CHAPTER 1

Chaos in Ukraine: Defining the Context of Anti-Jewish Violence

“I don’t know how to begin, because I have lived through so much. . . . I have survived the following pogroms: Petliura’s, Denikin’s, Sokolovsky’s, and so many more.”¹ Roza Rozenvasser, the twelve-year-old girl born in Vasilkov, found herself unable to account for all the violence that she had witnessed from February to November 1919, when she was questioned by the representatives of the Central Committee for Relief to the Pogrom Survivors. Roza’s memory betrayed her, because the outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence followed one another continuously as various armed forces from formal regiments of different armies to armed bands of locals captured Vasilkov or passed through.

By 1919, Vasilkov (Vasylkiv), a town to the southwest of Kiev, was home to over five thousand Jews that constituted over forty percent of the population. The destiny of Vasilkov’s Jewish community is emblematic of the dynamic of anti-Jewish violence as it unfolded and engulfed the territory of Ukraine. In the beginning of February, when the pogrom by the “Petliura’s soldiers,” as Ukrainian National Army soldiers were commonly referred to, devastated the shtetl, it left many Jews dead and Jewish property plundered and ruined. The exact number of pogroms that followed the first one is very hard to pin down, as the witness accounts contradict each other,² because the pogroms continued for weeks on end, and regiments and armed bands³ followed one another. At least two pogroms were perpetrated by the armed bands led by infamous atamans—Sokolovsky and Zelenyi—who continued to torture and

¹ Miljakova, Kniga Pogromov, 320.
² Ibid., 366–80.
³ The Russian word “banda,” a band, is unanimously used by contemporaries to identify armed gang of (usually) uprooted natives led by a commander—an ataman.
murder the Jewish population, rob their property, and extort money. The sixth pogrom, as related by some survivors, happened in July, when the Bolsheviks fought the Volunteer (White) Army. Volunteer Army soldiers started a pogrom in Vasilkov, which lasted for approximately four weeks, while the unfortunate town was captured and recaptured again. Little did Roza Rozenvasser know in November 1919 that in May 1920 yet another pogrom would be perpetrated by the soldiers of the Polish armed forces.

Continuous pogroms, multiple armed forces passing through town, and gangs of locals who formed their own armed bands and roved the land were all too common characteristics that defined the life of shtetls and towns all over Ukraine. The disastrous continuous anti-Jewish violence in Vasilkov unfolded in 1919 amid the Civil War that ensued following the First World War and the Revolutions.

Chaos would be the most concise yet accurate description of the historical situation in Ukraine from the beginning of the First World War in 1914 until the official declaration creating the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1922. Those were the years when rapidly shifting war fronts, hostile invasions, brutal battles of the Civil War, and prowling warlord armies—combined with two Russian revolutions and erratic succession of various governments—inundated Ukraine, which was already being torn from within by the deteriorating economy and the unresolved ethnic hostilities, and turned it into a pandemonium of violence and disorder. The Jewish question was at the center of this complex situation, and defined the politics and actions of the major belligerents engaged in the conflict that included the Ukrainian National Army, former Russian imperial officers united into the Volunteer Army, the Bolsheviks, and a number of guerrilla militant groups. The outbreak of the First World War and the engagement of the Russian army on the Eastern Fronts brought the war violence literally home and became the turning point in the history of anti-Jewish violence.

4 YIVO Archive, file 165, 14022.
5 Oleg Budnitskii has explored in depth his research how “the Jewish question” (a commonly used euphemism to describe the complex of problems and all degrees of anti-Jewish opinions in public discourse) has been interpreted and utilized by various belligerents in the Civil War. Oleg Budnitskii, Rossijskie Evreii Mezhdu Krasnym i Belymi (1917–1920) (ROSSPÉN, 2005), 496.
6 For further research on the topic, see Eric Lohr, “The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I,” The Russian Review 60, no. 3 (2001); and Eric Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I, vol. 94 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003)—as well as
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The First World War exacerbated the turbulent situation in the country and imposed many adversities on the Jews of the Russian Empire. The Russian government’s policies after the beginning of the First World War intentionally victimized and punished its Jewish population that remained deprived of civil rights and confined to the Pale of Settlement, the territory where the Jewish population could legally reside. The Russian Command branded the Jewish civilian population as traitors and spies, and ordered deportation of Jewish residents from the areas close to the front lines, which included vast areas in Ukraine and Belarus. According to the latest estimates, deportations affected about half a million Jews in the border communities. In some localities the evacuations, although still looming as a threat, were eventually replaced by the heinous practice of taking hostages among the local Jewish population in an attempt to prevent sabotage and espionage. The result of the expulsions and the violent hostage policies was a massive refugee crisis: large numbers of Jews found themselves in need of immediate relief and resettlement. Jewish communal and philanthropic organizations responded to the crisis and provided aid and support to the uprooted Jewish population.

