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THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON POLISH-JEWISH RELATIONS IN POLISH LANDS UNDER THE SOVIET OCCUPATION BETWEEN 1939 AND 1941

Introduction

Polish-Jewish relations under the Soviet occupation are among the most controversial topics in Poland's recent history. Due to the complicated relations between Poles and Jews in the first half of the twentieth century, they are perceived differently by each community. The topic also leads to conflicting opinions among Polish and foreign historians.

Our knowledge about this topic is derived from various primary historical sources. These include institutional documents, memoirs and testimonies from witnesses of the era, press articles, photographs, films, and scholarly or popular works authored by journalists, researchers, or writers. Each of the significant social, ethnic or national groups inhabiting the area of eastern Poland occupied by the Soviet state (apart from the Belarusians, of whom more than 90% were peasants with no or limited literacy skills) left behind one of the sources mentioned above or many monographic or popular studies written on their basis. These subjective testimonies primarily reflect the point of view of the representatives of the ethnic group concerned, showing only part of the reality of the time or interpreting it ac-

cording to the community's historical experience. Few works go beyond the pattern set by national or group historiographies (for example, the landed gentry) created in this way. Therefore, such scholarly publications usually meet with the support of their community and the disapproval of others. The most significant controversies are caused by views of the past inherent in Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Israeli historiography. Soviet historiography can also be added to this group, which, although no longer developing, has left behind numerous publications with strongly outlined or exaggerated theses.

In this article, I will focus on the most critical scholarly publications by historians from the abovementioned groups. I will also consider American historiography. The character and substantive value of these publications were affected by the fact that research on the issues of interest to us was not undertaken in Poland for many years after the end of the Second World War. The policies of the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland and the Soviet Union prevented dealing with these topics until 1989. For this reason, relations between Jews and Poles under the occupying Soviet authorities were terra incognita until the collapse of the communist system. The lack of reliable knowledge, underpinned by proper scholarly research, perpetuated many negative stereotypes and prejudices and, eventually, engrained numerous omissions, half-truths and outright lies, which shaped the thinking of subsequent generations about the attitudes of the Polish and Jewish populations under the Soviet occupation of Polish lands in 1939–1941.

Polish Historiography

The research gaps were filled by Polish historians in exile and Israeli historians. In their understanding of the issue, the former considered mainly (although not always) Polish and the latter Jewish sources. As far as Polish historiography is concerned, a pioneering role was played by the research carried out by Jan Tomasz Gross, the author of the first scholarly accounts of the Soviet occupation of the period in question. Among his most important publications is the monograph *Revolution from Abroad. The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, 1988), in which – through an analysis of the political and social changes set in motion by the Soviet conquest of the territory of the Polish state – he also presented the evolution of Polish-Jewish relations in the Soviet

occupation zone. The same author prepared a collection of Polish testimonies of repressions – in this case, of deportations deep into the USSR – against Polish citizens, and in the introduction to this collection, he pointed out the participation of some Borderland Jews in the implementation of the Soviet repressive policy in the occupied territories in 1939–1941. He also published two essays on the elections to the People's Assemblies of the so-called Western Belarus and Western Ukraine, organised by the Soviet occupation authorities on 22 October 1939, and on the deportations of 1940–1941 ("Wybory 22X 1939" [Elections of 22 October 1939] and "Wywózki do Rosji" [Deportations to Russia]), published in the 1980s in the émigré magazine *Aneks* (45 and 46–47 [1987] and 51–52 [1988]).[1]

In 1986, the same periodical (issues 41–42) published an essay by Aleksander Smolar, an opposition activist, political émigré and political scientist, entitled "Tabu i niewinność" (Taboo and Innocence), in which the author addressed the issue of the attitude of Jews (Polish citizens) towards the Polish state in the eastern territories of the Second Republic in September 1939. In doing so, he cited the various reasons why a significant, or, at any rate, well-visible section of the Jewish community supported the policy of the Soviets, at least at the beginning of their rule in the occupied territories. He also described the sense of injustice with which the Poles reacted, hugely surprised by this disloyalty. But at the same time, they were unwilling to acknowledge their pre-war Polish guilt towards their Jewish fellow citizens.

The research on Polish-Jewish issues, also devoted to Polish-Jewish relations in the Soviet occupation zone, could develop thanks to the activities of the academic journal *Polin*, published by the Centre for Judaic Studies at the University of Oxford. Publications on this topic also appeared in other academic journals.[2]

The first of the works devoted to Polish-Jewish relations under the Soviet occupation and written in Poland (after the fall of the communist regime in 1989)

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[1] See J.T. Gross, "Wstęp," in "*W czterdziestym nas, Matko, na Sibir zesłali." Rosja a Polska 1939–1942*, comp. and ed. by I. Grudzińska-Gross and J.T. Gross (Warszawa, 1989), pp. 28–29.

