The City Left Behind: Changes in the Ethnic Composition of Vilnius During and After World War II

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Abstract

The population of Wilno/Vilnius numbered over 200 000 people when the Second World War broke out. The city found itself at the crossroads of Polish, Lithuanian and belated Belarusian nation building efforts. In the first phase of the war, the multi-ethnic city which was also a centre of a voivodship and where Poles were the majority community, came under Lithuanian authority. The Soviet military and diplomatic actions played a key role in this change. The arrival of the Soviet troops halted the extensive "Lithuanianization" process that had begun. As a result, tensions between the Polish community and the Lithuanian state eased. The Extermination of the Jewish population the city commenced with the German invasion on 24 June 1941. Before the Soviet troops reached the Vilnius Region, the Polish Home Army (AK) gained control over the rural areas. Despite the Polish plans, Vilnius was liberated with the help of the Soviet Red Army on 13 July 1944. The relationship between the Polish and the Soviet army quickly turned hostile. Moreover, violence continued to accompany population movement. Even though the Old Town remained largely intact, the demographic profile of Vilnius altered dramatically. First, it became a Russian dominated space. Following the collectivization, as a result of the influx of the Lithuanians intensified and they gradually became the majority in the city.

Keywords

Wilno/Vilnius, Polish-Lithuanian relations, Soviet occupation, World War II

Introduction

The years of World War II and the subsequent Sovietization are the most tragic and traumatic periods in the history of Vilnius. In 1939, the population of the city chiefly consisted of Poles and Jews. A decade later, it was no longer the case. At the same time, Vilnius became the capital of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.[1] Wartime destruction, the Holocaust and the repatriation of Poles (that took place between 1944 and 1947) dramatically changed the ethnic relations. Just like it happened to other cities that the Soviet Union annexed (Lwów, Chișinău), the ethnic Russian and immigrants from other republics of the Soviet Union took the vacated place of the former inhabitants in Vilnius, too. This also meant a new context for the urban structure - including built environment - which had been in the making for generations. A new milieu came about in a very short period of time in Vilnius, the same way as in Lwów and Wrocław.[2]

While for the Polish society, Wilno was an important regional centre,[3] (similarly to Lwów or Poznań), the Lithuanians saw the city as their past and future capital. From the point of Belarusians, Vilna should have been part of their country since the town played a key role in forming the Belarusian literary language and a sizeable Belarusian community in the city that was even larger than the Lithhuanians'.[4] After World War I, the Poles and the Lithuanians came into conflict over the city. Eventually, General Lucjan

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1 *Theodore R. Weeks*: A Multi-ethnic City in Transition: Vilnius's Stormy Decade, 1939–1949. Eurasian Geopgraphy and Economics 47. (2006) 2. 153-175.

2 *Violeta Davoliūtė:* The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania. Memory and modernity in the wake of war. London–New York, 2013. 7.

3 The city had a major impact on the neighbouring areas as well. In fact, the geographical name "Region of Vilnius" (Wileńszczyzna, Vilniaus kraštas) has multiple meanings. From historical perspective, it refers to the agglomeration that Vilnius dominated, thus it includes areas that are in North-western Belarus today. (Hrodna/Grodno, Lida, Ashmyany/Oszmiana) and Southwestern Lithuania. In the present study, we apply the term for the area that was annexed to Lithuania between October 1939 until November 1940. The area of this region was 9527 km[2]. *Mariusz Kowalski*: Wileńszczyzna jako problem geopolityczny. In: Problematyka geopolityczna ziem polskich. Red. Piotr Eberhardt. Prace Geograficzne nr. 218. Warszawa 2008. 267–268.

4 The Lithuanians also maintained a network of cultural institutions in Vilnius during the interwar period. They were the majority community in the villages of the northern part of the region. *Timothy Snyder*: The Reconstruction of Nations. Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999. New Haven–London 2003. 53–54.

Żeligowski secured the area for Poland by declaring independence for Central-Lithuania on 12 October 1920. The Lithuanians vehemently opposed this move. The tense relationship between the Poles and the Lithuanians had an impact on the way World War II unfolded in the region.[5]

Inhabitants of Vilnius during World War I, app. 1915–1916. Source: wikipedia

For Poland, the salience of the Lithuanian question waned when the Council of Ambassadors sanctioned the border on 15 March 1923, however, it was difficult to integrate the eastern borderlands (*kresy*) as like the Vilnius Region to Poland. Wilno, as one of the Polish provincial centres, became more of a cultural than actual economic and industrial centre since it had lost its former markets that remained in interwar Lithuania and in the Soviet Union (in the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic).[6] The Voivodship of Wilno constituted a security threat for Poland due to the revisionist efforts of Lithuania and because of the high proportion of Belarusians living in the area.

Based on the census of 1931, in terms of ethnicity, notable differences were

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5 *Krzysztof Buchowski*: Litwomani i polonizatorzy, Mity, wzajemne postrzeganie i stereotypy w stosunkach polsko-litewskich w pierwszej połowie XX wieku. Białystok 2006. 8–22.