On the eve of the first Russian Revolution in February 1917, the Ukrainian countryside swelled with a vast number of Jewish refugees, who, while being branded as enemies on the one hand, were driven to seek a new economic niche and settlement and, on the other hand, had all their movable possessions with them and received humanitarian aid. Those combined factors distinguished the Jewish population as an obvious target of racial violence and fomented the rise of the pogrom wave that devastated the Jewish community of Ukraine during the Civil War and became “a genocidal killing spree that left over one hundred thousand Jews dead in its wake and hundreds of thousands of refugees and orphans.”

The First World War was a time of crisis for the Jews of the Russian Empire and European Jewry, because the Jews became the scapegoats blamed for all misfortunes and were placed in an extremely vulnerable situation. This

Semion Goldin, “Deportation of Jews by the Russian Military Command, 1914–1915,” *Jews in Eastern Europe* 41, no. 1 (2000): 40–73.
7 Lohr and Goldin share the same estimate.
8 Jeffrey Veidlinger, from the unpublished manuscript of his forthcoming book on pogroms, by author’s permission. The First World War as a point of origin of the pogroms in Ukraine has been recently discussed and supported by many historians. See also Oleg Budnitskii, “Shots in the Back: On the Origin of the Anti-Jewish Pogroms of 1918–1921,” in *Jews in the East European Borderlands. Essays in Honor of John D. Klier* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 187–201.
continuous crisis not only paved the way for the anti-Jewish violence but also “became an opening for transformative communal change.” The need for organized relief effort, according to Simon Rabinovitch, promoted the combined effort of Jewish communal organizations locally and internationally and gave an impulse to the Jewish struggle for the national rights, which would forever transform Jewish politics in the world.

The First World War and the ensuing dramatic revolutionary changes in Europe had the most direct impact on Jewish political activity in Ukraine. The fall of the Russian Empire in 1917 promised positive changes for the Jewish population, gave hope of success to Jewish politics, and evoked powerful positive dispositions and enthusiasm among Jewish activists and the general population. The Revolution in February 1917, which abolished discriminatory class-based, religious, and ethnic legislation, initiated the process of revolutionary change in Ukraine. The Central Rada (Parliament) was constituted in April 1917 in Kiev and, following the agreement with the Provisional Government in Petrograd, three national minorities, the Russians, the Jews, and the Poles, were shortly called to join its ranks. The majority in the Ukrainian parliament pressed for greater independence of Ukraine, and in July 1917 the Central Rada declared autonomy within the Russian Federation and established the Ukrainian government in the form of the General Secretariat, which consisted of fourteen branch secretariats. The National Secretariat, a branch of the General Secretariat, had three national minority divisions headed by the vice-secretaries. Later, the secretariats would be renamed into ministries, and each national division would become a separate ministry. The first secretary, and later minister of Jewish affairs, was Moshe Zilberfarb, member of a Zionist party and a fervent autonomist. The key issue on the agenda of the Jewish

9 Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 170.
10 Ibid., 168–69.
11 For detailed analysis of Jewish politics at the time, see Simon Rabinovitch’s research (*Jewish Rights*) and also David Engel’s analysis of the Jewish politics on the eve of Schwarzbard’s trial (Engel, *The Assassination of Symon Petliura*).
12 Many Jewish political activists had been inspired by the initiatives of the young Ukrainian democracy. More on Jewish politics and particularly on Tcherikower’s attitude toward changes, see Joshua M. Karlip, *The Tragedy of a Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
13 For more on Zilberfarb, see Jonathan Frankel, “The Dilemmas of Jewish National Autonomism: The Case of Ukraine 1917–1920,” *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective* (1990): 265; Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government*, 55.
Secretariat/Ministry was the Jewish national autonomy, and in January 1918 the Central Rada passed into law the Bill of National Personal Autonomy that was celebrated as a significant victory for the Jewish minority. The recognition of the rights of minorities invigorated Jewish politics despite the rise of anti-Jewish violence and rapid deterioration of the economic situation. The short-lived democracy in Ukraine established the unique precedent of the national minorities’ representation in the parliament and the government, described as a “noble experiment in human rights.”

The period of active Jewish participation in the Ukrainian government was far from insignificant, although it lasted only briefly from its glorious beginnings in the summer of 1917 until its ignoble demise in spring of 1918, when the rising wave of pogroms caused the Jewish support to be withdrawn from the Ukrainian government that itself did not survive beyond 1920.

