


ARTICLE

Jewish Militias As a Factor in Post-World War One State Building in Galicia¹

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Abstract

The article analyses the Jewish militias that were established in Galicia during the fall of the Habsburg empire in 1918 and the creation of new nation-states. As public order collapsed and the region descended into violence, Jews throughout Galicia took up arms to protect and organize their communities and to take an active part in the transformation of the region. They mirrored the efforts of their non-Jewish neighbors, creating paramilitary forces that aimed to fill the vacuum left behind by the disintegrating imperial state. The militias were more than a means of self-defense. They actively participated in the establishment of the new states' monopoly on violence but did so on their own terms—integration was only possible through separation. At the same time, the militias served a decidedly internal, Jewish purpose by replacing traditional leaderships and imposing discipline in the community, at times through universal conscription.

Keywords: Galicia; habsburg empire; jews; pogroms; self-defense

When the Habsburg state collapsed in the fall of 1918 and its army was “broken and scattered, divided among the many peoples of [the] vast empire”² as Joseph Roth once observed, Jews were among those who took up arms and in many respects were among those who took on the legacy of that old army. They filled the power and security vacuum, attempted to protect their communities and to maintain some form of order. They mirrored their neighbors and took an active part in the remaking of the region. As one Jewish teenager in Lviv (Lwów, Lemberg) noted in his diary on November 16, 1918: “The Jews in all parts of Austria establish militias and maintain order.”³

The collapse of the Habsburg state in Galicia and the ensuing conflict over its succession is commonly read through the dual lens of state building—particularly in its Polish variant—and anti-Jewish violence. Jews appear largely as passive victims. The aim of this article is to shift the focus in regard to the Jewish experience, and, crucially, Jewish agency in this process by centering on the Jewish militias that were established throughout the region from the fall of 1918. Some of them only existed for a few days or weeks, at most months,

¹ I am incredibly grateful to my wonderful Landecker Lecturer colleagues for their kind and careful reading, critique, and advice. Many thanks also to the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful and constructive comments and suggestions.

² Joseph Roth, *Radetzky marsch* (Munich: DTV, 2005), 274

³ Yedidyah Shoham, *Yoman Ne'urim: Yameha ha-rishonim shel tenu'at ha-shomer ha-tsa'ir: Levov 1917—Bet alfa 1925* (Bet alfa: Kibuts Bet alfa, 1987), 92.

but not only were they an essential aspect of many Jews' experiences during this transition, they were also an integral element of a multi-layered process of state building in the region.

To the extent that studies of this period have foregrounded the Jewish experience, they rightly centered on the traumatic pogroms and violence inflicted upon the Jews, not least because it so overshadowed in particular Polish–Jewish relations throughout the interwar period and beyond.⁴ Due to this focus, most of the historical literature, when it mentioned them at all, reiterates the approach to the Jewish militias common at the time, presenting them primarily in the context of overt anti-Jewish violence and pogroms, ascribing to them an almost exclusively reactive role, as (usually failed) forms of self-defense to the organized violence of Gentiles against Jewish communities.⁵ This reading of events is based on contemporary accounts. One of the more prominent ones, to take but one example, is Israel Cohen's 1919 booklet, which has been used extensively by scholars working on anti-Jewish violence in this period.⁶ Cohen, an activist in the Zionist movement in the United Kingdom was dispatched to Poland in late 1918 to document the violence and to make recommendations for the debate over Polish statehood as it pertained to the Jewish minority, at the Paris Peace Conference.⁷ Although he meticulously documented the violence against Jewish communities in the region, the Jewish militias—where mentioned at all—appeared principally in the context of their disarmament, seen as a precursor to the subsequent pogrom.⁸ However, the first thing Cohen noted in his diary after arriving in Kraków in December 1918 was “Jews with guns (militia), even men wearing flat hats and caftan also with guns.”⁹ A close study of the empirical material Cohen used to write his report—especially the letters and testimonies he received from survivors and eyewitnesses in the affected communities—further illustrates that in the experiences of local communities, these Jewish armed forces were more than (failed) attempts to protect oneself against pogroms.¹⁰ A similarly more complex picture emerges when studying materials in local archives, most importantly in Kraków, which add many additional dimensions to the development of Jewish militias.

Reading the Jewish militias in a reactive frame of failure suggests a top-down relationship between Jews and non-Jews in this period, stripping agency from the Jewish community, and effectively rendering them passive, or at best reactive, victims of the violent state-building process. This article aims to go beyond this understanding and to conceptualize the Jewish militias of this period not exclusively as a means of self-defense,

⁴ David Engel, “Lwów, 1918: The Transmutation of a Symbol and Its Legacy in the Holocaust,” in *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 32–46.

⁵ E.g., William Hagen, *Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1914–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 123–72; Christoph Mick, *Lemberg, Lwów, L'viv, 1914–1947: Violence and Ethnicity in a Contested City* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2015), 147–58; Alexander Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland: War, Ethnicity, and Anti-Jewish Violence in East Galicia, 1914–1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015), 78–90; Jan Kutilek, “Looting and Killing are Permitted: Rumors in the November 1918 Pogrom in Lviv,” *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* 1 (2024), 1–25.

⁶ Israel Cohen, *A Report on the Pogroms in Poland* (London: Central Office of the Zionist Organization, 1919). E.g., Hagen, *Anti-Jewish Violence*, 123–93; Konrad Zieliński, “The Anti-Semitic Riots on the Territories of the Kingdom of Poland at the Beginning of Independence,” *Studia Żydowskie. Almanach* 3/3 (2013): 87–94; Jan Kutilek, “Jews in Limbo: Decay of the State Authority in Galicia in 1918 as a Prelude to Post-War Anti-Jewish Violence,” *Slovanský přehled* (2023): 169–92; Jan Rybak, *Everyday Zionism in East-Central Europe: Nation-Building in War and Revolution, 1914–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 170–79.

⁷ Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great War, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 209–64.

⁸ Cohen, *A Report on the Pogroms in Poland*, 10.

⁹ Israel Cohen, “My Mission to Poland (1918–1919),” *Jewish Social Studies* (1951): 155.

¹⁰ Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut (YIVO), RG 448, Box 2, Folders 17–21.

but as mirroring the actions of their neighbors, as armed forces and active participants in the larger process of post-Habsburg state building in Galicia.

These Jewish paramilitary forces are part of a wider regional story. Julia Eichenberg observed that armed groups often considered themselves as para-state or pre-state forces, the act of taking up arms being a core element in the process of state building.¹¹ Such armed forces, sometimes already established during World War I and in the days and weeks of transition, often directly transformed into the instruments of violence and coercion of the new states-in-the-making. Robert Gerwarth, Jochen Böhrer, Andres Kasekamp, John Horne, Serhy Yekelchuk, John Paul Newman, Tomas Balkelis, and many others have made similar arguments regarding non-state, paramilitary armed forces and their relation to nation and state building. From pre-state and non-state actors, self-defense groups, *Freikorps*, and warlords, the entire region from the Ottoman Empire to the Baltics, from the Caucasus to Ireland was awash with paramilitary forces involved in the violent re-shaping of these lands.¹² It seems to make little sense to write the Jews of east central Europe, and their at times considerable armed forces out of this story, and to ascribe to them—and to them alone—a merely reactive, defensive role.¹³

What Jews active in these paramilitary forces envisioned their role would be is to an extent reflected in the names they chose for them. They rarely, if ever, chose the term “self-defense,” but rather names like “citizens’ guard” (as in Kraków) or “Jewish militia” (as in Przemyśl/Peremyshl/Pshemishl). Importantly, this stands in marked contrast to the parallel efforts of Jewish armed forces in Ukraine and to earlier Jewish armed formations, such as during the 1905–06 revolutions and pogroms in the Tsarist empire, where activists in general and very consciously named their units “self-defense” (*samooborona/zelbstshuts*).¹⁴ Far from semantic pedantry, this choice of names already suggests that the people participating in the post-World War I formations in Galicia not only sought defense against imminent pogroms, but rather saw themselves as the armed organization of the Jewish community, assuming roles not dissimilar to the armed formations of their non-Jewish neighbors.

¹¹ Julia Eichenberg, “Consent, Coercion and Endurance in Eastern Europe: Poland and the Fluidity of War Experiences,” in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe’s First World War*, ed. Jochen Böhrer (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2014), 235–58.

¹² Jochen Böhrer, *Civil War in Central Europe, 1918–1921: The Reconstruction of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Andres Kasekamp, *The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Peter Gatrell, “War after the War: Conflicts, 1919–1923,” in *A Companion to World War One*, ed. John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 558–75; Serhy Yekelchuk, “Bands of Nation Builders? Insurgency and Ideology in the Ukrainian Civil War,” in *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, ed. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 107–25; Tomas Balkelis, *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making in Lithuania, 1914–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); John Paul Newman, “The Origins, Attributes, and Legacies of Paramilitary Violence in the Balkans,” in *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, ed. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 145–63; Uğur Ümit Üngör, “Paramilitary Violence in the Collapsing Ottoman Empire,” in *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, ed. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 164–83.

¹³ The creation of Jewish armed formations at the time was not an exclusively Galician phenomenon. Similar organizations were established throughout the region. On Ukraine: Mihály Kálmán, “Hero Shtetls: Jewish Armed Self-Defense from the Pale to Palestine, 1917–1970” (PhD diss., Harvard University 2017). On Hungary: Olosz Levente, “Zsidóellenes erőszak és zsidó önvédelem az őszirózsás forradalomban,” in *Forradalmi erőszak Magyarországon 1918-ban*, ed. Ákos Fóris and Ádám Gellért (Budapest: Erőszakkutató Intézet, 2024), 134–218. On Vienna: David Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War* (Oxford, Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 173–76.