[2] See i.a. A. Żbikowski, "Jewish reactions to the Soviet arrival in the Kresy in September 1939," *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (2000), pp. 66–68; M. Wierzbicki, "Polish-Jewish relations in Vilna and the Region of Western Vilna under Soviet occupation, 1939–1941," *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 19 (2006), pp. 487–516; A. Żbikowski, "Poles and Jews in the Vilnius Region in 1939–1941," *Darbai ir dienos* 67 (2017), pp. 151–161 (DOI:10.7220/2335-8769.67.6).

was Jerzy Robert Nowak's *Przemilczane zbrodnie* (Silenced Crimes) (Warsaw, 2017), which deals with the attacking, murdering and repressing of Polish citizens by the Soviet authorities and their supporters. The author focused on the fate of the victims, emphasising that they were mainly ethnic Poles because the Polish population had been the mainstay of the Polish rule in the eastern lands of the Second Polish Republic before the outbreak of the Second World War. Among the perpetrators, he named Soviet soldiers and officials but also emphasised the infamous role of some sympathisers of the Soviet power, drawn from the local Byelorussian, Ukrainian and Jewish populations. He described at length the involvement of pro-Soviet Jews in exterminating the Polish political and social elite, represented primarily by the intelligentsia, specifically landowners, teachers, Catholic clergy, policemen, Polish Army officers, military settlers and civil servants. In particular, he portrayed the Jewish population in the context of their mass support for the Soviet occupation authorities and their hostile or indifferent attitude towards the Polish state and its leadership strata. This, in turn, was to lead, the author writes, to increased antagonism between Poles and Jews and, above all, to the hostility of the Polish population towards the Jewish community of the Borderlands. The study lacked a critical reflection on the reasons for the hostile or indifferent attitudes of Polish Jewish citizens towards Poles and Poland and a critique of the sources on which the claims about the anti-Polish attitude of representatives of the Jewish community were based, according to the author. Indeed, the accounts, memoirs and documents generated by the Polish side were accepted *en bloc* as credible. At the same time, the vision of Polish-Jewish relations proposed in this monograph was presented from the point of view of the Polish victims of repression and murder.

Marek Jan Chodakiewicz presented a similar picture of Polish-Jewish relations in his monograph *Polacy i Żydzi. Współistnienie – Zagłada – komunizm 1918–1955* (Poles and Jews. Coexistence – Holocaust – Communism 1918–1955) (Warsaw, 2001). Writing extensively on Polish-Jewish relations before and during the outbreak of the Second World War, he focused primarily on the characteristics of the situation of the Jewish population in the Second Republic and its attitude towards the Polish state and Poles. Moreover, he analysed the perception of Jews by the prewar Polish authorities and Poland's neighbours, clearly separating the political and social relations between the elites of both nations from Polish-Jewish relations in

everyday life, which were often imbued with a greater pragmatism leading to consensual coexistence than would appear from a political or ideological perspective. He did not mention the rise of anti-Semitism during the great economic crisis of the early 1930s, when Polish and Jewish communities had to find ways to mitigate the adverse effects of the economic downturn. Jews, especially young Jews, sought rescue mainly in emigration to Palestine or in radical political activity, including in the ranks of communist organisations. Poles, on the other hand – deprived of the possibility to emigrate to the West – tried to broaden the scope of their economic activities, entering areas hitherto reserved for Jews, such as trade, services and the liberal professions. This led to quarrels and conflicts in which Poles, determined to get rid of the Jewish competition or convinced of the rightness of the ideology of nationalism, which made them put the interests of the Polish nation before the interests of the national minorities of the Second Republic, were the attacking and more numerous party.

While describing Polish-Jewish relations under the Soviet occupation, Chodakiewicz tried to avoid generalising about the attitudes of the Jewish population. Still, he argued that Jews in the Soviet occupation zone had considerable pro-Soviet sympathies. He portrayed the dramatic fate of Jewish refugees from the German occupation zone, the so-called *byezhency* (refugees in Russia during the First World War), and also showed the activities of Jewish supporters of communism, particularly officials of the Soviet occupation apparatus, which were harmful to Poland and Poles. Consequently, according to Chodakiewicz, anti-Semitic sentiments grew among Poles, eventually culminating in acts of aggression against Jews after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war on 22 June 1941.

Foreign Historiography

From the end of the Second World War until the end of the twentieth century, Polish-Jewish relations were not central to historians' interest outside Poland. The topic was mainly raised on the margins of scholarly works concerning the situation of the Jewish population during the Soviet occupation or the fate of Jews during the Holocaust. Examples include works by Israeli historians, such as Ben Cion Pinchuk's *Shtetl Jews under Soviet Rule*, Cambridge (Massachusetts, 1990), and Dov Levin's *The Lesser of Two Evils. East European Jewry under Soviet Rule*

(Philadelphia–Jerusalem, 1995), *Baltic Jews under the Soviets 1940–1946* (Jerusalem, 1994) and *Żydzi wschodnioeuropejscy podczas II wojny światowej* (East European Jews during the Second World War) (Warsaw, 2005) by the same author. These historians, while focusing on the fate of the Jewish population in the areas of the Second Polish Republic occupied by the USSR, presented the Soviet policy in these areas, the different attitudes of Jews (Polish citizens) towards the Soviets, including the social advancement of some of the Jewish population in the Soviet reality along with the degradation of members of the wealthier strata. Against this background, they provided examples confirming the thesis of deteriorating Polish-Jewish relations in the period and territory in question. They concluded, however, that the leading cause of this phenomenon was not the collaboration of a part of the Jewish population with the Soviets or their pro-Soviet attitude but rather the reluctance of the non-Jewish inhabitants of the occupied territories towards the process of Jewish emancipation under Soviet rule. The monographs discussed here provide an insight into the point of view of the Jewish population of the Eastern Borderlands. They show a picture of the questions of interest presented in Israeli historiography, which will be outlined later in this article.

