

# Jewish-Byelorussian Solidarity in World War II Minsk

In his book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*,<sup>1</sup> Jan T. Gross tells the story of what happened after the Germans took power in the half Jewish, half ethnically Polish town of Jedwabne, Poland. The occupying Germans indicated to the Polish mayor of the town that he and his supporters could do what they liked with the Jews. The mayor then coordinated a massacre in which gangs of Poles killed virtually the entire Jewish population. Gross's book raised a furor in Poland and elsewhere because it showed the extent of local collaboration with Nazi anti-Semitism. But it also underlined what was already taken to be a central message of the Holocaust: the Jews had few if any reliable allies. During the German occupation others assisted the Germans, or at least stood by, while the Jews were annihilated.

In many parts of occupied eastern Europe this was in fact what happened. The major Jewish underground movements, in the ghettos of Warsaw, Bialystok, Vilna, and Kovno, were able to find few allies outside the ghettos. There were individual non-Jews who risked their lives either helping individual Jews to escape or assisting the Jewish underground movements, and there were small organizations that tried to help. But there was no substantial, organized solidarity from outside the ghettos either in Poland or in Lithuania. In Poland, the Council for Aid to Jews, more commonly known by its acronym, Żegota, saved the lives of thousands of Jews. Żegota consisted of a small number of highly placed underground members who were determined to do what they

could to aid Polish Jews; unfortunately such concerns were not widely felt in the Polish underground as a whole. It is unlikely that the Nazi massacres of Jews could have been prevented by internal efforts. Most of the Jews of eastern Europe were killed during 1942, when the Germans were at the height of their power, and when they were engaged in killing not only Jews but also Poles, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, and others. But if non-Jewish organizations with substantial influence and resources had done what they could to help the Jews, more Jews would have escaped and survived, and hopeful views of the human capacity for courage and generosity of spirit might have survived the war more nearly intact.

The German army occupied Jedwabne en route to the original territories of the Soviet Union (which were outside the western area occupied by the Soviets since September 1, 1939, under the Hitler-Stalin pact). Less than a week later, on June 27, 1941, the Germans reached Minsk, the capital of the Soviet Republic of Byelorussia. The Communist government fled to the east, along with the Red Army. First, German planes bombed the city; then the German army arrived and took control, as it had elsewhere to the west. The Germans were, if anything, less restrained in their violence toward Jews in eastern Byelorussia and Ukraine than in the western areas whose populations had not willingly joined the Soviet Union. In the area that had been the Soviet Republic of Byelorussia (that is, the eastern part of what is now the Republic of Belarus), the Germans rounded up Jews and shot them or drove them into ghettos, which they soon destroyed, along with their inhabitants. In many cases these massacres were conducted in plain sight of local inhabitants. West of the occupied Soviet territories the Germans had gone to some lengths to conceal their massacres of the Jews from non-Jewish local inhabitants. In Byelorussia, the Germans proceeded as if unconcerned about the reactions of local inhabitants, or assuming their support for attacks on the Jews.

If the Germans assumed unanimous local support, they turned out to have been wrong, at least in the case of Minsk. A powerful resistance movement emerged. In the ghetto and also outside it, in the area that both Jews and non-Jews called "the city," secret opposition groups formed, made up of rank-and-file Communists (who, unlike the Communist leaders, had remained in Minsk) and others whom the Communists trusted; these groups came together in a united underground movement that included both Byelorussians and Jews. With the help of this united underground movement, and also of many Byelorussians who were not members of the underground, thousands of Jews fled the ghetto

and joined partisan units in the surrounding forests. No one knows for sure how many Jews from the Minsk ghetto survived to join partisan units, but they certainly numbered in the thousands, and some estimate as many as 10,000, from a ghetto whose population was approximately 100,000 at its height. Nowhere else in occupied eastern Europe were such large numbers of Jews able to flee the ghettos and engage in resistance. What made this possible in Minsk was the alliance of Jews with non-Jews outside the ghetto.<sup>2</sup>

My account of resistance in the Minsk ghetto is based on more than fifty interviews with ghetto survivors and on a slightly larger number of written memoirs, most of which are by ghetto survivors, including members of the ghetto underground, with a smaller number by members of the Byelorussian underground outside the ghetto. These accounts, written and oral, show that there was widespread resistance in the Minsk ghetto, and that it took a different form than the much better-known resistance movements in Polish and Lithuanian ghettos such as Warsaw and Vilna. In these ghettos, as in others in Poland and Lithuania, Jewish underground movements attempted to mobilize revolts within the ghetto walls. Such efforts were successful only in the Warsaw ghetto, where a revolt of great magnitude took place. Elsewhere, however, underground movements were unable to mobilize such revolts, because it was clear that the revolts would be defeated. But given the absence of allies outside these ghettos, it was difficult to find an alternative to internal revolts. In the Minsk ghetto, by contrast, there was no effort to mobilize an internal revolt. Instead, the main aim of the underground movement was to send as many Jews to the forest as possible to join the growing Soviet-aligned partisan movement. Flight to the partisans also became the aim of large numbers of ghetto Jews who did not belong to the underground; in effect, it became the major strategy of resistance of the ghetto as a whole.

A number of factors promoted efforts to escape the ghetto and made escape more feasible in Minsk than in many of the major ghettos to the west. First, in Minsk the Germans began killing Jews in the ghetto and also driving them out of the ghetto by the thousands to their deaths soon after they had established the ghetto. In many of the ghettos in Poland and Lithuania the Germans also conducted massacres at the same time, but here they were often more successful in leading surviving ghetto inhabitants to believe that those who had been taken out of the ghettos had been transported to work elsewhere. In the Minsk ghetto, everyone knew that the thousands driven out of the ghetto were being taken to their

deaths. These massacres, which the Jews called pogroms, made it clear that remaining in the ghetto meant death.

The Minsk ghetto was also easier to escape than many others. On July 19, 1941, a few weeks after having arrived in Minsk, the Germans announced that all Jews would be required to move into the old Jewish neighborhood, an area of about twenty blocks cross-cut by several major streets but otherwise laced with winding alleys. This was the area where Jews had traditionally lived in Minsk, but by the time of the war many Jews lived elsewhere in the city. In their order establishing the ghetto, the Germans announced that a brick wall was to be built around it.<sup>3</sup> Instead they constructed a barbed-wire fence around the rim of the ghetto, and they assigned patrols, rather than fixed sentries, to guard the fence. This relatively lax security probably reflected strained resources: the German administration also oversaw many prisoner-of-war camps in Minsk. In the first days of January 1942, the Germans put down an attempted uprising on the part of prisoners of war in Minsk. As the prisoners of war were former soldiers, and so had military experience, they no doubt seemed a greater threat to the Germans than the ghetto population. The Germans may have been somewhat lax about securing the ghetto because they did not expect resistance there.<sup>4</sup>

In comparison to some other ghettos, the Minsk ghetto was porous. It was very dangerous, but nevertheless possible, to crawl under the barbed-wire fence at a moment when there was no patrol in sight. Many Jews were captured doing this, and killed. The Germans supplied virtually no food for ghetto inhabitants; those who worked for the Germans outside the ghetto received small amounts of food at their workplaces. Many Jews, especially children and teenagers, regularly left the ghetto to obtain food for their families. Jews who decided to flee the ghetto could crawl under the fence at an opportune moment or leave with a column of Jews being taken out of the ghetto to work, and then escape from the column. Jews were required to wear yellow patches on their outer clothes; those going in and out of the ghetto illegally had to find ways of attaching these so that they could be taken off and put back on quickly.