6 *Weeks*, *T. R.:* A Multi-ethnic City in Transition. 155.

seen between urban Vilnius and rural areas of the Voivodship of Wilno: for Poles it was 65.93% and 58.57%, for Belarussians 0.89 and 26.63%, for those of the Jewish faith 27.98% and 5.01% and Lithuanians 0.8% versus 6.03%, respectively. Regarding the demography of Christian Churches, Catholics constituted 60-65% in both urban and rural setting, while 29.18% of the rural population belonged to the Orthodox Church based on the same data. As it was seen, this latter figure was close to the weight of the Israelites in Vilnius.[7]

The closed border between Poland and Lithuania, the tense international relations and the frequent armed incidents along the demarcation line made life more difficult in the multi-ethnic voivodship. As a result, Poland and Lithuania established diplomatic relations as late as on 19 March 1938, after Poland had issued an ultimatum.[8] Thus, hardly any time left for reconciliation or at least for identifying common interests before the Second World War.[9]

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7 According to the census of 1931, the Voivodhsip of Vilnius (excluding Vilnius) had a population of 1 080 868 people. In terms of the number of native speakers, the proportions were the following: 633 095 Polish (58.57%), 287 938 Belarussian (26.63%), 65 259 Lithuanian (6.03%), 54 232 Hebrew (5.01%), 37 109 Russian (3.43%), and 3253 other (0.29%). Confessions showed the following patterns: 671 484 Roman Catholic (62.12%), 315 417 Orthodox (29.18%), 55 790 Israelite (5.16%) and 3.54% followed further faiths. Drugi Powszechny Spis Ludności z dn. 9. XII 1931 r. mieszkania i gospodarstwa domowe, ludność, stosunki zawodowe : województwo wileńskie., bez miasta Wilna. Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Warszawa 1936. 10. At the same time, the total population of Wilno was 195 071, out of which 128 628 were Polish (65.93%), 54 596 Jews (27.98%), 7442 Russian (3.81%), 1579 Lithuanian (0.80%), and 1089 other (0.55%). In the city, the religious landscape looked as follows: 125 999 Roman Catholic (64.59%), 55 006 Israelite (28.19%), 9321 Orthodox (4.77%), and 4745 people (2.43%) belonged to other churches. Powszechny Spis Ludności z dn. 9. XII 1931 r. mieszkania i gospodarstwa domowe, ludność, stosunki zawodowe: Miasto Wilno. Warszawa 1937. 11.

8 *Artur Ochał*: Na litewskiej rubieży, Brygada KOP „Grodno" (1929–1939). Warszawa 2017. 605.

9 *Piotr Łossowski*: Stosunki polsko-litewskie 1921–1939. Warszawa 1997. 309–352.
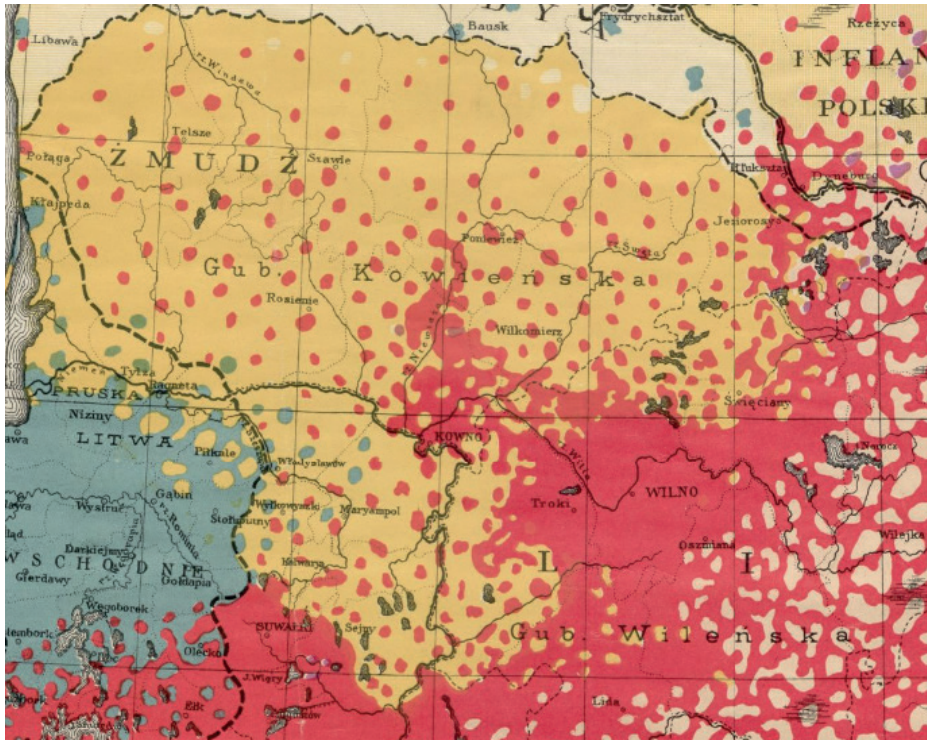
Ethnic patterns of Polish areas. Red represents Polish, yellow means areas where Lithuanians lived. [10]

The Period of Lithuanian Authority and Soviet Occupation

Although, according to the Secret Clause of the German–Soviet Pact of non-aggression signed on 23 August 1939 (known as the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact), Lithuania was supposed to be part of the German sphere of interest, in the sense of the German-Soviet negotiations of 28 September, the territory went to the Soviet Union in exchange for the area around Lublin.[11] The Parties agreed that Lithuania annex Vilnius. The Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic also made a claim for Vilnius, Stalin, for strategic reasons, favoured Lithuania in this regard. Negotiations about handing over Vilnius began 3 October 1939. These were formally based on the Lithuanian-Soviet

10 *Edward Maliszewski*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Biura Pracy Społecznej, Wykonano w Lit. W. Główczewski, 1919.

