Antony Polonsky

Fragile Coexistence, Tragic Acceptance

The Politics and History of the East European Jews

Eastern Europe's Jews have their own history. In the 18th and 19th centuries, repression and reform forced the Jews to assimilate to their surroundings. However, attempts to integrate failed repeatedly and led to ideological divisions among the Jews. As Zionists, integrationists, and socialists, they pursued different paths to social and legal equality. Most East European Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. After the Second World War, some of the survivors tried to shape Communist societies – unsuccessfully. Antisemitism and pogroms forced them to emigrate.

On the eve of the Second World War, Poland's borders embraced the largest Jewish community in Europe. With nearly 3.5 million Jews, Polish Jewry maintained its position as one of the main centres of the Jewish world. The second largest Jewish community in Europe (and third in the world) was that of the Soviet Union, where over 3 million people had declared themselves to be of "Jewish nationality" during the 1939 census. It, too, was a major source of Jewish creativity, although much of the specific Socialist cultural autonomy granted the Jews in the 1920s had been whittled away by Stalin in the 1930s. At this time, Lithuania, with over 150,000 Jews, also remained a vital centre of Jewish culture, both religious and secular.

All three of these communities were derived from the Jewish community of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795). In the mid-18th century, the lands of this vast state were home to a Jewish community whose population had reached more than three-quarters of a million, at least one-third of the Jews in the world at the time. This community prospered as a result of a "marriage of convenience" with the Polish nobility (szlachta), which dominated the pre-partition Commonwealth and enabled the Jews, despite outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence such as those that had accompanied the crisis of the Polish state in the mid-17th century, to flourish economically and spiritually. Jews were allowed to practice a wide range of trades, crafts, and skills and very frequently managed the estates of the nobility. As craftsmen – carpenters, cobblers, blacksmiths, tailors, tar manufacturer, wheelwrights – they were indispensable to the rural economy in the villages and small towns (shtetlekh). Their position was unique in Europe. Jewish religious and intellectual life also experienced a very rich development. The schools of Talmudic study (yeshivot) in Poland served as models

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for the rest of Europe, while Polish masters of Jewish religious law (halakha) exerted tremendous influence on the religious life of Jews throughout the world. It was in Poland that the study of Jewish mysticism (kabbalah) was transformed from the domain of a small aristocratic elite into a mass movement, and it was in the Polish lands that Hasidism, the last mass religious movement to establish itself in the Jewish world, emerged and flourished.

As early as the mid-17th century, the situation of the Jews began to deteriorate, as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth itself went into decline. Nonetheless, the community managed to maintain itself and even expanded in the 18th century. Towards the end of the century, the Jews came under increasing pressure, first from the Polish reformers – who gained in influence after the first partition of Poland-Lithuania in 1772 – and then from Austria, Russia, and Prussia – which completed the partitioning of the Commonwealth in 1795 – to transform themselves from a community that was bound by a shared faith and way of life and transcended national borders into citizens of the country where they lived. Elsewhere in Europe, the Jews were also subjected to similar pressures, which proved relatively successful in the western and central parts of the continent. In the course of the 19th century, the Jews were transformed into Englishman, Frenchman, and Germans "of the Hebrew faith". However, due to the size of the Jewish population on the Polish lands, resistance to this transformation, and the rise of anti-Jewish sentiment, the Polish and Jewish "assimilationists" had by the late 19th century largely failed in their efforts to turn the Jews of Poland into "Poles of the Mosaic faith". Only in Prussian Poland, where a civil society had been established by the reforms of the early 19th century, did the Jewish population undergo such a transformation.

However, here, as in the other territories ruled by Prussia, the Jews adhered to German rather than Polish culture. A minority of Polish Jews – both in Galicia (Austrian Poland) and in the Kingdom of Poland (whose autonomy within Russia was established at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and effectively abolished with the Uprising of 1863) – accepted the assimilationist dream, linked as it was with political liberalism, and integrated into Polish society. In the parts of Poland-Lithuania directly absorbed into the tsarist empire – the Pale of Settlement, to which the vast majority of Jews from the Commonwealth were confined – the maskilic elite, the adherents of the Jewish enlightenment, favoured Russification over Polonisation. Here, too, however, the greater part of the community remained Yiddish-speaking and adhered to a traditional Jewish way of life.

Starting in 1881, the Jews' situation within the Russian Empire began to worsen severely. This was partly the result of the tsarist government's growing disillusionment with its policies for transforming the Jews into what it considered useful subjects. This deterioration was also caused by the growth of revolutionary activity and the social tensions that this engendered. Under these new conditions, the goal of integrating and transforming the Jewish community through education and Russification became increasingly discredited among Jews. Ethnicity instead of religion now was seen by many as the hallmark of Jewish identity, while others came to view Socialism and its promise of a new and equitable world as the "solution" to the "Jewish question". This "new Jewish politics" spread from the eastern half of the Pale of settlement to the Kingdom of Poland and to Galicia, where integrationist policies, though

more successful than in Russia, had also encountered considerable resistance and were now increasingly being called into question by both Jews and non-Jews. The new Jewish politics even had an impact in Prussian Poland, the one area of former Poland-Lithuania where integration had seemed successful.

Politics and History of the Jews until 1914

The failure of integration was responsible for the deep divisions that characterised Jewish political life in the lands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In a 1907 story entitled "Samooborona" [Self-defence], the Anglo-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill describes a Russian-ruled Polish shtetl with the ironic name Milovka (agreeable). A young man named David Ben Amram arrives to organise the local Jews against the anti-Jewish violence sweeping the Russian Empire. He is unable to accomplish his mission given the deep ideological divisions that have developed even in this remote backwater.

The Jews are split between integrationists and assimilationists (of which there were several varieties), religious Jews (likewise divided into Hasidic and Misnagdic [anti-Hasidic] groups), several varieties of Zionists (Socialist Zionists, Zionist Zionists, cultural Zionists, religious Zionists), Sejmists (parliamentarians), territorialists (those seeking a territory for the Jews), Socialist territorialists, and members of the General Jewish Workers' Alliance, best known as the Bund. The idealistic organiser is brought to the brink of despair:

> He had a nightmare vision of bristling sects and pullulating factions, each with its Councils, Federations, Funds, Conferences, Party-days, Agenda, Referats, Press-Organs, each differentiating itself with meticulous subtlety from all the other Parties, each defining with casuistic minuteness its relation to every contemporary problem, each equipped with inexhaustible polyglot orators speechifying through tumultuous nights.[1]

What was the general character of the political groupings that emerged from the failure of integration?