Another factor that made it possible for Jews to flee the Minsk ghetto was the proximity of the forest and of partisan units located in it. The roads out of Minsk led through forests dotted with small peasant villages. Within kilometers of Minsk, one encountered the dense, forbidding terrain of thick, overgrown trees and bushes that the Byelorussians call "pushcha." These thickets served as protection for the bands of young men, most of whom were former Red Army soldiers, that took to the

forests in the first months of the occupation to hide from the Germans, and began to engage in resistance. The Byelorussian pushcha was a much better environment for escape and resistance than, for instance, the forest around Ponar, the area near Vilna where the Germans took Jews to be killed. Many Jews tried to run away from Ponar, but few succeeded. The forest was sparse and unforgiving. With trees widely spaced and with little underbrush between them, the Germans could see for considerable distances and shoot those attempting to escape with little difficulty. Byelorussia became the center of partisan resistance not only due to the extent of Byelorussian hostility to the Germans, but also because the dense, extensive forests created an ideal staging area for partisan resistance and acted as a magnet for Soviet-aligned partisan groups from throughout the region.

Soon after the ghetto was established, rumors that there were partisan units in the forests began to circulate in the ghetto. By the summer of 1942 Byelorussia had become the center of the growing Soviet-aligned partisan movement, and increasing numbers of units based themselves in the forests around Minsk.<sup>5</sup> For Jews in the ghetto, joining the partisans offered hope of resisting the Germans and perhaps surviving the war. But gaining access to these units was very difficult. They moved frequently, making it difficult to establish and maintain contact; most units would accept only volunteers who brought weapons, and few Jews had weapons to take with them to the forest. The ghetto underground managed to establish contact with a few partisan units, but most contacts were made through the Byelorussian underground, whose members had greater ability to move through the countryside, and thus were able to contact many more partisan units.

The barbed-wire fence that surrounded the Minsk ghetto, and the presence of partisan units in the nearby forests, created preconditions for escape. But these could not have been realized on anything like the scale that they were without sustained, organized cooperation between Jews in the ghetto and Byelorussians outside it. As soon as the ghetto was established, Communists and others, mostly trusted friends of Communists, began forming secret groups in the ghetto to discuss means of resistance. Meanwhile, Byelorussian Communists and others outside the ghetto were forming similar groups. (The term “Byelorussian” here includes not only ethnic Byelorussians but Byelorussian citizens of all “nationalities” or ethnic backgrounds. The term was also used, at the time of the war, to refer to all those of Slavic/Christian background—that is, excluding Jews, Tatars, and Roma.) In late November or December

1941, a citywide underground organization was established; the ghetto underground was a component of it and was represented on the City Committee, which governed the underground as a whole.

When the City Committee was first formed, the full name given to it was the Second (or Auxiliary) City Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party. The reason for this awkward title was the uncertain status of the underground as a Communist organization. It was widely assumed among the rank-and-file Communists who remained in Minsk that the Communist leaders must have left a committee behind charged with organizing resistance, and that this committee would eventually contact them. The rank-and-file Communists who formed secret groups in the first weeks and months of the occupation were in many cases reluctant to take the step of formally creating an underground organization, for fear of stepping on the toes of the legitimate, authorized underground committee, and thus behaving a way that could be regarded by the Soviet authorities after the war as insubordinate. In the ghetto, some “westerners” among the secret groups (Jews, mostly Communists, from outside the Soviet Union, who had fled to Minsk and were trapped there) laughed at these concerns and argued that the best way to locate the First Committee would be to form an underground organization. Since the legitimate underground committee did not appear, and the need to organize resistance was pressing, an underground organization was formed with the term “Second” tacked onto its name to indicate its deference to the First Committee. The First Committee was never found, because it did not exist. Gradually the terms “Second” and “Auxiliary” passed out of use, and members of the underground came to regard their organization as the legitimate underground, the Minsk branch of what they hoped would become a wider Communist resistance in occupied Byelorussia. It later turned out that the Byelorussian Communists had been right to worry about the consequences of acting without approval from the leaders of the Communist Party.

There was no debate among those who formed the underground about uniting Jews and non-Jews; it was taken for granted that the different national groups that made up the Byelorussian population would be subsumed within the framework of a Communist-led resistance movement. Because conditions in the ghetto were very different from those outside it, with ghetto inhabitants forbidden from leaving the ghetto, and massacres taking place frequently, and because it was extremely dangerous to cross what was called “the border” between the ghetto and the city, the Jewish and Byelorussian underground organizations functioned

separately to a considerable extent. Nevertheless, liaisons were frequently sent in both directions. Some members of the ghetto underground were assigned to leave the ghetto regularly to remain in contact with the city organization, and some members of the city organization visited the ghetto frequently. The ghetto and city underground organizations worked closely together to send large numbers of Jews to the partisans. Some groups of Jews were sent from the ghetto to the forest; some Jews were included in groups leaving from the city.<sup>6</sup>

It became known throughout the ghetto that an underground organization was sending Jews to the forest, partly because the Germans fulminated in public against the underground and its connections with the partisans. Many Jews would have liked to have joined the underground or to have been included in the groups it was sending to the forest, but had no way of finding it. Inspired by the example set by the underground, many Jews set off for the forest without its help, usually in groups, though sometimes alone. Over time the numbers of those leaving the ghetto without help from the underground increased. Fleeing the ghetto was dangerous, but remaining in it was even more so. Ghetto survivors estimated that of those who left without underground guides or instructions from the underground, two out of three were killed along the way, due to German patrols and the willingness of some Byelorussians to turn Jews in. Some died wandering in the forests, looking for partisan units. Some were killed when they reached the partisans. Especially in the early months of the war, some partisan groups were likely to rob and kill those who approached them; sometimes anti-Semitism was a factor. Nevertheless, thousands of Jews from the Minsk ghetto reached the forest and were taken into Soviet partisan units without the assistance of the ghetto underground.

Sending Jews to the forest was the main, but not the only, aim of the ghetto underground. Underground groups in the ghetto also engaged in sabotage. The head of the Minsk Judenrat, Ilya Mushkin, and most of its members worked closely with the underground; as a result the underground was often able to place its members in German military factories, where they could damage military goods produced for the German army, or in weapons factories, from which they could steal weapons parts. In some cases groups of Byelorussian and Jewish underground members, working in the same factories, supported each other in engaging in sabotage. The Byelorussian and Jewish underground organizations also worked together to create an underground printing press, which produced leaflets and an abbreviated "newspaper" of several pages

providing news of the war, and distributed these materials throughout Minsk, both in the ghetto and outside it. The two underground organizations also worked together to rescue children from the ghetto. Jewish women who were members of the underground inside the ghetto took children under the wire and delivered them to Byelorussian women waiting outside, who were also members of the underground. The Byelorussian women then took the children from the ghetto to Byelorussian orphanages with directors willing to hide Jewish children, or to the homes of Byelorussian underground members. Hundreds of children were saved in this way.