¹⁴ E.g., Artur Markowski, *Przemoc antyżydowska i wyobrażenia społeczne: Pogrom białostocki 1906 roku* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2018); Kálmán, “Hero Shtetls”; Shlomo Lambroza, “Jewish Self-Defense During the Russian Pogroms of 1904–1906,” *Jewish Journal of Sociology* (1981): 123–35.

The defense against pogroms or the threat of them was nonetheless a central consideration for those who established Jewish militias from the autumn of 1918. However, the problem is broader than that. It was a problem of state building, not least because of the centrality of the state and its role in any understanding of mass anti-Jewish violence. Countering the traditional reading of the pogroms in the Tsarist empire, historians since the 1970s have emphasized that it had not been state authorities that had organized the pogroms.¹⁵ In fact, in most cases of mass violence against Jews in modern European history, the state at one point intervened to suppress it—not necessarily out of sympathy for the victims but because the modern state could not accept extra-legal, uncontrolled vigilante violence and had to exert its exclusive right to the use of force.¹⁶ Indeed, at the very heart of the modern state lies its “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” as Max Weber described it.¹⁷ However, such a monopoly did not exist in Galicia at the time in question. With the demise of the Habsburg empire no state existed that could implement it, hence Jews effectively participated in its creation—if sometimes only for the lack of alternatives. There was obviously no attempt to establish an independent Jewish territorial state in east central Europe, but in many other respects, as will be shown, the hallmarks of state building were present, embodying a project of quasi-state self-organization in dialectical relation with the processes of Polish and Ukrainian state building.

What Comes after the State?

The necessity to establish armed formations stemmed from the collapse of order and state power already in the last months of Habsburg rule. One of the gravest threats to the civilian population was the ever-growing presence of deserters in the countryside, villages, and increasingly even in larger towns and cities. In the summer and autumn of 1918, thousands abandoned their regiments, and often joined together in bands, living largely off robbery and theft. The military command in Przemyśl reported that some garrisons had not been supplied with bread for weeks, leading soldiers to abandon their posts and join with civilians in the ransacking of stores, bakeries, railway freight cars, and warehouses.¹⁸ State authorities tried to get this “plague of deserters” (*Deserteursplage*), as a report by the gendarmerie in Wadowice described it, under control but did not have the means to do so.¹⁹ Whereas everyone was threatened by bands of deserters and marauders, they appear to have often targeted Jewish homes and Jewish-owned businesses in particular.²⁰

¹⁵ Hans Rogger, “The Jewish Policy of Late Tsarism: A Reappraisal,” *Wiener Library Bulletin* (1973): 42–51; John D. Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 234–51, 386–410; Hans Rogger, “Conclusion and Overview,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 314–72; Michael I. Aronson, “The Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia in 1881,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 44–61.

¹⁶ For a long-term comparative overview, see Werner Bergmann, *Tumulte, Excesse, Pogrome. Kollektive Gewalt gegen Juden in Europa 1789–1900* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2020).

¹⁷ Max Weber, “Politics as Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Hans Gerth and Charles Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 78.

¹⁸ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv–Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv (ÖStA-AVA), Inneres MdI Präsidium A2119, Präsidium des k. k. Ministeriums des Inneren, “Stimmungsbericht des Militärkommandos Przemyśl,” July 2/7, 1918.

¹⁹ Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie (ANK), 268/0/15.5/177, K. k. Gendarmarieabteilungskommando Nr. 20, “Exh. Nr. 744,” July 5, 1918.

²⁰ E.g., Polska Akademia Umiejętności (PAU), Rkps 4175, Napady bandyckie na Zator, “Krzeszowice i Alwernię,” undated (1918); ÖStA-AVA, Inneres MdI Präsidium A2119, Präsidium des k. k. Ministeriums des Inneren “Stimmungsbericht des Militärkommandos Przemyśl,” July 2/7, 1918; ANK, 268/0/15.5/177, Landesgendarmariekommando Nr. 5, Abteilung Wadowice, Posten zu Zator Nr. 22, “Spf. Nro. 52,” July 7, 1918.

That in the wake of a collapsing supply situation, rising antisemitism, and a failing state, Jews were subjected to violence and plunder had been observable since 1917 and had intensified throughout the year 1918.²¹ The state was neither capable of supplying the population nor of bringing the violent chaos—a symptom often resulting from the former—under control. The military command in Przemyśl wrote that therefore “the populace increasingly believes that the state is neither in a position nor has the power to maintain order and security; this naturally brings state authority itself into disrepute.”²² At the same time, military units were increasingly fracturing along national lines.²³ Having failed in their core task of protecting the population, there were no longer any positive bonds between the people and the state and its institutions, which were now experienced only in their most oppressive form: arresting relatives who were hiding from military duties, confiscating foodstuffs, arresting black marketeers, and supposedly protecting the rich, the hoarders, and speculators—as whom Jews were very often imagined.²⁴ With the state failing, there had been cases of ad hoc organized self-protection throughout the year 1918, principally by Jews responding to attacks on their communities in the absence of state-provided security, but with the disintegration of the state apparatus, this became an almost universal development.²⁵ In September 1918 a report to the Polish National Committee in Zurich noted that because of the failure of the state to protect the citizenry, people in small towns as well as in major cities like Kraków considered establishing citizens’ guards to protect their homes.²⁶

Within a few days in late October and early November 1918, everything came crashing down. On October 28, Polish nationalists declared the end of Habsburg rule in Galicia and their newly created temporary government—the *Komisja Likwidacyjna* (Liquidation Commission)—claimed power in the former crownland from its seat in Kraków.²⁷ In Lviv, Ukrainian units of the Habsburg army took power in much of the city on the night of October 31, hoisting the Ukrainian flag and proclaiming the West Ukrainian People’s Republic.²⁸

Whereas these declarations of independent statehood seemed grand, they often had very limited practical impact, especially outside the main urban centers (Lviv and Kraków), where self-declared “national” governments had little reach and even less influence. Despite both sides claiming to be creating states, they were largely incapable of establishing a state’s core function, the “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force.” In much of the region, locals resorted to physical force and essentially assumed power from below. They did so by storming police and gendarmerie posts, disarming the last uniformed representatives of the old regime, taking weapons from army warehouses, and organizing their own armed units to protect their communities and maintain some semblance of public order. Zygmunt Lasocki, who assumed the role of head of the administration of the Liquidation

²¹ Kutílek, “Jews in Limbo,” 169–92; Rybak, *Everyday Zionism*, 156–64.

²² ÖStA-AVA, Inneres MdI Präsidium A2119, Präsidium des k. k. Ministeriums des Inneren, “Stimmungsbericht des Militärkommandos Przemyśl,” Oct. 17/28, 1918.

²³ ÖStA-AVA, Inneres MdI Präsidium A2119, Präsidium des k. k. Ministeriums des Inneren, “Stimmungsbericht des Militärkommandos Przemyśl,” Oct. 17/28, 1918.

²⁴ ANK, 230 /0/-/6, K. u. k. Militärkommando Krakau, “7152/Gstb. to C. K. Starostwo w Tarnowie,” Sept. 2, 1918; ANK, 230 /0/-/6, K. k. Ministerium des Inneren, “Z.Z. 10,878 to C.K. Starostwo w Tarnowie,” May 6, 1918; ANK, 234/1, Pinkas Volk, “Letter to C. K. Starostwo w Dąbrowie,” Feb. 4, 1918.

²⁵ Armeeoberkommando to Präsidium des k.k. Ministeriums des Inneren, “Stimmungsbericht des Militärkommandos in Przemyśl,” June 18/July 4, 1918, ÖStA-AVA, Inneres MdI Präsidium A2118, K.u.k.

²⁶ Comité National Polonais (Zurich), “Exposé: La vie a Cracovie,” Sept. 12, 1918, Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), 39/0/12/1915.

²⁷ Marek Przeniosło, *Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna 1918–1919* (Kielce: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego Jana Kochanowskiego, 2010), 17–19.

²⁸ Stephen Velychenko, *State Building in Revolutionary Ukraine: A Comparative Study of Governments and Bureaucrats, 1917–1922* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 208–10. Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 75–78.

Commission, explained this dynamic through his nationalist lens, claiming that the gendarmerie (he did not mention the police) were alien-national and therefore hated by the locals.²⁹ While unsurprising, given Lasocki's patriotic credentials, this explanation is nonsensical, not least because people also targeted, disarmed, and supplanted police, who had generally been recruited from the local populace.³⁰ However, Lasocki made an important observation regarding the motivation and composition of these new armed formations. They were, he wrote, "composed of people living in a given municipality or locality, connected to the local population by ties of kinship and [shared] interests."³¹ Less the grand national concepts and promises and more local conditions and relations between neighbors determined who was part of this usurpation of power and how these newly established armed forces would treat individuals and communities in their sphere of influence.

While Lasocki's observations related primarily to West Galicia, the war-ravaged east of the former crownland similarly saw a complete collapse of institutional order. In contrast to West Galicia, however, the local forms of usurpation of power largely materialized along national fault lines, continuing and accelerating the national stratifications of previous months.³² Within a few days, local military units claiming to represent and defend their nations emerged, fought against each other, and established control, trying to simultaneously establish national rule over claimed neighborhoods and territories, and to provide some semblance of stability and order for "their" populace. In both West and East Galicia, Jews were part of this process. They mirrored the actions of their neighbors, sometimes participating in local militias, and at other times establishing their own. Similarly, the two dimensions of armed organization in Galicia—providing security and building states—were evident in the actions of Jewish communities and activists, making them an active and not merely reactive part of the state-building processes.