The Integrationists

The integrationists remained a significant force in the lands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth both inside and outside the tsarist empire. In those areas directly incorporated into Russia, the integrationists sought to transform autocracy in alliance with other political groups, above all the Constitutional Democrats (whose leadership included a significant number of Jews), and so secure legal equality for the Jews. In the Kingdom of Poland, the assimilationists, in alliance with the Orthodox, continued to control the Warsaw community (kehila) and propagated their views through the weekly *Izraelita*. Their influence declined in the aftermath of the Revolu-

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[1] Israel Zangwill, "Samo-oborona", *Ghetto Comdies* (New York 1907), pp. 429–487. I am indebted to Ezra Mendelsohn's *On Modern Jewish Politics* (New York 1993) for this reference.

tion of 1905 and the rise of Polish integral nationalism, particularly after the bitter conflicts in Warsaw that accompanied the election to the Fourth Duma in 1912. In Galicia, the alliance between the Jewish integrationists and Polish politicians seeking more autonomy within Austria lasted until 1914, although, after the introduction of universal male suffrage in the elections to the Austrian Reichsrat, this alliance was challenged increasingly both by Polish integral nationalists and populists as well as Ukrainian nationalists. In Prussian Poland as well, the integrationists came under increasing pressure from their Zionist opponents.

Zionists

The integrationists were now challenged by new political forces in Austria, Prussia, or Russia, especially in the Pale of Settlement. The late 19th century saw the emergence and increasing dominance of autonomist concepts of Jewish self-identification, in particular Zionism and Jewish autonomism. It is perhaps not surprising that nationalism should have had a major impact on Jewish life at this time. It is the dominant political movement of our times. After all, the world is today divided into nation-states. All of the empires built on other principles have collapsed. As Theodore Weeks has pointed out:

> Whereas in 1800 most Europeans derived their sense of identity from local, religious, and social categories (i.e., village X, Catholic, peasant), by 1914 nationality as a principle of self-definition had in most places overwhelmed these old defining characteristics. The combined effects of industrialization, railroads, state educational systems, military service, and simply a higher degree of personal mobility created a situation where large numbers of Europeans came to regard themselves primarily in ethnic and national terms.[2]

This inevitably affected the tsarist empire, where Russian hegemony was also increasingly challenged by national movements. The 1890s saw a revival of Polish nationalism and the crystallisation of a Lithuanian and Ukrainian national consciousness in the eastern territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Other nationalities within the empire, such as the Finns, the Armenians, the Georgians, and various Moslem groups, became much more self-conscious and assertive as well.

In recent years, there has been considerable debate over the nature of nationalism. Nationalist ideologues, such as Johann Fichte (1762–1814) and Johann Herder (1744–1803), stressed the timeless and primordial character of national identity. In fact, it is clear that nationalism is, above all, a product of 19th-century political changes – the waning of supranational ideologies and the growing importance of popular sovereignty. What has marked the debate about the character of nationalism has been a difference of emphasis. On the one hand, there are those, like Benedict Anderson, who see nationalism as a wholly new phenomenon and the nation as an "imagined community" emerging in response to the development of modern communications and new

[2] Theodore R. Weeks, "Assimilation, Nationalism, Modernization, Antisemitism: Notes on Polish Jewish Relations, 1855–1905", in Robert Blobaum, ed., *Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland* (Ithaca 2005), pp. 20–38, here p. 20.

political conditions. This position is challenged by people like Anthony Smith, who accept the modern character of nationalism as a political movement, but emphasise the extent to which the national idea in different areas was built on an older core of ethnic self-consciousness, what Smith calls the "ethnie".[3]

In the case of the Jews, it is clear that within the traditional Jewish identity, there were many elements, above all the call for the return to Zion and the constant emphasis on Jewish life in the land of Israel (Erets Yisrael), that provided nationalist ideologues with a firm foundation on which to build a modern national identity. Indeed, one of the reasons why the national idea proved rather more successful than its Socialist rivals among the Jews of Eastern Europe was because it harmonised so well with the traditional Jewish view of the world.

In the emergence of the Jewish national movement, one can distinguish three different components, which were often combined. There were those who became nationalists because of the persistence of antisemitism and what they perceived as the impossibility of Jewish integration. Then there were those who became nationalists because they believed integration was being bought at too high a price. Assimilation, in their opinion, would lead to the disappearance of the Jewish people or, at best, to the loss of all that was authentically Jewish. And finally, there were those who attempted to fuse nationalism with another ideology, either with Socialism or with some form of Jewish religious identity.

Among those who became Zionists because of their belief in the incurable Judeophobia of the Christian world were Leon Pinsker (1821–1891), a former integrationist and veteran of the Crimean War, and Moshe Leib Lilienblum (1843–1910), a repentant maskil. Other people who fall into this category are Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism, and Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880–1940), the founder of Revision Zionism. Jabotinsky, a native of Odessa, distinguished between the "antisemitism of people" and the "antisemitism of things". The former was the result of prejudice and could be minimised; the latter was the consequence of the inevitable economic conflict caused by the competition between the Jewish middlemen and the rising middle class of nations such as the Poles and Ukrainians and could not be avoided. He rejected liberalism as an illusion:

> It is a wise philosopher who said, "Man is a wolf to man." ... Stupid is the person who believes in his neighbour, good and loving as that neighbour may be; stupid is the person who relies on justice. Justice exists only for those whose fists and stubbornness make it possible for them to realize it.[4]

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[3] For Benedict Anderson's views, see *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London 1983); for those of Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (Oxford 1987); idem., *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover, NH, 2000); idem., *Nationalism Theory, Ideology, History* (Malden, MA, 2001). Some other important contributions to the debate are E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca 1983) and E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge 1990).

[4] Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modem Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York 1981), p. 164.

