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The Roads to Revolt: The Different Paths of the Vilna and Warsaw Ghettos

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“Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter. It is true that we are weak, lacking protection, but the only reply to a murderer is resistance. Brothers, it is better to die as free fighters than to live at the mercy of killers. Resist, resist, to our last breath.”

- *Abba Kovner, commander F.P.O, December 31, 1941 (Vilna)*

“The most important thing is that my life's dream has come true. Jewish self-defense in the ghetto has been realized. Jewish retaliation and resistance has become a fact. I have been witness to the magnificent heroic battle of the Jewish fighters.”

- *Mordechai Anielewicz, letter to friend, April 23, 1943 (Warsaw)*

“...But even now the truth, which we have not wearied of repeating, has been substantiated: only one reason guarantees our survival—our labor”

- quote from ghetto administration publication *Geto Yedies*- July 1943 (*Vilna*)¹

¹ Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem: Cooperative Printing Press, 1980), 371.

Abstract:

The carnage that pervaded the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe had been envisioned by Adolf Hitler and the *Schutzstaffel* (S.S.) long before the German armored divisions crossed the flat plains of Poland in the fall of 1939. This war in Europe, a war that would become a global entanglement, was not limited to mere territorial pursuits in the quest for *Lebensraum*², but was a war intended to decimate the “subhuman” Jewish entity that had, long in Nazi ideology, plagued Germany and the world. However, in the midst of their machinations, the Germans encountered something from the Jews that had been soundly unexpected from such an inferior race— the prospect of armed resistance within established Jewish ghettos. And yet, this is what the Germans encountered in the ghettos of Vilna (Lithuania) and Warsaw (Poland); Jews willing to fight and die, Jews who would not be deceived and led to slaughter, but Jewish men and women who were willing to believe in something again, if only for a short while.

The story of Jewish resistance is neither simple nor symmetrical-- while the Jews of Warsaw rose in unity to defy their Nazi occupiers, the majority of the Jewish population of Vilna allowed themselves to be slowly siphoned off until almost nothing remained of the “Jerusalem of Lithuania.” Why did the Jews of Vilna not fit the mold of Warsaw and unite together and rise up in defiance of tyranny, especially considering that Vilna hosted an ideologically unified underground resistance movement, the *Fareynikte Partizaner Organizatsye*, or F.P.O.³ This paper seeks to answer this question by comparing elements within the two ghettos that, the paper argues, may help explain their final outcomes. There is no definitive answer for why Vilna and Warsaw met such

² German term for territorial expansion in the East, literally translated to “living room”

³ Fareynikte Partizaner Organizatsye is Yiddish and can roughly be translated into “United Partisan Organization”

divergent fates; however, by focusing on several discernable factors within each ghetto and tracing the chronology of each, a much better understanding of why Vilna did not engage in the same unified resistance that embodied the epic tale of Jewish heroism during the Warsaw Uprising can be ascertained.

Introduction

The idea for this thesis was not motivated by historical curiosity alone. It was inspired by a desire to understand a society's capacity and willingness to resist in the face of unimaginable torment. The *capacity* to resist existed in both Warsaw and Vilna: weapons, although expensive and dangerous to procure, became available to those who sought to use them. The *willingness* of these ghettos to resist, however, is decidedly more complex an issue and requires delving into the psychological states of those that resided inside the ghettos' walls.

Throughout the existence of the Vilna ghetto, *Atkionen* ("actions") carried out by the Germans corroborated the "Work to Live" philosophy espoused by Jacob Gens, head of Vilna's Ghetto Police, and instilled within the Jews a resolute belief that they could survive this occupation. Neither the rumors of massacres at Ponar nor the literature disseminated by the F.P.O. could breach this keenly cultivated fantasy of self-preservation and thus, Vilna had no uprising. The psychological make-up of the majority of Vilna's inhabitants never transcended beyond a particular paradigm of thought—the Germans couldn't possibly kill them all. Initially a similar paradigm existed within the Warsaw ghetto; there, the Jewish political leadership thought it imprudent to risk the lives

of everyone in the ghetto with actions of resistance, especially considering that, prior to the summer of 1942, no substantial massacres had occurred in Warsaw.