Another publication presenting the attitude of non-Polish historians to Polish-Jewish relations under the Soviet occupation in 1939–1941 is the collective work *Shared History – Divided Memory: Jews and Others in Soviet Occupied Poland* (ed. by Elazar Barkan, Elizabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve, Leipzig, 2007). These are the proceedings of an international academic conference held in Leipzig in January 2005, which brought together a large group of historians researching the history of the Second World War in Central and Eastern Europe, the Third German Reich and the Holocaust. Among them were Omer Bartov, Amir Winer, Timothy Snyder, Anthony Polonsky, Norman Naimark, Yevgeny Rosenblat, Andrzej Żbikowski, Anna Bikont, Martyna Grądzka, Grzegorz Hryciuk, Rafał Wnuk, and Marek Wierzbicki. The papers presented diverse views on the issue of nationality relations under Soviet rule, and the discussion focused mainly on the situation of Jews and the attitude of other nations to their role under Soviet occupation and the frequent acts of anti-Jewish violence, often carried out on a mass scale. The subject of the exchange of views became mainly the cause of the wave of assaults, self-judgements, pogroms and mass murders that rolled across the Soviet-occupied

territories shortly after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war (22 June 1941), and to which other local Jews, in addition to collaborators of the Soviet authorities, fell victim. The conference debate revealed the diversity of historians' opinions on ethnic and social relations in the Polish lands occupied by the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, often formed by differences in national cultures, the collective memory of individual nations and preferred interpretations of disputed events.

Two Viewpoints on Polish-Jewish Relations During the Soviet Occupation of Poland from 1939 to 1941

The publication *Shared History – Divided Memory…* brings to light the fact that after 1989, significant discrepancies emerged among historians, including Polish historians, regarding the assessment of Polish-Jewish relations under Soviet occupation. Over time, two different viewpoints on this issue took root and have competed for the "rule of souls" of readers from Poland and other countries for the last twenty years or so. The first can be described as a traditional Polish historiographical approach, and the second as a revisionist approach. The conventional approach emphasises the impact of the events of the Soviet occupation on the deterioration of national relations in the former Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic, including relations between Poles and Jews. It was due to the collaboration of a large part of this national minority with the occupying authorities, which hit the interests of the Polish population. The collaboration, for example, involved backing the Soviet anti-Polish policies, which included the repression or even eradication of Polish political and social elites (such as landed gentry, Polish Army officers, administrative personnel, educators, clergy, and social and political activists), and the dismantling of Polish state institutions in the occupied territories.

Within this trend, a more radical version can be distinguished, whose representatives (for example Jerzy Robert Nowak, Bogdan Musiał[3]) place emphasis mainly on the above aspect of the history of Jews and Polish-Jewish relations, and a moderate one, whose proponents (for example Tomasz Strzembosz, Tomasz Szarota, Marek

[3] See B. Musiał, *"Elementy kontrrewolucyjne rozstrzelać". Brutalizacja wojny niemiecko-sowieckiej latem 1941 roku* (Warsaw, 2001).

Wierzbicki[4]) point out many other factors determining the attitudes of Jews towards the Soviet authorities and the Polish population, for example their discrimination in the interwar period, their fear of the arrival of the Germans, as well as the diversity of these attitudes. The aforementioned historian's work seeks to elucidate the rise in anti-Semitic feelings among the Polish population. The historian posits that this surge was due to the common social tendency to blame an entire national, cultural, or ethnic group for the misdeeds committed by a few members. Its validity is confirmed by contemporary social behaviour towards, for example, Muslims or Arabs in the wake of the terrorist attacks carried out by relatively few extreme Islamist groups.

Wierzbicki underlines that the emergence of pro-Soviet attitudes among some Jews was rooted in a combination of factors. The first was the unfavourable experience of the Jewish population in pre-war Poland, in which various spheres of public life were characterised by anti-Semitic prejudice. The acute economic crisis of 1929–1933 in agriculture, lasting until 1936, intensified the economic rivalry between Poles and Jews. Its consequence was a growing conviction in many Polish circles that the Jewish population was unnecessary and should be removed from Poland by more or less forced emigration. This rhetoric was adopted after the death of Marshal Józef Piłsudski in 1935 by the *Sanacja* authorities competing with the national movement (National Democracy). Therefore, Soviet rule, offering the possibility of social advancement irrespective of race and nationality (at least in the first months of the occupation), encountered favourable reactions from the Jewish population. Another determinant of Polish-Jewish relations was the fear of the arrival of German troops or the fact that many Jews were terrified by the policy of the German occupying authorities in central and western Poland. It should be stressed that the attitudes of Jews towards the Soviets, Poles and the Polish state varied and evolved between 1939 and 1941 – from relatively broad support for the occupying authorities (in the autumn of 1939) to increasingly numerous expressions of dissatisfaction. As Jewish refugees, known as *byezhency*, from the German-occupied

[4] M. Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II RP pod okupacją sowiecką 1939–1941* (Warsaw, 2007); T. Strzembosz, *Rzeczpospolita Podziemna. Społeczeństwo polskie a państwo podziemn*e (Warsaw, 2000); T. Szarota, *U progu Zagłady. Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie. Warszawa, Paryż, Amsterdam, Antwerpia, Kowno* (Warsaw, 2000).

zone struggled to adapt to their new circumstances (most of whom were eventually deported deep into the USSR), Jews began to distance themselves from the policies of the Soviet occupying authorities. This new reality, which included the nationalisation of industry, crafts, and trade and repressive policies such as those against black market activity, further exacerbated their challenges.