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The relationship of the Ukrainian government and the minorities, which historically represented the majority of the urban population, and particularly with the Jewish community, was a very intricate and multidimensional affair. On the one hand, the Ukrainian government was in dire need of support from the major national minorities—Russians, Poles and Jews; on the other hand, the attitude toward the Jewish community was ambivalent at the very least. Due to the long history of anti-Jewish antagonism, Ukrainian politicians were suspicious of the Jewish allegiances, but in 1917 and in early 1918 Jewish support was much needed by the Ukrainian parliament. Considering this imperative, historians argue that the Central Rada vied to attract Jewish support and succeeded by its consistent devotion to the idea of national autonomy and its declared desire to preserve unity with Russia.

It is also true that Jewish political activists were just as much interested in participating in the Ukrainian parliament and the institutionalization of Jewish national autonomy, prompted by the fast development of the Ukrainian state. Ukrainian Jews did not want to risk missing this unique historical opportunity.

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14 Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government*, 163.
15 Formally, the Jewish representation in the Ukrainian government lasted for two more years.
16 Serhy Yekelchyk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 83.
17 Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government*, 66.
18 Frankel, “The Dilemmas of Jewish National Autonomism,” 265.
This sense of urgency was sharpened by the example of other national minorities’ struggles for their rights and even independence, and encouraged similar activism among some groups of Jewish politicians. Rabinovitch concludes that “the fact that most of Russia’s Jews lived among other national groups vying for territorial independence or autonomy within a federal state bolstered the determination of Jewish autonomists to secure similar rights for Jews.”

Jewish participation in Ukrainian democracy was a mutually beneficial if fragile deal: just as the new Ukrainian state needed the support of ethnic minorities, the Jewish community cooperated with the Ukrainian government seeking national minority rights. The major discrepancy that lay in the basis of this union was the question of the Ukrainian independence, as it was not favored by most Jewish political parties and movements that had their headquarters in the Russian capital and were actively preparing for participation in elections to the All-Russian Jewish Congress. The reserved support of the Ukrainian cause among the Jewish political leaders became one of the factors that precipitated further fragmentation of the Jewish faction in the Central Rada. Although Jewish parties in the government almost unanimously supported the Central Rada against the Bolsheviks and the Red Army, the finale of the experiment of national autonomy was ultimately inevitable.

At the same time, the rising pogrom wave presented new challenges for the Jewish representatives in the government, as Jewish communities all over Ukraine forwarded their reports of the pogroms to the Ministry of Jewish Affairs, seeking protection and justice. There is documented evidence of pogroms in seventy-nine locations that took place in the period from October 1917 to July 1918. This rate of pogroms per year is comparable to that of 1881–82, when the first wave of pogroms shocked and terrified Russian and international society and forever embedded the pogroms in Russian Jewish history. Not forty years later this level of anti-Jewish violence deeply alarmed the

19 Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights*, 206.

20 The problem of allegiances of the Jewish fractions in the Central Rada became the focus of intense discussions by the historians and contemporaries alike. Tcherikower argued this point to contradict the proliferation of the popular canard of Judeo-Bolshevism (Di Ukrainer Pogromen) and for some politicians, like A. Revutsky of Poalei Zion, their participation in the Ukrainian government became a sore point in his negotiations with Soviet Russia. See more in Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights*.

21 Klier and Lambroza, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence*, 39–43.
Jewish community and its leaders, and was considered catastrophic, though not exceptional. The language of the anti-pogrom proclamations issued jointly by the Vice-Secretariat for the Jewish Affairs, the National Secretariat, the Military Secretariat, Secretariat of the Internal Affairs, and the General Secretariat of Ukraine in October and November 1917 is indicative of how “incidents” of anti-Jewish violence, as they were commonly referred at the time, became a routine occurrence. The proclamation against pogroms and other forms of anti-Jewish violence reads as follows:

From all over Ukraine we receive unfortunate reports that in addition to the usual looting, arson etc., some attempts to organize Jewish pogroms and loot Jewish property have also been noted. Felonious instigators are exploiting the ignorance of the citizen masses. . . . It is a duty of all conscientious Ukrainians . . . to assist the Secretariat General in the fight against this abomination inherited from the Tsarist regime.

We were oppressed, but we must never become oppressors. . . . If we allow national enmity to develop and Jewish pogroms to fester, we shall have alienated an entire people. We shall have allowed a dark blemish on our collective consciousness. . . .