East Galicia

Historians have at times described the sectarian, nationalist violence that followed the collapse of the Habsburg state as "inevitable."³³ It appears that with the collapse of the multinational state, the peoples of East Galicia—around 64.5 percent Ukrainians, 22 percent Poles, and 12 percent Jews, if we accept the categorizations derived from the 1910 census—were destined to violently turn against each other.³⁴ I argue that such interpretations fail on two accounts: 1) they suggest a rather dystopian idea of the region and of diversity in general, implying that different national, ethnic, linguistic, etc. groups would be unable to co-exist peacefully; and 2), they subsume the diverse actions of locals in national meta-narratives that fail to account for the concerns and decisions of individuals and communities that did not necessarily match them. In fact, in several places, while there were armed conflicts, people were often less concerned with implementing ethno-nationalist

²⁹ Zygmunt Lasocki, "Letter to Ignacy Paderewski," Mar. 13, 1919, PAU, Rkps 4177.

³⁰ This is reflected in part by the complete lack of notes in most local police and gendarmerie record books in the first weeks of November 1918, sometimes until the end of the year. E.g., ANK, 261/0/-/11, Komenda Powiatowa Policji Państwowej w Oświęcimiu, "Dziennik podawczy 1918," 1918; ANK 268/0/2.1/15, Posterunek Żandarmerii Lipnica Dolna, "Dziennik 1918–1919," 1918/19; ANK 29/268/0/11.2/143, Komenda Powiatowa Policji Państwowej w Limanowa, "Dziennik podawczy (prezydialny) tajny, 1918/1919," 1918/19.

³¹ PAU, Rkps 4177, Zygmunt Lasocki, "Letter to Ignacy Paderewski," Mar. 13, 1919.

³² Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 75–76; Böhler, *Civil War in Central Europe*, 77–79.

³³ Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914–1918* (Milton Keynes: Penguin Books, 2015), 545; Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 75.

³⁴ On the demographic data: Piotr Eberhardt, *Ethnic Groups and Population Changes in Twentieth-Century Central-Eastern Europe: History, Data, Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 92–93. The argument about the post-imperial inevitability of violence was also made at the time. E.g., Cohen, *A Report on the Pogroms*, 7;

territorial projects than they were with keeping their communities safe, which left considerable room for local cooperation across ethnic/national/religious/linguistic lines. For the Jewish population, this in turn provided a political space in which they could position themselves as one of many nations, potentially participating in a joint, multinational state-building project.

Przemyśl, the fortress city, today at the border between Ukraine and Poland, where at the time about one third of the population was Jewish, in the wake of imperial collapse saw no immediate “inevitability” of nationalist conflict.³⁵ On October 31, local Polish and Ukrainian national committees even briefly established a joint city administration. A committee of Jewish parties, led by different Zionist factions, followed by establishing their own Peoples’ Council, which was recognized by its Gentile counterparts, with one of its representatives co-opted into the trinational city government. This initial local understanding collapsed on November 3, when newly arrived Ukrainian troops took over the city south of the San (Sian) River while Polish forces held the north bank.³⁶ This, however, did not immediately affect the Jewish community. The Jewish militia, which had been established a few days earlier, had a clearly defined and mutually agreed-upon area under its control—the Jewish quarter on the south bank—and was recognized, even seen as a partner, by their Polish and Ukrainian counterparts.³⁷ On November 4, the Ukrainian National Council declared that only Ukrainian and Jewish soldiers were permitted to carry arms, emphasizing in their newspaper on the following day that since Jews were absolutely loyal and did not aim to establish their own territorial state, they should be fully respected.³⁸ That same day, the Polish National Council published a leaflet, stating that “The Jewish People’s Council takes the most neutral and correct position towards us [...]. The same position is taken by the Jewish militia.”³⁹

The principal task of the militia was to protect the Jewish neighborhood, mainly against marauders and plunderers. Tzvi Luft, a twenty-four-year-old Zionist activist and veteran of the Habsburg army, who became one of the commanders of the militia later remembered: “There were no mob outbreaks, which must surely be largely attributed to the militia’s actions, however there was certainly no lack of individual attempts at robbery and destruction.”⁴⁰ Despite having considerable arms at their disposal following the plundering of a

³⁵ On Przemyśl during war and violent transition: John E. Fahey, *Przemyśl, Poland: A Multiethnic City During and After a Fortress, 1867–1939* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2023), 72–125.

³⁶ Tsentral’nyy Derzhavnyy Istorychnyy Arkhiv Ukrayiny m. Lviv (TsDIAL), F. 584, d. 9, L. 200 (Polish-Ukrainian Agreement on the City Administration), Nov. 1918; Archiwum Państwowe w Przemyślu (APPr), 397/0/2823, Volodymyr Blazhkovski, Herman Liberman, Feliks Pryemski, Dr. Leonard Tarnavski, Andriy Alyskevych, Volodymyr Zahajkevych, Ivan Zhovnir Evhen Forostyna, “Leaflet ‘Do naseleennya mista i povitu,’” Nov. 2, 1918; APPr, 140/0/2/12, Żydowska Rada Ludowa w Przemyślu, “Letter to Rady Narodowej Polskiej w Przemyślu,” Nov. 5, 1918; Curt Dunagan, “The Lost World of Przemyśl: Interethnic Dynamics in a Galician Center: 1868 to 1921” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2009), 357–60; John E. Fahey, “From Imperial to National: Przemyśl, Galicia’s Transformation through World War I,” *Region* (2015): 213–14; Zdzisław Konieczny, *Polska Rada Narodowa w Przemyślu (4 listopad 1918–15 luty 1919)* (Przemyśl: Archiwum Państwowe, 2012).

³⁷ APPr, 140/0/2/12, Żydowska Rada Ludowa w Przemyślu, “Letter to Rady Narodowej Polskiej w Przemyślu,” Nov. 5, 1918; APPr, 140/0/2/12, Żydowska Rada Ludowa w Przemyślu, “Letter to Rady Narodowej Polskiej w Przemyślu,” Nov. 8, 1918; APPr, 140/0/2/12, Polska Rada Narodowa w Przemyślu, “Letter to Żydowska Rada Ludowa w Przemyślu,” Nov. 9, 1918; APPr, 140/0/3/26, Ukrayins’ke Viys’kove Komenda Voyenna Peremys’koho Okruha, “Poster: ‘Opovistka. Loraznyy Sud,’” Nov. 4 1918; APPr, 397/0/-/2824, Polska Rada Narodowa w Przemyślu, “Leaflet ‘Odezwał,’” Nov. 5, 1918.

³⁸ APPr, 140/0/3/26, Ukrayins’ke Viys’kove Komenda Voyenna Peremys’koho Okruha, “Poster: ‘Opovistka. Loraznyy Sud,’” Nov. 4, 1918; Anonymous, “Yak mayemo zakhovuvaty sya surporty Polyakiv. Zhydiv, shcho mesh kayut’ v mezhakh nashoyi derzhavy?,” *Volya*, Nov. 5, 1918, 2.

³⁹ APPr, 397/0/-/2824, Polska Rada Narodowa w Przemyślu, “Leaflet ‘Odezwał,’” Nov. 5, 1918.

⁴⁰ Tzvi Luft, “November 1918,” in *Sefer Pshemishl*, ed. Arie Menczer (Tel Aviv: Irgun Yotzei Pshemishl be-Yisrael, 1964), 194. On Luft’s biography: Matityahu, in *Sefer Pshemishl*, ed. Arie Menczer (Tel Aviv: Irgun Yotzei Pshemishl be-Yisrael, 1964), 301–03.

former K. u. k. arms depot—Luft spoke of 400 rifles as well as handguns, and a few months later the police discovered machine guns—it was more of a police force than a self-defense detachment.⁴¹ Luft was also dispatched to the Polish-controlled north bank, where with the agreement and support of the Polish command he organized a militia from the smaller Jewish community there, which secured the area around the synagogue in Grunwaldzka Street and dispatched patrols to protect a nearby soap and candle factory against looting.⁴²

At the same time, the militia served a decidedly internal purpose. Its very first act had been to depose—according to some reports, to arrest—the old leadership of the Jewish community and to impose the power of the Zionist-led People's Council.⁴³ It also secured food supplies and, like other Jewish militias, appears to have recruited members from all walks of Jewish society, including Yeshiva students, workers, former soldiers, and *laidik-gaiers* (unemployed/idlers) and trained every day.⁴⁴ This tense but relatively stable situation collapsed when newly arrived Polish military forces broke the stalemate, stormed across the railway bridge, and drove the Ukrainians from the city.⁴⁵ The Jewish militia at this point disarmed itself. As much as it may have considered itself a neutral third-party factor in a city in political transition, the outside Polish military forces, whose interest lay not in local relations but in an ethno-nationalist state-building project, turned against the Jewish community, with mass outbreaks of violence that claimed the lives of several Jews, and with the threat of staging a full-scale pogrom.⁴⁶ It must be emphasized, however, that some local Polish nationalists—in the form of the Polish National Council—continued to adhere to the earlier multinational understanding, intervening with the Polish command to prevent, or rather stop, the pogrom.⁴⁷ Israel Cohen even quoted eighty-year-old Leonard Tarnowski, a leader of the Polish National Council, who reportedly declared to the military commander that he would “have to order firing at me and the Poles before you let your soldiers loose against the Jews.”⁴⁸

The dynamics of cooperation with other nationalities and their representatives, the establishment of order and security, and especially the internal role of the militia was evident in many places. “The militia command did not contend itself with maintaining

⁴¹ Gans, “Dr Tzvi Luft,” 301–03; Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe (CAW), L. dz. 810/Def., I.304.1.12., “Obozu Jeńców i Internowanych w Przemyślu,” 1919.

⁴² Luft, “November 1918,” 195.

⁴³ APPr, 140/0/3/28, Żydowska Rada Ludowa, “Poster ‘Żydzil,’” Nov. 1918; Anonymous, “Żydowska Rada ludowa I Rada Żołn. w Przemyślu,” *Nowy Dziennik*, Nov. 6, 1918, 1; Yosef Altbauer, “Pshemishl overet tachat shlaton polani,” in *Sefer Pshemishl*, ed. Arie Menczer (Tel Aviv: Irgun Yotze'i Pshemishl be-Yisrael, 1964), 185–90.