The supporters of the revisionist position emphasise, however, that at the source of accusations against Jews for their participation in the anti-Polish policy of the Soviet occupiers lies Polish anti-Semitism, that is the conviction, stemming from racial prejudice, that Jews were enchanted with communism and therefore betrayed Poland – consequently, they deserved to face consequences from the local population (Belarusians, Lithuanians, Poles and Ukrainians). Concurrently, Jewish perspectives on the realities of the occupation, including their views on Poles, were diverse and evolved based on the changing circumstances of the Jewish community under Soviet rule. This necessitated selecting an effective adaptation strategy to their new living conditions. Consequently, the Jews adopted various adaptation strategies, taking advantage of the opportunities offered to them by the Soviet power. On the other hand, Poles could not see the motivation behind the Jewish population's behaviour because of their anti-Semitism, seeing in it mainly an anti-Polish bias. For example, supporters of the revisionist position present Polish accusations of enthusiastic and mass welcoming of the Red Army by Jews as an illusion that could only have arisen from dislike or even hostility towards the Jews. They react similarly to the ascription to the Jewish community of widespread collaboration with the Soviets or other expressions of pro-Soviet sentiment. This could be seen, for instance, in the enthusiastic participation of Jewish youth representatives in the communist youth organisation, the Komsomol.

The leading representatives of this historiographical trend include Jan Tomasz Gross, Andrzej Żbikowski, Krzysztof Jasiewicz and Witold Mędykowski. The first of these scholars can even be regarded as the founder of this current – for in the 1990s, he changed his views and departed from the interpretative patterns preferred in traditional Polish historiography. In his book *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje na temat stereotypów wobec Polaków, Żydów, Niemców i komunistów* (The Ghastly Decade. Three Essays on Stereotypes about Poles, Jews, Germans and Communists) (Warsaw, 1999), the author posits that the allegations of Jewish collaboration with

the Soviets against Poles stemmed from the Polish population's perpetuation of the "Jewish communist" stereotype, also known as the "Judeo-commie conspiracy" (Żydokomuna). These accusations, he argues, did not mirror the actual state of affairs. He repeated a similar opinion in his most famous publication, *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Neighbours. The History of Destruction of a Jewish Town), which – although it discusses the crime against the Jews of Jedwabne after the end of the Soviet occupation – contains a chapter interpreting the events of 1939–1941 as a confirmation of the anti-Semitic stereotype functioning in Polish mentality. His later monograph, *Opowieści kresowe 1939–1941. Żydzi i Sowieci* (Tales from the Borderlands 1939–1941: Jews and Soviets) (Cracow–Budapest–Syracuse, 2019) already contains a more balanced assessment of the phenomenon of Jewish collaboration with the Soviet occupation authorities, combined with the correct observation that, although it undoubtedly occurred, it nevertheless involved a relatively small part of the Borderland Jewish community.

This trend was referred to for some time by Krzysztof Jasiewicz, who in his monograph *Pierwsi po diable. Elity sowieckie w okupowanej Polsce 1939–1941* (The First after the Devil. Soviet Elites in Occupied Poland 1939–1941) (Warsaw, 2001) formulated far-reaching theses on Polish anti-Semitism, which was to deform the image of Soviet reality in the eyes of Poles, deeply (and, according to Jasiewicz, wrongly) convinced of the Jewish population's collaboration with the Soviets to the detriment of the Second Republic and its citizens. His views on the subject evolved, however, and in subsequent monographic studies, took on a form that was strongly critical of the attitudes of the Jewish population towards Poland and the Poles. For example, in his work *Rzeczywistość sowiecka w świadectwach polskich Żydów* (Soviet Reality in the Testimonies of Polish Jews) (Warsaw, 2009), he no longer downplayed the phenomenon of Jewish collaboration with the Soviet occupation authorities, but, in an unequivocal and sometimes even categorical manner, he considered it to be a commonplace phenomenon, arousing justified anger of the Polish population, and crucial for shaping the attitudes of Poles towards Jews during the Holocaust (between 1941 and 1945). According to Jasiewicz, the memory of Jewish ingratitude towards Poland "during the time of the first Soviet" (as the period of the Soviet occupation was commonly referred to) played a vital role in the decision of many Poles to refuse to help the persecuted Jews. However,

the author did not present convincing evidence to support his thesis (although he meticulously documented the phenomenon of collaboration of some Jews with the Soviet authorities in 1939–1941, using Polish sources for this purpose). Furthermore, in his analysis of the accounts of Polish Jews from this period, he referred only to the testimonies given by them to the Polish Army in the USSR in 1941–1942, while he omitted the equally important collection of testimonies of Jewish refugees from central Poland, deposited in the collections of the so-called (Emanuel) Ringelblum Archive (Oneg Shabbat).[5]