Among those who saw assimilation and the loss of the Jewish national substance as the principal dangers facing the Jewish people was Asher Ginsberg (1856–1927), who wrote under the pen-name Ahad ha'am (One of the People). Ginsberg, educated at a yeshiva and a Jewish high school, was the most brilliant Hebrew essayist of his generation. He was convinced that before large scale colonisation of Palestine could be successful, the Jewish people would have to be transformed and permeated by the national idea. He saw this idea in elevated terms: "We must propagate the national idea and convert it into a lofty moral ideal."[5] Similar views were held by Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858–1922), the architect of the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language (who in his youth had been close to the Russian revolutionary *narodniki*), and by the younger German Zionist, Martin Buber (1878–1965).

Finally, there were those who combined Zionism with Socialism or with religion. Of the Zionist Socialists, the most important were Nahman Syrkin (1867–1924), Ber Borochov (1881–1927), and Aharon David Gordon (1865–1922). Gordon was influenced by the *narodniki* and the Slavophiles and settled in Palestine in 1903. He believed that the Jews were unhealthy, because they had lost their connection with the land. For them to become a nation again, they needed to transform themselves into farmers in the ancient homeland.[6]

Among those who sought to combine Zionism with religion were Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines (1839–1915) and Ze'ev Jawitz (1847–1912). Reines, who was born in Karolin in Belarus, studied at the Volozhin yeshivah in before holding the post of rabbi in Šaukėnai, Švenčionys, and Lida. While in Lida, he tried to found a modern yeshiva where secular subjects would be studied. His first attempt in 1891 was frustrated by Orthodox opposition, but after 1905, he succeeded in creating a thriving institution. He was one of the first supporters of the movement Hibat Tsiyon (Hovevei Zion) and was immediately attracted to Herzl's political Zionism, participating in the first Zionist congresses.[7]

The emergence of Jewish nationalism was a phenomenon that took place on a wider stage than the tsarist empire. Indeed, one of its strengths was that it brought together Jews from all areas of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, who still retained strong links with their Jewish heritage, and acculturated Jews from Central Europe, who were concerned both by the disruptive effect that the crisis of Russian Jewry would have on the position of the more integrated Jews of Central and Western Europe, and by the unnecessary and humiliating compromises that had been made in pursuit of the goal of integration into their societies. The evolution of the Zionist movement owed much to the interaction between these two groups, and its development was encouraged by the movement to Central Europe of East European Zionists, among them ideologists like Perets Smolenskin, who established himself in Vienna, and the later generation of Russian-Jewish university students who were compelled to study in the west because of restrictions in Russia.

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[5] Simon Dubnow, *A History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, pp. 3 and 49. On Ahad ha-am, see the biography by S. Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism* (London 1993).

[6] On Gordon, see Avineri, *The Making of Modem Zionism*, pp. 150–172, and Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (New York 1969).

[7] S. Rabinowitz, ed., *Kneset yisrael*, 1 (1887).

The Socialists

A significant minority within the Jewish community was attracted to Socialism in its various forms and the vision it offered of a new world in which the old divisions of Jew and gentile would be subsumed by the creation of a new Socialist humanity. The emergence of Socialist movements across Europe was the product of two developments: the progress of industrialisation, particularly in Western and Central Europe, which created a class of industrial workers, and the success of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in articulating an ideology for this working class movement, "scientific Socialism", which they claimed, unlike earlier utopian versions, identified the forces underlying the development of society and therefore ensured the ultimate triumph of their ideas.[8]

From its inception, the Socialist movement was plagued by deep divisions. In constitutional states, a rift developed between the advocates of revolutionary change and those who sought to achieve their goals gradually, by parliamentary means. This issue was to split the movement during the First World War. The key question in this dispute was whether the capitalist system was capable of being reformed.

The tsarist empire was an autocracy, and even after the Revolution of 1905, Socialist activity of all types was savagely repressed. Here, the divisions within the Socialist movement were of a different type. They centred on a number of issues. One was tactical: Did one need a small tightly-knit party of conspirators to struggle against the tsarist regime, or should one favour mass agitation as a means of promoting change? The first form of organisation was favoured by Lenin and the Bolsheviks and, in a different way, by the Polish Socialist Józef Piłsudski until his break with Socialism in 1908. A party based on mass agitation was favoured by the Mensheviks and the majority of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS).[9]

A second source of division was the role of the peasantry in the revolution. In Western and Central Europe, the Socialist movement had been suspicious of peasants, who had been used to suppress the 1848 revolution and were the mainstay of conservatism in a number of countries.[10] However, in the Russian Empire, the impoverished and land-hungry peasantry, which had been emancipated only in 1861, was a potentially revolutionary force by the end of the 19th century. The Social Revolutionaries, the direct descendants of the *narodniki* of the 1860s and 1870s, saw themselves as the spokesmen for this radical anti-government force. The Mensheviks, who were the most western of the Russian Socialist groups, shared the western suspicion of the peasantry.[11] Lenin and the Bolsheviks, for their part, saw the peasantry as a force that could be instrumentalised. The peasants' revolutionary sentiments could be exploited,

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[8] On this, see Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge 1968); David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York 1978).

[9] Anna Żarnowska, *Geneza rozłamu w Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej 1904–1906* (Warsaw 1965); Robert Blobaum, *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904–1907* (Ithaca 1995).

[10] Lewis Namier, *1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals* (Oxford 1992).

[11] Leopold Haimson, *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries: Voices from the Menshevik Past* (Cambridge 1987); Israel Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Cambridge 1967).

but the revolution would remain under the control the small tightly-knit group of professional revolutionaries.[12]

A third issue dividing the various Socialist parties was the problem of the non-Russian nationalities within the tsarist realm, a problem that was becoming increasingly pressing. Lenin and the Bolsheviks saw this problem in instrumental terms as well – the national sentiments of different groups could be exploited, but their aim was world revolution.[13] The working class had no fatherland. With the advent of the Socialist millennium, nations would be abolished, although some form of national autonomy could be granted to groups with a common territory, language, economy, and culture.[14] The counterpart of the Bolsheviks in the Polish lands was the Social Democracy of the Congress Kingdom and Lithuania (SDKPiL), a title deliberately chosen by its founders to stress that the party did not seek support outside the tsarist empire. Its leaders, some of Jewish origin, such as Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Jogiches, others ethnically Polish, like Julian Marchlewski, argued that the different lands of the partitioned Commonwealth were now integrated into the economies of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia.[15] To seek Polish independence would hamper the revolutionary struggle. The SDKPiL should therefore ally itself with revolutionary Socialist groups in Russia, above all the Bolsheviks.[16] The SDKPiL was opposed by the PPS, which saw itself as a party of Poles throughout the old Commonwealth, although it was divided on how to achieve Socialism and Polish independence.