These thoughts, however, would drastically change following the seven-week long incident known as “The Great Deportation,” where eighty percent of Warsaw’s Jews were rounded up and sent off to their deaths at the Treblinka extermination camp. This singular moment had resounding implications for the ghetto, as it fomented a desire for vengeance against the Germans and placed the ghetto on its eventual path of unified resistance. Without this defining moment, the Jews of Warsaw would have most likely remained rooted in the same state that continued within Vilna and there would have been no impetus towards armed resistance.

The psychological mindset of both ghetto’s inhabitants was also shaped by the capabilities of their respective Health Services and the effects they had on their demographics. Warsaw proved to be a breeding ground for typhus and their inability to deal with endemic diseases further depleted its already frail population. Vilna, on the other hand, maintained an extremely efficient and complex medical infrastructure, which resulted in lives being saved. However, in an ironic twist of fate, saving these lives acted as another impediment towards resistance prevailing as an alternative to acquiescence. By maintaining a portion of its elderly population, Vilna was still plagued by the “moral responsibility” inherent in risking the lives of those who couldn’t defend themselves. No such impediment existed in Warsaw, whose elderly population had been the first to succumb to typhus and whose last remnants were removed during “The Great Deportation.”

The Jewish Communities of Vilna and Warsaw before World War II

Prior to its invasion by the Third Reich, Warsaw had the distinction of hosting the largest Jewish population of any European city. Jews in Warsaw numbered close to 370,000 people, or one third of Warsaw's entire population (at the outset of the establishment of the Warsaw ghetto in January of 1941, this number would increase to 380,740).⁴⁵ As a result of having such a large Jewish community, Warsaw became one of the leading centers for Jewish political intellectuals. The Jewish community encompassed, thus, a diverse set of ideological beliefs. Within Warsaw, there were Socialist Zionists; members of the *Bund* who closely aligned themselves with the Polish Socialists; the militant Revisionist Zionist followers of Jabotinsky; and Orthodox Haredi Jews under the umbrella organization of Augudat Yisrael.⁶ Each of these organizations had paired with it a youth organization that took up the political mantle of its "father" organization.

However, Warsaw's Jewish community was not unique in spanning the entire spectrum of Jewish political, cultural, and religious tendencies and organizations. Vilna also held this distinction and, as in Warsaw, these organizations were heavily committed to imparting their own ideology to the parallel youth movements within the city. Indeed, Vilna held its own particular distinction: it was a major center of Jewish religious teachings and home to a large number of universities in which the Hebrew language was

⁴ Moshe Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto: The Untold Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Jerusalem: Green Publishing House, 2011), 13.

⁵ Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*, trans. Ina Friedman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 62.

⁶ Moshe Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto: The Untold Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Jerusalem: Green Publishing House, 2011), 14-21.

the primary medium of education. As a result of many *yeshivas*⁷ in the area and the large number of Jewish theologians who flocked to Vilna, the city became known as the “Jerusalem of Lithuania.”

Although the cultural significance of Vilna for the people of the Torah was beyond contestation, the city’s political history had been difficult. From the end of World War I until the start of the German occupation in 1941, Vilna had often been subject to the imposition of foreign rule, with control of the city shifting between Polish, Lithuanian, and Soviet hands. These political and ethnic divisions and the resulting shifting nationalistic alliances greatly affected Jews in Vilna. They were subjected to the growing resentment and anti-Semitism of both Poles and Lithuanians.⁸

The anti-Semitic fervor that so often gripped Polish communities resulted in a tumultuous relationship between Jews and non-Jews and invariably led to scuffles, pogroms, and even murders. The Jews of Vilna, and of Lithuania in general, were treated with the same ill regard by their gentile neighbors. The very day that Vilna’s autonomy was transferred from Soviet to Lithuanian hands (10/27/39)⁹ was “marked by anti-Jewish riots” that eventually culminated in the destruction of numerous Jewish-owned homes

⁷ “*yeshiva*” is a Jewish educational institution that focuses on the study of traditional religious texts

⁸ The city of Vilna came under the authority of the Polish government following its abrupt military seizure by General Zeligovski on October 9, 1920. General Zeligovski, in an attempt to sway the Jews of Vilna to actively support the city’s ascension to Polish rule, fostered an amiable relationship with the Jews. The city then transferred to Lithuanian control, after the U.S.S.R handed it over to them “with a view to enhancing the friendship between the Soviet Union and Lithuania.” Control of Vilna again reverted to the Soviets, who had perceived Lithuania as making transgressions against their common Soviet- Lithuanian defense pact. In the end however, following Operation Barbarossa, Vilna would be under the control of the murderous Germans who had shown them but a small penchant of their hatred during their occupation of Vilna during the first World War. Israel Cohen, *Vilna* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1992), 383. Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem: Cooperative Printing Press, 1980), 10.