The most prominent publication of this historiographical trend concerning Polish-Jewish relations is Andrzej Żbikowski's monograph *U genezy Jedwabnego. Żydzi na Kresach Północno-Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej. Wrzesień 1939 – lipiec 1941* (Concerning the Genesis of Jedwabne. Jews in the North-Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic. September 1939 – July 1941) (Warsaw, 2006). The book aims to present the fate of the Jewish community in the north-eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic and in the Białystok and Łomża regions during the Soviet occupation of the Polish territories in 1939–1941 and in the first months of the German occupation of this area, that is in the summer of 1941. The author assumed that the chapters dealing with this period would separately present the Polish, Jewish and Soviet discourses on the situation of Jews and the relations between them and the Poles. In doing so, he did not attempt to construct a comprehensive, coherent picture of the history of this occupation. He believed that the memories of these nations were so different that a historian could not find points of contact within them. Consequently, each of the above chapters contains an overview of the sources produced within a nationality group or the Soviet occupation apparatus along with a description of the version presented by each group (Poles, Jews and Soviet officials). Thus, this part of the monograph is more like a material-based paper on the content of individual historical sources. Conversely, the depiction of "various truths about the Soviet occupation, derived from diverse sources" in a manner diverging from the conventional narrative structure used in this book resulted in noticeable disarray and inconsistencies.

[5] See *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy*, vol. 3: *Relacje z Kresów*, ed. by A. Żbikowski (Warsaw, 2000).

Concerning the first months of the German occupation of the Łomża region and the Białystok area, Żbikowski applied the classical, traditional method of building a historical narrative using Polish, Jewish and German sources. In this way, the description of the events of this period, especially the murders and pogroms committed against the Jewish population, takes the form of a logically connected sequence of events according to a cause-and-effect pattern. The author argues it was not the pro-Soviet attitude of a part of the Jewish population that caused the rise of anti-Semitism on the Polish side but the anti-Semitism deeply rooted in Polish culture, which, given favourable conditions, led to the outbreak of hatred and violence against Jews. Żbikowski, however, did not explain why the Polish population, barring the criminals who targeted both Jews and Poles for robbery, refrained from committing widespread atrocities against Jews in September 1939 when the Germans had temporary control over the region. Furthermore, it remains unclear why, following the commencement of the German-Soviet war in June 1941, there was a marked increase in hostility towards Jews, often manifesting in brutal acts of violence. He blamed Poles for the murders and pogroms against the Jewish population, attributing to Germans only the role of the catalyst for these events.

So where does the truth lie, and who is right in this dispute? It is not easy to resolve this controversy, but it can be potentially clarified by consulting sources and scholarly works that originate outside of Polish historiography. Such an approach makes it possible to verify the views of Polish historians and to check whether the historiographic output of other nations or milieus contains elements identical to the Polish discourse on the Soviet occupation of the lands of the Second Polish Republic in 1939–1941. The content we are looking for can be found, for example, in the monographs mentioned above and scholarly articles written in the circle of Israeli historiography, especially the works of Pinchuk and Levin. Both authors have shown that the Jewish community of the occupied territories had to adapt to the changes under Soviet rule to ensure optimal living conditions. At the same time, it took advantage of the opportunities for social advancement created by the Soviet reality, which eliminated (and often exterminated) the previous, mainly Polish political and social elites. Upon entering the structures of the occupying power, representatives of the Jewish community (as well as Belarusian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Polish) replaced Polish officials, teachers, police officers and local government

activists while implementing the policy imposed by the Soviet authorities. This policy, in turn, was anti-Polish for a significant part of the period in question and aimed to remove all traces of Polish statehood, including its structures, institutions, regulations and elites. This caused dissatisfaction among Poles, which often deepened their reluctance and sometimes even hostility towards the Jewish population.

Among the publications containing an analysis of the attitudes of Polish Jews under Soviet occupation, Dov Levin's work is noteworthy, especially his article on the situation of the Jews of Wilno during the Soviet occupation of Wilno between 19 September and 28 October 1939. It is clear from the study that in the political and military situation of the time, partly due to a sense of threat of anarchy and the prospect of German occupation, the Jewish community of the city on the banks of the Vilnia River was mostly sympathetic to the new authorities. Pro-Soviet sentiments were widespread among supporters of the social left and the local proletariat, petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. It was hoped that equality in political and social relations would be introduced for all national and social groups, including the Jews. Such expectations led to the mass participation of Jews in the enthusiastic welcoming of the Red Army units and the favourable treatment of the policy of the Soviet authorities in the city and region.

The relatively widespread involvement of Jews in organisations and institutions set up by the occupation authorities was intended to safeguard the interests of the Jewish community in uncertain times of war. For example, according to Dr. Shlomo Katz, deputy commander of the Wilno Workers' Guard (a police-like formation used to combat political opponents of the new authorities), representatives of the Jewish population made up about 90% of its membership. Such data may explain the reasons for Polish resentment against the city's Jewish inhabitants – as the units of the Workers' Guard were responsible for numerous arrests of the Wilno-based Polish, Belarusian and Jewish social and political elite. This, in turn, deepened the fear of the Wilno-based Jews and made them even more dependent on the Soviet occupying authorities.[6]

Another publication that touches on the issue of Jewish attitudes towards the Soviet authorities is an article by the American historian Anthony Polonsky,

[6] D. Levin, "Wileńscy Żydzi w dobie władzy radzieckiej, 19 IX – 28 X 1939 r.," in *id.*, *Żydzi wschodnioeuropejscy podczas II wojny światowej* (Warsaw, 2005), pp. 11–53.

a renowned scholar of the history of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe in the twentieth century and the author, among other works, of the multi-volume monographic series *Jews in Poland and Russia*. In it, he described the attitude of the Jewish population to the Soviet reality after the October Revolution in the context of the Jews's situation in the Russian Empire before 1914, during the First World War and the Russian Civil War. He showed that many representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia, especially of the younger generation, willingly participated in the construction of a new order which, by removing previous administrative and cultural barriers (for example anti-Semitic prejudices and restrictions), allowed them to participate fully in socio-political life, to receive education and to realise their aspirations. By aligning themselves with the Soviet system, the Jewish intelligentsia secured a prominent role in cultural, administrative, and artistic domains. This, in turn, often provoked hostile reactions from representatives of the other peoples of Russia, especially the Russians, who were accustomed to their dominant position under the Tsar and the permanent marginalisation of the Jews.