Socialist ideology had a strong appeal for Jews, both the growing Jewish artisan class and the smaller proletariat as well as the more radical sections of the Jewish intelligentsia. By 1898, there were nearly half a million Jewish artisans in the Pale, 194,000 employed in the textile industry and 58,000 in food production.[17] There were also about 50,000 Jews employed in medium- and large-scale factories.[18]

There were a number of reasons why the Socialist idea appealed to Jews. First, it seemed a way of breaking out of Jewish isolation and integrating into society as a whole. With this in mind, Jews had begun to involve themselves in the revolutionary movement in the 1860s. Jews were a significant minority in the Russian revolutionnary movement Narodnaya Volya (People's Will), particularly its later incarnations. Thus, in the 1880s, five out if its seven top leaders were Jewish (Abram Bath, Boris Orzhikh, Natan Bogoraz, Zakharii Kogan, Khaim Lev Shternberg). Between 1885 and 1890, they made up between one-fifth and one-third of the movement's membership in the south and southwest.[19] Other Jewish leftists, including Arkadii Kremer, Lidia Akselrod, Leon Jogiches, and Tsemakh Kopelson, joined the growing Social Democratic

[12] Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (New York 2002); Dmitri Volkogonov, *Lenin: A New Biography* (New York 2006).

[13] Robert Blobaum, *Feliks Dzierżyński and the SDKPiL: A Study of the Origins of Polish Communism* (Boulder, CO, 1984).

[14] Ibid.

[15] Namier, *1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals.*

[16] Blobaum, *Feliks Dzierżyński*.

[17] For these figures, see E. Mendelsohn, *Class Struggles in the Pale* (Cambridge 1970), Chapter 1; *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis naseleniia Rossiiskoi Imperii, 1897 god* (Moscow 1899–1905).

[18] Ibid.

[19] E. Haberer, *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth Century Russia* (Cambridge 1995), p. 46.

movement.[20] Socialism seemed a road to integration in the larger society at a time when the integration of the Jews no longer seemed to be an achievable goal under the existing political system in East-Central Europe. As Ezra Mendelsohn has written of conditions in the Pale of Settlement:

> intellectuals [who] were no longer able to identify with the old Jewish culture nor free to become assimilated into Russian life ... could at least identify with "the people", the peasant, or the proletariat.[21]

Many Jews were attracted to the Socialist idea consciously or unconsciously, because it represented a secularised version of the age-old Jewish longing for the messiah. Indeed, the messianic impulse, which was only one element in traditional Judaism, became in its new secular form the dominant passion that motivated many Jewish Socialists.[22] Many were also driven to the Socialist movement by the abject poverty of the Jewish proletariat.

Jews were to be found in all the major Socialist movements within the Russian Empire, the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries, the PPS, the SDKPiL. In addition, there was a specifically Jewish Socialist party, the General Jewish Workers' Alliance (usually called the Bund), which was founded in September 1897 in Vilnius. Because of the connecting railway line to both St. Petersburg and Warsaw, the presence of a teachers' institute that had replaced the rabbinical seminary in 1874, and the poverty of the artisan population, this city became a major centre of Socialist agitation. Throughout its history, the Bund had difficulty in finding the right balance between its general Socialist objectives and its specifically Jewish goals. It joined the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party shortly after its founding as an autonomous group. At its third conference, held in 1899, it rejected a resolution calling for national equality for the Jews on the grounds that emphasis on national differences would undermine the solidarity of the working class. At its fourth conference, in May 1901, it accepted a resolution that within the tsarist empire:

> the various nationalities should become a federation of nationalities with full national autonomy for each, regardless of the territory it occupies ... The concept of "nationality" should also apply to the Jewish people.[23]

The Bund's growing interest in national cultural autonomy, partly dictated by the disadvantage of its illegal status in conflicts with its rivals on the Jewish street led to clashes with the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, from which the Bund seceded in 1903.

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[20] For more information about the involvement of Jews in revolutionary activities, see E. Haberer, *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth Century Russia*; N.M. Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats: The Russian Revolutionary Movement under Alexander III* (Cambridge, MA, and London 1983), pp. 92-95 and 202-211; N. Levin, *While Messiah Tarried: Jewish Socialist Movements 1871-1917* (New York 1977); L. Schapiro, "The Role of the Jews in the Russian Revolutionary Movement", *Slavonic and East European Review*, 44 (1961), pp. 148-67.

[21] Mendelsohn, *Class Struggles*, p. 29.

[22] W. Herberg, "Socialism, Zionism and the Messianic Passion", *Midstream*, 2, 3 (Summer 1956), pp. 64–69, here p. 68.

[23] As quoted in J.S. Hertz, "The Bund's Nationality Program and Its Critics in the Russian, Polish and Austrian Socialist Movements", *YIVO Annual*, 14 (1969), p. 57.

Nonetheless, the Bund continued to stress its leftist credentials, giving priority to the revolutionary struggle over efforts to improve the immediate situation of Jewish workers. In 1905, during the height of revolutionary agitation, the Bund finally came out in favour of Jewish "national-cultural autonomy", with Yiddish as the language of education, and called for the recognition of the right of Jews to use Yiddish in public life.[24]
One movement, the Po'alei Tsiyon (Poalei Zion), attempted to combine Socialism with Jewish nationalism. Founded in 1900, it soon began to compete effectively with the Bund. Partly because of its use of national slogans that resounded on the Jewish street and partly because of its stress on the need to strive for practical goals rather than revolution, it attracted those sceptical of Bundist maximalism.[25]
Along with the development of these new ideologies, the emergence of Yiddish as a literary language and the development of modern Hebrew took place. Faced with the challenge of secularisation and the attraction of these new movements, Orthodox Jews (a term that only came into use at this time) also began to organise themselves politically. The first political party that attempted to defend the position of religiously observant Jews, the Mahzikei hadas (The Upholders of Faith), emerged in Galicia in the 1870s. It was followed by the emergence in the years before 1914 of similar groups in the Kingdom of Poland and the rest of the tsarist empire.