Resistance was not limited to members of the underground in Minsk, either in the ghetto or outside it. Virtually every underground campaign or effort involved some people outside the underground organizations; this was particularly the case in regard to the effort to send Jews to the partisans. The great majority of Jews who fled the ghetto and reached the partisans received assistance from one or more Byelorussians, in some cases members of the underground, in some cases not. Some Jews received help from friends or former neighbors, schoolmates, or coworkers; some received assistance from strangers, whose identities they never learned. Of course, those who were later able to describe their flight to the partisans were those who survived; those who received no such help were much less likely to survive. It is nevertheless clear from the regularity with which Byelorussians offering help appear in my interviews and in written memoirs by ghetto survivors that there were many people who provided such assistance.

Resistance to the German occupation in Minsk was based on dense networks of Jews and Byelorussians; members and nonmembers of the underground; comrades, friends, acquaintances, and strangers. The underground organization was at the center of resistance efforts and in a general way provided leadership or at least inspiration to those outside it, but the large numbers of Jews and Byelorussians who engaged in resistance from outside the organized underground also played a crucial role, creating a culture of solidarity between Jews and non-Jews. The fact that there were many Byelorussians who were willing to take some risks to help Jews made it a little safer for every Byelorussian who took such a risk, and also gave every Jew who left the ghetto a better chance of reaching the partisans than he or she would have had otherwise. Inside the underground organization, such solidarity was official policy, and many underground members repeatedly risked their lives maintaining contact and providing assistance across the German-imposed divide



between Byelorussians and Jews. Outside the underground organization solidarity between Byelorussians and Jews rested largely on personal ties among friends, former neighbors, coworkers, and others, but also included some who acted on principle rather than on the basis of personal connections. Many Jews, while in the ghetto, maintained contact with friends and former neighbors outside the ghetto; sometimes these connections became bases for networks of resistance. There were Jews in the ghetto who never found the ghetto underground but instead joined or worked with underground groups outside the ghetto. There were Byelorussians outside the ghetto who did not join the Byelorussian underground organization in the city, perhaps because they could not find it, but formed their own underground groups and either made contact with underground groups in the ghetto or set about rescuing Jews from the ghetto. Two stories of ghetto survivors whom I interviewed may help to illustrate the networks of Jews and non-Jews, and of members and nonmembers of the underground, that formed the basis for Jewish resistance in Minsk.

#### MIRA RUDERMAN'S STORY

Mira Ruderman was fifteen when she and her family were taken from the village outside Minsk where they lived and forced into the Minsk ghetto (see fig. 1). Mira, her parents, her younger brother, Marek, and the baby, Nyoma, moved in with Mira's uncle and his family, who had lived in the Jewish neighborhood before it was designated as a ghetto. Every morning Mira left the ghetto in a column of Jews; she worked in a German-run cinema house in the city as a cleaning woman. At work she was given thin, watery soup and bits of bread; she did her best to bring food home for her family.<sup>7</sup>

As Mira told the story many decades later, one day when she happened to be near the barbed-wire fence surrounding the ghetto, she saw a young Byelorussian woman, Shura Yanulis, on the other side, beckoning to her. Before the war, Shura and her family had frequently spent summers as renters in the Rudermans' house, as a rural vacation from the city. Mira went to speak to Shura through the fence. Shura asked if Mira would be willing to help the underground. A leader of the underground, Ivan Kabushkin, had been arrested, and the underground was looking for a Jew who worked in the Minsk prison and who would be willing to relay messages to and from him. Perhaps, Shura said, Mira could find such a person. Mira, like everyone else in the ghetto, knew



Figure 1. Mira Ruderman,  
after the war.

that the underground had contacts with partisan units. If she were to help the underground, she asked Shura, would the underground help her reach the partisans? Shura said that it would, and Mira agreed to look for someone to pass messages to Kabushkin. Two young girls, the Knigovy sisters, Tanya and Frieda, who lived in the same courtyard where Mira and her family lived, worked at the prison; as cleaners, they regularly entered Kabushkin's cell. In response to Mira's request, they agreed to serve as liaisons to Kabushkin. A chain of communication was established. A member of the underground would meet Mira in the ladies' room of the cinema house where she worked and give her a message to be relayed to Kabushkin. Back in the ghetto, Mira would convey the message to the Knigovy sisters, who would take it to Kabushkin. His answer would be returned along the same chain.

After some time, the underground found a prison guard who was willing to give Kabushkin a copy of the key to his cell, and to look the other way while he escaped, in return for a fur coat and some gold coins. A member of the underground brought the coat, the coins, and the key to Mira. This was early spring; during the cold months, Mira wore a sheepskin coat, which she had brought into the ghetto with her. That evening she went back to the ghetto wearing the fur coat, with the coins and key

in its pockets, under her sheepskin coat, and she gave the coat, coins, and key to the Knigovy sisters. But before the coat could be delivered, the plan was somehow leaked to the Germans. There was a wave of arrests of underground members in the city. Someone from the underground gave Mira morphine and cyanide tablets in case she should be arrested. A few days later, Mira looked out of the window of her house in the ghetto and saw German soldiers entering. She took the morphine but not the cyanide. By the time they reached her room, she was out cold. The soldiers did not hurt her; presumably they thought she was dead. After the soldiers left, a physician from the Jewish hospital in the ghetto, which was a center of underground activity, came to the house, pumped Mira's stomach, and forced her to walk.

When Mira recovered, she decided that she had lived in the ghetto long enough, and that it was time to go to the partisans. She wasn't sure if the Germans who entered her house had been looking for her, or if they had been on some entirely unrelated mission. But if they had been looking for her, it would not take them long to learn that she was alive, and come looking for her again. She decided not to contact the underground for its help, but to flee immediately; from her underground connections she knew which way to walk, once out of the ghetto, to reach an area where there were partisan units. She asked the Knigovy sisters if they would go with her, but they refused, saying that they were committed to staying with Kabushkin, who was now being tortured, as long as he lived. The Germans later discovered the Knigovy sisters' connection to the underground and executed them.

Mira persuaded her brother, Marek, who was a little younger than she, and her father to go to the partisans with her. One evening toward dusk, the three Rudermans left their house and walked toward the fence. It often happened that if someone walked toward the fence at dusk, looking purposeful, others would follow them, thinking that they were on their way to the forest and perhaps had connections with the partisans. A crowd gathered behind the Rudermans and followed them out under the wire. As Mira held the bottom wire up with her handkerchief, bits of metal, attached to the wire for just this purpose, jangled and alerted a nearby policeman, who came running. He was unarmed but called to other nearby police; in the confusion the Rudermans managed to get away. They walked through the edges of the city and then westward through the forest; they continued walking all night. Along the way, they saw corpses. Mira assumed that these were the bodies of Jews who, like themselves, had escaped the ghetto, but who had died trying to find a

partisan unit to join. These bodies served as reminders of the risk that the Rudermans had taken by leaving the ghetto, especially without the help of the underground. The Rudermans had no weapons, Mira was young and female, her brother was too young to be a fighter, and they were Jews. They had little reason to believe that they would have better luck in finding acceptance by a partisan unit.