Anti-pogrom politics originally was not among the major goals and objectives of the Ministry of Jewish Affairs, but as anti-Jewish violence increased, the work on stopping and preventing the pogroms became the ministry’s daily agenda and necessitated an active involvement of both the Ukrainian government and the Central Rada in order to respond to the violence and curtail it. The Ministries (Secretariats) of the Military Affairs and Internal Affairs cooperated with the Ministry of Jewish Affairs, although the chaotic situation in the country, the ongoing war, and the weakness of the new government considerably undermined the efforts.

The Jewish community of the town of Makarov (Makariv), located about thirty miles west of Kiev, sent a formal letter to the Jewish representative in the Ukrainian government on October 21, 1917, concerning the head of the militia (the name for the local police force). Jewish citizens addressed their complaint, written in Yiddish, to the head of the Jewish Secretariat, applying to him as “Great Master” and “Enlightened of Israel,” and requested a different chief of

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22 Emphasis is mine.
23 YIVO Archive, file 123, 9406–16.
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the militia: the current one took bribes ten times higher than before and was therefore very costly, so they asked to send them “a cheaper one.” This letter in a subtle way reflects three chief sociopolitical aspects that determined the plight of the Jewish community in 1917–18: the relationship with the Ukrainian authorities, the relationship with the Jewish representatives in the government, and the rising anti-Jewish violence. The Jewish community of Makarov tried to ensure protection from growing incidents of anti-Jewish violence, but the local militia chief requested bribes to execute his direct responsibilities and to calm civil unrest. The distress caused in the Jewish community by police abuse was a matter all too common, and the community leaders were not complaining about corruption as such, only about its rapid increase, seeking to curb the amount of bribes paid to the authorities. The most uncommon feature of this appeal is that it is written in Yiddish and addressed to the government structure that is designed to protect the rights of the Jewish population—both options that did not previously exist. The Jewish community leaders of Makarov had no recent precedent in communication with the Jewish representatives in the government, which explains the confused and convoluted style of the address. In response to the complaint, the Jewish Secretariat did follow through and forwarded an official inquiry to Ministries of the Internal and Military Affairs to resolve the problem, and the Kiev prosecutor’s office conducted the investigation that by the end of December 1917 resulted in an official reprimand sent to the head of the militia in Makarov.

The Ukrainian government did take measures to stop and prevent anti-Jewish violence and contributed not only by undertaking administrative measures, like in Makarov, but also by dispatching regular troops to the pogrom locations. However, the Ukrainian government distanced itself from the cause of the pogrom and strictly opposed the attempts of the Jewish representatives to organize centralized Jewish self-defense, to institute anti-pogrom units within the Ukrainian army, or any other form of organized civic response to the pogroms. The Rada and the government did not engage in developing a consistent policy to systematically prevent pogrom violence. It was not a priority for the Ukrainian government especially since the position of the Jewish

24 I. M. Cherikover, Antisemitizm un Pogromen in Ukraine, 1917–1918: Tsu der Geshikhṭe fun Ukrainish-Yidishe Batshungen, ed. Archiv Ostjüdisches historisches, Geshikhṭe fun der Pogrom-Bayegung in Ukraine, 1917–1921 (Berlin: Mizreḥ-Yidisn historishn arkhiṿ, 1923), 96.
25 Mihaly Kalman, “A Pogromless City: Jewish Paramilitaries in Civil War Odessa” (paper presented at New Directions in Russian Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, April 3, 2016).
fraction in the parliament was weakening fast and the apparent lack of Jewish support for Ukrainian independence undermined it even further.

In the beginning of 1918, Ukraine finally proclaimed its independence from Russia. At the same time, following much deliberation, the Law of National-Personal Autonomy had been promulgated, ostensibly opening new perspectives for Jewish politics. What appeared to be the victorious commencement of the Jewish politics in Ukraine was in fact the beginning of its rapid demise. While denying its allegiance to Bolshevism, the deeply divided Jewish fraction decided against following the Rada into exile and remained in Kiev. Equating Jews with Bolsheviks became the most commonly and frequently employed rationale for the anti-Jewish violence in 1919. For the belligerent armies, as well as for numerous military gangs that loosely associated with Ukrainian National Army, the anti-Jewish violence became the focus of their rhetoric, and acquired a redeeming quality, as all the Jews were branded as Bolsheviks.