A similar mechanism, according to Polonsky, appeared in the Polish lands after the end of the Second World War, which to some extent confirms the statements of Polish historians about the involvement of some Jews (Polish citizens) in the political goals of the Soviet state, which contradicted the Polish raison d'état. These Jews accepted the new socio-political landscape in Russia and Poland as a natural process of changes in the world order. However, their active endorsement of or empathy towards the communist regime was perceived as an act of betrayal against the previously dominant nation by many representatives of Central and Eastern European countries, particularly in regions where the Soviet dictatorship had been installed. This leads to the conclusion that the divergence of interests between Poles and Jews, combined with a different assessment of the situation, choice of survival strategies and racial prejudice, led to mutual hostility and hatred. Although Polonsky's article does not refer to the period of the Soviet occupation of Polish lands in 1939–1941, it can be assumed that the same mechanisms that shaped Polish-Jewish relations were at work there during that period.[7]

[7] A. Polonsky, "Jews and Communism in the Soviet Union and Poland," in *Jews and Leftist Politics: Judaism, Israel, Antisemitism, and Gender*, ed. by J. Jacobs (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 147–168.

Another publication representing non-Polish historiography and analysing the attitudes of the Jewish population of the Eastern Borderlands towards the Soviet occupation authorities and the Poles in 1939–1941 is an article by Yevgeny Rozenblat (a Jewish historian from Brest-on-the-Bug, in the Republic of Belarus) entitled "Yevrei v sisteme myezhnatsional'nykh otnoshenyi v zapadnykh oblastyakh Belarusi. 1939–1941 g.," published in *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne* (13 [2000]). The author describes the attitude of some of the Jewish population towards the Soviet authorities in the occupied territories as follows:

> The prevailing internationalism [under Soviet rule], the equality of nations and nationalities, forever removed all restrictions and prohibitions, made the Jews equal in rights to the native population of the republic [of the Belarusian SSR]. For that reason, the Jewish masses enthusiastically participated in the reconstruction of the political life in the incorporated territories, expressing their pro-Soviet sentiments. It was mainly left-wing elements [former members of the CPSU, the Polish Communist Party (KPP) and others] who collaborated with the authorities at this stage [in the autumn of 1939]. However, traditional Jewish authorities often supported them, especially in towns.

The instances mentioned are not meant to measure the breadth and depth of the intricate occurrence of a segment of the Jewish population collaborating with the Soviets and their stance towards the Soviet leadership during the time in question. This is particularly significant as this occurrence transformed in tandem with the evolution of Polish anti-Semitism towards Polish Jews in territories under Soviet control. They only indicate the presence of collaboration between representatives of Jewish circles and the Soviet occupation apparatus and the negative judgment of such an attitude by many local Poles. Similar processes could be observed, for example, among the Belarusian, Lithuanian, or Ukrainian communities in the territories of the Second Polish Republic annexed by the USSR, which also led to increased tension and hostility between Poles and Belarusians, Lithuanians and Ukrainians. However, contemporary Belarusian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian historiography does not deny these facts, seeing that they have found confirmation in numerous primary sources (Polish, Soviet, Jewish, Belarusian, Lithuanian and

Ukrainian). Polish historiography treats these facts similarly when speaking of collaborators of the Soviet authorities of Polish nationality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be emphasised that research on Polish-Jewish relations has developed considerably over the last 30 years. This was brought about by the fall of communism in 1989 and the lifting of political restrictions which, after the end of the Second World War, obstructed and, in practice, effectively prevented the development of academic research on issues such as the Soviet occupation of the Polish lands and relations between Poles and Jews under Soviet rule. Thanks to these changes, the first works on these issues began to appear as early as the 1990s, and with them, the first differences of opinion arose. The breakthrough came with the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Sąsiedzi* (Neighbours) in 2000, which triggered a nationwide debate in Poland about the Jedwabne crime and the collective memory of Poles, in which Polish-Jewish relations played an important role. During this discussion, the thread on the Soviet occupation and its impact on the mutual relations between Poles and Jews, as well as the dispute over the effects of the events of 1939–1941 on the history of the murders of Jews in the Soviet-occupied territories after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, came up frequently.

By their very nature, the attitudes of Poles and Jews under the Soviet occupation took on a particular significance. For some, they justified or at least explained the hostility towards the Jewish population after 22 June 1941, while for others, they provided evidence of the racial prejudices of Poles that would predetermine their participation in the Holocaust. The debate stemming from this matter has shaped the progression of academic research by introducing novel resources and discoveries into scholarly discourse. As a result, our knowledge of Polish-Jewish relations during the Soviet occupation is much better today than it was thirty years ago. The scholarly monographs by Marek Wierzbicki and Andrzej Żbikowski have played a vital role in this, providing a structured, comprehensive and exhaustive account of the most critical aspects of this issue, including its genesis, course and consequences. Moreover – and this is extremely valuable from a scientific point of view – they have proposed different interpretations of the same facts, using different methodological approaches and, as a result, widely different conclusions.