⁴⁴ Altbauer, “Pshemishl overet tachat shlaton polani,” 185–86; Luft, “November 1918,” 196.

⁴⁵ Fahey, “From Imperial to National,” 214–15; Zdzisław Konieczny, *Walki polsko-ukraińskie w Przemyślu i okolicy: listopad grudzień 1918* (Przemyśl: Tow. Przyjaciół Nauk 1993). On the Przemyśl pogrom: Waclaw Wierzbinić, “Zajścia antyżydowskie w Przemyślu pod koniec 1918 r,” in *Świat niepożegnany: Żydzi na dawnych ziemiach wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej w XVIII–XX wieku*, ed. Krzysztof Jasiewicz (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2004), 573–80.

⁴⁶ Central Zionist Archives CZA, Z3\178, Jüdischer Nationalrat für Deutschösterreich, “Einige Auszüge aus den beim jüdischen Nationalrat für Deutschösterreich erliegenden Materialien über die polnischen Pogrome,” Nov. 1918; YIVO, RG 448 Folder 17, Dr. D., “Letter from Przemyśl,” Nov. 11, 1918; APPr, 140/0/2/12, Polska Rada Narodowa w Przemyślu, “Letter to Żydowska Rada Ludowa w Przemyślu,” Nov. 12, 1918; APPr, 397/0/514, Komenda Miejskowa Wojsk Polskich w Przemyślu, “Leaflet ‘Ogłoszenie,’” Nov. 1918; YIVO, RG 448 Folder 17, Unknown Author, “Report on the Pogrom in Przemyśl,” Nov. 18, 1918; YIVO, RG 448 Folder 17, Sala Finkelhammer, “Letter from Przemyśl,” Nov. 15, 1918.

⁴⁷ APPr, 397/0/512, Michał Tokrazewski, “Poster: ‘Ogłoszenie,’” Nov. 19, 1918; Polska Rada Ludowa, “Odpowiedź Polskiej Rady Narodowej na list żydowskiej Rady ludowej,” *Ziemia Przemyska*, Nov. 19, 1918, 1–2.

⁴⁸ Cohen, *A Report on the Pogroms in Poland*, 21.

order outside,” remembered Ben-Tsion Fet, a thirty-two-year-old Zionist leader and war veteran, one of the commanders of the Jewish militia in Ternopil (Tarnopol). “It considered its main task—the enforcement of order internally.”⁴⁹ In December 1918, the militia command there even implemented universal conscription for all Jewish men born between 1892 and 1900. Around 800 men were drafted and equipped with arms that were provided by the Ukrainian authorities. They had powers of arrest of both Jews and non-Jews and managed their own jail, effectively becoming the armed force of the Jewish national representation, the National Council, which, like in Przemyśl and many other places, had supplanted the old community leadership.⁵⁰ Similar dynamics unfolded throughout the region. Everywhere, old community boards were replaced by newly created national councils that were for the most part led by Zionist activists, and Jewish militias, assuming similar tasks and following similar patterns were established in places such as Berezhany (Brzeżany), Jarosław (Yaroslav), Tysmenytsia (Tyśmienica), Stanyslaviv (Stanisławów; today Ivano-Frankivsk), Stryi (Stryj), Rozhnativ (Rożniatów), and probably others.⁵¹

These structures and organizations were integrated into the state-building project of the West Ukrainian People’s Republic. In some respects, this built on pre-war traditions of cooperation between Jewish (particularly Zionist) movements and their Ukrainian counterparts in the region; in practice, however, the Ukrainian promise of national autonomy for the minority and the mere reality of their state-in-the-making being in control of the region created the conditions for cooperation.⁵² In some cases, Jewish militias—or a great number of their men—even joined the armed forces of the nascent Ukrainian state.⁵³ At the same time, from the Jewish perspective, this was still a matter of self-confident autonomy rather than submission and over time, considerable conflicts arose over control as, despite all assurances, the West Ukrainian authorities would not accept completely independent Jewish forces on their territory. In the wake of this, some Jewish militias were disbanded for allegedly (or potentially) siding with the Poles; there were increasing cases of violence by Ukrainian forces against Jewish civilians, and considerable pressure was exerted on Jews

⁴⁹ Ben-Tsion Fet, “Mi-shlaton ostri le-shlaton ukraini,” in *Tarnopol*, ed. P. Korngruen (Jerusalem: Hēvrat entsiklopedyah shel galuyot, 1955), 169. On his biography: Yitzhak Estreicher, “Be-Tsion Fet,” in *Kehilat Reisha: Sefer zikaron*, ed. Moshe Ya’ari Vald (Tel Aviv: Irgune bene Reisha be-Yisrael uve-Artsot ha-Brit, 1967), 261–62.

⁵⁰ Fet, “Mi-shlaton ostri,” 168–72. On the national councils in East Galicia: Marcos Silber, *The Jewish National Councils 1917–1919: A Selection of Documents* (Göttingen: 2025), 89–94.

⁵¹ A. Shaklai, “Sof hama’a ha-19 ad 1920,” in *Bez’ez’ani, Narayuv, veva-sevivah*, ed. Menachem Katz (Haifa: Hotsa’ah peratit shel Irgun Yotse’i Beze’za’ni, Narayuv veva-sevivah, be-Yisrael uve-Artsot ha-Brit, 1978), 33; Shlomo Blond, *Tismenits* (Tel Aviv: Hamenorah, 1974), 82; Nathan Michael Gelber, “Toldot ha’am ha-yehudi be-Stanislav,” in *Arim ve-imahot be-Yisrael; matsevet kodesh li-kehilot Yisrael she-nehhrevu bi-yede aritsim ve-teme’im bi-milhemet’olam ha-aharonah*, Vol. 5: Stanislav, ed. Dov Sadan and Menachem Gelerter (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kuk, 1952), 55; Naphtali Zigel, “Yami ha-shlaton ha-ukrainim (1918),” in *Sefer Stri*, ed. Natan Kudish (Tel Aviv: Irgun yotse’i Stri be-Yisrael, 1962), 69; Ben Tsion Horowitz, “Le’achar milchamet ha-’olam ha-rishonah,” in *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Rozniatow*, ed. Shimon Kanc (Reprint, Amherst: National Yiddish Book Center, 2001), 103; Raport służbowy, Feb. 28, 1919, CAW, I.304.1.12. On the national councils and their assumption of power within the communities in East Galicia: *Mittaylungen funim Ostgalitsishen Yudishen Natsionalrat*, Feb. 25, 1919; Apr. 13, 1919.

⁵² Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 71–73. Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 258–64; John Paul Himka, “Dimensions of a Triangle: Polish–Ukrainian–Jewish Relations in Austrian Galicia,” *Polin* (1999): 25–48; Reuven Fahn, *Geshikhte fun der Yudisher natsyonaloytonomye in’m period fun der Mayrev-Ukraynisher republik* (Lviv: Farlag Kultur, 1933); Nahum Michael Gelber, “The National Autonomy of Eastern Galician Jewry in the West Ukrainian Republic, 1918–1919,” in *A History of Polish Jewry During the Revival of Poland*, ed. Isaac Lewin (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1990), 221–309.

⁵³ Oleh Stetsyshyn, “Military Cooperation of the Jewish Population of Galicia with the West Ukrainian Peoples’ Republic (1918–1923),” *Humanitarian Studies: History and Pedagogy* 2024): 51–76; Yaroslav Tynchenko, “The Jewish Formations of West Ukraine in the Civil War,” *Polin* (2014): 197–212.

to join the army of the state, which Jewish organizations and representatives resisted and vehemently protested.⁵⁴

The most notable of the Jewish paramilitaries, which has featured most prominently in historiography and memory, was the Jewish militia in Lviv. For the most part, the militia's "role" in these analyses relates to the pogrom that unfolded in the city on November 21–23, to its failure in protecting the community, and especially to the Polish claim over its alleged breach of neutrality as the supposed cause of the mass violence against the Jewish community.⁵⁵ Given the horror of the pogrom and its centrality in shaping Polish–Jewish relations in the following decades, this is understandable. Nonetheless, such readings of the militia's story tend to interpret events and ascribe historical significance backwards (from the pogrom), and thereby risk missing important other dimensions of its story.

The Jewish militia in Lviv was established on November 1, 1918 by a joint committee of Jewish parties, in the wake of the disintegration of the local garrison along national lines and the ensuing Ukrainian–Polish conflict over the city.⁵⁶ Similar to the situation in Przemyśl, an initial agreement was reached with the Polish and Ukrainian sides, clearly delineating the areas under its control; an area where the majority of the city's Jews, about a quarter of the population, lived.⁵⁷ In the highly precarious situation of the ongoing Polish–Ukrainian conflict, the release of prisoners from the city's jail, and overall chaos, the Jewish militia aimed to establish security and control on the part of the Jewish population of the city. Max Reimer, an eyewitness, reported: "The Jewish population wanted to guarantee the security in the 'ghetto' itself. Following a proclamation, several hundred Jewish soldiers volunteered for the Jewish militia, who were identified with a stamped white band and served only in the Jewish quarter. They were primarily tasked with maintaining public order and preventing plunder and robbery."⁵⁸ It appears that most of the militiamen were former soldiers of the Habsburg army with reported numbers varying from 302 soldiers and forty-five officers to 600 or even 800 militiamen.⁵⁹ Yedidyah Shoham, the teenager from whose diary I quoted at the beginning of this article, wrote on November 16 that he wanted

⁵⁴ Gelber, "The National Autonomy of East Galician Jewry," 261–64. On protests against recruitment: CAHJP, P83/G/266, Jüdischer Nationalrat für Ostgalizien, "Protest (translation Nathan Gelber)," Jan. 21, 1919; CAHJP, P83/G/265, "Pressedienst der Delegation des Jüdischen Nationalrats für Ostgalizien," Feb. 28, 1919.