⁹ It was actually on 10/10/39 that the Russians agreed in to cede the Vilna district to the Lithuanians, but the Russians didn’t actually withdraw until the 27th. Israel Cohen, *Vilna* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1992), 469.

and shops and the death of a Jewish child.¹⁰ Even when Jews displayed Lithuanian patriotism fervently, as was done, for example, by shedding blood during the War of Independence, Lithuanians continued to look down on the Jews, cast racial slurs on them, and initiated countless beatings and anti-Semitic pogroms.¹¹

The Ghettoization of Vilna Jews in 1941

The harassment of the Vilna Jews by Lithuanians was so severe and relentless that “many Jews felt a sense of relief upon entering the ghetto” for the first time, as the Lithuanian guards maintained their positions outside the ghetto walls and could no longer subject Jews to random acts of abduction and humiliation.¹² Yet the relief exhibited by those who arrived at the newly constructed Vilna ghettos would be short-lived, as the German administration soon imposed harsh restrictions on the Jews. There were those, however, that never saw the formation of the ghettos; they perished at Ponar during “The Great Provocation,” where their memories and fates were suppressed from the inhabitants of Vilna.

During the closing days of August 1941, the German administration in Vilna, headed by *Gebietskommissar* (District Commissar) Hingst, gave new impetus towards the formation of a ghetto that would house the Jewish population of Vilna, which at this time

¹⁰ Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem: Cooperative Printing Press, 1980), 11.

¹¹ During the Lithuanian War of Independence, as thousands of Jews were fighting for Lithuania, many of them as volunteers, Lithuanian army regulars initiated a pogrom in Ponevezh. Even despite the loyalty shown and the blood spilled, the Lithuanians still maintained a hatred for Jews that carried over into the time of formation of the Vilna ghetto. Dov Levin, *Fighting Back: Lithuanian Jewry's Armed Resistance to the Nazis, 1941-1945*, trans. Moshe Kohn and Dina Cohen (New York: HM, 1985), 8.

¹² Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem: Cooperative Printing Press, 1980), 120.

was approximately 60,000 people.¹³ His instructions were to be carried out by his personal adjunct, Franz Murer, who would soon be given the *nom de guerre* “The Butcher of Vilna.” The site of the ghetto would be erected in the old Jewish quarter of the city, which already housed thousands of Jewish residents.¹⁴ In order to create enough room for the ghetto, Murer would incite “The Great Provocation,” which resulted in the sadistic murder of tens of thousands of Vilna’s Jews and provided the basis for a framework of German deception that would remain a fixture in Vilna.

“The Great Provocation” began, like most Nazi initiatives, with an act of deception: Lithuanian men, at the behest of their German masters, fired a volley of shots at German sentries outside of a cinema—an act then blamed on the Jews. This ‘ambush’ of German soldiers became the pretext to evacuate and purge the entire zone that had been designated to become the ghetto. Men, women, and children were either taken directly to Ponar and shot or spent a few days in the Lukiszki prison before eventually reaching their final resting place at Ponar. Fear and panic swept through Vilna as thousands were being deported from within the confines of the city. However, the majority of the new residents of the Vilna ghetto failed to see the broader scope of the German’s ‘Jewish’ policy because of how the purge was framed. By framing “The Great Provocation” as a retributive act to punish the whole community for the faults of a few, the Germans gave Vilna Jewry hope that such an action would be a one-time event and not a continuous state of affairs. This hope would soon be stamped out by further

¹³ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 28. When the Germans invaded Vilna, Lithuanian sources communicated the demographics of Vilna to the Germans, where they stated that the total population of Vilna was 200,000 people--80,000 of which were Jews. While their approximation of the total population was accurate, the number of Jews reported was distorted as the Jewish community had been declining since the last census was taken (1931). Therefore, at the time of the German invasion, Jews in Vilna accounted for roughly 30% of the total population.