In the morning, the Rudermans entered a village and encountered a man who asked them if they were looking for the partisans, and when they said they were, volunteered to show the way to a partisan base. Mira followed him, leaving her father and brother to wait for her; she had the impression that her guide, a Byelorussian, was helping the partisans in the hope that he, too, would be accepted into the unit. He led her to a partisan base in the forest and to its commander, a Ukrainian, Semyon Ganzenko. Ganzenko asked Mira what her name was and where she was from. When she responded that her name was Ruderman, and that she was from the Minsk ghetto, Ganzenko exclaimed, "My wife's name is also Ruderman, and she's from Minsk! Perhaps you are my in-law." It was true, as Mira found out later, that Ganzenko's partner was a young woman named Fanya Ruderman, from Minsk; she and Ganzenko had met in the partisan unit. Ganzenko admitted Mira, her father, and brother to his unit; Mira and her father were given weapons and became fighters, while Marek was included in the unit's family group, which consisted of women and children who could not fight; they cooked and cleaned for the unit. All three Rudermans survived the war. Mira believed that Ganzenko had admitted them to the unit on the strength of their presumed family connection, and out of his love for his partner, Fanya. Later in the course of the war, she said, many more Jews were included in the unit.

What Mira did not know, at that time at least, was that Ganzenko had more reasons than his love for his partner/wife to be open to including Jews in his unit. He was a former Red Army commander and some months before the Rudermans arrived in the forest, in the spring of 1942, had been a prisoner of war in a camp in Minsk. This was the concentration camp on Shirokaya Street, where the ghetto underground had found jobs for several of its members; their task was to help prisoners of war escape to the partisans. One underground member, Sonya Kurlandskaya, was translator and secretary for the camp's commander; several others had the job of taking garbage out of the camp. The ghetto underground had sent a group to the forest that had joined with a group of Byelorussians to form a new partisan unit. Word had gotten back to

the ghetto underground that the group needed a commander with military experience. When Kurlandskaya learned that a prisoner in the camp, Ganzenko, was a former Red Army commander, the underground decided to rescue him and send him to the forest. Ganzenko and several other prisoners of war were put in barrels of garbage and given straws to breathe through. The underground members put the barrels on a truck and drove the truck out of the camp.<sup>8</sup> At a prearranged place on the road, a liaison from the partisans, Tanya Lifshitz, a young Jewish woman, was waiting for them. The men were taken out of the barrels, and Lifshitz led them to the forest, where Ganzenko was made commander of the new unit.<sup>9</sup> Ganzenko rose in the partisan hierarchy; he came to be widely regarded as a decent man, and also as a friend of the Jews. Perhaps he would have included the Rudermans in his unit even if the Jewish underground, and a Jewish liaison, had not saved his life. But it seems likely that Ganzenko's own history played a role in his willingness to go out of his way to help Jews.

By the spring of 1943, a year after Ganzenko arrived in the forest, when Minsk was the largest of only a handful of ghettos and Jewish work camps still in existence in Byelorussia, Jews were fleeing the ghetto in large numbers, and many were wandering around the forest looking for partisan units to join. Some Jews from the ghetto underground had gained positions of leadership in the partisan units that they had joined; many Jews in the forest were convinced that the Germans would soon destroy the Minsk ghetto, as they had already destroyed many others. Several Minsk Jews who were now part of the partisan hierarchy, of whom the most influential was a man named Shimon Zorin, approached Ganzenko with the suggestion that he form a large family camp as a refuge for Jews wandering in the forest, especially women, children, and old people, who could not become fighters. They also argued that liaisons should be sent into the ghetto to bring people out, so as to save as many as possible, and that those who could not fight could be placed in this family unit.

At first Ganzenko refused. From a military point of view, this was an entirely unconventional idea: it would require assigning military resources, including fighters, to a unit that had no military purpose. But Ganzenko changed his mind. He named Zorin commander of Division 106 (more popularly known as "Zorin's Brigade") and contributed eighteen of his own fighters. Ganzenko sent liaisons through the countryside to find Jews and into the ghetto to bring Jews out. Those who could not fight were placed in Zorin's Brigade, and those who could were

either added to its fighting unit or placed in other units. Ultimately Zorin's Brigade included 558 people, of whom 137 were fighters; of these, 121 were men, and 16 were women. The remainder, members of the family camp, consisted of 421 unarmed women, children, and old people. Zorin's Brigade as a whole included 557 Jews and 1 Byelorussian. The brigade supported other fighting units by producing shoes and clothing and operating a bakery, laundry, and hospital. The fighting unit protected the brigade from the Germans, sometimes by engaging in battles, but ultimately by moving the entire brigade deeper into the forest, out of German reach. Other than some casualties among the fighters in the last months, Zorin's Brigade survived the war intact.<sup>10</sup>

#### RAISSA KHASENYEVICH'S STORY

Raissa Grigorievna Khasenyevich was twenty-seven years old when she was forced into the ghetto, along with her two young children—Leonid, four, and Eleanora, two—her sister, and her nephew.<sup>11</sup> Both women's husbands were in the Russian east with the Red Army. Their father, Grigori Sherman, had left Minsk soon after the Germans arrived; he predicted that the Germans would kill all the Jews, and begged his family to go with him. But both Raissa's son, Leonid, and her nephew were in kindergartens that for the time being could not be reached due to the German bombing of the city, and the women refused to go without the children. Grigori left by himself; he managed to get across the border, and he survived the war. By the time Raissa and her sister retrieved their children, it had become impossible to leave the city. In a series of interviews decades later, Raissa recalled her experiences in occupied Minsk.

Raissa's house was bombed when the Germans attacked Minsk; she and her children got out in time, but all their possessions were destroyed. Over the following month, before the ghetto was established, they alternately stayed with Raissa's friend Katya Kremiez and lived on the street. The fact that Raissa was Jewish and Katya was Byelorussian in no way interfered with their friendship; in Soviet-ruled Byelorussia interethnic friendships, and for that matter marriages, were taken for granted by young people, especially those with higher education. Raissa and Katya had become friends while students at a Minsk polytechnic institute, and they had also met their husbands there. Raissa's husband was a Tatar, and Katya's a Jew. The two couples had remained close friends after their student days. Both Raissa and her husband were Komsomol members, and Katya and her husband were also supporters of the Soviets. When

the Germans attacked Minsk, Katya and her husband had fled, joining the large numbers of people trying to reach the Russian border. A German plane flying overhead had dropped a bomb, and Katya's husband was killed. Katya returned to Minsk alone.

Raissa's documents had been destroyed when her house was bombed, and Katya proposed that she should accompany Raissa to a police station to help her get a new passport. Raissa's old passport had identified her as a Jew; like all Russian internal passports, it gave the nationality of the bearer. Katya said that she thought the Germans were going to be hard on the Jews. She suggested that Raissa, who until this time had used her maiden name, Riva Sherman, might instead use her husband's Tatar name, Khasenyevich, and identify herself as a Tatar. Raissa took Katya's advice, partly because she remembered that her father had made similar predictions about the Germans. The two women decided on the name Raissa, the Russian equivalent of Riva, and invented a plausible story, including a place of birth (the shtetl where Raissa had been born was not a likely birthplace for a Tatar) and an account of why and when she had come to Minsk. At the police station Raissa identified herself as a Tatar on the passport application form. The woman clerk looked at her skeptically and commented that she looked more like a Jew than a Tatar. The two young women responded to this vociferously: Raissa pointed out that the woman clerk, who had long dark hair, looked more like a Jew than she did, and Katya announced that she was of German descent and that she would never hang around with a Zhid (the Russian equivalent of "kike"). The woman clerk gave Raissa her passport, identifying her as a Tatar. This passport probably saved Raissa's life. It enabled her to leave the ghetto and walk through the streets of Minsk in relative safety, and it protected her against charges that she was actually the Jewish Communist Riva Sherman.