The divergent perspectives on Polish-Jewish relations presented in these monographs indicate the existence of two distinct historiographical schools. Each proposes its own comprehensive interpretation of the interactions between Poles and Jews in the territories of the Second Republic, which were under Soviet occupation during the initial phase of the Second World War. One of them, based on traditional interpretations of the issue, proposes to recognise a causal link between the collaboration of a relatively small proportion of Jews with the Soviets, to the detriment of Poland and the Poles, and the noticeable rise of anti-Semitism among Poles. The second school of thought, referred to as the revisionist school, posits that inherent anti-Semitism, firmly embedded in Polish mentality and culture, led to the collective accusation of Borderland Jews that they betrayed Poland. These allegations served as a justification to strip the Jewish community of their rightful privileges and to inflict physical, moral, or symbolic harm upon its members, even to the extent of taking their lives. Therefore, any attempt to attribute a pro-Soviet attitude to the Jewish population and their acts to the detriment of the Polish population is supposedly only an expression of anti-Jewish prejudice and stems from the Poles' sense of guilt for their complicity in the Holocaust.

This raises the question of whether it is possible to reconcile such divergent positions and thus create a coherent vision of Polish-Jewish relations and what else should be investigated to enrich our knowledge of the subject. Our present knowledge of this part of the Polish-Jewish affairs should be treated as a working hypothesis to be verified during new scholarly research. The research itself should begin by abandoning event-based political history in favour of social history, understood as the study of the history of the society of the Second Republic of Poland under the Soviet occupation, through an analysis of the development or disappearance of social structures, economic factors, the "long duration" of private, state and local government institutions, collective and individual social practices, survival strategies, and anthropological factors, such as mentality, customs and the organisation of collective and personal existence. The perspective of everyday life, showing the real problems and choices of all social and ethnic groups in the occupied territories, and the mechanism of bottom-up formation of political attitudes (according to the bottom-up method popular in Anglo-Saxon historiography) should play a unique role in such research. It would then be pos-

sible to use the achievements of the social sciences (sociology, psychology, cultural anthropology or political science) in historical research, thus enriching its narrative and interpretive possibilities. Interdisciplinarity has long been an essential requirement in Holocaust research, so it seems natural that it could also broaden the scholarly workshop of historians dealing with Polish-Jewish relations under the Soviet occupation.

Such bottom-up research should be complemented by micro-historical analyses, which aim to trace broad historical processes at the micro level, that is at the lowest levels of social life, such as the village, the municipality, the parish, the local association, or the agricultural or consumer cooperative. In recent decades, several new historiographical trends have emerged that challenge the status of traditional research methods. Nevertheless, the application of micro-historical research to questions of nationality relations seems most appropriate. At the micro level, it is easiest to answer how things really were, which is at the heart of the study of ethnic relations. This is because it raises questions about who was to blame, who were the perpetrators and who were the victims, and why there were acts of violence, cooperation or indifference to the suffering of members of another nationality group. Micro-historical research would help to verify the current view of Polish-Jewish relations, provided that the principle of honesty in research is respected, which consists in recognising the meaning of the facts from the sources analysed and not bending them to fit preconceived theses.

Another proposition involves the advancement of comparative research that would enable an objective examination of the attitudes of Jews and Poles. It should take various directions, for example, comparing Polish-Jewish relations with the relations of the Jewish population with other nations of Central and Eastern Europe occupied by the Soviets, specifically Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Romanians. Research by historians such as Ben Cion Pinchuk, Dov Levin, Yevgeny Rozenblat, Marek Wierzbicki or Witold Mędykowski could be helpful in this regard. Comparisons could also include different periods, for example September 1939 and June–July 1941, or the attitudes of Poles and Jews towards different experiences and events of the Soviet occupation, such as repression (for example deportation deep into the USSR), legal, cultural and social life, participation in economic life, as well as the perception of Soviet reality.

In my opinion, the study of Polish-Jewish relations should also be extended to an analysis of the relations of the Polish population with other nations of the Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic to be able to observe their dynamics, specificity and the determinants of their development during the period in question. Marek Wierzbicki initiated this research, the results of which were published in a monograph on Polish-Belarusian relations in the north-eastern territories of the pre-war Polish state between 1939 and 1941.[8]

One of the results of this research is the observation of two critical trends. The first turned out to be the cooperation of some of the Belarusian population with the Soviet occupation authorities in various fields, including the establishment of structures of the new government or the extermination of the Polish Borderland elites. The second tendency resulted from the impact of this process (combined with the increased role of Belarusians in the political and social life of the occupied territories) on the deterioration of relations between Poles and Belarusians. The study also uncovered a notable decline in relations between Poles and Lithuanians and between Poles and Ukrainians. These findings suggest a similar mechanism of rapid and significant deterioration of nationality relations in the Soviet-occupied territories. This universal mechanism affected all national and ethnic groups, including Poles and Jews. Its understanding helps to develop a broader and more distanced view of Polish-Jewish relations, in which the same mechanisms of conflict of interests were at work as in the case of all the Borderland nations of the Second Polish Republic. Such an apparent change for the worse in nationality relations meant the failure of the nationality policy of pre-war Poland. This issue requires continued research.