11 *Bojtár Endre*: Európa megrablása. A balti államok bekebelezésének története dokumentumok tükrében 1939–1989. Budapest 1989. 29–30.

Treaty of 1920.[12] Eventually, Lithuania received only 6656 km^2, the northern belt of the Voivodship of Wilno with Vilnius as its centre. Since 20 000 Soviet troops coming to be stationed in Lithuania, although Soviets hardly ever left the Vilnius District and the cost of annexing Vilnius was independence.

In September 1939, the Lithuanian leadership refused to satisfy Hitler's demand that Lithuania join the campaign against Poland.[13] At the same time, the state opened its borders for the refugees and 9500 Polish soldiers arrived right in the first month. The Lithuanian government ordered their arms to withdraw and be interned. The Soviet troops occupied Vilnius on 18 September 1939. In September 1939, the Polish civilian refugees from the Central and Western parts of Poland began to pour into Vilnius. This caused a shift in the ethnic patterns of the city as the number of Poles soared. Until February 1940, more than 30 000 refugees had arrived in Vilnius including more than 11 000 Jews and 3700 Lithuanians. They had to face an increasingly difficult situation as securing supplies and housing were a constant issues.[14]

According to the Soviet-Lithuanian Pact of 10 October 1939, 549 000 people became denizens of Lithuania. In terms of ethnicity, 59% of them were Poles, 19% were Jewish, 6% Lithuanian, 14% Belarusian and 2% Russian. In November 1940, an additional 2647 km^2 were annexed (Święciany/ Švenčionys, Druskiennik/Druskininkai and Dziewieniszki/Dieveniškės had formerly been part of the Belarussian SSR), thus, by 1940, the Lithuanian SSR had gained 9527 km^2.[15] In 1937, Vilnius had a population of 210 000. Throughout the war and in the post-war period, this figure continued to be volatile due to the extermination of the local Jewish population, the influx of the refugees and the waves of expulsion that occurred after the war.[16]

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12 *Snyder, T.*: The Reconstruction of Nations. 79–83.

13 Since, as a result of an ultimatum issued on 20 March 1939, Lithuania was forced to cede the vicinity of Klaipeda (Memel Territory), the relations between Germany and Lithuania were tense in 1939. The region around the port of Klaipeda was one of the most advanced areas of Lithuania.

14 The influx of Polish people contributed to the severity of post-war deportation/repatration of Poles. *Tomas Bakelis*: War, Ethnic Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in Lithuania, 1939–1940. Contemporary European History 4. (2007) 16. 463–465.

15 *Piotr Łossowski*: Litwa a sprawy polskie 1939–1940. Warszawa 1982. 56–57.

16 *Bakelis, T.*: War, Ethnic Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in Lithuania, 1939–1940 i. m. 464.; *Lagzi Gábor*: Városok a határon. Wrocław, L'viv és Vilnius multikulturalizmusa a múltban és a jelenben. Budapest 2016. 72.

Celebrations of Vilnius return to Lithuania near Vilnius Cathedral in 1939. Source: wikipedia

The Polish Government-in-exile that initially had its seat in Paris protested against the annexation and halted the diplomatic relations between Poland and Lithuania, yet again.[17] Although in Paris negotiations proceeded between the Parties regarding interned Polish soldiers and civilians, these negotiations meant no progress for the status of Vilnius. The Polish Government-in-exile hoped that it would be able to take the Eastern territories back with the support of Western allies. However, this proved to be an illusion. Allies did not keep their word regarding Vilnius and Lwów and let the Soviet Union decide on the affiliation of these areas.[18] Fake news contributed to the deterioration of Polish-Lithuanian relations during the war. Furthermore, the lack of the Lithuanian emigré government that could have negotiated on Vilnius exacerbated the problems.

The Polish refugees did not welcome the Lithuanian troops marching into the region of Vilnius on 28 October 1939. They perceived the developments as a

17 *Krzysztof Tarka*: Konfrontacja czy współpraca? Litwa w polityce Rządu Polskiego na uchodźstwie 1939–1945. Opole 1998. 20.; *Łossowski, P.:* Litwa a sprawy polskie 1939–1940. 53.

18 *Norman Davies*: Rising '44. The Battle of Warsaw. London 2004. 42–45.

temporary invasion. However, we shall not forget that the region of Vilnius remained a kind of "Polish island" that fell outside the German and the Soviet zones of occupation. Thus, many saw the city as the centre of Polish efforts break away. The current conspiracies and the activities of the Union of Armed Struggle (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej, Okręg Wileński*), the predecessor of the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa* - AK) fuelled this belief.[19]

On the whole, in Vilnius, the tensions between the Poles and the Lithuanians were on the rise during the months of the Lithuanian occupation (that lasted from 28 October to 15 June 1940). The reasons behind this were the Lithuanization of the educational institutions as well as the social care, and the closure of the Stefan Batory University, among other things. These moves contributed to the increase of unemployment in the city. The Lithuanian intellectuals, workers and employees replaced the Polish'. Moreover, the regulations excluded the Polish settlers from the Lithuanian citizenship. At the same time, the Lithuanian government tried to persuade the Holy See to replace the Archbishop of Vilnius, Romuald Jałbrzykowski, who tried protecting the interests of the Polish people in the region and on the territories that belonged to the diocese. This were further triggered the uproar among the Poles.[20] The fact that the actual capital was still Kaunas and the head of state did not move to Vilnius reflect refleced on the seriousness of the situation.[21]

Lithuania had to secure supplies for 30 000 Polish civilians and soldiers. Despite some help from abroad, this caused a humanitarian crisis in the country and it remained a major issue up to the Soviet takeover. The Lithuanian government was not prepared for receiving so many refugees when it wished to integrate with the annexed territories.[22] The Lithuanian leadership wished to distinguish between the loyal Poles from "strangers" (*ateiviai*).[23] Accord-

19   *Piotr Niwiński*: Okręg Wileński AK w latach 1944–1948. Warszawa–Kraków 2014.