When the Jews were ordered to move into the ghetto, Raissa, her sister, their mother, and the three children moved in together; having nowhere else to live, they slept on the floor of an abandoned cinema house. Unlike her mother and sister, Raissa spoke Russian fluently and without a Yiddish accent; she had learned Russian as a teenager, studying for a time in Moscow, and in her subsequent job in Minsk as an inspector in a wood factory she had come to speak it fluently. Raissa frequently left the ghetto by crawling under the wire fence; in the city people readily gave her food for her family. When she was in the city, Raissa often dropped in to see a woman named Tamara Sinitza, whom Raissa had first met when her daughter was an infant. Tamara also had a baby,

and the women had met at a children's kitchen where baby food was provided to new mothers. During the first weeks of the occupation Tamara had happened to come upon Raissa and her children in the street, and the two women had a conversation about the need for resistance to the occupation. This conversation led Raissa to think that she and Tamara could work together. The first time Raissa left the ghetto she went to see Tamara and found that Tamara was taking care of five children, three of them her own, the other two those of her brother. Tamara's brother had been married to a Jewish woman who had died of tuberculosis just before the war, the brother had gone into the Red Army, and Tamara had taken the children. Thus Tamara was hiding two Jewish children.

When Raissa dropped in to see Tamara again a week or so after this first visit, she found a young woman in the house who had just arrived from Moscow. Tamara introduced Raissa to Tanya Bauer. Tamara explained that her husband was in Moscow working with a unit that was training people to be sent into occupied territory to help organize an underground; he had sent Tanya to Tamara to help her form an underground group. Tamara invited Raissa to join the group, and Raissa agreed. The group, Tamara explained, would meet to listen to Soviet broadcasts about the war on the radio that she had kept against German orders, and to write leaflets containing information about the war and urging resistance. Raissa was to take leaflets back to the ghetto with her. After this, when Raissa left the ghetto for food, she also met with her underground group or did other work for the underground, such as distributing leaflets.

Katya had in the meantime found an unoccupied basement on Revolution Street, just outside the ghetto, and had shown it to Raissa, suggesting that she stay there during her trips out of the ghetto. Tamara asked the members of her group to assemble at her house on November 7, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, to listen to the speech that Stalin was to give on that day, and write leaflets. Raissa left the ghetto the day before, taking her children with her. On November 7, after the meeting was over, Raissa and her children returned to the basement apartment. A few hours later Katya appeared, so distraught that she could barely speak; she told Raissa that there had been a pogrom in the ghetto, and thousands of Jews had been driven out of the ghetto, loaded onto trucks, and had been taken to be shot. The pogrom had taken place in the part of the ghetto where Raissa's family had lived. The next day Raissa and Katya went into the ghetto to the place where Raissa and her family had lived, and discovered that Raissa's mother, sister, and



nephew were gone. Katya implored Raissa to remain in the basement apartment and not go back to the ghetto. Raissa refused. The underground's rules of conspiratorial work forbade her to explain to her friend that she was working with the underground and had to deliver leaflets to the ghetto. Katya may have guessed as much; she never pressed her friend to explain her activities.

Katya continued to help Raissa. She arranged a meeting between Raissa and her Tatar in-laws, which resulted in their taking Raissa's son, Leonid. Katya also introduced Raissa to her fellow workers. Katya had a job in a German oil distribution firm located in central Minsk, not far from the basement apartment. The director of the firm, his secretary, and one or two other employees were Germans, but the rest of the staff consisted of Byelorussian women. Raissa became friendly with several of these women, including the German secretary, and when the firm needed an extra employee Raissa was often given the job. This enabled her to discover where German oil supplies were stored in Minsk, and pass the information to the underground, which relayed it to the partisans, resulting in a bombing raid. The jobs that Raissa acquired through the firm also gave her much needed income. After the November 7 pogrom she spent most of her time outside the ghetto. A neighbor in the house on Revolution Street, Vera Ivanovna Nestorovich, took a liking to Raissa's daughter, Eleanora, and offered to take care of the child while Raissa was "at work" (which often meant on missions into the ghetto). Katya also helped take care of Eleanora.

Raissa frequently met friends and acquaintances in Minsk; some of them helped her, in most cases by giving her food, and others did nothing to harm her. But one day, as she was walking through central Minsk, she felt that she was being followed. She was near Katya's workplace; she went there quickly and ran up the stairs to Katya's office. But a policeman came through the door after her and announced that she was under arrest as a Communist and a Jew. Despite Raissa's insistence that she was neither a Communist nor a Jew, but a Tatar, the policeman insisted on taking her with him to the police office, where she found a former coworker, Volsky, waiting for her, wearing the uniform of a policeman serving under the Germans. In 1934, when the popular Communist leader Kirov was assassinated, at a meeting of workers at the wood factory, Volsky said that he was glad that Kirov had died, and he hoped more Communists would be assassinated. Volsky subsequently lost his job. Since Raissa was the head of his department, he may have assumed that she had reported his remark (which in fact she had not

done) and caused him to lose his job. He was an anti-Communist; he assumed that Raissa was a Communist (actually she was a member of the Komsomol, but not of the Communist Party), and he was determined to get revenge.

Raissa said that she had never met Volsky before, and she produced her passport to prove that she was not Riva Sherman, but rather Raissa Khasenyevich. Volsky said that she was lying. The head policeman suggested that Volsky find a witness to back up his claim, and he left. A few hours later he came back with a man named Maditzky, whom both Volsky and Raissa knew well. Maditzky looked at Raissa blankly and said that he had never seen her before; Raissa said that she did not recognize him either. Volsky shouted that they were both lying, but they insisted. Maditzky said that Volsky must have made a mistake. He wrote a statement to this effect, and he left. Volsky went out again to try to find another witness. Raissa said that this was clearly a mistake, and suggested that they let her go. The head policeman said that he was inclined to agree with her, but that Volsky had filled out a complaint against her as a Jew and a Communist who had mistreated him before the war. This, he said, required him to turn her over to the Gestapo. He assured her that the Gestapo would certainly discover the truth. He assigned a policeman to take her to the Gestapo and also sent along the statements signed by Volsky and Maditsky.

Raissa was placed in a cell filled with women, two of whom were ill with typhus; most of the women were facing accusations similar to those leveled against her. After several days she was taken out of the cell to a room where she was interviewed; she was asked to provide names of people who could attest that she was not a Jew. Raissa gave the names of several people whom she could trust to attest that she was not a Jew; she did not give the names of anyone in the underground. She went back to the cell. Several days later she was taken out again and told that she was free: no evidence against her had been found. She was probably saved by Maditsky's testimony, which contradicted Volsky's; by the testimony of those whose names she had supplied; and perhaps also because Volsky had mistakenly identified her as a Communist. The Germans had a list of members of the Byelorussian Communist Party. If they had looked for the name of Riva Sherman (or Raissa Khasenyevich) on that list, they would not have found it.