¹⁴ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 101.

Atkionen directed against the Jews, *Atkionen* that, with the aide of Jacob Gens, would soon indoctrinate a philosophy of “Work to Live” within the Vilna ghetto and hamper efforts to form a unified resistance against the Germans.

Before looking into Jacob Gens and his influence in shrouding the German massacres at Ponar from the ghetto residents of Vilna, as head of its Police Force, let us take a brief look at the mindset of those Jews who were lucky enough to make it inside the walls of the newly erected ghetto following “The Great Provocation.” In the months prior to the creation of the ghetto, the Jews of Vilna had been harangued by both the Poles and Lithuanians; they had also seen friends, neighbors, and even family members ripped from their homes and sent away with no idea as to their fates. While the Germans, and some astute Jews, knew or surmised their fate, most of those within Vilna simply could not believe that thousands upon thousands had been led to slaughter. Amidst a population of intellectual thinkers, no paradigm of thought yet existed that could fathom a rational people willingly massacring a civilian population.

The rationales behind this mindset are two-fold: first, systematic German deception and lack of communication between the ghettos led to some Jews believing that a third ghetto had been built at Ponar and that their friends and relatives were simply in the same state of affairs that they found themselves in.¹⁵ The belief in the existence of a third ghetto at Ponar was not conjured out of thin air by Vilna Jewry, but was a German rumor instigated “to ensure that the allegation about a third ghetto in Vilna reached the

¹⁵ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 135. The creation of the Vilna ghetto was actually split between Ghetto No. 1 and Ghetto No. 2. There was virtually no communication between the two ghettos, especially following Murer’s September 18 directive, which saw the removal of all telephone lines from within both ghettos. This lack of communication spurred on the naïve belief that a third ghetto existed at Ponar instead of facing the realization that it was simply a mass murder site.

ears of the Jews.”¹⁶ Jacob Gens openly denied rumors about Ponar and did everything within his power to suppress them in order to maintain the productivity of the ghetto. There would be, however, no illusion of safety or relief in the coming weeks; the coming *Atkionen* would shatter any tentative complacency and replace it with an ideology predicated on labor productivity.

The Jewish inhabitants of Vilna were first placed in either Ghetto No. 1 or Ghetto No. 2 depending on where they lived before the creation of the ghettos. This temporary distribution, however, would be rectified by the coming *Atkionen* and the subsequent liquidation of Ghetto No. 2. The first to be transported from Ghetto No. 1 to Ghetto No. 2 would be the sick and the elderly, while simultaneously “holders of work-permits and their families [were] moved from Ghetto No. 2 to Ghetto No. 1.”¹⁷ As the Germans were slowly and thoroughly removing any remnants of life from within Ghetto No. 2, the Jews of both ghettos were so consumed with the prospect of survival and obtaining work permits that resistance was never considered. This sentiment of self-preservation is also reflected in the actions of both ghettos *Judenrat* (Jewish Council). These Jewish leaders were doing whatever they could to strengthen the ghetto’s “image” of productivity in order to ensure its survival. As Jews were trying to escape from Ghetto No. 2 back to Ghetto No. 1, Gens was doing everything in his power to prevent such transgressions, while the *Judenrat* officials of Ghetto No. 2 were desperately trying to retain their own able-bodied workers.¹⁸ This set a precedent that would echo in the history of Vilna, as the *Judenrat* was constantly willing to sacrifice the lives of Jews for the sake of preserving the majority of the ghetto. A notion remembered through the actions of

¹⁶ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 177.

¹⁷ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 133.

¹⁸ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 140.