⁵⁵ Engel, "Lwów, 1918," 32–46; Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others*, 101–30; William Hagen, "The Moral Economy of Popular Violence: The Pogrom in Lwów, November 1918," in *Antisemitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland*, ed. Robert Blobaum (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 124–47; Mick, *Lemberg*, 137–208; Svyatoslav Pacholikov, "Zwischen Einbeziehung und Ausgrenzung. Die Juden in Lemberg, 1918–1919," in *Vertraut und fremd zugleich: Jüdisch-christliche Nachbarschaften in Warschau-Lengenau-Lemberg*, ed. Alexandra Binnenkade et al. (Cologne: Böhlau, 2009), 155–216; Jerzy Tomaszewski, "Lwów-Listopad 1918. Niezwykłe losy pewnego dokumentu," *Dzieje Najnowsze* (1993): 164–73; Kutilek, "Looting and Killing are Permitted." A recent article by Oleh Stetsyshyn re-approaches this experience by centering on the Jewish Militia as an actor in its own right: Oleh Stetsyshyn, "'Zhydivs'ka militsiya' L'vova yak tretia storona 'L'vivs'kykh boyiv' 1–21 lystopada 1918 roku mizh ukraïyns'kymy viys'kamy i pol'skymy formuvannyamy," *Visnyk Kyivskoho natsional'noho universytetu imeni Tarasa Shevchenka—Istoriya* (2021): 66–71.

⁵⁶ Stetsyshyn, "Military Cooperation," 59–61; Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 76–77.

⁵⁷ Mick, *Lemberg*, 148; YIVO, RG 448 Folder 17, Bronisław Łapiński, Isidor Fuchs, Reiss, Alexandrowicz, "Agreement between the Jewish Militia and the Polish Army," Nov. 10, 1918.

⁵⁸ CZA, Z3\174, Max Reimer, "Die Pogrome in Lemberg," undated (probably late November 1918).

⁵⁹ Prusin, *Nationalizing*, 78–81. A report by Elias Nacht, a Zionist from the city who lived through the events stated that the Jewish militia had 800 men, which was probably an exaggeration. CZA, Z3\174, Elias Nacht, "Das Blutbad von Lemberg," undated (probably late November or early December 1918). Another report which was given to the Zionist Central Bureau in Berlin mentioned 600 militiamen. CZA, Z3\179, Zionist Central Bureau Berlin, "Report on Lemberg," Nov. 28, 1918. See also the account by one of the commanders: Central archives for the History of the Jewish People CAHJP, PL/164, Fischel Waschitz, "Milicya Żydowska we Lwowie," undated.

to enlist in the militia or with the paramedics but both refused him because they already had sufficient personnel.⁶⁰

As in other cases, the Jewish militia ought to be conceptualized as more than “merely” a means to defend oneself against the threat of a pogrom. Fischel Waschitz, who had unsuccessfully attempted to raise a Jewish Legion in Lviv in August 1914 and was now one of the commanders of the militia, described its role as suppressing price-gouging and the hoarding of foodstuffs, arresting thieves and speculators—Jewish and non-Jewish—and providing general security in the areas under its control.⁶¹ Similarly, Yosef Tenenbaum, a Zionist leader and army doctor, wrote in his account that “the Jewish militia did its duty, providing food for the starving, bringing wounded to the hospitals, burying bodies, protecting the municipal gasworks, organizing the provision of the Jewish quarter, easing the hardships of the situation.”⁶² The report by a delegation of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in December 1918 similarly noted that the Jewish militia had controlled and secured the proper functioning of municipal gas and water works and had set and controlled prices in local shops that were mandatory for both Christian and Jewish merchants.⁶³ All this indicates that the militia did not “only” center on the Jewish community but took responsibility for the wider city. Furthermore, Tenenbaum stated that due to its neutrality in the Polish–Ukrainian conflict, “[t]he Jewish militia soon became the most popular institution in Lemberg, whose services were not only used by Jews, but even non-Jews entrusted the Jewish militia with the protection of their property. Many Christian merchants let their shops be protected by the militia. But the two fighting parties also needed a neutral, mediating factor and for this reason the militia could establish itself as an equally fruitful factor for both sides.”⁶⁴ It may be an overstatement to describe it as “the most popular institution” but Tenenbaum’s account, corroborated by others, highlights how the Jewish paramilitary organization assumed responsibility for the wider city and community, beyond immediate self-defense of the Jewish population. In fact, from their perspective, the two factors conditioned one another.

The problem of Jewish neutrality in this conflict has been central to contemporary and historiographic analysis of the events. Polish (incorrect) claims that the Jewish militia breached its pledge of neutrality and sided with the Ukrainians in the fight over the city were used as a rationale for the pogrom that unfolded in the Jewish quarter from November 21 to 23 after Polish forces had taken the city and the Jewish militia surrendered its weapons. This in turn informed responses and historiographic assessments of events.⁶⁵ To a certain extent, this reads history backwards—from the pogrom or its aftermath—thereby situating the militia primarily in the context of all-out anti-Jewish violence. As in other places, however, the militia and its neutrality were an essential part not only of an attempt to organize day-to-day security and survival in a highly precarious situation, but the armed expression of a vision of equality between the national communities of a newly forming multinational state. Not least, this is expressed in the conclusions that many Jewish

⁶⁰ Shoham, *Yoman Ne’urim*, 92. This is confirmed by Josef Bendow (Yosef Tenenbaum), *Der Lemberger Judenpogrom* (Vienna, Brno: M. Hickl Verlag, 1919), 25.

⁶¹ CAHJP, PL/164, Fischel Waschitz, “Milicya Żydowska we Lwowie,” undated. On Waschitz: Ephraim (Fischel) Waschitz, *Derekh ha-yav shel tsiyonit lohem: Kovets mismakhim metuch archivun shel Ephraim Washitz* (Jerusalem: Ahi’asaf, 1947).

⁶² Bendow (Tenenbaum), *Der Lemberger Judenpogrom*, 15–16. On Tenenbaum’s service during the Great War: Yosef Tenenbaum, in *fayer: Ertsehlungen fun’m shlakhtfeld fun a doktor in der alter estraykhish-ungarisher army* (New York: Maks N. Mayzel, 1926).

⁶³ AAN, 2/39/0/2/159, “Raport tymczasowy delegacji Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych,” Dec. 17, 1918.

⁶⁴ Bendow (Tenenbaum), *Der Lemberger Judenpogrom*, 15.

⁶⁵ E.g., Engel, “Lwów, 1918,” 32–46; Fink, *Defending the Rights*, 101–30; Mick, *Lemberg*, 137–208; Kutilek, “Looting and Killing are Permitted.”

activists, some of them members of the militia, drew from the pogrom—that only national autonomy would prevent future violence and allow for a peaceful coexistence of the many nations of the new state.⁶⁶

West Galicia

Less affected by immediate nationalist warfare and with less pressure to position itself as a neutral “third” nation, efforts in West Galicia, where about 10 percent of the population were Jewish, related even more directly to the Polish state-building project. In the last days of October and early days of November, local militias sprung up everywhere in the region. As in other places, they were mainly a response to the power vacuum and crisis of security in the region, as the state had collapsed and former soldiers and deserters roamed the countryside—both a challenge to security and a source of local militiamen for months to come.⁶⁷ As the earlier quote by Lasocki indicated, they related to local conditions, meaning that the implications for Jewish communities differed from place to place. In some towns, such as in Chrzanów, Jews were, at least initially, integrated into the rank and file of the local citizens’ guard.⁶⁸ In Wiśnicz, it appears that the citizens’ guard was even exclusively composed of Jews.⁶⁹ In Dąbrowa (Dąbrowa Tarnowska) nationally minded Jews pushed aside the traditional leadership of the community and held negotiations with Christian-Polish representatives for the establishment of a joint citizens’ guard.⁷⁰ In most places, however, these local armed forces reflected communitarian structures and interests, and were sometimes initiated or led by local Polish-nationalist organizations and were exclusively recruited from the Christian-Polish population. Mirroring this, Jews in many places formed their own militias.

The creation of these Jewish militias appears to have been a simultaneous response to their exclusion from the “regular” citizens’ guards, the general sense of insecurity, and the expectation of imminent organized violence against the community. In many places, mistrust of the “general” (non-Jewish) town militia was warranted. In Mielec, locals and deserters stormed the gendarmerie post on November 1, beat its commander to death, and stole the weapons to establish a militia.⁷¹ Despite repeated requests, Jews were not admitted into its ranks. Initially, it nonetheless maintained order and prevented peasants from the surrounding villages from plundering of Jewish shops. Three days later, however, it stood idly by as people attacked Jews and looted shops, because the militiamen, according to one official, “did not want to get in danger for the Jews.”⁷² In Trzebinia, Jews obtained permission from the head of the district to establish a militia but were forced to accept a notoriously antisemitic local politician as its commander.⁷³ Similarly, fearing pogroms

⁶⁶ E.g., Israel Cohen, *A Report on the Pogroms in Poland*, 34–36.

⁶⁷ E.g., ANK, 229/0/15/33, Powiatowe Dowództwo Straży bezpieczeństwa w Oświęcimiu, “Raport,” Dec. 12, 1918; ANK, 256/0/-/1, Dowództwo Straży bezpieczeństwa okręgu Krakowskiego, “Raport,” Dec. 11, 1918.

⁶⁸ YIVO, RG 448 Folder 18, Poalej Syjon, Żydowska Partia Socjalistyczna, Partia Syjonistyczna, “Report on the Pogrom in Chrzanów,” Nov. 1918; PAU, Rkps 4174, Józef Mohr, “Relacya,” Nov. 12, 1918.