25. *Login Tomaszewski*: Wileńszczyzna lat wojny i okupacji 1939–1945. Warszawa 1999. 279.

20   Kazimierz Michalkiewicz vice-bishop of Vilnius passed away on 16 February 1940. The Santa Sede appointed the former bishop of Vilkaviškis, Mečislovas Reinys for his replacement. Reinys was of Lithuanian origin.

21   *Dangiras Mačiulis, Darius Staliūnas*: Lithuanian Nationalism and the Vilnius Question 1883–1940. Marburg 2015. 193–199.

22 As a result, a number of offices and departments of the government moved to Vilnius and so did the state owned companies of the food processing industry (Maistas, Pieno centras). *Bakelis, T.*: War, Ethnic Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in Lithuania, 1939–1940. 464.

23   *Kowalski*, M.: Wileńszczyzna jako problem geopolityczny, ibid., 269–274.; *Piotr*

ing to the Act of 20 March 1940, the government denied citizenship to app. 83 000 Poles living in Vilnius and further tens of thousands that stayed in the region, altogether 150 000 people who arrived between 1920 and 1939. The ideology behind the Lithuanization of the Vilnius region was that the Polish-Belarusian population should turn back to their Lithuanian roots so that local population might be "re-Lithuanized".[24]

On 15 June 1940, the Soviet Red Army occupied the entire area of Lithuania. Following a fraud election, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet accepted the request of the People's Government of Lithuania to join the Soviet Union. In the region of Vilnius, the occupation also meant that the conflict between Lithuanians and Poles halted and that the political-economic-cultural integration of the region to Lithuania slowed down. The head of state, Antanas Smetona and the Lithuanian political elite took refuge in Western Europe. Deportations and arrests during the autumn of 1940 took a heavy toll among the Poles and the Lithuanians of Vilnius.[25] The Polish associations, including the charity organization called *Komitet Polski* were banned.[26]

Łossowski: Po tej i tamtej stronie Niemna. Stosunki polsko-litewskie, 1883–1939. Warszawa 1985. 5–8.

24 *Bakelis, T.*: War, Ethnic Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in Lithuania, 1939–1940, ibid., 463–469.

25 Between 14 and 18 June 1941 34 260 people were deported from Lithuania to the Interior of the Soviet Union. *Georg von Rauch*: A balti államok története. Budapest 2000. 197.

26 *Piotr Niwiński*: Okręg Wileński AK w latach 1944–1948. 2014. 28.
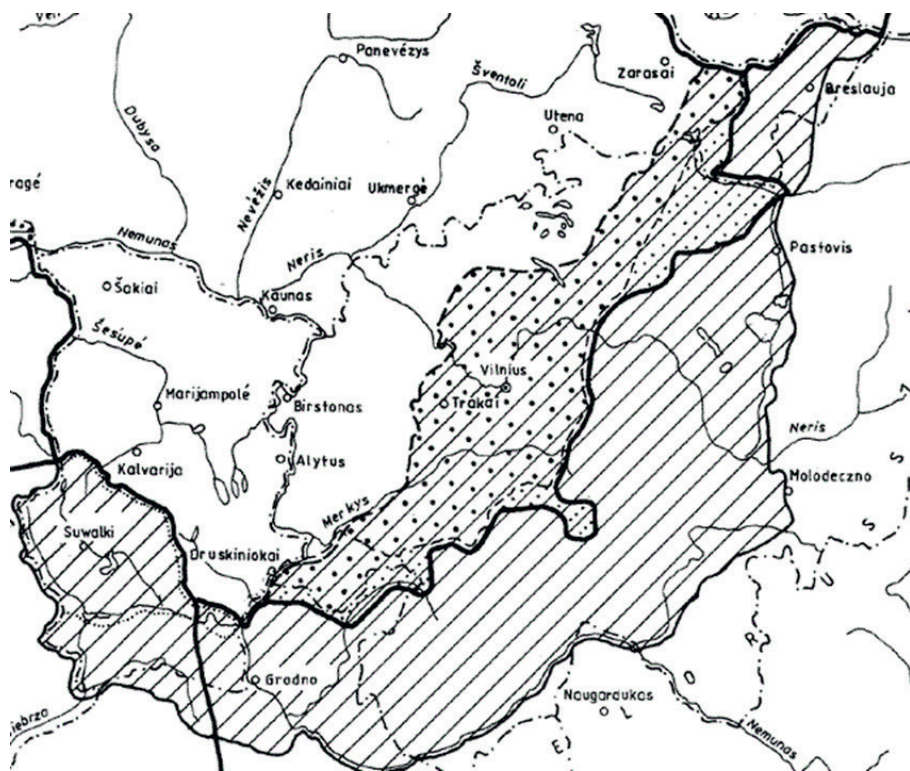
Area annexed to Lithuania between 10 October 1939 and November 1939.