A. Fried, chairman of Ghetto No. 2 *Judenrat*:

[When the Germans order us to supply 2,000 persons, we are obliged to obey them in order to save the other Jews. If we do not hand them over, they [the Germans] will take anyone they please, and as many as they please, and this will make it worse for the thousands of remaining Jews.]¹⁹

The three separate *Atkionen* and final liquidation of Ghetto No. 2 in Vilna lasted from September 15 - October 21 and culminated in the murder of 7,200 Jews; however, while the fate of those Jews is now apparent, their fate was heavily suppressed by both the German administration and the *Judenrat* in order to forestall panic in the ghetto and ensure its continued productivity. The German administration did this in a variety of clever ways. At the beginning of the liquidation, for example, 3,000 Jews who lacked working permits were assembled at the gates of Ghetto No. 1 to prepare for a transfer to Ghetto No. 2. Yet by the time the Jews reached Ghetto No. 2, only 600 remained, while the rest had been shipped off to Lukiszki prison and from there to Ponar.²⁰ The Germans didn't allow a fraction of the group to live for any reason other than to deceive the Jews; the lack of communication between the ghettos made it impossible for those in Ghetto No. 2 to be aware of how many Jews were supposed to be making the journey. By having some Jews arrive at the ghetto, rather than none at all, suspicions would not be aroused. German deception, though, was only effective when coupled with the willing cooperation of the *Judenrat* in suppressing the knowledge of the massacres at Ponar.²¹

¹⁹ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 138.

²⁰ Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem: Cooperative Printing Press, 1980), 134.

²¹ While both the German administration and the *Judenrat* both actively suppressed knowledge of Ponar, their motivations were intrinsically different. The German administration were trying to stem the spread of information in order keep the Jews in the dark so when the next *Atkionen*

Several days prior to the creation of the two ghettos and the initiation of the fall *Atkionen*, four weary Jewish women stumbled into the Vilna ghetto hospital to recount the tale of horror they experienced at Ponar.²² The hospital staff were the first to hear the story and quickly assured the Jewish women that it was in their best interest to refrain from spreading the story (as German repercussions would be severe and possibly directed against the hospital staff themselves). A few days later, when the women were willing to tell their tale, there was no *Judenrat* available anymore to hear it. They had themselves recently been liquidated by the Germans. Thus the first concrete stories from Ponar were heard by a mere few, since the “Jews of Vilna [were] devoid of leadership and with no institution or body to which they could turn.”²³ However, in the days and weeks to come, many more tales of Ponar would reach the ears of men like Gens and the newly reinstated *Judenrat*, men who were capable of disseminating this information to the masses of Vilna, men who stifled such reports in order to maintain stability within the ghetto and ensure its ability to produce able-bodied workers for the German war machine.

The rationale Jacob Gens and the *Judenrat* used for concealing this information from Vilna’s Jews coincided with their decision to sacrifice elements of the Jewish population—for the greater good of the ghetto. By the second half of September 1941, the *Judenrat* no longer discounted the stories about Ponar; they had heard the same harrowing tale countless times and from a variety of different sources. Their course of

came they would not resist. The *Judenrat*, however, wished to keep a state of calm within the ghetto in order to maintain its productivity. For them, work productivity was the only chance of survival.

²² Hernan Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps, 1939-1944*, trans. Barbara Harshav, ed. Benjamin Harshav, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 94. “They were taken from Lidzki Street to prison and from there to Ponar. One the spot, a group of Lithuanians, commanded by Germans, started shooting them with rifles. They were shot from behind as they walked. Some of them were told to sit on the edge of a ravine and were shot from behind. All the women and children were killed. When asked how many people might have been there, one of them replied several thousand, others a few hundred.”

²³ Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem: Cooperative Printing Press, 1980), 176.

action would be simple and “Gens warned against spreading their stories in the ghetto.”²⁴ The façade of stability had to be maintained within the ghetto in order to ensure that the members of the ghetto remained productive in their daily lives. If productivity lessened, if the Germans believed that the Jews knew what their fate was to become, they might be inclined to speed up their process of extermination and then no Jews would survive. But for all Gens and the *Judenrat* did, for all their secrecy and manipulation, the “story” of a third ghetto at Ponar couldn’t have prevailed without the semblance of hope carried by the Jews of Vilna. They desperately wanted to believe that those who had been deported weren’t just slaughtered like animals. If that were true then they had, for no logical reason, just lost friends, neighbors, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers.