The origin of the Judeo-Bolshevik canard, which will be discussed from a different prospective in the course of this research, has been traced by the scholars at least as far as the First World War. During the Civil War in Ukraine, this slander was consistently employed by soldiers of the Ukrainian National Army, various independent military groups, and the White Army as well. The pogrom perpetrators placed the rationale for anti-Jewish violence strictly on the fervently unquestionable argument that all Jews were Bolsheviks and were responsible for the Revolution, the Civil War, the fall of the Russian Empire, and the decline of the independent Ukrainian republic, and “none entertained the idea that Ukrainians could be Bolsheviks, even though this was undoubtedly the case.” This allegations apparently stemmed from the visual overrepresentation of the Jews among revolutionaries in general and Bolsheviks in particular. Also, it appeared that Jews benefited from the Revolution more than any other minority, as the restrictions against them were lifted. In fact, the Bolshevik command did not treat Jews favorably, considered them to be capitalists, and exploited the Jewish population frequently through expropriations and forced labor. Nevertheless, the popular opinion

26 Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights*, 170–73.
27 Christopher Gilley, “Beyond Petliura: The Ukrainian National Movement and the 1919 Pogroms,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 47, no. 1 (2017): 45–61.
28 Budnitskii, “Shots in the Back,” 87–201.
29 Gilley, “Beyond Petliura,” 48.
was firmly set in the belief that Jews were Bolsheviks, and this conviction has never been fully eradicated.

Tcherikower and his contemporaries considered those accusations to be the fundamental reason for the ultimate failure of Jewish politics in Ukraine and the major reason for anti-Jewish violence, and proving these claims false became the major theme of Tcherikower’s writings on pogroms.\(^{30}\) As Ukraine started to sink into the abyss of the Civil War, Jewish politics crumbled alongside Ukrainian democracy, growing increasingly detached from the turmoil of war and lawlessness that devastated the country. Despite the continued fervent political, cultural, and philanthropic activity of various Jewish parties and organizations in Ukraine, the experiment of the Jewish national-personal autonomy in Ukraine was over by spring 1918.

**THE BOLSHEVIKS, THE GERMAN PROTECTORATE, AND THE DIRECTORY**

Following the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd in November 1917 and the establishment of the Russian Soviet Republic, the Bolsheviks of Ukraine proclaimed the Ukrainian Soviet Republic at the end of December 1917. The Bolshevik government in Russia supported the new Ukrainian Soviet Republic with troops, and the Bolshevik army began an immediate advance on the Ukrainian capital. At the beginning of February 1918, the Red Army captured Kiev for the first time in the course of the Civil War. Five weeks later, Kiev was liberated by the German Army, supported by the government of the Ukrainian republic. However, the German Army had its own agenda, seeking the end of hostilities on the Eastern Front. The German government made a pact with the Bolsheviks in March 1918, according to which Russia unilaterally withdrew from the World War and the Triple Entente coalition with France and Great Britain, and Germany assumed control over Ukraine. Following this agreement in April 1918, German command took power in Kiev and established the regime of protectorate under the leadership of their protégé Hetman (Commander) Skoropadsky, who formally dispersed the Ukrainian government. The Central Rada continued its work in exile and plotted its restoration.

\(^{30}\) See I. Cherikover, “Antisemitizm i Pogromy na Ukrainе, 1917–1918 гг.,” *K istorii ukrainsko-еврейских отношений* (1923); I. M. Cherikover, *Di Ukrainer Pogramen*, Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1919 (New York: Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut, 1965).
German and Austro-Hungarian military forces that backed up the puppet regime of Hetman Skoropadsky effectively curbed anti-Jewish violence along with other forms of unrest throughout most of 1918. The Central Powers, who received a “breathing space” as a result of the Brest Peace, required of Ukraine the resources to continue the war, and a ceasefire on the Eastern Front to serve the same objective. Any kind of disturbance in Ukraine was dangerous for the Central Powers, and the pogrom violence wound down for almost a year.

The regime of Hetman Skoropadsky began to deteriorate by the end of 1918, following the withdrawal of German and Austro-Hungarian forces from Ukraine after their defeat in the First World War. Concurrently, Ukrainian political activity in exile was on the rise. The Ukrainian opposition contemplated the return to power and had established a five-member committee, a Directory, to coordinate the uprising. Symon Petliura, the former minister of war of the Ukrainian republic, and a journalist and a playwright by profession, was initially one of five members of the Directory. Following the successful uprising, Petliura arrogated to himself the absolute power of the Directory within the first months of recapturing Kiev and did not reinstate the Rada. The Directory proclaimed unification with Western Ukraine, which had been occupied first by Austro-Hungarian and later by Polish troops. However, before any decisions could be implemented, the Directory had to abandon Kiev to Bolsheviks in early March 1919. From that moment on, Petliura’s government constantly moved away from the shifting front lines to the west and south of Kiev, while plotting the counteroffensive. The Ukrainian National Army finally managed to recapture Kiev on the last day of August 1919, but retreated on the same day, abandoning the Ukrainian capital to the advancing Volunteer Army. August 31, 1919, symbolically marks the end of the short “Petliura’s 1919,” and although Petliura still made attempts to regain control over Ukraine, his movement lost momentum, leaving the territory of Ukraine as a battlefield for the Civil War between the Reds and the Whites.32

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31 Symon Petliura is a very controversial historical figure forever linked to the pogroms in Ukraine. In the course of this book, I will not discuss Symon Petliura and his personal responsibility or lack thereof for the pogrom, and in the course of this and the following chapters I will make arguments for this position. This point of view is supported by a number of modern historians; see, for example, Christopher Gilley, “Beyond Petliura,” 45–61. Notwithstanding the irrelevance of the discussion of Symon Petliura to this book, I would like to point out several significant works, the most recent and thorough of which is Engel, The Assassination of Symon Petliura.