The stripes indicate the area that belonged to Lithuania according to the Lithuanian–Soviet Agreement on 12 July 1920, while the dotted area is the territory that the Soviets actually handed over.[27]

German Occupation

In consequence of the mass deportations and the cruelty suffered at the hands of the Soviet authorities, inhabitants of Vilnius welcomed the German troops as liberators, initially. The Lithuanian rebels took over on 23 June 1941 in Kaunas and Vilnius and both cities awaited the arrival of the German troops with open gates. Although a provisory government formed with the leadership of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) but the Germans dissolved it in August 1941.[28] The Nazi Germany refused to recognize the independent

27 Köztes-Európa 1763–1993 (A collection of maps). Compiled by *Pándi, Lajos*. Osiris-Századvég, Budapest 1995. 673.

28 *Rauch,* G.: A balti államok története. 200–201.

status of Lithuania and introduced a regime of military occupation. Lithuania belonged to the Eastern Governorate (*Reichskommissariat Ostland*) that held a subsidiary Lithuanian governorate (*Generalkommissariat Litauen*).[29] The administrative center and the seat of the general governor Theodor Adrian von Renteln (1897-1946?) [who played a key role in the deportation of 20 000 Jews from Vilnius - translator's note] was in Kaunas, and the Lithuanian governorate was divided into four districts. The district of Vilnius (*Gebiet Wilna – Land*) comprised 15840 km^2 and 600 000 inhabitants after two Belarussian districts had been added to it.[30]

The occupying army tried to control the local level administration and used it to achieve their own objectives. Since the Germans lacked the capacity to overtake this level, Lithuanians were in control of these. They introduced Lithuanian street names, and, besides German, the use of Lithuanian language was also allowed in offices. At the same time, there were efforts to side-line the Polish language. Schools, where Polish was the medium of education, had to close and the same applied for theatres and movie theatres. Yet, the Lithuanian administration had no leverage over the decisions of the German command. Hardly had the Poles any civilian or military organizations that could have stood up in defence of their interests despite the fact that the majority of employees were still Polish. When a local census proved the Polish majority in the city, it became possible to employ more of them.[31] The Germans were not interested in reinforcing the ethnic rivalry and tried to ensure that employment patterns were to reflect the ethnic proportion at the lower level of administration. This policy intended to ensure that the Germans could exploit the resources of the hinterland. When the Germans realized that Lithuanians wanted more freedom, they did not hesitate to uti-

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29 *Login Tomaszewski*: Kronika Wileńska 1941–1945. Z dziejów polskiego państwa podziemnego. Warszawa 1992. 16.

30 *Ar*ūnas *Bubnys*: Stosunki międzyetniczne na Wileńszczyżnie w latach okupacji nazistowskiej (1941–1944). Studia Podlaskie 17. (2007/2008) 134.

31 The census of 1942 showed a very different picture since a large part of the Jewish population was exterminated in 1941 and the number of the Linthuanians grew. In the six districts that belonged to Vilnius (Vilnius, Trakai/Troki, Eišiškės/Ejszyszki, Ashmyany/Oszmiana, Svir/Świr, Švenčionys/Święciany) according to the census that German authorities carried out, Lithuanians became the major community (58.8%), the proportion of the Poles was 36.9%, and that of the Belarussians 12.9 %, while the ratio of the Russians was 2.9%. In Vilnius itself, Poles formed the majority with 71.9%, while the proportion of Lithuanians was 20.5%. The number of the Russians equalled to 4.1% in proportinal terms, while the Belarussians reached 2.1%. There were 15-17 000 Jews in the ghetto of Vilnius. *Bubnys* A.: Stosunki międzyetniczne. 134.

lize the Polish population against them, thus preventing harsher anti-Polish administrative measures. As an integrated part of this policy, announcements were issued in four languages.[32]

The exclusion of the Jewish communities had begun before the German occupation. The Lithuanian authorities mainly referred to the cooperation with the communists as pretext for the measures. The Lithuanian police and the Lithuanian Shooters' Association (*Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga*) also took part in the extermination of Jews. The Gestapo involved units that they called *Sonderkommando* for the execution of the Jews. The bloodiest massacres of the Vilnius region took place near Ponary (Paneriai), 7 kms to the southwest of the city.[33] Until the end of 1941, these organizations murdered 33-35 000 people, which were more than half of the 58 000-strong Jewish community of Vilnius.[34] On 4 September 1941, the Germans left it for the Lithuanian authorities to set up the ghetto of Vilnius and to down the Jewish population. The 17 000 survivers of the first wave of genocide lived in the ghetto. Eventually, in September 1943, the ghettos of Vilnius and Święciany/Švenčionys were liquidated and the surviving Jews transported to Estonia, Latvia and to various parts of the Governorate. Overall, only two-three thousand Jews of Vilnius survived the war. The district that included the ghetto became practically unpopulated.[35] The fate of the Yiddish Scientific Institute (Yidisher Visenshaftlekher Institut, YIVO), founded in 1925, reflects the history of the Jewish cultural heritage. YIVO played an active part in exploring the Ashkenazi in the interwar period. Moreover, one shall credit this institute with standardizing the Yiddish script and its transcription. A special German "kulturkommando" [Culture Commando] managed to take away part of its archive but the American troops took hold of it and this material made it possible to take up the work in New York that had begun in Wilno.[36]

Since the Lithuanians participated in the massacres of 1941, during the Nazi occupation, the relationship between Poles and Lithuanians deterio-

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32 *Bubnys A.*: Stosunki międzyetniczne.137.