Between the World Wars

The First World War fundamentally transformed the situation of Jews in Eastern Europe. It led to revolution and civil war in the tsarist empire and the ultimate triumph of the Bolsheviks. In Soviet Russia and, after 1922, the Soviet Union, a revolutionary Socialist regime attempted to "solve" the Jewish problem, by fostering both a radical form of integration and, at least in the 1920s, the emergence of a specifically Socialist form of Jewish cultural life. The Jews, according to Bolshevik theory, were not a nation. A nation, wrote Stalin in his famous study *Marxism and the national question*, should have four characteristics: a common territory, a common language, a common economic system, and a common culture.[26] As Stalin himself put it, "The demand of national autonomy for Russian Jews is something of a curiosity – proposing autonomy for a people without a future and whose very existence has still to be proved."[27]

[24] On the Bund, see H. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia from Its Origins to 1905* (Stanford, CA, 1972); Mendelssohn, *Class Struggle; Y. Peled, Class and Ethnicity in the Pale. The Political Economy of Jewish Workers' Nationalism in late Imperial Russia* (London 1989); J. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews and the Politics of Nationality: The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia* (Madison, WI, 2004).

[25] On Po'alei tsiyon (Poalei Zion), see B. Borochov, *Nationalism and the Class Struggle: A Marxian Approach to the Jewish Problem* (Westport, CT, 1937, reprinted 1972); M. Mintz, "Ber Borokhov", *Studies in Zionism*, 5 (April 1982), pp. 33-53; Zvi Yitzhak Abramovitch, "The Poale Zion Movement in Russia, its History and Development", in H.F. Infield, ed., *Essays in Jewish Sociology Labour and Co-operation, In Memory of Dr. Noah Barou 1889-1955* (London and New York 1961), pp. 63-72.

[26] Benjamin Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (Cambridge 1988), p. 50. Stalin's study was first published in 1913 in the journal *Prosveshchenie*.

[27] Ibid.

Clearly, the long-term fate of the Jews was to be integrated into the nations among whom they lived and ultimately, especially during the Stalinist period, into the emerging Soviet nation. The Bolsheviks clearly recognised that the Jews possessed some proto-national characteristics. Therefore, in order to facilitate their integration into the new Socialist world, a specific Socialist Jewish identity, expressed through a secularised version of Yiddish, could be tolerated for a period. Some Jews, and even some senior Bolsheviks, such as Mikhail Kalinin, thought this could become permanent.[28] After Stalin's "second revolution", however, most aspects of this cultural autonomy were done away with.

Integration was fostered by the unequivocal condemnation and persecution of antisemitism and by the abolition of all tsarist restrictions on Jews. Intermarriage, which had been rare before 1917 and had usually required conversion, now became much more frequent.[29] The economic restructuring of the Jewish population, one of the principal goals of Soviet policy, proceeded relatively slowly in the 1920s, but was accelerated by the industrialisation drive of the 1930s. These developments transformed the economic and social situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union. In the words of Benjamin Pinkus:

> To sum up, the economic situation of the Jews at the end of the 1930s was considerably better than in the 1920s. They occupied influential positions both in the economy and in institutions of higher learning, research, art and culture, that is to say, in the socio-economic elite of the Soviet Union. The level of education among the Jews, with 72 percent literacy, already the highest among the Soviet nationalities in 1929 (apart from the Latvians who constituted a small minority in the Soviet Union), had risen still further by 1939. The proportion of the working population, which included women – a sign of modernization – rose among the Jews from about 40 percent in 1926 to 47 percent in 1939. The social structure we have outlined, with a stratum of 40 percent of functionaries and intelligentsia and a high percentage of Jewish students, is proof that by the end of the 1930s the Jewish population had become an advanced modern society.[30]

The situation was different in the states that emerged after the collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and German empires. In the Polish and Lithuanian nation-states the divisions within Jewish political life were perpetuated. The peacemakers at Versailles were determined to safeguard the rights of the national minorities in these states, and these guarantees were not only inserted into the respective Polish and Lithuanian constitutions, but were guaranteed by the allied and associated powers in the peace settlement. Versailles also gave international sanction to the November 1917 Balfour Declaration, which stated London's support for a "National Home for the Jewish people"; the League of Nations, another product of the peace talks, adopted a mandate for the British administration of Palestine that reflected the declaration's content. The Jewish delegations at Versailles had been an uneasy mix of old-style integrationists, such as Lucien Wolf and Louis Marshall, and proponents of the new politics. But the final settlement

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[28] Ibid., pp. 49–75.
[29] Ibid., pp. 89–97.
[30] Ibid., pp. 98.

seemed to fulfil the dreams of those who thought in terms of Jews as a people, both in underpinning Zionist aspirations and in establishing conditions for the creation of a system of non-territorial national autonomy in Eastern Europe.

Striving for Autonomy in Lithuania

The autonomists pinned their highest hopes for the creation of such a system on Lithuania. According to Leo Motzkin, who represented the Zionist Organisation at the Second Jewish National Assembly in Lithuania in Kaunas on 14 February 1922, "Fifteen million Jews are watching your experiment in the struggle for national rights".[31] In response, Dr. Max Soloveitchik, minister for Jewish affairs in the Lithuanian government, declared: "Lithuania is the source from which will flow ideas that will form the basis for new forms of Jewish life."[32]

Lithuanian Jewry – with its very specific character, derived from the regional strength of the Jewish Enlightenment (haskalah) and Zionism, the lack of acculturation, and the vigour of Misnagdic and Musar traditions – seemed the ideal vehicle for the establishment of a system of Jewish autonomy. This seemed to be in the interests both of Jews and Lithuanians. The two groups had cooperated before the war in elections to the Duma, and Lithuanians had hoped that Jews would support their claims to Vil'na (Vilnius). There seemed to be no fundamental economic conflict between the emerging Lithuanian intelligentsia and the Jews. Lithuanian nationalists were more comfortable with specifically Jewish cultural manifestations than with Jewish acculturation to Russian, Polish, or German culture. Given the mixed character of the area, Jewish national autonomy would also make the state more attractive to Belarusians and Germans who might be incorporated into it.[33]

By the mid-1920s, it was clear that the system, which had been launched with such high hopes, was collapsing. In May 1926, a new, leftist government came to power and made important concessions to national minorities. This and the general dissatisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system led to a coup led by right-wing nationalist Antanas Smetona in December 1926. The political system in Lithuania became increasingly autocratic and no longer had any place for Jewish, or any other kind of autonomy, although the highly developed Jewish systems of private schools and cooperative banks survived.