32 Yekelchyk, Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation, 79.
The general scope of events in the first half of 1919 is best described as disarray and anarchy. Petliura’s government was too weak to have any impact on the internal affairs or even to maintain its own regular operations. With no allies and no support, the Directory metamorphosed into military headquarters for the army on the march. From the very beginning, the Directory found itself in a very difficult political and military situation, caught between several belligerents. One side was represented by the Bolsheviks, who sent an entire army to Ukraine. Some members of the Directory and the Rada were ready to negotiate with Soviets with the goal of concluding a pact with them, but this undertaking failed even before it began, and by mid-January 1918 Ukraine and the Soviet Republic were already at war, with the Red Army advancing from the north. At the same time, the Polish army was holding onto western provinces of Ukraine, vying to maintain a buffer territory there to separate itself from the Soviets. In the southeastern regions, the former Russian officers, in coalition with the Cossack military unions, plotted an offensive against Bolsheviks and organized into the Volunteer Army, also known as the Whites. The Whites considered Ukraine to be a province within the Russian Empire, and used the name “Southern Russia” or “Lesser Russia” instead of “Ukraine.” They had no interest in an alliance with the Directory. The Entente Coalition, former allies of Tsarist Russia, sent their troops to Ukraine in an attempt to support the Volunteer Army in their bid to overthrow the Bolsheviks, restore the Russian Empire, and regain control of their former ally, especially since Bolsheviks took control over the army, disrupted the war alliance, and refused to recognize any debts of the Tsarist government. French troops landed in Odessa and other port cities, backing the Whites from the south.

THE UKRAINIAN NATIONAL ARMY AND ANTI-JEWISH VIOLENCE

The first half of 1919 saw an enormous surge of anti-Jewish violence committed by Petliura’s army. Locked in the midst of the intertwining front lines, the Ukrainian National Army became the most prominent functioning body of Petliura’s government, and in many respects constituted the entirety of the government. The military action unfolded across most of the Ukrainian territory, as Ukrainian troops advanced from the western provinces of Ukraine and engaged in warfare with the Reds and Whites in the southeastern provinces along the Dnieper River and in the central regions. Everywhere the Ukrainian army moved, anti-Jewish pogroms took place, starting with the pogrom in Kiev that began the moment Petliura’s army entered the town. The statistics are
scarce, and the estimates vary; for example, the Russian Red Cross Committee to Assist Pogrom Victims reported 391 pogroms perpetrated under Directory rule, and this number appears to represent the most probable number of pogroms that took place during the first six months of 1919. Even the most cautious estimates attribute at least forty percent of all the pogroms to the Directory. The Ukrainian army, for the entire time of its existence called “insurgents” by the Jews and local population alike, was not a homogeneous structure, but rather a patchwork of various detachments of different origin and levels of training and experience that shared little in common except the general commitment to the Directory cause—to fight against Bolsheviks.

The insurgent nature of the Petliura’s army was defined by its lack of structure and cohesion. The army of the Ukrainian republic consisted of about fifteen thousand “Free Cossacks” and volunteers, who were for the most part peasants. Only some of the troops had seen previous engagement as part of the Tsarist army. Before Petliura’s uprising, several elite battalions known as Sich Riflemen, formed in Galicia during the First World War and trained under German command, defected to the Directory side. The Ukrainian army had no uniform organization or consistent rank system, and many detachments were under the sole command of various officers or “atamans,” while numerous independent bands and gangs almost indistinguishable from the regular insurgent army prowled various regions of Ukraine. In the Ukrainian army, what an ataman was varied from ranking officer who was subordinate to the high command, to chieftain or warlord who fought independently alongside or sometimes against the poorly organized Ukrainian army.