After being released from prison Raissa came down with typhus and went into a hospital in the Russian district; a member of her underground group, a nurse, came to see her every day to take care of her.

When she was released from the hospital, a member of the hospital staff told her that a man had frequently come to ask about her, but, oddly, he had never asked to see her. Raissa understood that Volsky was still after her. He may have simply been tracking her, or he may have hoped to identify Jewish friends and relatives who might have visited her. Raissa's impression that she was still in danger from Volsky was reinforced when, several weeks later, she went to the home of another former coworker, Anya Petrovskaya, now an employee at the railroad station, to obtain a train schedule for the partisans. When Anya saw Raissa, she went pale and demanded that Raissa leave immediately. "Hasn't anyone told you," she asked, "that Volsky has been showing your photograph around, that he brought Nadezhda Lazarevna Dudo [another former coworker] to the police station, and that she certified that you are Jewish and that your name is Riva Sherman?" After obtaining a promise that Anya would give the train schedule to someone else who would come later, Raissa left. She went to Nadezhda's house and confronted her. "I had no choice," Nadezhda said. "You must leave Minsk. There's no other way to protect yourself."

Raissa went straight to Tamara's house and told her that Volsky was still pursuing her and that it was time for her to go to the partisans. Tamara agreed. The problem was that the underground group had no weapons. Another member of the group pointed out that the partisans also needed typewriters; perhaps Raissa could obtain one. Raissa knew that the director of Katya's firm had a typewriter, and that he was out of town. She went to the firm, took the typewriter from the director's office, and, with the help of a young Byelorussian on the staff of the firm, put it in a box and left by the back door, out of fear that Volsky might be waiting at the front door. Raissa took the typewriter to Tamara's house and was hidden with Eleanora in the home of another underground member for several days, until a liaison from the partisans arrived. Raissa was taken to the partisans but was forced to leave Eleanora behind in Tamara's care. Once admitted to a partisan unit, she was soon transferred to the general partisan headquarters, along with her German typewriter, which she learned to use, producing leaflets directed to German soldiers. Several months after Raissa's arrival at the partisan headquarters, Tamara came, bringing Eleanora, who remained with her mother for the duration of the war. After the liberation, Raissa returned to Minsk, retrieved her son, Leonid, from her in-laws, and was reunited with her husband, who had returned from the east (see fig. 2).



Figure 2. Raissa Khasenyevich and Maria Zhloba, on vacation together, shortly after the war. Photograph courtesy of Leonid Khasenyevich.

#### ANTI-NAZI SOLIDARITY IN MINSK

Mira Ruderman and Raissa Khasenyevich's stories illustrate the extent to which resistance to the German occupation in Minsk involved the intertwined efforts of Jews and Byelorussians (in the sense in which the term was used in Minsk at the time, meaning not only ethnic Byelorussians but other Byelorussian citizens of Slavic/Christian background). Raissa's story illustrates the cosmopolitan quality of life in prewar Minsk, especially among young people. Interethnic friendships were taken for granted, and interethnic marriages were common. These ties led to solidarity during the war, ranging from providing help for friends to supporting resistance. As elsewhere in occupied eastern Europe there

were collaborators in Minsk who were willing or eager to turn Jews in, and there were many people whose main concern was to keep their heads down and stay out of trouble. Nevertheless, the degree of solidarity between Jews and Byelorussians in wartime Minsk contrasts sharply with the much more pervasive indifference to the plight of Jews or even hostility toward them in Poland and Lithuania.

The aim of this book is to describe these organized and spontaneous ties of solidarity and to explain what it was about the history of Minsk and its wartime situation, and that of Byelorussia more generally, that made such ties possible. In chapter 2 I argue that especially in Minsk, the Byelorussian capital city, two decades of Soviet rule had fostered Jewish integration and had promoted an ideology of internationalism that had a particular influence on young people, leading many to regard interethnic friendships with pride. Furthermore, prewar Byelorussia fared relatively well under Soviet rule; the Soviets introduced industry, promoted education, and modernized the cities, especially Minsk. The Soviet collectivization of agriculture had much less dire effects in Byelorussia than in Ukraine, where it involved mass killings and led to widespread famine. Many young people in Minsk were supportive of the Soviet regime and adopted its internationalist perspective. I also argue that there was a longer historical basis for the interethnic solidarity that flourished in Minsk during the war. Unlike its neighbors, Byelorussia had never provided a fertile soil for nationalist movements. In Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, nationalist movements had long histories and profoundly shaped national cultures. In Byelorussia a nationalist movement emerged only at the close of the nineteenth century, and it remained small and weak. It did not aspire to create a Byelorussia for ethnic Byelorussians, nor did it seek to promote ethnic antagonisms. Soviet influence, along with the historical absence (and later weakness) of nationalism, made it possible for interethnic solidarity to grow during the war.

Subsequent chapters describe the German attack on Minsk, the Minsk ghetto, the ghetto underground and its ties to the Byelorussian underground outside the ghetto, and the mass flight of ghetto Jews to partisan units in the forests surrounding Minsk. The main aim of the Minsk ghetto underground was to send as many Jews from the ghetto to the forests as possible, in order to strengthen the partisan struggle, and also because those who reached partisan units had a chance of surviving the war, while those who remained in the ghetto did not. Chapter 7 places the Minsk ghetto in the context of ghetto resistance in occupied eastern Europe: the major underground movements in the ghettos of Poland and

Lithuania were Zionist-led and followed the strategy of mobilizing rebellions from within the ghettos. I describe the Kovno (Kaunas) ghetto underground, which, alone among the major ghetto resistance movements of Poland and Lithuania, eventually followed the same strategy as the Minsk ghetto underground, sending Jews to partisan units in the forest. Due primarily to the paucity of support from outside the ghetto, this effort was much less successful in the Kovno ghetto than in the Minsk ghetto: only about 300 Jews from the Kovno ghetto reached the forest. This underlines the point that solidarity was crucial to the success of the Minsk ghetto underground. Chapter 8 describes what happened when the Soviets returned to Minsk, and how they dealt with an underground movement that had been formed without their authorization.

#### ZIONISM, COMMUNISM, AND GHETTO RESISTANCE

There are two ways in which this book might be misread, one having to do with the relationship between Soviet Communism and Jews, the other with Zionism. The contrast between the prewar Soviet campaign against anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitic campaigns of the Soviet leadership in the postwar years calls for some comment. Because this book is about Minsk, and not about the Zionist-led resistance movements in the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania, it may be less clear to the reader that I am not trying to elevate the Minsk ghetto resistance over the resistance movements that took place in other ghettos, nor do I intend to argue that a Communist-led resistance movement was in principle superior to a Zionist-led resistance movement. In prewar Poland and Lithuania, Zionism and the Bund attracted large numbers of Jews, while Communism did not. The Zionist Left, especially Socialist Zionism, was especially influential among young Jews. Zionists were therefore in a much better position than Jewish Communists to provide leadership for resistance in the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania. Bundists played less of a leading role than Zionists, largely due to their unwillingness to set aside animosities toward Zionists and Communists, which under wartime conditions stood in the way of effective Jewish resistance. The paucity of alliances between Jews and non-Jews in these societies had more to do with anti-Semitism than with Jewish particularism. During the war Zionists, especially Socialist Zionists, did what they could to construct such ties, but found few partners in this effort. A Communist-led resistance movement had the advantage of an ideology that stressed unity and of organizational structures and habits of political work that fostered alliances

among different nationalities. But the disadvantage of Communist ideology was that it could suppress the concerns of minority groups when they did not fit the overall agenda.