The Situation in the Warsaw Ghetto (November 1940-July 1942)

Despite the fact that they had received credible information directly from the F.P.O. about the fate of those who traveled to Ponar, the same ill-conceived hopes held in Vilna prevailed within the Warsaw ghetto as well. Before the formal creation of the F.P.O., members of Vilna’s various youth political movements sought to inform their brethren in Warsaw about the mass killings that had been occurring in Vilna in order to galvanize Warsaw to follow its example and set up its own armed resistance organization. And while there were men in Warsaw, such as Yitzhak Zukerman (head of the Socialist Zionist Movement), who were cognizant of the threat posed by the Germans, “those who held leadership positions in the political parties in the Warsaw ghetto were not convinced.”²⁵ Their objection to the formation of an organized armed defense against the

²⁴ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 178.

²⁵ Moshe Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto: The Untold Story of the Warsaw Ghetto*

Germans didn't stem from their disbelief in the presence of massacres in Vilna, although some did still dispute this, but rather they felt that Vilna, a former Soviet province, would be held to a different standard than Warsaw, which resided within the *Generalgouvernement*. Finally, with half a million residents, Warsaw was far larger than Vilna, leading most within Warsaw to believe the German incapable of liquidating the ghetto.

The simple fact remained that in Warsaw no mass killings had been carried out yet and so the atmosphere wasn't yet conducive for the formation of an underground resistance movement. There were individual members and organizations that heeded the call to arms that was brought by the emissaries from Vilna, but the vast majority of the population within Warsaw still believed themselves immune from the dreary state of affairs that had engulfed Vilna. The Warsaw ghetto would need to be shocked into action before the mindset of resistance resonated within them; however, by the time such thoughts came to pass, the Warsaw ghetto had been delivered a mortal blow.

Prior to the "The Great Deportation" of Jews in the summer and early fall of 1942, the Warsaw ghetto had gone relatively untouched by the German administration. Health care and the scarcity of food continued to reduce the already feeble population. There was still a constant harassment by both Polish nationals and German soldiers, but in terms of mass killings, like those that had occurred in Vilna and Bialystok, Warsaw had not been burdened by such dreadful affairs. However, in early July 1942, once the Treblinka death camp had been completed for the Jews of Warsaw and Malkinia, there was no longer anything holding the Germans back from completing their annihilation of Polish Jewry. Even as rumors began to circulate within the ghetto "that the Germans

were planning large-scale deportations of the Jews of the ghetto,” no imperative yet emerged to plan or engage in armed resistance, either by the leading members of the political movements or by the majority of Warsaw’s Jews.

First, Adam Czerniakow, the head of the Warsaw *Judenrat*, had been given assurances by the deputy chief of Section III, Scherer, that the rumors of deportation were unfounded and that he could inform the ghetto that none were scheduled to occur.²⁶ Despite these assurances, just two days later, Czerniakow was then given the task of handing over 6,000 Jews for deportation and the next day another 9,000. Czerniakow didn’t openly resist the German demands for Jews, but he protested in his own way. Unlike Gens and the *Judenrat* officials in Vilna, Czerniakow wasn’t a man capable of sending Jews off to die—especially the likes of orphans who were scheduled to be rounded up and deported on July 23, 1942. Therefore, rather than send more innocents to the slaughter, Adam Czerniakow took his own life that day with a cyanide capsule. Czerniakow couldn’t warn the Jews of the massive deportation that would soon be at their heels because he didn’t know it was about to occur. When he realized the German’s intention, when he understood that he would need to become complicit in German malfeasance, he committed suicide. The leaders of the political movements met on the same day of Czerniakow’s death, when the deportations began and when Jews were knowingly being sent off to their death, and still advocated acquiescence over resistance.

²⁶ Adam Czerniakow, *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow*, trans. Stanislaw Staron, ed. Raul Hilberg, Stanislaw Staron, and Josef Kermisz (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 383.

“I went to the deputy chief of Section III, Scherer. He expressed his surprise hearing the rumor and informed me that he too knew nothing about it. Finally, I asked whether I could tell the population that their fears were groundless. He replied that I could and that all the talk was *Quatsch* and *Unsinn* [utter nonsense].”