The reasons for the collapse of the autonomous experiment in Lithuania are clear. The two sides had unrealistic expectations of each other. Lithuanians believed that Jews would aid them in acquiring Vilnius and Memel and in attracting Belarusians to a multinational Lithuania. They had much less need of Jews in the fairly homogeneous Lithuania that actually emerged, while it soon became clear that Jewish support would not be a significant factor in acquiring Vilnius. For their part, the Jews took far too seriously

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[31] "Proceedings of the Second Congress on the Jewish Communities and the Jewish National Assembly. Stenographic Reports", *Yidishe shtime* (February 1922), quoted in Samuel Gringauz, "Jewish National Autonomy in Lithuania (1918–1925)", *Jewish Social Studies*, 14, 3 (July 1952), pp. 225–246. See also Sarunas Liekis, "Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania", *Brandeis University, Ph.D. Thesis*, 1997; idem, *A State within a State? Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania 1918–1925* (Vilnius 2003).

[32] Gringauz, "Jewish National Autonomy in Lithuania".

[33] Cf. ibid.; Liekis, "Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania"; in idem, *A State within a State.*

assurances made by the leading Lithuanian politicians whose commitment to Jewish autonomy was always dependent on their larger goals. Other reasons for the failure of the experiment were that it fell prey to conflicts between the Lithuanian parties, and that the degree of consensus necessary for the experiment's success was absent within the Jewish community. It may also be that there is an inherent contradiction between the basic principles of the liberal state and guarantees of special collective rights.[34]

Trench Warfare in Poland

The attempt to establish Jewish autonomy in Lithuania explains some of the otherwise puzzling features of interwar Jewish politics in Poland and illustrates some of what one might describe as the "discontent" with the new Jewish politics. The bitter dispute between the Zionists from the former Austrian lands, led by Leon Reich, and those from the area formerly ruled by Russia, led by Yitzhak Gruenbaum, has to be understood in the context of what seemed like the successful achievement of Jewish national autonomy in Lithuania. Gruenbaum, coming from an area where ethnic antagonisms had become quite pronounced, stressed the need for a vigorous and uncompromising defence of Jewish national rights, especially because they had been guaranteed by the Polish Minority Treaty and Poland's Constitution.[35] Jews, in his view, would find a reasonable place for themselves only when Poland had been transformed from a nation-state into one of nationalities, where the various ethnic groups enjoyed a wide measure of autonomy.[36]

This view of the Polish situation lay behind Gruenbaum's advocacy of a united front of the minorities – Jews, Germans, Ukrainians, and Belarusians – which led to the establishment of the Bloc of National Minorities in the November 1922 elections. This policy could only have been pursued by someone who had unrealistic goals and no practical experience in politics: It bitterly antagonised Poles, already hostile to the Jews because of their support for Lithuanian claims to Vilna and their neutrality in the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in eastern Galicia. Moreover, the Jews' objectives were quite different from those of the other minorities with whom they sought an alliance. While the Jews wanted only the implementation of rights that they had been guaranteed, the Germans were openly revisionist, and the Slavic minorities wanted at least territorial autonomy, at most secession.

Reich, a native of Galicia, where the Austrian constitutional regime had somewhat softened ethnic tensions, rejected Gruenbaum's maximalism and favoured a direct approach to the Polish authorities. This resulted in a May 1925 agreement with Prime Minister Władysław Grabski, by which the Jewish side pledged allegiance to the Polish state in return for the alleviation of their principal grievances. This soon collapsed amid a welter of accusations and counter-accusations of bad faith by the parties involved: Foreign Minister Aleksander Skrzyński and the Jewish Parliamentary Club. Yet after the May 1926 coup returned Józef Piłsudski to power, Reich and his associates, who

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[34] Liekis discusses these issues comprehensively in ibid.

[35] On this see Itzhak Grunbaum, *Milhamot hayehudim bepolin* (Jerusalem 1946); Shlomo Netzer, *Maavak yehudei Polin al zekhuyotehem le-ezrahiyut vehalumiyut (1918–1922)* (Tel Aviv 1980).

[36] Ibid.

dominated the Jewish Parliamentary Club, still hoped to establish lines of communication with the government. They were generally satisfied with the government's behaviour in the 1920s and, although uneasy about the impact of the economic crisis, still regarded the government as far better than the alternatives, whether to the right or the left.[37] They felt particularly justified in this view by the actions of the government in August 1929, when the National Democrats attempted to exploit the allegedly Jewish profanation of a Corpus Christi procession in Lwów (L'viv) to launch a campaign of anti-Jewish disturbances. Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski, who later gained notoriety by urging an anti-Jewish economic boycott in April 1936, acted firmly and swiftly to restore order and stop the attacks on the Jews.

The main Orthodox political organisation, Agudas Yisroel, in accordance with its understanding of the talmudic principle of "the law of the state is law" (dina de malkhuta dina) had quickly established friendly relations with the Piłsudski regime after May 1926.[38] It had been rewarded by a decree in 1927 extending and reorganising the autonomous Jewish communities (kehilot), which were now granted wide powers in religious matters, including the maintenance of rabbis, synagogues, baths (mikva'ot), religious schools, and ritual slaughter (shekhitah). Some welfare for poor members of the community was also to be provided. Agudas Yisroel, in return, supported the government in the elections of March 1928 and November 1930. In 1928, one of its leaders, Eliasz Kirszbraun, was even elected on the list of the Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government.