⁶⁹ YIVO, RG 448 Folder 17, Board of Directors of the Jewish Community of Wiśnicz, “Letter to Jewish National Committee in Kraków,” Dec. 4, 1918.

⁷⁰ ANK, 234/2, Zwierzchność Gminy Wyznaniowej Izraelickiej w Dąbrowie, “Letter to Starostwo w Dąbrowie,” Nov. 26, 1918.

⁷¹ PAU, Rkps 4174, Inspektorat Straży na Zachodnia Galicję, “Raport Mielec,” Dec. 6, 1918.

⁷² PAU, Rkps 4174, Inspektorat Straży na Zachodnia Galicję, “Raport Mielec,” Dec. 6, 1918. YIVO, RG 448 Folder 17, Jehuda Kohn et al., “A short description of the antisemitic excesses in Mielec,” Jan. 1, 1919. Konrad Zieliński, “Z fali zająć antysemitycznych i pogromów w Galicji Zachodniej: Mielec, listopad 1918 r.,” in *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach Polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, Vol. 2: Studia Przypadków (do 1939 roku), eds. Kamil Kijek, Artur Markowski, Konrad Zieliński (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2019), 217–40.

⁷³ YIVO, RG 448 Box 2 Folder 17, “Report on Trzebinia,” Nov. 1918.

and due to “the influence of the proclamation of the [Polish Liquidation Commission]” an exclusively Jewish militia was established in Rozwadów.⁷⁴ In Szczakowa, Jews formed an independent militia which was soon disarmed by the order of its Christian-Polish counterpart.⁷⁵ Despite initial understandings, the Jewish militiamen in Chrzanów were eventually disarmed and two men who refused were executed. This was followed by plunder and violence against Jewish residents and Jewish-owned shops.⁷⁶

In Oświęcim, following a series of violent robberies and attacks against Jews—the perpetrators were described as bandits or deserters—and after open threats against the community by some Christian-Polish notables of the town, Jews decided to arm themselves.⁷⁷ Young Jewish men and women took over the old imperial and royal arms depot, took rifles and machine guns, and swore to defend their community.⁷⁸ “Let us not stretch forth our throats to the slaughter! As long as we are able to maintain our honor and our right to human existence, we can hope that we will eventually achieve independence as they [the Poles] have. We must demonstrate by our stance both our strength and our determined decision: We will defend our families’ lives and our honor, we will defend ourselves by force!”⁷⁹ Indeed, a few days later the Jewish militia there successfully fought off an organized attack by peasants from the surrounding villages.⁸⁰

The most significant of the Jewish militias was established in Kraków. In late October/early November, when the Liquidation Commission took charge, and some attacks against Jews occurred in the city (albeit minor, in regional comparison), activists of various Jewish parties and movements—most of them Zionists, Poalei Tsion, or socialists—convened to establish a militia, replicating the actions of their Christian-Polish neighbors, and establishing order and security in the Jewish quarter of Kazimierz. As in other places, this went hand-in-hand with the establishment of a Jewish National Council that claimed to represent the Jewish people of the city and was recognized as such by the new Polish leadership.⁸¹ A joint leaflet, signed by the Jewish Military Committee, the Jewish National

⁷⁴ YIVO, RG 448 Box 2 Folder 17, “Report on Rozwadów,” Nov. 1918.

⁷⁵ YIVO, RG 448 Box 2 Folder 17, “Szczakowa: Protocol,” Nov. 8, 1918.

⁷⁶ YIVO, RG 448 Box 2 Folder 17, Reuben Ernst, “Chrzanów,” Nov. 1918; CZA, L6\112, Samuel Horowitz, “Zu den Judenpogromen in Galizien,” undated (probably November 1918); YIVO, RG 448 Folder 18, Poalej Syjon, Żydowska Partia Socjalistyczna, Partia Syjonistyczna, “Report on the Pogrom in Chrzanów,” Nov. 1918.

⁷⁷ Anonymous, “Kronika: Oświęcim,” *Nowy Dziennik*, Nov. 6, 1918, 2–3; Anonymous, “Wszędzie pogromy. Oświęcim,” *Nowy Dziennik*, Nov. 8, 1918, 1; Anonymous, “Za kulisami akcji pogromowej w Oświęcimiu,” *Nowy Dziennik*, Nov. 10, 1918, 1. On assaults in Oświęcim and its surroundings: ANK, 229/0/15/33, Starostwo Powiatowe w Oświęcimiu, “Collected file on violent incidents in Powiat Oświęcim,” Dec. 1918; ANK, 229/0/15/33, Pedracki, “Report to Dowództwo Straży Bezpieczeństwa Powiatu w Oświęcimiu,” Dec. 18, 1918.

⁷⁸ On November 3, a new Polish command claimed to assume the institutions, powers, and responsibilities of the old Austro-Hungarian army in the region. That they were unable to even control the main arms depot speaks to the limits of such claims. ANK, 268/0/15.5/177, Starostwo w Oświęcimiu, “Okólnik,” Nov. 3, 1918.

⁷⁹ Uri Hanis, “Oshpitsin,” in *Sefer Oshpitsin: Oshvityents’im—Oshvits*, ed. Chaim Wolnerman, Aviezer Burstin, and Meir Shimon Geshuri (Jerusalem: Irgun yotze’i Oshpitsin be-Yisrael, 1977), 368.

⁸⁰ Hanis, “Oshpitsin,” 369–70.

⁸¹ ANK, 247/0/-/128, Zjednoczony Komitet Żydowski dla Ochrony Ludności Żydowskiej, Rady Narodowej Żydowskiej, “Letter to Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna,” Nov. 9, 1918; AAN, 36/0/3/44, Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna, “Komunikat urzędowy o wykroczeniach zachodniej Galicji przeciwko żydom,” Nov. 20, 1918; CZA, Z3\816, Unknown Author, “Das Präsidium des Jüdischen Nationalrates bei der Polnischen Liquidierungskommission,” Nov. 8, 1918; CZA, Z3\178, Otto Warburg, “Telegram to Zionist Central Bureau,” Nov. 12, 1918; CAHJP, P83/G/262, Unknown Author, “Die Reserve Jüdischer Soldaten und Offiziere (translation Nathan Gelber),” Nov. 7, 1918; CAHJP, P83/G/256, Jewish Military Committee, Jewish National Council, Polish Liquidation Committee, “Proclamation to the Jewish Soldiers (translation),” Nov. 8, 1918; AAN, 36/0/3/44, Pełnomocnik Głównego Urzędu Likwidacyjnego w Wiedniu, “Komunikat urzędowy o wykroczeniach zachodniej Galicji przeciwko żydom,” Nov. 20, 1918; Leon Chasanowitch, *Les Pogroms Anti-Juifs en Pologne et en Galicie en novembre et décembre 1918: faits et documents* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Judea, 1919), 22.

Council, and representatives of the Polish Liquidation Commission called on Jewish soldiers, officers, and civilian volunteers to enlist.⁸² This unit was explicitly “for the purpose of supporting the Polish militia” and the Liquidation Commission even assigned them a local school for barracks and reportedly provided arms and ammunition.⁸³ There was no shortage of weapons though, following the disintegration of the Habsburg army. Yaakov Billig, a former officer of the Habsburg army and one of the commanders of the Jewish militia, noted that acquiring arms and ammunition was “a question of money and nothing else. It was possible to get small arms of any kind for bread and cigarettes, and in the large arms depot, you could obtain cheap machine guns and even artillery.”⁸⁴ Hand grenades, he wrote, went for the price of eggs and they purchased 250.⁸⁵

Aside from securing the Jewish neighborhoods in Kraków, the militia was also to have mobile detachments, to intervene where Jewish communities elsewhere were under threat. The Liquidation Commission explicitly agreed to this, despite somewhat different understandings of what this meant. Lasocki decreed them to be a reserve force for the “Christian guards”—all under Christian-Polish command—that was only to be called up when local forces were insufficient to suppress riots.⁸⁶ Created in the spirit of autonomy, the Jewish militia naturally saw matters differently and on several occasions dispatched troops to communities threatened by violence. This is documented for Mielec, Podgórze, and Brzesko, and was probably also the case in Chrzanów and Oświęcim.⁸⁷ This last case, mentioned earlier, the most “traditional” form of what is considered self-defense, became a matter of contention, with the Polish Military Command prohibiting any future dispatching of Kraków Jewish units to other places.⁸⁸

From the perspective of the Liquidation Commission, the Jewish militia was part of the general process of the establishment of local guards and militias that went in parallel and sometimes in contradiction to its centralizing state-building efforts. The Liquidation Commission’s primary task was the establishment of a monopoly of violence, and it tried to do so by two means: 1) it made concessions and tried to co-opt local armed initiatives, either by “legalizing” already existing forces or by even calling for their establishment as a means to assume control over them.⁸⁹ 2) Where local militias seemed unreliable or too independent, it either tried to merge them with other forces, such as the remnants of the gendarmerie, or ordered their disarmament and suppression.⁹⁰ The Kraków Jewish guard experienced both approaches. Having proven itself—in the eyes of

⁸² CAHJP, P83/G/256, Unknown Author, “Aufruf an die jüdischen Soldaten (translation Nathan Gelber),” Nov. 8, 1918.

⁸³ CAHJP, P83/G/262, Unknown Author, “Die Reserve Jüdischer Soldaten und Offiziere,” Nov. 7, 1918; Anonymous, “Odezwa do żołnierzy żydowskich,” *Nowy Dziennik*, Nov. 7, 1918, 1.