Young Zionists played the dominant role in the underground movements in the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania (except the Kovno ghetto, where the Communists ultimately played the leading role) because they had large, cohesive organizations of highly committed members who were willing to take great risks and were able to count on each other and work together effectively. The left-wing, pioneer organizations, which prepared their members for life in agricultural collectives in Palestine, were particularly tightly knit and idealistic; they had extensive connections and were widely respected. These organizations also had the advantage of autonomy: they were not youth wings of adult organizations. Except for the Communists, the older political activists were in many cases cautious to the point of paralysis, or even in some cases of collaboration. The autonomy of the young Zionists, especially the left-wing pioneer organizations, made it possible for them to engage in resistance when their elders hesitated to do so.

Zionists led the resistance movements in most of the Polish and Lithuanian ghettos not only because there were Zionist organizations that were capable of taking on this role, but because Zionism had been the main tendency within the prewar Jewish movements in these countries and had widespread support among Jews. The Zionist parties and organizations provided social services, sponsored schools and newspapers, and were regarded by many Jews as the main vehicle for Jewish community; collectively, they constituted the largest element in a vibrant, and politically and ideologically diverse, Jewish public arena. The mainstream Zionist organizations did not expect Jews to move to Palestine en masse, and most Jewish adults were not interested in leaving Poland. Nevertheless, the Zionist solution to the problems of Polish and Lithuanian Jews was more credible than the solutions offered by the other Jewish movements. Few Polish or Lithuanian Jews could support the Communists' enthusiasm for the Soviet Union. Many Jews shared the social democratic perspective of the Bund, but as anti-Semitism escalated the Bundist vision of a revolutionary movement of Jewish and non-Jewish workers became increasingly difficult to uphold. The strategy of going to Palestine gained wide appeal, especially among young Jews, who were freer than their elders to do so.

In the years before the war Zionists, Bundists, and Jewish Communists were often in conflict. With the onset of the war, and the establishment

of ghettos, many Jewish activists recognized the need for unity. Left Zionists, especially the Marxist-Zionist movement Hashomer Hatzair, often with the help of the Communists, played the main role in bringing Jewish resistance groups together. In the Warsaw, Vilna, and Bialystok ghettos members of Hashomer Hatzair worked with Communists to establish umbrella organizations and persuaded others, including less radical Zionists, the Revisionists, the right wing of the Zionist movement, and ultimately Bundists, to join these coalitions. Despite its prominence before the war, the Bund played a lesser role in ghetto resistance than the Zionists due to the inability of older Bund leaders especially to put aside pre-war antagonisms toward Zionists and especially toward Communists and join in resistance efforts with them, and also to abandon their insistence that resistance take the form of an alliance between Jewish and non-Jewish working classes. Young Bundists were on the whole less wedded to old antagonisms and strategies than their elders. A parallel division existed between older and younger Zionists: in both Warsaw and Bialystok younger Zionists tried to persuade older Zionists that the Germans intended genocide and that armed resistance was necessary. The model of an umbrella resistance organization, which included Zionists of both the left and the right, Communists, and Bundists, was pioneered in the Vilna ghetto and promoted by members of Hashomer Hatzair. This model was later adopted in the Warsaw and Bialystok ghettos.

The ideological differences among the various Jewish organizations turned out to be a less serious source of conflict during the war than the question of strategy: whether to mobilize a ghetto uprising or go to the forests and join the Soviet-aligned partisan movement. Positions on this question did not always follow ideological lines: some Zionists supported going to the forest; some Communists, internal revolt. In each of the ghettos Hashomer Hatzair members supported internal revolts out of a view that going to the forest meant abandoning Jews who could not leave; their commitment to the Jewish community took precedence over their Soviet sympathies. In the Vilna ghetto the Communist leader Itzik Wittenberg opposed going to the forest, out of the hope that a ghetto revolt would join with a citywide revolt. Young Revisionists, members of a movement that had been fiercely anti-Soviet before the war, left the Vilna ghetto for the forest because of their focus on military struggle, which they believed had a much better chance in the forest than in the ghetto. The Warsaw ghetto was too distant from the partisan movement for the strategy of going to the forest to have been considered as an option for the ghetto or even the underground as a whole.



In each of these ghettos Zionist leaders of the underground organizations did their best to make connections outside the ghetto, with other ghetto underground organizations and also with non-Jewish allies. Each of the ghetto underground organizations was assisted by individual non-Jews who took great risks to give support to resistance and to save the lives of Jews. But organizational support was meager. Everywhere, the Communists were the most reliable allies of the Jewish underground organizations, but Communist parties had been illegal in prewar Poland and Lithuania and had had little public support, and under the German occupation the Communist underground organizations were small, lacked resources, and were frequently destroyed by arrests. The other organizations that assisted the Jewish resistance were also small and followed no particular political or ideological pattern: the Vilna resistance was assisted by a mother superior and her convent staff; the Warsaw resistance by a group of former Boy Scouts and a maverick group of Polish soldiers. The Warsaw ghetto underground repeatedly sought the help of the Home Army, the main Polish resistance organization, but received only meager aid. Apparently the leaders of the Home Army feared that a ghetto rebellion might play into the hands of the Soviet Union, because of the ghetto underground's desire for a Red Army victory. Furthermore, a ghetto revolt might have set off a wider revolt, over which the Red Army might have gained control. The Home Army's betrayal of the Warsaw ghetto had to do with the way in which anti-Communism and anti-Semitism were intertwined in Poland; Zionism was not a factor.

In those ghettos close enough to partisan territory for large numbers of Jews to have gone to the forest, underground organizations may have been mistaken in pursuing the strategy of ghetto rebellion rather than flight. Ghetto residents wanted revenge, but they also wanted to survive the war. In the Vilna ghetto no uprising took place, for lack of popular support in the ghetto. An uprising took place in the Bialystok ghetto, but it involved only members of the underground, probably not more than 300 people, the great majority of whom were killed. If the underground movements in these ghettos had sought to find ways to send Jews to the forest, they probably would have found more support. Zionism was a factor in the underground movements' preference for ghetto rebellion, because ghetto revolts were instances of Jewish resistance, while in the partisan movement the Jewish presence was less visible. But the romanticism of young underground members was also an important factor. Resistance, in the view of young underground members, required

a willingness to give one's life. Many regarded anything less as cowardice.

