view everything primarily as a function of “Polish anti-Semitism,” while ignoring the dynamics and impact of real events and developments.

What is most puzzling is Liekis’s revelation that “the most controversial parts of [Yaffa Eliach’s book *There Once Was a World*], which dealt with the AK, have been toned down and better documented in its later editions.” (He does not elaborate, so one is left guessing what, if anything of substance, has changed.) Liekis concedes, however, that Eliach is still heavily imbued with “unreasoning resistance to any critique of her stance on Jewish-Polish relations.” Liekis was commissioned to conduct research for the documentary *There Once Was a Town* based on Eliach’s book. He describes the changes made to Eliach’s book, on which he does not elaborate, as “a beneficial side-effect of that research.” What exactly do the changes consist of? Who instigated them? Why were they made? To render that deeply flawed book more palatable and less obviously flawed? These are serious and troubling questions, given the attempt of the reviewer to rehabilitate, as it were, Eliach’s book.

Unfortunately, even scholarly works by professional historians continue to exhibit a disappointing, skewed, sketchy and even shoddy treatment of relations between Jewish and Polish partisans. These include studies such as Israeli historian Shalom Cholowsky’s *The Jews of Belorussia during World War II*<sup>236</sup> and American historian Martin Dean’s *Collaboration in the Holocaust*.<sup>237</sup> Both of these books contain many of the same shortcomings as the popular books by Eliach and Levine. While expressing highly critical views of the Polish Home Army, they do not acknowledge any wrongdoings on the part of Jewish partisans and ignore important Polish and Soviet sources. Unfortunately, these publications are characteristic of the politicized nature of Holocaust scholarship on this topic.

Most recently, in July 2003, freelance journalist Peter Duffy published a popular and sanitized account of the exploits of the Bielski partisans, *The Bielski Brothers: The True Story of Three Men Who Defied the Nazis, Saved 1,200 Jews, and Built a Village in the Forest* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), which was immediately heralded on CNN and NBC Newsweek as a major revelation, though little, if anything, it contained was new.<sup>238</sup> Despite some scholarly trappings such as the extensive endnotes, the book is largely anecdotal and borrows heavily from Nechama Tec’s scholarly 1993 monograph on this topic. The shoddy treatment of the Polish Home Army is characteristic of writing of this genre. Duffy writes:

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<sup>236</sup> Shalom Cholowsky, *The Jews of Belorussia during World War II* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 108, 139, 180–81, 216, 226.

<sup>237</sup> Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–41* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 2000), 142–44. Martin Dean is an Applied Research Scholar at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC.

<sup>238</sup> See CNN interview with Peter Duffy by Paula Zahn (aired July 8, 2003), posted at: <<http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0307/08/se.17.html>> and NBC Newsweek article “War Heroes,” by Barbara Spindel (July 10, 2003), posted at: <<http://www.msnbc.com/news/937363.asp>>. It appears that the film rights have been purchased by Miramax for a hefty figure, and that a film based on this book is in the works.

Of course, Zus's men [Zus was Tuvia Bielski's brother and led the smaller combatant unit of the Bielski Jewish group] had plenty of other enemies and their members seemed to be increasing every day.

Principal among them were anti-Soviet Polish partisan units, whose strength was growing in the Lida/Novogrudek [Nowogródek] area during late 1943 and early 1944. Fighters of the Armia Krajowa (AK) or Home Army, were referred to as White Poles, and the Bielski brothers knew them to be vicious enemies of the Jewish people. Indeed, General Bor-Komorowski [Bór-Komorowski], the AK's top commander, issued an order on September 15, 1943, calling for the extermination [sic] of Jewish partisan groups, which he regarded as bandits.

Some Polish guerillas had attempted to cooperate with the Soviet fighters in the early years of the occupation. But the Soviets responded with "a cocked pistol" when the Poles were resistant to being incorporated into a movement that demanded loyalty to Stalin and Communism, according to one account of a White Polish fighter from the Novogrudek area. The Poles' willingness to fight the Soviet partisans led to alliances [sic] between the AK and the occupying Germans, who offered them weapons, ammunition, and medical care. Cooperation between the two was an open secret in the countryside, and a document written by the Nazi regional commissar in Novogrudek speaks of "our agreement with Polish partisans."<sup>239</sup>

Suffice it to say that the head of the Home Army issued no order to exterminate Jewish partisans, nor did it enter into an "alliance" with the Germans. The AK regional commander, Aleksander Krzyżanowski ("Wilk"), issued explicit orders that no ethnic group, including the Jews, should be mistreated, and Jews were omitted from the bandit groups that he targeted. As Yisrael Gutman put it succinctly,

One should not close one's eyes to the fact that Home Army units in the Wilno area were fighting 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 Home Army soldiers—as enemies of Poland, and not as Jews.<sup>240</sup>

Among the significant omissions in Duffy's hagiographic treatment of the Bielski partisans' wartime record are the following: their participation in the massacre of 130 civilians in the town of Naliboki carried out by Soviet partisans on May 8, 1943; and their participation in the "disarming" of Polish partisans by Soviet partisans on December 1, 1943. The latter omission is particularly egregious given that Duffy knows

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<sup>239</sup> Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers*, 232–33. The reference for the last statement is the final report of the Nowogródek Regional Commissar, written on July 27, 1944 and August 3, 1944, that is, well after the Germans had left the area. It is found in the Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Germany, document R93 13, pp. 138–48. However, an "agreement" is hardly an alliance. An alliance is what Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union entered into in August 1939 when they agreed on the division of Poland between them. At p. 246, Duffy mentions a joint attack by Soviet partisans and Bielski's combatant unit, on March 5, 1944, in which 47 "White" Polish fighters were eliminated and 20 more injured. According to historian Zygmunt Boradyn, based on Soviet records, an assault by the Kirov and Chapaiev brigades that day resulted in 31 Polish partisans being killed, 22 wounded, and 17 missing. In actual fact, based on Polish sources, only 7 Poles were killed and 8 wounded. Based on their own count, Soviet casualties amounted to 6 killed and 5 wounded. See Boradyn, *Niemen—rzeka niezgody*, 262.

<sup>240</sup> Israel Gutman, "Uczmy się być razem," *Znak* (Kraków), June 2000: 66.

Techama Tec's scholarly monograph, *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans*, which confirms that 50 Bielski partisans took part in the disarming, and that he refers to a Polish eyewitness account in the 1954 publication, *The Unseen and Silent: Adventures from the Underground Movement Narrated by Paratroops of the Polish Home*, which vividly describes the treacherous and bloody disarming. The pacification of the town of Naliboki is currently under investigation by Poland's Institute of National Remembrance. Duffy's unsupported charges that "a Polish sharpshooter unit" took was in Operation Hermann (p. 173), which German reports do not mention, and that large convoys of German vehicles retreating toward the Reich were protected by "White Poles" (pp. 251–52) simply underscore how shoddy his research is in this area.