⁸⁴ Yaakov Billig, “Le-toldot ha-haganah ha-yehudit be-Kraka be-shenet 1918–1919 (ktai yuman),” in *Sefer Kraka, Ir ve-em be-Yisrael*, ed. Arie Bauminger, Meir Bosak, and Nathan Michael Gelber (Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kuk, 1959), 193.

⁸⁵ Billig, “Le-toldot,” 195.

⁸⁶ Anonymous, “O Straże żydowskie,” *Nowy Dziennik*, Nov. 10, 1918, 4.

⁸⁷ YIVO, RG 448 Folder 17, Jehuda Kohn, Ascher Melech Strom, Scyja Sternglanz, Alexander Stempler (and three others with illegible signatures), “Report on Mielec,” Jan. 1, 1919; Cohen, *A Report on the Pogroms in Poland*, 11, 12, 15; PAU, Rkps 4174, Polska Komenda Wojskowa w Krakowie, “Letter to Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna w Krakowie,” Nov. 13, 1918; CZA, Z3\178, Meier Hofstätter, “Report on the pogrom in Mielec,” Nov. 15, 1918; Chasanowitch, *Les Pogromes Anti-Juifs*, 32–4.

⁸⁸ PAU, Rkps 4174, Polska Komenda Wojskowa w Krakowie, “Letter to Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna w Krakowie,” Nov. 13, 1918.

⁸⁹ E.g., ANK, 29/256/0/-/1, Komenda Powiatowej Straży, “Instrukcja Nr. 1,” Nov. 1918.

⁹⁰ E.g., ANK, 268/0/15.2/173, Powiatowa Dowództwo Żandarmerii w Oświęcimiu, “Circular to Posterunków żandarmerii,” Dec. 24, 1918; Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach—Oddział w Bielsku-Białej (APKa-BB), 621/0/1/7, Starostwo w Oświęcimiu, “Letter to Zwierzchności Gminnych,” Dec. 15, 1918.

the Liquidation Commission—to be somewhat uncontrollable, the militia was officially dissolved on November 13. It was ordered to surrender its weapons and some of its commanders, including Yaakov Billig, were briefly detained. The Jewish militia was only the first to experience this. One week later all residents of Kraków were ordered to surrender their arms.⁹¹ With this came the other approach, the rebuilding of a Jewish militia under the control of the Liquidation Commission, which continued to consider it—as many other local armed forces—as a necessary means in their state-building project.

Reorganizing the armed forces of the city, the Liquidation Commission established a centralized citizens' guard (*Straż Obywatelska*), divided by districts and with a central command subordinate to the magistrate and financed and supplied by the municipality.⁹² The city's VII and VIII districts, Kazimierz and Stradom, formed one division of the guard. As these were the neighborhoods where the majority of the city's Jews lived (they were about 25 percent of the city's overall population), a new Jewish guard was created by default, though not by accident.⁹³ At the same time, a less controlled, better armed organization of the Jewish militia continued to exist underground—the boundaries between the two were more than fluid.⁹⁴

The most notable new factor was the introduction of universal conscription to the guard. This appears to have been done autonomously, as universal conscription throughout the city was only introduced in full in June 1919.⁹⁵ The Jewish citizens' guard established a draft board and examined all eligible male residents of the area under its control.⁹⁶ By early 1919, a total of 3,497 men—about the size of a full infantry regiment—had been drafted into the guard.⁹⁷ It appears that 1,164 men were examined and dismissed due to them being unfit for service.⁹⁸ Being the first to introduce conscription, the Jewish guard was by far the most potent of the divisions in the city, not least because local Jews appeared to have been highly motivated to join. At a meeting of central command in late November 1918, Zygmunt Ehrenpreis, the representative of the Kazimierz-Stradom division, reported that 70–80 percent of the 2,830 men called up at this point had reported for duty. No other division had called up even half that number and some reported no-shows of over 80 percent.⁹⁹ British army captain Peter Wright, traveling with Stuart Samuel in 1919 to investigate anti-Jewish

⁹¹ Billig, "Le-toldot ha-haganah," 196; ANK, 29/531/0/8/129, Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna, "Poster: Ogłoszenie!," Nov. 20, 1918.

⁹² This change in name (and less in nature) was also evident in the XXII. district, Podgórze, where a workers' militia had existed, which was integrated into the citizens' guard with little change in its composition or practical function (at least initially). ANK, 256/0/-/1, "Lista wypłaty z grudnia 1918," Nov. 30, 1918; ANK, 256/0/-/1, Dowództwo Straży Bezpieczeństwa Powiatu Krakowskiego, "Letter to Dowództwo Straży Bezpieczeństwa dla Galicji i Śląska," Dec. 2, 1918; ANK, 256/0/-/1, Zygmunt Biesiadecki, "Letter to Komendant Powiatowy Straży," Nov. 24, 1918; ANK, 29/531/0/2/44, "Sprawozdanie z posiedzeń Naczelnego Komitetu Straży Obywatelskiej w Krakowie," Nov. 11, 1918. Up to July 1919, the Jewish guard received over 5 million crowns, more than most other divisions.

⁹³ It should also be noted that the commanding personnel was largely the same as before and that the files created in the short days of the independent Jewish militia were taken over and continued in the new form. See: ANK, 29/531/0/1/26.

⁹⁴ AAN, 2/1774/0/3/21, "Raport do Prokuratury Państwa w Krakowie," Jan. 22, 1919.

⁹⁵ ANK, 29/531/0/1/4, "Poster: 'Wezwanie!'," June 7, 1919.

⁹⁶ No women show up in the records of the Kazimierz-Stradom division of the guard. A total of twenty-four women served in other districts, most of them holding medical degrees and were presumably recruited as medical professionals. ANK, 29/531/0/3/55, "Index Kobiet zajętych w Straży Obywatelskiej," early 1919.

⁹⁷ ANK, 29/531/0/3/70, *Straż Obywatelska* Dz. VII–VIII, "Index," spring 1919.

⁹⁸ ANK, 29/531/0/3/71, *Straż Obywatelska* Dz. VII–VIII, "Lista reklamowanych," Feb. 1919.

⁹⁹ ANK, 29/531/0/2/44, "Sprawozdanie z posiedzeń Naczelnego Komitetu Straży Obywatelskiej w Krakowie," Nov. 28, 1918.

violence in Poland, commented: “The Jews, remembering Lemberg, armed themselves and rather terrified everyone else.”¹⁰⁰

The guard established a permanent, professional core of about 200–250 experienced soldiers and officers. Everyone else was assigned reserve duty and was called up every ten days for patrol duty and drills.¹⁰¹ On any given day, between 200 and 400 guardsmen were on patrol throughout the day in changing two-hour shifts and between 60 and 100 would serve on stationary checkpoints or were on call for emergencies.¹⁰² Discipline was very strict—both internally and externally. Failing to report, sleeping while on guard duty, abuse of power, and other forms of misconduct were punished harshly. Between November 1918 and March 1919, 133 guardsmen were punished, most of them with fines of up to 300 crowns.¹⁰³ Notably, however, this was treated as an internal matter. A book documenting misconduct and punishment of guardsmen throughout the city shows that only very few cases were reported from the VII and VIII districts.¹⁰⁴ In respect to the residents of Kazimierz and Stradom, the guard rigorously enforced market prices, suppressed hoarding and black-market trading, and intervened against public drunkenness and disorder. It had the right to impose punishments without legal proceedings and operated its own jail.¹⁰⁵

Despite the integration of the Jewish guard in the wider project, relations with the central command and Polish leadership in general remained tense. This may be attributed in part to antisemitism among some Christian-Polish leaders, but certainly reflected the Liquidation Commission’s ongoing efforts of centralized state building, which gradually did away with the autonomy of local guards—Jewish or otherwise. In the countryside and in smaller communities, the Liquidation Commission gradually moved to integrate local grassroots militias with the remnants of the old gendarmerie or to replace them entirely.¹⁰⁶ In the Jewish case, this appears to have been done especially where they had successfully fought against attackers and sustained themselves as independent organizations. Most notably, this was the case in Oświęcim, where authorities insisted on the disbandment of all armed forces, their replacement by regular police or gendarmerie forces, and the confiscation of all weapons.¹⁰⁷ In this context, from late December 1918, the meetings of the central command in Kraków became gradually more tense, especially when the reduction of the force—supposedly due to financial concerns—and the matter of the autonomy of the various divisions were discussed.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ Peter Wright, “The Captain Wright Report,” in *The Jews in Poland: Official Reports of the American and British Investigative Commissions*, ed. The National Polish Committee of America (Chicago: The National Polish Committee of America, 1920), 47.

¹⁰¹ Billig, “Le-toldot ha-haganah,” 198; ANK, 29/531/0/4/94, “Książka dyżurów Komendy Straży Obywatelskiej dzielnic VII–VIII 1918–1919,” 1918/19; ANK, 29/531/0/3/69, “Wykazy członków Straży Obywatelskiej dzielnic VII–VIII 1918–1919,” 1918/19.

¹⁰² ANK, 29/531/0/5/98, Raporty dzielnicowe do Naczelnej Komendy Straży Obywatelskiej, Dec. 1918.

¹⁰³ ANK, 29/531/0/3/73, Straż Obywatelska Dz. VII–VIII, Wykaz poddanych do ukarania dzielnic, Nov. 1918–Mar. 1919.

¹⁰⁴ ANK, 29/531/0/3/54. Alfabetyczny wykaz ogólny członków Straży Obywatelskiej w Krakowie podanych do kary, 1918/1919.

¹⁰⁵ ANK, 29/531/0/1/4, “Rozkaz Nr. 4,” Nov. 26, 1918; ANK, 29/531/0/2/44, “VII. Protokoły z posiedzeń Naczelnej Komendy Straży Obywatelskiej,” Nov. 14, 1918; Nov. 28, 1918; Billig, “Le-toldot ha-haganah,” 198–99.