#### SOVIET COMMUNISM AND SOVIET JEWRY

This book emphasizes Soviet internationalism because of its importance in relation to wartime Jewish resistance. However, Soviet Communist attitudes toward Jews were deeply ambivalent. During the revolutionary period anti-Semitism was a weapon of the czarist right; the revolutionary forces vigorously opposed anti-Semitism because it was the most widespread and violent form of ethnic discrimination in the Russian empire, and the revolution stood for an egalitarian society. During the revolution, and for decades following it, the campaign against anti-Semitism stood for opposition to ethnic/national discrimination generally. For a Soviet Communist to fail to support the campaign against anti-Semitism was as unthinkable as for an American leftist to fail to support efforts against racism. But anti-Semitism was deeply rooted in Russian society. The revolution emancipated Jews by overturning the laws that had confined them geographically and in other respects. But Jews did not easily fit the Soviet agenda. Though most were poor, many continued to follow occupations (artisans, shopkeepers) that left them outside the Soviet definition of the proletariat. Jews' orientation toward education, and toward political activism, suggested the possibility of dissidence. Furthermore, Jews were internationalist in a way that became troublesome for the Soviet leaders, especially in the years after the Great Patriotic War (World War II). As a result of the massive Jewish emigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, vast numbers of Russian Jews had relatives outside the Soviet Union, mostly in the United States, but also in Palestine, later Israel. In the postwar years the Soviet leaders sought to create a Soviet identity based on total allegiance to the Soviet Union. This abandonment of internationalism left Jews exposed to attack as traitors to the nation.

In the prewar years the vigor of the campaign against anti-Semitism had hid the fact that Jews were regarded differently than other nationalities by the Soviet authorities. During the 1920s and into the 1930s the Soviet leadership sought the support of the national minorities within the Soviet Union by promoting minority languages and lending support to minority customs and traditions, at least as long as they appeared consonant with Soviet aims (as expressed in the slogan "National in form, socialist in content"). Soviet minorities policy referenced Stalin's

1913 treatise *Marxism and the National Question*,<sup>12</sup> which endorsed the right of nations to self-determination and limited regional autonomy, within a unified party, and which proposed that national minorities be allowed political expression through regional Communist parties. However, Stalin's definition of a nation required settlement in a common territory. The Jews of the Russian empire were scattered through the cities and towns of Lithuania, Ukraine, and Byelorussia, and to a lesser extent other areas. They did not comprise a majority in any region of what would become the Soviet Union. In the years leading up to the (failed) Revolution of 1905, when the Bund led Jewish revolutionary activity, it had demanded the right to represent the Jewish working class within the context of the Russian Social Democratic Party. Lenin rejected this demand.

Though Lenin's decision was based on political calculations, not anti-Semitism, it coincided with the view, later reinforced by Stalin's treatise on the national question, that while other national minorities were building blocks of the Soviet Union, for Jews to become truly Soviet they must cease to be Jews. This was consonant with a view of Jewish identity as reducible to religion, and also with the view of Jewish culture as bourgeois or petit bourgeois. Either of these views of Jewish culture set it at odds with Soviet culture. During the 1920s and 1930s the Soviets insisted that Jews must be treated equally with others, but as individuals, not as a collectivity among other collectivities. Many young, urban Jews applauded this policy: they wanted education and the opportunity to rise in society; they were inspired by Soviet internationalism and proud to be part of a multinational society in which anti-Semitism was frowned upon. Many were willing to accept the Soviet view of Jewish identity as a private or family matter.

During the postwar years Stalin and those around him embarked upon a campaign against Soviet Jews, and in particular against influential Jewish intellectuals and professionals. What was referred to as the antic cosmopolitan campaign was at first directed at Soviet intellectuals generally (among whom were many Jews) but soon came to be focused on Jews in particular. The term "rootless intellectuals," which was used to describe those whose influence was to be eradicated, was widely understood to mean Jewish intellectuals. The antic cosmopolitan campaign began in earnest with the assassination of Solomon Mikhoels on January 19, 1948. Mikhoels was the director of the Moscow State Yiddish Theater and the head of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which had been formed during the war with official approval to seek support for the

Soviet Union in its struggle against Nazi Germany from Jews around the world, and especially in the United States. The Committee had attracted leading Jewish writers and intellectuals; in the wake of Mikhoels's death fifteen leaders of the Committee were arrested, and in a secret trial in July 1952 thirteen were condemned to death. Meanwhile, thousands of other Jews were arrested, among them many writers and intellectuals.

On January 13, 1953, nine prominent Soviet doctors, six of them Jews, were arrested and accused of plotting to murder Soviet officials by medical means. In the wake of these arrests many Jewish doctors and other professionals lost their jobs, public meetings were called to warn the population of the threat, and Jews were insulted and attacked in public places. There were reports from credible sources (though never proven) that Stalin had established camps for Jews and that a mass deportation was planned. On March 4, 1953, Stalin died, before the trial of the accused doctors began. Reports on the case disappeared from the newspapers, and a month later the charges were officially dropped. The rumored deportation did not take place.

Jews were not the only group of Soviets persecuted during the war and after. Small national minorities suffered forced removals from their homelands and deportations to inhospitable destinations. Soviets, mostly young people, whom the Germans had forcibly taken to Germany to work during the war, were discriminated against upon their postwar return to the Soviet Union. The Soviet authorities regarded those who had remained in occupied territory during the war with suspicion, as if their having lived under German rule made them collaborators. Postwar official discrimination against Jews emanated from the Soviet leadership's abandonment of internationalism and adoption of a narrow nationalism and a fortress mentality, but it was also one of many instances of official discrimination carried out during Stalin's years of escalating paranoia before his death.

Literature on resistance to the Holocaust, and for that matter on the Holocaust itself, in the occupied Soviet territories is extremely scanty, in sharp contrast to the voluminous literature on Holocaust resistance (and on the Holocaust generally) outside the Soviet territories, especially in Poland and Lithuania. There are dozens of books about the Warsaw ghetto uprising and more than a dozen on the Vilna ghetto and its underground movement. The number of articles on these topics is even greater.<sup>13</sup> The literature on the Minsk ghetto and its underground is by comparison miniscule, consisting of two memoir/histories by Hersh Smolar, a surviving leader of the ghetto underground, and a recent monograph in Hebrew by Dan Zhits.<sup>14</sup> The vast discrepancy between literature on, and public

knowledge of, Holocaust resistance inside and outside the Soviet territories has in part to do with where ghetto survivors settled after the war. Most survivors of Polish and Lithuanian ghettos emigrated to North America or to Palestine, where many wrote about their experiences. Most Soviet Jews remained in the Soviet Union, where anti-Jewish campaigns promoted by the Soviet leadership made it difficult if not dangerous to discuss wartime experiences in the ghetto in public. It was considerably more difficult for Western historians to conduct research on the Holocaust inside than outside the Soviet Union. Meanwhile in the Cold War/McCarthyite United States, Communists had come to be understood as enemies of freedom, more or less interchangeable with Nazis; given these assumptions, stories about Communist-led anti-Nazi movements, Jewish or otherwise, would likely have been met with bewilderment. American Jews were more likely to be aware that in eastern Europe, inside and outside the Soviet territories, Jewish Communists had played a part in the struggle against fascism. But mainstream Jewish circles in the United States veered sharply to the right in the postwar years. In these circles the story of a Communist-led ghetto underground movement would have been met with embarrassment if not fear. Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the Holocaust in the Soviet territories, and Jewish resistance to it, remained marginal to public awareness. Now that the Cold War is definitively over, I hope that the story of the Minsk ghetto and its underground movement can be considered on its own terms.