Warsaw's Decision Not to Fight during "The Great Deportation"

The results of the meeting that took place on July 23, 1942 between all the political movements of Warsaw, except the militant Revisionists whose call for armed resistance had already been well documented, can be summed up quite sufficiently through the following quote given by Dr. Yitzhak Schipper, a fifty-eight-year old historian and former member of the Polish parliament:

[We are in the midst of a war. Every nation sacrifices victims; we too are paying the price in order to salvage the core of our people. Were I not convinced that we can succeed in saving the core, I, too, would come to a different conclusion. There are times in the history of a people when they cannot and should not fight, when fighting in unfavourable conditions would lead to the loss of what could have been rescued otherwise. It is better to write off those being sent away and at that price save the others. We have no moral right to endanger the lives of all the Jews of Warsaw. We have to save what can be saved.]²⁷

These words--and the meeting in general, although carrying with them profound meaning, amounted to nothing more than a rhetorical discussion due to the fact that beyond the Revisionists, no group had logistically prepared for an armed insurrection. Arms had not been purchased in large quantities and fighting groups had not been organized or trained adequately enough to pose a threat to the Germans. The members of this gathering who were in leadership positions within the youth movements, advocated resistance against the Germans, but they were squarely in the minority. Those who had been deceiving themselves into believing that the "Germans would deport perhaps sixty thousand, but not all the Jews in the ghetto" viewed those who favored immediate action as "impetuous youngsters who lacked the wisdom that came with age and experience."²⁸

²⁷ Moshe Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto: The Untold Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Jerusalem: Green Publishing House, 2011), 82-83.

²⁸ Yitzhak Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, trans. and ed. Barbara S. Harshav (California: University of California Press, 1993), 193.

However, the lack of arms and training isn't why the political leadership within Warsaw chose to stand by idly—their decision was predicated on the moral responsibility inherent in beginning an armed resistance against the Germans. As in Vilna, the Germans had made it abundantly clear in Warsaw that resistance by a few would carry with it severe repercussions for the entirety of the ghetto population. Therefore, as Dr. Schipper said, who were they to endanger the lives of the Jews of Warsaw, especially given their belief that the Germans would only be deporting a minor fraction of Warsaw's population? And so the thought process that permeated through the ranks of the majority of the Jews in Warsaw, was one that prevented a unified struggle against the Germans, and in turn led to the eventual deportation and murder of 270,000 Jews, leaving only 50,000 survivors.²⁹

The Warsaw Ghetto after “The Great Deportation”

As the SS troops packed up their bags and the remaining Jews emerged from their respective hiding places, a state of utter disbelief consumed the remnants of Warsaw's once flourishing Jewish population. In just seven weeks during the summer of 1942, and with minimal effort, the Germans had managed to rid Warsaw of almost 80% of its Jewish population. This deportation, however, finally removed the shroud of willful naïveté that had spread like a cancer throughout Warsaw and instilled within the remaining Jews two dominant patterns of response that would have major implications for the future path of the Warsaw ghetto.

²⁹ Moshe Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto: The Untold Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Jerusalem: Green Publishing House, 2011), 103-104.

The first of these responses was “an implacable hatred of the Germans, which expressed itself in a refusal to believe any of their pronouncements and a deep desire for revenge.” The second pattern of response was the concrete belief that surrender did not by any means guarantee survival and thus, “the only course left was to adopt initiatives that would foil the Germans’ plans.”³⁰ The Germans had succeeded in riding Warsaw of most of its Jewish inhabitants, yet in the same stroke, they instilled within the survivors a purpose to which all would be committed—to stifle German operations as best they could and defend the ghetto from future deportations. They sought to engage in a resistance movement that would echo in the annals of Jewish history for generations to come as a model of courage and serve as inspiration for other Jews to follow.

There was a time before “The Great Deportation,” where neither the knowledge of massacres in Vilna and Lublin could “penetrate the armor of self-denial” that pervaded the majority of Warsaw’s Jews—in spite of everything, hope still existed.³¹ Despite the early successes of the German army, its military advances had begun to dissipate by the summer of 1942, news which was readily available within the ghetto. The decision to engage the German army would be rash; the presumed “logical” choice for those in the ghetto was to bide their time and outlive the German occupiers as the knights of democracy would soon liberate those within the ghetto’s gates.³² This strategy had served the Jews since the Middle Ages and history had always shown that the Jews would

³⁰ Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*, trans. Ina Friedman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 284.