All these groups found their political positions drastically undermined by the increasingly antisemitic stance of the government and the other national minorities, particularly the Germans and Ukrainians, after 1935. Gruenbaum moved to Palestine in 1929. For his followers, the idea of transforming Poland into a state of nationalities was now a pipedream. The attempt by Reich (who died in 1929) to find a modus vivendi with the Polish authorities that would reconcile Polish national interests and Jewish group rights had also clearly failed. In addition, the hope of large-scale emigration to the Middle East was now a chimera, which also undermined the position of the more moderate Zionist groupings. The position of Agudas Yisroel was also crumbling. It had continued to regard the government as sympathetic in the early 1930s. Thus, it came as a particularly cruel blow, when, in April 1936, the government introduced a law effectively banning ritual slaughter. The move was justified on hygienic and humanitarian grounds, but it was clear to all that its main objectives were to make life difficult for Jews and to ruin those Jewish slaughterers who also sold meat to Christians.[39]

In these circumstances, the Bund came to occupy the centre of Jewish politics in Poland. Its links with the PPS seemed to tie it to a group that had a real chance of taking

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[37] On this, see Antony Polonsky, "A Failed Pogrom: The Demonstrations following the Corpus Christi Procession in Lwów in June 1929", in Ezra Mendelsohn, et al., eds., *Jews in Interwar Poland* (Armidale 1990), pp. 109–125,.

[38] On Agudas Yisroel, see Ezra Mendelsohn, "The Politics of Agudas Israel in Inter-War Poland", *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 2 (1972), pp. 47–60; G. Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition. Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916–1939* (Jerusalem 1996).

[39] The issue of shekhita has given rise to a vast literature which is well reviewed in Emanuel Meltzer, *Maavak medini be-malkodet, Yehudey Polin 1935–1939* (Tel Aviv 1982), pp. 97–110. This appeared in English as idem, *No Way Out. The Politics of Polish Jewry 1935–1939* (Cincinnati 1997).

power and was more sympathetic to Jewish aspirations than most political movements in Poland. This situation also explains the support for radical Zionist groups, above all the Revisionists, and for radical leftist movements, primarily the Communists. These are all examples of the politics of desperation. The politics of the possible had been abjured because it did not exist. Under pressure from the persistence of the economic crisis and antisemites emboldened by observing the Nazis' success in disenfranchising and expropriating one of the best-integrated, prosperous Jewish communities in Europe, the government decided to adopt a policy of encouraging the emigration of a large part of Polish Jewry. Just how desperate the situation was is illustrated in the comment of Jerzy Tomaszewski, a cautious historian of the period. After pointing out that mass emigration was not at this time a feasible possibility for dealing with the "Jewish question", he comes to the following conclusion:

> A lasting solution for the social and economic problems of the Jews thus had to be sought in Poland, in close association with the whole range of problems faced by the country. It is difficult today to reach a conclusion concerning the chances of finding such a solution, because the outbreak of the war led to a break in the normal evolution of the country. If one takes into account the situation that prevailed at the end of the 1930s, the prospects for lasting solutions must seem doubtful.[40]

One cannot say whether Tomaszewski's judgement, which echoed Jabotinsky's view in the 1930s that the Jews had no future in Poland, or anywhere else in Eastern Europe, is correct. Earlier dire predictions of a "Polish-Jewish war", frequently uttered on the eve of 1914, had proved misplaced (an even earlier "Polish-Jewish war" in 1859 had in fact been followed by a Polish-Jewish rapprochement that preceded the Uprising of 1863). Under German occupation during the First World War, Polish-Jewish tensions had abated. On the eve of the Nazi occupation, Polish-Jewish relations were certainly envenomed. But it is only from hindsight that we know that the bulk of Polish Jewry was doomed in 1939. It could equally be argued that the bark of Polish antisemitism was rather worse than its bite, and that had the Polish regime returned to some form of liberal democracy, as seemed possible in 1938-1939, a new Polish-Jewish modus vivendi would again been possible.

After the Shoah

More than 90 percent of Polish Jewry perished in the Holocaust. Only in the Baltic states was the percentage of Jewish casualties higher.[41] The 5 million Jews of the Soviet Union as of June 1941 can be divided into the 2 million incorporated into the country in 1939-40, and the 3 million who were there before the war. Of the 2 million Jews acquired in the annexation of eastern Poland, the Baltics, and parts of Romania,

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[40] Jerzy Tomaszewski, "Niepodległa Rzeczpospolita", in Jerzy Tomaszewski, ed*., Najnowsze Dzieje Żydów w Polsce* (Warsaw 1993), p. 215.

[41] Józef Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej Ludową", in Jerzy Tomaszewski, ed., *Najnowsze Dzieje Żydów w Polsce* (Warsaw 1993), p. 379; Christoph Dieckmann and Saulius Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941* (Vilnius 2006).

1.5 million were killed, with the rest being deported or fleeing into the Soviet interior. Of the 3 million original Jewish inhabitants, 1 million were killed.[42]

The war affected the various political orientations of Polish Jewry in different ways. The Orthodox had the greatest difficulty in recovering from the trauma of the war. They figured disproportionately among those murdered since they were for the most part unacculturated and easily identifiable. Many found the tragic fate of the Jews difficult to reconcile with their belief in the benevolent God of Israel, although they subsequently overcame this crisis of faith and successfully rebuilt their communities, particularly in Israel and North America. The postwar Polish regime was most unsympathetic to their concerns, while most Orthodox survivors, after their experience with Soviet rule, were eager to flee Soviet-style Socialisms as soon as possible.

The groups that did recover on Polish soil were the integrationists, the Zionists, the Bundists, the Communists, and, in smaller numbers, the Social Democrats. In the immediate postwar period, the relationship between these different groups was somewhat complex. The Communists and the Bund found themselves in a bitter conflict for control of the Jewish street. At the same time, the Polish Workers' Party was also willing to work together with the Zionists to facilitate Jewish emigration, much to the annoyance of the Bund. Indeed, at this time, Soviet policy, which was already clamping down on the manifestations of Jewish identity that had been permitted between 1941 and 1945, also favoured the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, partly because this would weaken the British, and partly because Moscow hoped that this state would adopt a pro-Soviet foreign policy.