33 *Theodore R. Weeks*: Vilnius between Nations 1795–2000. DeKalb. 2015. 182–183.

34 At the same time, in late 1939, the Jewish population of Vilnius grew larger as a result of the arrival of refugees. In the first half of 1940, their number might have reached 80 000. *Andrzej Żbikowski:* Poles and Jews in Vilnius Region 1939–1941. Darbai ir dienos 67. (2017) 154.

35 *Bubnys A.*: Stosunki międzyetniczne. 140–141. *Arūnas Bubnys*: Eksterminacja żydów wileńskich i dzieje getta wileńskiego (1941–1944). Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość 2. (2010) 229–236.

36 *Lagzi G.*: Városok a határon. 81–85.

rated further. The Polish partisans became active in the spring and summer of 1944. At that time, the Wilno Regiment of the Polish Home Army was 23 000-strong. As the Germans began to retreat, they became interested in fuelling the interethnic tension. They hoped that partisans would turn against the Lithuanian police. The Germans used the Lithuanian police and self-defence units to crush the Polish uprising and to maintain their control over the population. However, by the summer of 1944, the Germans controlled only Vilnius and the district centres.[37]

The Final Days of the German Occupation and the Worst Period of Polish–Lithuanian Relations

The struggle of the Polish Home Army against the German forces of occupation went hand in hand with the liquidation of the Lithuanian police and the administrative units that cooperated with the Germans. These operations were particularly successful against the Local Lithuanian Units (*Lietuvos vietinė rinktinė* – LVR) that fought on Germans' side. Both sides committed atrocities against civilians and both parties were guilty of war crimes. The Lithuanians killed the Polish villagers and members of the Home Army killed the Lithuanian civilians who allegedly collaborated with the Germans. In the last weeks of the German occupation, in June 1944, the conflict escalated and the Lithuanians and the Polish engaged in the ethnic cleansing near the area that used to be the Polish-Lithuanian borderland (at the settlements called Podbrzezie/Paberžė and Dubingiai/Dubniki).[38] When the Polish AK became the strongest force in the rural areas of the Vilnius region, they started fighting against the Soviet partizans.[39]

In the summer of 1944, the The Polish Government-in-exile launched the

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37 Germans also tried using the weaker Belarussian nationalism against Lithuanians and Poles. They tried to form a pro-German group among Belarussians and allowed them to broadcast radio programmes in Belarussian language from Vilnius besides having their own newspaper, high school and national committee. They could also take part in local public administration. *Bubnys A*.: Stosunki międzyetniczne. 139-140.

38 *Paweł Rokicki*: Glinciszki i Dubniki. Zbrodnie wojenne na Wileńszczyźnie w połowie 1944 roku i ich konsekwencje w współczesnych relacjach polsko-litewskich. Instytut Pamięci Narodowej. Warszawa 2015. 336.

39 *Niwiński, P*.: Okręg Wileński. 30.

operation Storm (*Operacja Burza*) with the objective of securing Vilnius.[40] One of the tactical moves (*Operacja Ostra Brama*) was to liberate Wilno with the help of the Home Army in order that they could be in a good position by the time the Soviet troops reached. However, the Home Army began the siege too late and they could only take Vilnius from the Germans with the help of the Red Army.[41] Despite this initial friendliness, the Soviet troops soon began liquidating AK units - not only in the region of Vilnius but also in Volhynia and around Lwów. These developments projected the re-Sovietisation of the territory and influenced preparations for the battle for Warsaw.[42]

Member of the Polish Home Army and Soviet soliders during the liberation of Vilnius. Source: wikipedia.

Third (Final) Soviet Occupation and Deportations and Displacements

On 22 September 1944, the Polish government of Lublin signed an agreement about population exchange with Soviet Lithuania. According to the agreement 20 thousand Lithuanians transferred from the Voivodship of Bi-

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40 *Niwiński, P.*: Okręg Wileński. 30.

41 *Niwiński, P.*: Okręg Wileński. 33.

42 *Davies, N.*: Rising '44. The Battle of Warsaw.

ałystok and other territories of Poland. At the same time, Poles from the Vilnius region and other areas of Lithuania were also forced to migrate. Between 1945 and 1947, 171 158 left for Poland, more than 50% of them were from Vilnius. A mass population movement continued and a total of 213 934 persons resettled in Poland until April 1959.[43] The deportations mostly concerned urban Vilnius since authorities allowed the Polish rural population to stay in order to prevent depopulation. While less than 20 000 Lithuanians resettled to Lithuania from Poland, the Polish minority in the Lithuanian SSR suffered severe losses since intellectuals were not only deported from Vilnius but also rural areas.[44]

In the immediate post-World War II period, Vilnius, by having lost half of its population, became a Soviet city. It was the official capital of the Lithuanian SSR where temporarily Russian became the desired medium of communication. According to census data from 1959, native Russian speakers formed the relative majority (37%), Lithuanian speakers came second (33.4%), while 19.4% claimed they were native Polish, following by 4.8% Jews, 3.1% Belarussians, 1.3% Ukrainians, and 0.7% fell in other categories. However, ethnically the Lithuanians were the most numerous 33.6%, then came the ethnic Russians (29.4%) and the Poles (20%), while the proportion of Jews fell to 6.9% and that of the Belarussians increased to 6.2%. Ukrainians made up 2.8% of the population and 1% related to others.[45] The Polish immigrants came from nearby villages and the Poles remained the majority in the district called Nowa Wilejka.[46]