Though Petliura had over little control over his army, his name and the fight against the Reds and Whites became the common denominator that ostensibly united the diverse array of the armed units in Ukraine in the first half of 1919. That is why most of the atamans, whether they were leading a small guerilla band or commanding a large battalion, associated themselves with Directory cause and Petliura’s name. Ataman Palienko, whose “Battalion of Death” perpetrated bloody pogroms in Berdichev (Berdychiv) and Zhitomir (Zhytomyr), and ataman Semesenko, who masterminded and carried out the

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33 YIVO Archive, file 49, 4034–37.
34 Yekelchyk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation*, 80.
35 For further discussion of Ukrainian army soldiers and their motives for anti-Jewish violence, see Chapter 4 of this book.
infamous Proskurov (now Khmelnytskyi) pogrom, both acted as heads of divisions of the Ukrainian army.

Although the sparse documentary evidence does not account for every insurgent band and every warlord, the combination of direct and circumstantial evidence suggests that most of the numerous atamans roving Ukraine with their bands either allied with the Ukrainian army at some point or supported it. Notorious atamans Kozyr-Zyrka, Angel, and Zelenyi, who operated in the northern and central parts of Ukraine, arguably started as Ukrainian officers, and others, like Laznyuk and Struk, called themselves ones. Ataman Tyutyunik, whose dubious allegiances were rarely bestowed on anyone, wrote in his rather illiterate leaflet: “Trust Petliura and nobody else; the rumors of Bolshevik advance are all silly lies.” Even the vicious ataman Grigoriev, whose independent army terrorized and exterminated Jewish communities in the southeastern region of Cherkassy and Elisavetgrad, started his campaign on the side of the Directory. The only consistently anarchist army under the command of the peasant chieftain Nestor Makhno nevertheless fought against Reds, Whites, and Germans, just as Petliura’s army did.

The loose and unstable structure of the Ukrainian army, its various allies, and fellow fighting countrymen resulted in the constant shifting of allegiances and changing sides as a distinctive form of warfare. Often, when the Bolsheviks were winning, and defeat became inevitable, Ukrainian army regiments and ataman armies would defect to the Bolshevik side—temporarily or permanently. Atamans like Grigoriev, Kozyr-Zyrka, Zelenyi, and many others, as well as regular Ukrainian army regiments, changed sides fairly easily, out of conviction or convenience. The same people became soldiers in various armies, and the Red Army readily accepted the new arrivals, needed to fight its true enemy—the Whites.

36 As in Berdichev and Zhitomir, the Proskurov pogrom occurred during the very first wave of the pogroms in early 1919. The Proskurov pogrom stands out because it was masterminded by the officer of the Ukrainian National Army ataman Semesenko, who organized the massacre of the Jews in Proskurov as a punitive expedition. The Proskurov pogrom is considered to be the most violent attack on Jews during the pogrom wave, taking lives of an estimated 800–1,500 Jews.

37 According to Tcherikower’s own research: YIVO Archive, file 658, 55817–33.

38 Ibid., file 75, 5870.
CHAPTER 1

THE WHITES

The Whites or the Volunteer Army is the common designation for the anti-Bolshevik forces that participated in the armed resistance to the new regime. Following the Bolshevik coup in October 1917, groups of Russian officers that did not support the Revolution began to form organized resistance. When the Bolsheviks made temporary peace with Germany, Russia’s former allies France and Great Britain fought the Bolshevik army on the front lines of the First World War and endorsed the internal military resistance to the Soviets. The Entente provided financial and military support for the White movement until its defeat in the Civil War against the Reds. The White movement was loosely organized and lacked centralized command and strategic planning; its armies were dispersed widely along the Civil War fronts from Siberia and Urals to Caucasus and Crimea. The major challenge of the Volunteer Army was the lack of fighting force; there were not enough soldiers. Bolsheviks had successfully targeted the backward, amorphous, and undersupplied Russian army with their propaganda, and the recruited soldiers and sailors became the basis of the Soviet army and major supporters of the Soviet state. The officers, robbed of their privileges and property by the Revolution, controlled only a small number of devoted elite regiments. During 1918 the Volunteer Army in South Russia sought to obtain manpower by uniting with the Cossacks of the Kuban and Don regions near the Black Sea and Caucasus.

The Cossacks were members of long-established militarized communities and served directly under the tsars’ command as their private guards and elite units, retaining their privileges and land ownership. The negotiations between the elected governments of several Cossack communities and the White Army command proved to be extremely involved. Peter Kenez has thoroughly researched the alliance between Cossacks and the White movement, and concluded that this temporary union remained fragile since both sides never truly shared the same goals and ideology. As Kenez persuasively argued, antisemitism became the center of the White movement doctrine, while for the Cossack communities anti-Jewish violence presented a lucrative incentive.