Among the integrationists, those who saw themselves as Poles, whether they emphasised or, as was often the case, rejected their Jewish origins, the same divisions can be observed as in Polish society as a whole, with some individuals welcoming the political transformations that followed the war and others totally rejecting Communism. Both Julian Tuwim and Antoni Słonimski, who spent the war abroad and had previously shown little sympathy for Communism, now saw little alternative to it in Poland.[43] Writers of Jewish origin were also prominent in the Forge (Kuźnica), a group of writers who hoped to restructure Polish cultural life under the new political conditions, by drawing on the traditions of the Polish Enlightenment and avoiding as much as possible the extreme versions of Marxism and Socialist Realism. Among the principal Jewish members of the Kuźnica group were the literary critic Jan Kott, Adam Ważyk, Kazimierz Brandys, Paweł Hertz, Seweryn Pollak, Mieczysław Jastruń, and Adolf Rudnicki. The most significant figure in the group was probably Adam Ważyk (1905-1982). For close to ten years, to use the words of the critic Artur Sandauer:

> [Ważyk] was the official artistic authority. He wrote dramas that were immediately produced and inevitably failed; film scripts that were immediately shot and met a similar fate; he excoriated [Cyprian] Norwid for his petty-

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[42] For these figures, see Yitzhak Arad, "The Destruction of the Jews in German-occupied Territories of the Soviet Union", in Joshua Rubinstein, Ilya Altman, eds., *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-occupied Soviet Territories* (Bloomington 2008), pp. XIII–XVII.

[43] On this see Marci Shore, "The Spring that Passed: The Pikador Poets' Return to Jewishness", *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry 22, Social and Cultural Boundaries in Pre-Modern Poland,* forthcoming November 2009.

> noble ideology and the producers of Coca-Cola for serving atomic death. He delivered a programmatic lecture at the Fifth Conference of the Association of Polish Writers and carried over Stalin's linguistic theses to the methodology of literary studies.[44]

Although he later repented for his Stalinist past and made an important contribution to the thaw in Poland before 1956, many in the Stalinist period saw him as the official face of Communist culture.

It is clear that, like the history of Poland itself, the history of Polish Jewry took yet another radical turn with the Communist seizure of power. The central fact in the history of the Jews in postwar Poland is that the disputes between the aforementioned groups were not resolved by the normal give and take of the democratic process. By early 1947, a monopoly of power in the hands of the Polish Workers' Party had been established and was consolidated by its subsequent absorption of the PPS. The authorities now proceeded, under the close supervision of the Kremlin, to impose its own "solution" of the "Jewish question", which involved the suppression of all groups not under direct Communist control.

At the same time, from 1944 on, there ensued several waves of emigration on the part of those whose memories of the war made it difficult to live on Polish soil, those who feared anti-Jewish violence or were unwilling to live under a Communist government. The first such wave intensified after the Kielce pogrom, to be followed by a second wave in 1956–1958, and a third after 1968. At its height, the postwar Polish-Jewish community numbered perhaps 300,000. Although fear of the future and anti-Jewish violence pervaded this community, so did hopes for a brighter future. For many, like the majority of the Polish population, it was hoped that this future could be achieved in Poland. Events were to decide otherwise. Today, nearly 20 years after the end of Communism and considerable and admirable effort to revive Jewish life in Poland, there are perhaps 5,000 Jews in the various Jewish communal organisations and maybe another 25,000 linked in some way with Jewish life.

It is tempting to speculate how different the postwar history of Poland would have been had a sizeable Jewish community – and a community of 300,000 is such a community – remained. The failure to create a viable postwar community was the result of a number of factors: the difficulty of living in the cemetery where the Nazis had murdered the overwhelming majority of the prewar community, the persistence of antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence, and the character of the postwar Communist regime, which was clearly distasteful to the majority of Jewish survivors. It may be that this failure was inevitable, given all the difficulties the community faced. Nevertheless, it makes a sad epilogue to the tragic Jewish fate during the war and constitutes a posthumous victory for Hitler.

In the Soviet Union, the war years were very complex: On the one hand, the Jews were very aware of the popular hostility felt towards them and the sympathy among large parts of the population for what the Nazis were doing to the Jews.[45] On the other hand, Stalin's need to mobilise whatever support he could for the Soviet war effort led

[44] Artur Sandauer, *O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku (Rzecz, ktorà nie ja powinienem był napisać)* (Warsaw 1982), p. 50.

[45] See Rubinstein, Altman, *The Unknown Black Book.*

to the relaxation of policies that constrained Jewish life and saw the emergence of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. The postwar years were much more difficult. Stalin persecuted Soviet Yiddish authors and had many of them executed. Only Stalin's death may have prevented the mass deportations of Jews to the Jewish autonomous oblast (Birobidzhan) or somewhere else in the far east. The worst features of Stalin's Jewish policies were mitigated under successors, but there was no return to the cultural flourishing of the 1920s. Anti-Zionism became a staple feature of Soviet ideology. Jews increasingly felt that they were second-class citizens as a result of the vicious attacks on Israel that accompanied the Six-Day War (1967). This was what led to the movement among Soviet Jews to emigrate. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union nearly 1.5 million Jews have left the Soviet successor states.[46] At the same time, the end of Communism has seen a rebirth of Jewish life in Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, the Baltic states, and Belarus.

Outlook

The end of Communism has led to a revival of interest in the Jewish past both among Jews and non-Jews in the east and in the wider scholarly community. It has also led to a series of debates between Poles and Jews, Poles and Lithuanians, Jews and Ukrainians, and even Jews and Russians on the controversial aspects of this past. This is part of a general process of coming to terms with many neglected and taboo aspects of the history of the region. It has only really begun since the end of the Communism. For too long, relations between Jews and their neighbours in this area and Jewish topics have been the subject of much mythologising. The first stage of approaching such issues has to be from a moral point of view, a settling of long-overdue accounts. The wider implications for all of the countries of Europe, particularly for those in the northeast of the continent, are what make the debate over Polish responsibility for the massacre of the Jews of Jedwabne in July 1941 so significant.[47]

Because of the profound and serious character of this debate, one can hope that in the case of Polish-Jewish relations we are now starting to enter a second stage, where apologies and apologetics will increasingly be replaced by careful and detailed research and reliable and nuanced first-hand testimony. This second stage is also beginning in Ukraine and Lithuania. It should be possible to move beyond strongly-held, competing and incompatible narratives of the past and reach some consensus that will be acceptable to all people of good will and will bring about a degree of normalisation in our understanding of the history of the Jews in Eastern Europe. Some have questioned whether normalisation is a desirable or realisable goal. The past is too close and too painful for that. Perhaps our aim should be to strive for a "tragic acceptance" of those events that have united and, so often, divided the peoples of Eastern Europe in the past century. That, at least, is owed to the millions of victims of the totalitarian systems of the last century.

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[46] See the table on page 200 in Bernard Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe since 1945* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

[47] See on this, the contribution by Katrin Steffen in this volume, pp. 199–217.