Another example of comparative research that can shed more light on the fate of Jews in the territories occupied by the USSR in 1939–1941 is Levin's article on the situation of the Jewish population in Latvia under Soviet rule in 1940–1941. According to the author, the satisfaction of many Jews with communist, leftist or politically non-aligned convictions connected with the invasion of the Red Army units in June 1940, which was expressed in the enthusiastic reception of Soviet

[8] See for example M. Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Białorusini w zaborze sowieckim. Stosunki polsko-białoruskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej pod okupacją sowiecką w latach 1939–1941* (Warsaw, 2007).

troops and, in some cases, in their active support against Latvian army units, was one of the reasons for the growing hostility towards Jews in wide circles of the Latvian population. There were numerous attacks on Jews and other acts of violence that created a pogrom atmosphere in Latvian cities. On the one hand, the Soviet occupation authorities dissolved traditional Jewish organisations. On the other hand, many Jews, especially young ones, tried to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new socio-political system. They joined the universities, the Communist Party and the Komsomol, and the aforementioned Workers' Guard in large numbers. This kind of involvement further deepened the hostility of the Latvian population towards the Jews. It led to the consolidation of the belief among most Latvians that the Jewish population were directly backing Communist power.

No account was taken of the fact that a significant proportion of Jews regarded the new authorities with distaste and were merely trying to adapt to the new reality. Anti-Semitic feelings were reinforced by the participation of Soviet officers of Jewish nationality in mass repressions, such as the arrests and deportations of June 1941. The deportation of thousands of Jews, considered by the Soviet authorities to be a hostile or unsafe element, did not change this attitude. Thus, at the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, Latvian Jews were subjected to violence first by the Latvians and only later by the German occupying authorities. The mechanism of deterioration of the Lithuanian-Jewish relations in the Soviet-occupied Lithuania and the incorporated Wilno region, which was part of the Polish state before the Second World War, was similar.[9]

The approach to historical sources in this context also seems essential. The revisionist school proposes to treat the testimonies of Jewish Holocaust survivors "with confidence", that is without the criticism traditionally postulated in the methodology of historical research, which seems risky because it questions the sense of science as a critical reflection on the world and the existing body of knowledge. Much more intellectually fruitful, and therefore more helpful from a scientific point of view, is,

[9] D. Levin, "Żydzi w okresie władzy sowieckiej na Łotwie, 1940–1941," in *id.*, *Żydzi wschodnioeuropejscy*, pp. 55–82; V. Sirutavicius, "'A close, but very suspicious and dangerous neighbour': Outbreaks of antisemitism in inter-war Lithuania," *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 25 (2013), pp. 245–262; A. Edintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust* (Vilnius, 2003), pp. 82–88; D. Levin, "The Jews of Vilna under Soviet Rule, 19 September – 28 October 1939," *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 9 (1996), pp. 107–137; Wierzbicki, "Polish-Jewish Relations," pp. 487–516.

in my opinion, the postulate of criticism towards all sources, which by their very nature are subjective and, as such, require careful verification. This scenario would involve the mutual comparative analysis of historical sources generated within distinct national groups, such as Polish, Jewish, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Latvian, or Estonian. While these sources mirror the subjective historical recollections of each national community, they not only construct individual subjective historical narratives but also contribute to the objectification of varying interpretations of the past. The deliberate abandonment of this approach deprives us of the possibility of getting closer to the truth on issues that are still hotly disputed.

Therefore, researchers must try to reduce the "ethnic" viewpoint of the past, in other words researchers must develop a distance towards historical narratives produced on the basis of the memory of ethnic and national groups. Instead, it is a matter of using the sources and perceptions created within individual national and ethnic communities to reduce subjectivity as much as possible, specifcially to develop as objective a view as possible of the history of Polish-Jewish relations and, more broadly, of nationality relations in the eastern lands of the Second Polish Republic. This should mainly concern such a complex and controversial subject as the history of the Soviet occupation of Polish lands in 1939–1941.

The first attempts in this field show that, for example, the stereotypically denigrated Polish testimonies produced by Poles oppressed by the Soviet occupation authorities are more objective than was previously thought. As Krzysztof Jasiewicz and Marek Wierzbicki found in their work, Poles who gave an account of the course of Soviet repression did not focus exclusively on the involvement of the Jewish population but also saw perpetrators from other national and ethnic communities of the Eastern Borderlands, not excluding representatives of the Polish population. Jewish sources likely have considerable potential for objectivity. Still, they should nevertheless undergo the same verification and objectivisation as Polish sources to comply with the fundamental rule of critical analysis of historical documents on which any authentic scholarly study is based.

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SUMMARY

This article attempts to juxtapose, present and analyse the standpoints of Polish, Anglo-Saxon (Western) and Israeli historiography on the nature of Polish-Jewish relations in the territories of the Second Polish Republic during the Soviet occupation (1939–1941).

It outlines the state of scholarly (historical) research on Polish-Jewish relations since the 1980s. It discusses the main research trends, publications, and views on the most important and controversial events related to this topic. Among other things, it demonstrates the presence of two competing schools of historical thought in Polish historiography, which interpret and evaluate the most important issues of Polish-Jewish relations in that period differently. The article's conclusions contain research postulates that may further deepen the analysis and knowledge of the matter in question.

KEYWORDS

Poles • Jews • Soviet occupation • anti-Semitism • collaboration • historical research