¹⁰⁶ ANK, 256/0/-/01, Okręgowe Dowództwo Żandarmerii w Krakowie, “Raport Służbowy,” Mar. 14, 1919; Powiatowe Dowództwo Żandarmerii w Myślenicach, “Raport sytuacyjny,” Feb. 9, 1919.

¹⁰⁷ ANK, 256/0/-/01, Powiatowa Dowództwo Żandarmerii w Oświęcimiu, “Circular to Posterunków żandarmerii,” Dec. 24, 1918; APKa-BB, 621/0/1/7, Starostwo w Oświęcimiu, “Letter to Zwierzchności Gminnych,” Dec. 15, 1918.

¹⁰⁸ E.g., ANK, 29/531/0/2/44, “VII. Protokoły z posiedzeń Naczelnej Komendy Straży Obywatelskiej,” Dec. 28, 1918. Zygmunt Ehrenpreis walked out in protest at this meeting.

In March 1919, the city planned major celebrations to mark the 125th anniversary of Tadeusz Kościuszko's proclamation of the general uprising, his oath to the Polish nation.¹⁰⁹ As part of this, the district guards were to march in grand procession through the city center. Very symbolically, in the list of participants, the guards from the VII and VIII districts, while initially part of the plan, were crossed out.¹¹⁰ Despite these local tensions, violence escalated only when outside forces arrived in the city—as could be observed in other localities. In early June 1919, Józef Haller's troops passed through the city from East Galicia on the way to Upper Silesia.¹¹¹ Immediately, soldiers began to attack Jews in the streets, cut off beards and plundered Jewish-owned shops. While the other district guards did not intervene and the Jewish guard remained in its district, the entrances were barricaded, and reserves were called up. When the rampaging soldiers gathered and attacked the Jewish quarter, they were met with organized and disciplined military resistance with rifles, machine guns, and grenades. The guard successfully defended the Jewish neighborhood.¹¹²

The citizens' guard in Kraków like those in some other places appears to have existed until the summer of 1919 when they were then replaced by regular police and gendarmerie forces. This mirrored the general trend in the region, signifying the Polish authorities' increasing control over the situation, their eventual success in forming their state with its functions and institutions. For the new Polish rulers, the overall violence as well as the establishment of Jewish militias—and especially their deployment—had always represented a dilemma. On the one hand, they wished to establish law and order (primarily the latter) and beyond that were fully aware of how damaging the news of the pogroms were for Poland in the realm of international public opinion. On the other hand, theirs was a national state-building project that could not accept the self-armament and vigilante violence of local groups, especially if they were from a minority community.

Conclusion

I am going to the flower garden.

You are my friend. [...]

Before me is a bright nice room,

behind me a cold, dark night.¹¹³

We do not know the author of these short lines, scribbled in a notebook that found its way into the files of the *straż obywatelska* in Kraków. They were written in English and the author, a student at Jagiellonian University, appears to have been serving in the Kraków citizens' guard, in its Kazimierz-Stradom division. Among seemingly endless bureaucratic files, detailing patrol duties, ammunition supplies, rationing, salaries, and so on, the notebook stands out as a glimpse into the personal story of someone who, after years of war and carnage, served in the guard and attended language classes, probably hoping this would help him get a better life. "I am one of the most diligent pupils at the university," he noted, "but although the most diligent, not the best."¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ ANK, 29/531/0/1/4, Rozkaz Nr. 13, Mar. 22, 1919. Alex Storozynski, *The Peasant Prince Thaddeus Kosciuszko and the Age of Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 180–83.

¹¹⁰ ANK, 29/531/0/1/4, "Porządek pochodu w dniu 24/III. 1919 r," Mar. 24, 1919.

¹¹¹ David B. Kaufman, *The Troublesome Question: Poles, Jews and the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Saarbrücken: Lambert, 2012), 123–85.

¹¹² Billig, "Le-toldot ha-haganah," 199–201; CZA, L6/116, "Telegram Zionist Office Copenhagen," June 7, 1919.

¹¹³ ANK, 29/531/0/1/26, Notebook, 1918.

¹¹⁴ ANK, 29/531/0/1/26, Notebook, 1918.

The story of this unknown guardsman is probably one of thousands. It is impossible to calculate exactly how many enlisted in the dozens of Jewish militias in Galicia, but the number is probably somewhere between 5,000 and 8,000. For the most part, they were young men who had previously served in the Habsburg army. They sometimes even continued to wear their old Austro-Hungarian uniforms and were led by men who had served as officers in the World War—much like their Polish and Ukrainian counterparts. Their story has so far been largely overlooked or subsumed into the apparently more powerful, certainly more traumatic, story of the pogroms that shaped Jews' experiences at the beginning of the new era of self-declared nation-states. However, as I have argued throughout this article, the motivations of those joining the guards extended beyond the aim to defend oneself against impending pogroms. Or rather, the aim to protect oneself was part of a much wider project of state building. Given the centrality of the "monopoly of the use of physical force" in the creation of states, David Engel has situated the pogrom in the context of the formation of the modern state and its attempt to implement not only its power but also trust in the *Rechtsstaat* itself and the ensuing clashes between peoples' traditional notions of justice and the new legal order.¹¹⁵ Neither the Polish nor the Ukrainian states-in-the-making had any previous credentials, apart from old myths, that would elicit trust in their abilities to establish a universally accepted *Rechtsstaat*. This, however, did not mean that Jews were not perfectly willing to participate in such a creation—even if their willingness was only a result of the dearth of available alternatives.

Essential, however, was the form in which Jews organized themselves and participated in this process. While some enlisted in Polish or Ukrainian formations, the majority of those involved, those who are the subjects of this article, did so independently in decidedly Jewish forms. Crucially, this was not seen as a contradiction. The creation of independent Jewish armed units was intended to strengthen and not to sever the bonds between Jews and their neighbors. The decidedly Jewish paramilitary units were not considered in opposition to the Polish and Ukrainian state-building efforts but as a part of them. Ignacy Korngut, a resident of Wadowice, wrote in a letter that he as well believed that "any guard as an organ to maintain order and public safety must be territorial (state run) [*państwowa*] and not confessional [*wyznaniowa*]. [...] I believe that the performance of service in the citizens' guard in the interest of public safety by Jews does in no way make [the guard] confessional in nature."¹¹⁶ In this reading the efforts of Jews in the guards were efforts for the sake of everyone; it was part of a non-sectarian, multinational state-building effort. The point was that if Jews wanted to participate in organizing, building, and shaping this new state, they had to do so in their own form and in their own organizations. For example, in late 1918, the Christian-Polish commander of the citizens guard in Podgórze, Kraków's XXII district, which had a considerable Jewish population, complained that no Jews were reporting for service.¹¹⁷ In Kazimierz and Stradom, they enlisted in great numbers. Integration into the new states and their instruments of violence was only possible on independent terms.¹¹⁸ This did not mean that they were accepted as such by their Polish and Ukrainian neighbors. In fact, both the Ukrainian and the Polish nation-state projects at best tolerated them under the specific

¹¹⁵ David Engel, "What's in a Pogrom? European Jews in the Age of Violence," in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European Jewish History*, ed. Jonathan Dekel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan M. Meir, and Israel Bartal (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 19–37.

¹¹⁶ Ignacy Korngut, "W sprawie obywatelskich straży żydowskich," *Nowy Dziennik*, Nov. 16, 1918, 3.

¹¹⁷ ANK, 29/531/0/2/44, "Sprawozdanie z posiedzeń Naczelnego Komitetu Straży Obywatelskiej w Krakowie," Nov. 11, 1918.

¹¹⁸ This dialectic relation of inclusion and separation, universalism and peculiarity was a key element in the debates over the making of the new, multinational Polish state. See: Marcos Silber, "'One of Them' as 'One of Us': Jewish Demands for National Autonomy as a Means to Achieve Civic Equality During the First World War," *Polin* (2022): 321–44.

circumstances of chaos and transition when state structures had still not been fully established. This does not, however, change the underlying strategic orientation of state building and integration through separation of the Jewish militias.

In organizing independently, the militias also had a decidedly internal Jewish dimension. In many places, they were part of the process of removing the traditional leadership of the Jewish community and replacing it with new (supposedly more democratic) national bodies, a dynamic that also mirrored the efforts of their non-Jewish neighbors. This built on developments during the war when younger activists, primarily Zionists, but also socialists, actively challenged traditional integrationist or Orthodox leaderships in their communities by presenting themselves as the real leaders of the people. During the war the main area of challenge and competition had been that of relief and care for the destitute and starving.¹¹⁹ While these efforts remained vital, it was now the problem of organizing society, of defense, security, and the question of what role Jews would play in the newly-minted nation-states that was most pressing and that shaped Jewish society. For the Jewish nationalist activists who led these efforts, the struggle was over their people's place—as a nation—in these new states. As nationalists, they regarded Jews as equal to their neighboring nations and as these nations built their states, so did they. While never declaring or intending to declare a territorial state of their own, in many other respects they created the instruments of state authority and power, forces of coercion, protection, and control that in all societies are at the heart of any state's responsibilities. In doing so, they acted not dissimilarly to those who formed armed units throughout the vast European post-imperial space. Most notable in this context is the process of universal conscription, implemented in Kraków, Ternopil, and possibly other places. From the French revolutionary *levée en masse* to, indeed, the Great War that had just ravaged the continent, universal conscription was a means of state- and nation-building.¹²⁰ The mobilization and self-militarization of the Jewish community in these places should be read in a similar context. It was a means of state building—as Jews. It was not a territorial state but an autonomous structure, part of the future states of many nations that activists envisioned for their region.

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¹¹⁹ Rybak, *Everyday Zionism*, 60–141.

¹²⁰ Ute Ferver, *A Nation in Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Alan Forrest, *The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars: The Nation-in-Arms in French Republican Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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