The Polish who went to Poland from Wilno and its surroundings tried to keep the memory of their homeland: they left songs, paintings and poems be-

43 *Irena Mikłaszewicz*: Brzemię polskości. Odniesienie do Polski jako czynnika obciążającego katolików i duchowieństwo polskie w litewskiej części archidiecezji wileńskiej w materiałach sowieckich służb represyjnych. In: Od Maximis undique pressi do Totus Tuus Poloniae populus. Metropolie mohylewska i wileńska w latach 1798–1992. Red. Jarosław Wasilewski. Instytut Pamięci Narodowej. Białystok–Warszawa 2019. 188.

44 *Kowalski, M.*: Wileńszczyzna jako problem geopolityczny. 279.

45 *Kowalski, M.*: Wileńszczyzna jako problem geopolityczny. 283.; *Piotr Eberhardt*: Przemiany narodowościowe na Litwie w XX wieku. Przegląd Wschodni 3.1 (1991) 1. 474–475.

46 Polish kept migrating from Lithuania during the mid-1950s. According to the census of 1959, 230 000 Polish remained in Lithuania that was 8,5% of the total population (2 711 400). Their number was equal to that of the ethnic Russians at that time. Subsequently, the Russians overtook the Poles in terms of number. In Vilnius, the proportion of the Lithuanians rose above 50% only in 1989. *Eberhardt, P.*: Przemiany narodowościowe na Litwie. ibid., 473–480.

hind, along with memoirs and books about the Home Army.[47] The members of staff of the Stefan Batory University gained employment at the Nikolaus Kopernikus University of Toruń (Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika) that was founded in 1945. They tried to follow the traditions of their previous institution. In the autumn of 1944, Soviets forced the university to break with its past and take up Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas's name (1880–1935) who was a Lithuanian communist and member of the Comintern.[48]

Formally, the Lithuanian SSR was indebted to the Soviet Union since the earlier Lithuanian states were unable to hold Klaipeda, the important port town, and Vilnius at the same time. Despite the devastation that the war, the Holocaust and the deportation of Poles brought about, Vilnius and its region could preserve a multi-ethnic character.[49] The Lithuanian writer Tomas Venclova wrote the following about post-war Vilnius: "For many years after the Second World War, the Jewish quarter was a town of ghosts. All the quarters of the Old Town including the university, the Christian churches (with the exception of St. Catherine's that suffered minor damages) were miraculously intact. Only the Jewish quarter was hopelessly destroyed."[50] Although there were plans to radically alter the city, these were yet to realize and the historic townscape was preserved. Yet, one can still observe the impact of wartime damage, for example the uncertain fate of the Jewish built heritage that has become a domestic tourist attraction. The Polish-Lithuanian relations have been improving and this facilitates the academic study of the previous conflicts, which, in turn, is indispensible for reaching a social consensus about these.

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47 *Jarosław Krasnodębski*: Z Wilna nad Wilią do „Wilna nad Wisłą". Ekspatriacja i osiedlenie się mieszkańców Wileńszczyzny w Toruniu (1944–1948). Toruń 2019. 9–16.; *Vitalija Stravinskienė*: Między ojcowizną a ojczyzną. Przymusowa migracja Polaków z Wilna do Polski w latach 1944–1947. In: Pamięć kresów – kresy w pamięci, szerk. Bogusław Tracz. Muzeum w Gliwicach. Katowice–Gliwice–Warszawa 2019. 67–86.

48 *Lagzi G.*: Városok a határon. 90.

49 According to the census of 2011, the Lithuanians were 84.2% of the population, the Poles were yet again in second position with 6.6% (200 300 people), while the proportion of the Russians fell to 5.8% (176 900) and there were 36 200 Belarussians. This set of data shows that there were only 2852 Jews in Lithuania, 2012 of them lived in Vilnius. In the same year, the population of the capital was 524 406, out of which 63.6% were Lithuanian, 16.4% Polish, 11.9% Russian, 3.4% Belarussian and 4.7% belonged to other ethnic categories. Gyventojai pagal tautybę, gimtąją kalbą ir tikybą. Lietuvos Respublikos 2011 metų visuotinio gyventojų ir būstų surašymo rezultatai. Lietuvos Statistikos Departmentas. Vilnius 2013. 1–2.

50 *Tomas Venclova*: Vilnius. Egy város Európában. Budapest 2009. 114.

Summary

Apart from killings due to wartime violence and deportations in June 1941, the annihilation of the Jewish community – the murder of 33-35 000 people until the end of 1941 – of Vilnius constituted the most severe loss for the city. The discord between the Polish and the Lithuanian community also took the form of armed conflicts during the years of the war. Between the Soviet invasion of 1944 and 1947, 89 000 Poles left Vilnius.[51] A third of the buildings suffered irreparable damage during the war, even though the Old Town retained its original outlook.[52]

In fact, as a result of the deportations and the Holocaust Vilnius became an empty space. By 1945, the number of inhabitants dropped to 110 000 that was just half of the pre-war figure.[53] This "emptiness" made the influx of a new possible population rise and this led to the emergence of a "Soviet city" in place of the Polish-Jewish town that Vilnius had been. There were many Polish among the new settlers, but they also differed from the previous "repatriated" inhabitants, in social terms. The demographic collapse that the war caused made it necessary to attract newcomers from surrounding rural areas. As a result of the influx of non-Lithuanians, 75% of the inhabitants represented other ethnic groups in 1951. From that time, the number of the Lithuanians gradually rose and they eventually formed a majority.[54] After the collectivization, many Lithuanians embarked on a "new life" in the new capital. [55] In fact, it was a conscious policy that Sovietization and urbanization should go hand in hand. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union Vilnius became a real Lithuanian city, but preserved some multiethnic characters also.