39 For further discussion of White Army soldiers and their motives for anti-Jewish violence, see Chapter 4 of this book.
40 Peter Kenez, Civil War in South Russia, 1918: The First Year of the Volunteer Army (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 138–64.
41 Peter Kenez, "Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War," Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History 311 (1992), and also Peter Kenez, "The Ideology of the White Movement," Europe-Asia Studies 32, no. 1 (1980): 58–83.
And as the prospective of anti-Jewish violence surfaced as a unifying factor, the White Army gained much needed manpower through an alliance with the most powerful Cossack hosts in the southern regions and Caucasus—Kuban, Don, and Terek.

In spring 1918, General Anton Denikin consolidated the White movement on the southern front and assumed command of the various units of the Volunteer Army under the name Armed Forces of the South of Russia. Neither the White Army command nor General Denikin personally recognized Ukraine as a sovereign state or as federal unit, never considered a union with any of the Ukrainian governments, and never used the word Ukraine, calling it only “South Russia.” The focus of the White movement advance was Moscow, and Ukrainian territory became a strategic and economic foothold in the war with Bolsheviks.

In the first half of 1919, while Petliura’s army was heavily engaged in the war with Bolsheviks in the territory of Ukraine, Denikin consolidated his forces, gained control of the Caucasus and Southern Russian Provinces, entered Eastern Ukraine, and began to advance in the direction of Moscow. In early July 1919, Denikin’s army started its victorious offensive in the territory of Ukraine, capturing Odessa and Kiev, and in early September turned to the north and almost reached Moscow. The Bolsheviks seriously considered surrendering the old capital and were getting ready to go underground by forming a clandestine organization of the Bolshevik Party. However, the White forces in the south were over stretched. The Reds, who made a great effort to consolidate their forces in order to push back against Denikin, started to advance, aiming to cut the Volunteer Army in two. The final attempts of the Whites to advance further weakened their position, and they had to start withdrawing from Ukraine and Russia, moving back towards the Kuban region.

The White Army swept through Ukraine twice in less than six months, during the swift attack and then the rapid retreat, and on both marches the White Army perpetrated exceedingly violent pogroms. While the pogroms of the first half of 1919 were widespread and were carried out by various groups allegiant or similar to the Ukrainian army, the pogroms by the hands of the White Army were confined more to eastern and central Ukraine, particularly the area alongside Dnieper River in the Cherkassy region. The White Army perpetrated fewer pogroms in fewer locations, although in many locations the pogroms happened at least twice. For a number of reasons to be thoroughly discussed later, the White Army pogroms are characterized by a much higher overall death toll, brutality, and torture.
In early January 1920, Denikin assumed the title of supreme governor of Russia that was conferred on him by the leader of the Siberian front—legendary general Kolchak. However, this was by then a desperate, symbolic gesture that could not prevent the coming defeat. The Cossacks deserted the White movement, and the remnants of the Volunteer Army retreated to Crimea by the end of March 1920. On April 4, 1920, General Denikin resigned from the post of the chief commander of the Armed Forces of the South of Russia and left Russia, handing the leadership of the White Army to Baron Wrangel, who continued to fight Bolsheviks until 1924.

The Reds continued to fight against the armed resistance of the remnants of the White Army and miscellaneous Ukrainian peasant bands that prowled various regions of the country after the Bolsheviks established their control of Ukraine in 1920. Violent clashes of armed forces and outbreaks of anti-Jewish pogroms continued for a couple of years longer, but the Bolsheviks remained firmly in power, and proceeded to oppose, prohibit, and punish anti-Jewish violence, as they did from the beginning of the Civil War on the grounds of internationalism. Bolsheviks had consistently curbed and denounced pogroms occasionally perpetrated by the Red Army and prosecuted the pogrom instigators. The Soviet and Bolshevik Party organizations joined with Jewish and international philanthropic organizations to provide aid for the victims of the pogroms. The Ukrainian Soviet Republic, although never truly independent from the Soviet Russia, formally entered the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics when it was created at the end of 1922.

The anti-Jewish violence in the form of pogroms permeated the turbulent history of Ukraine at the time of Civil War from the scattered outbreaks in 1914–17 and through the two powerful waves of genocidal violence perpetrated by Petliura’s army and the Whites in 1919. Already by 1917, systematic anti-Jewish violence, as classified by David Nirenberg and extrapolated by Helmut Smith, evolved into catastrophic violence that affected and threatened the existence of Jewish communities all over Ukraine, as a result of the war and Revolution. In 1919, pogrom violence reached previously unseen proportions and became, alongside the warfare of the Civil War, the central most vigorous and essential activity of the various belligerents. The genocidal violence against Jews was not just at the center of the Civil War; it became the Civil War.

42 Nirenberg, Communities of Violence.
43 Helmut Walser Smith, The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 117.