51 *Lagzi G.*: Városok a határon. 87.

52   The Jewish quarter suffered the most damage and the Great Syangouge of Vilnius was finally demolished in 1949.

53 *Davoliūtė, V.*: The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania, ibid., 2–3.; Theodore R. Weeks: Remembering and Forgetting: Creating a Soviet Lithuanian Capital. Vilnius 1944–1949. Journal of Baltic Studies 39. (2008) 4. 517–533.

54 *Vitalija Stravinskienė:* Vilniaus miesto etninė-demografinė padėtis: 1944–1951 metai. Istorija. Lietuvos aukštųjų mokyklų mokslo darbai 95. (2014) 3. 52.

55 According to Violeta Davoliūtė, the rapid repopulation and reconstruction of Vilnius by ethnically Lithuanian (and Polish) population from the surrounding countryside would turn postwar Vilnius into a „peasant metropolis", because the vast majority of the the population had recently arrived from the village. *Davoliūtė, V.*: The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania. 2.
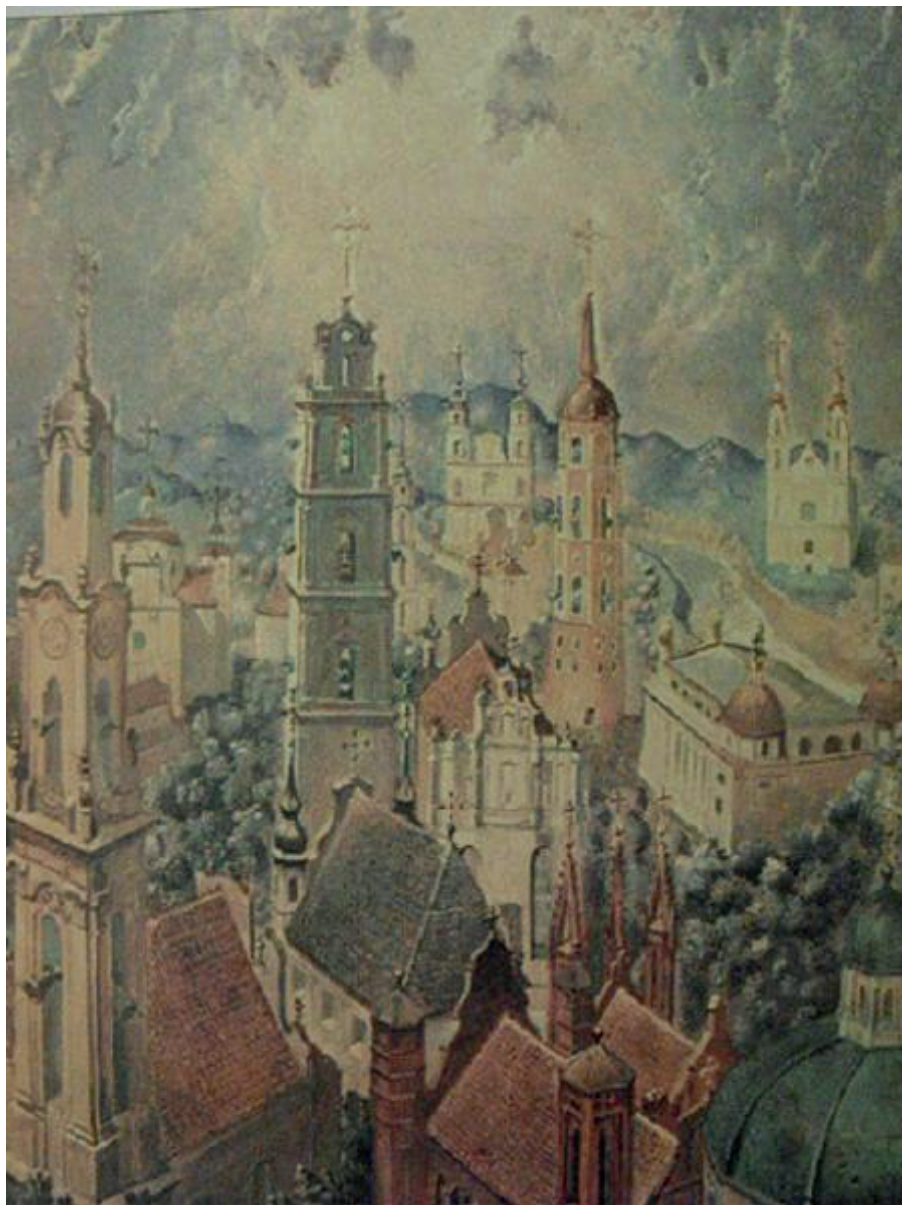
Ludomir Sleńdziński (1889–1980): Oratorium. Withdrawal from Wilno, 1944

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