³¹ Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*, trans. Ina Friedman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 70.

³² Chaim A. Kaplan, *The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan*, trans. and ed. Abraham I. Katsh (New York: Collier Books, 1965), 363. “We consoled ourselves that the Nazis’ downfall was drawing nearer, that their military victories were only of the moment, that their strength was imaginary. The evidence? The Russian front. The Nazis remained as though bound in their winter positions, and did not attempt an offensive against Leningrad or Moscow because they were convinced that it would not succeed.” (June 27, 1942).

prevail, sacrifices permitting, even in their bleakest moments. However, “The Great Deportation” finally managed to convince the Jews that the choices they had made that had allowed the Germans to so easily massacre so many Jews were no longer justified. Unfortunately for those who were working tirelessly within the F.P.O., such a unifying event never occurred in Vilna, as the frequency of massacres continuously corroborated Jacob Gens' ideological philosophy of “Work to Live.”

Chronology of Deportations in Vilna and its Effect on the Ghetto’s Mindset

During the three *Atkionen* of October 1941 that cumulatively led to the liquidation of Vilna’s Ghetto No. 2, Ghetto No. 1 remained relatively unscathed by German operations. Their “image” as a working, productive ghetto had managed to stave off their execution—if only for a short while. This would soon change only a few days later, as the Germans initiated their first ‘*Yellow-Pass*’ *Atkionen*, which would end in the massacre of 3,781 Jews.³³ The Yellow-Passes were to be divided among Jewish workers and “pursuant to the directives by the administration, the yellow pass granted immunity to the holder and three members of the family.”³⁴ For the Jews of Vilna nothing was more coveted than a yellow-pass; the yellow-pass signified life, it meant that during the cold nights to come they wouldn’t be scurrying about the street looking for *malines*³⁵ to hid in, paralyzed with fear at the prospect of being discovered by the Germans. Therefore, those in Vilna did not waste time occupying their thoughts with resistance, they spent those

³³ In the two days that encompassed the first “*Yellow Pass*” *Atkionen* 1950 females, 946 males, and 885 children were killed by Einsatzkommando 3. Karl Jager, “*The Jager Report*” (1941), excerpted, Florida Center for Instructional Technology, University of South Florida, <http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/resource/document/DocJager.htm> (accessed 12 Dec. 2012), page 5.

³⁴ Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem: Cooperative Printing Press, 1980), 146.

³⁵ makeshift hiding places where Jews would hid during deportations

hours in an all-consuming hunt for a workshop to grant them a yellow pass. Those Jews unlucky enough to neither get a pass, nor escape during the first and second ‘*Yellow-Pass*’ *Atkionen* or the subsequent ‘*Pink-Pass*’ *Atkionen*, were taken to Ponar and shot. Gens, however, readily accepted the moral responsibility of sacrificing some for the sake of others.³⁶ When questioned by a group of rabbis who claimed that he had no right to select which Jews to hand over to the Germans, Gens simply replied “that by surrendering the few, he was rescuing the others from extinction.”³⁷

Following the two ‘*Yellow-Pass*’ *Atkionen* and ‘*Pink-Pass*’ *Atkionen* in the winter of 1941, there was a suspension in the mass murders in Vilna, against the wishes of the S.S., in response to the Wehrmacht’s desperate need for skilled Jewish labor. The Jews had endured a brief spell of misfortune and had seen their comrades fall to the Germans, but it now appeared as though Gens’ claims of survival were in fact true; their ability to remain productive had temporarily guaranteed their survival. Day by day the Jews of Vilna reclaimed some hope that they might see the end of the war—they just had to remain productive.

These thoughts were misguided though, as all the Germans had done was postpone their fate until mid-1943 when the massacres, and complete liquidation of Vilna, would occur. By then, however, it was too late. No initiative had been taken by the majority in Vilna to engage in resistance, leaving the F.P.O. without the moral

³⁶ The Germans believed that the first “*Yellow-Pass*” *Atkionen* had been insufficient in discovering all the “illegal” Jews in Vilna and so they initiated a second search of the ghetto from November 3-5, 1941 which resulted in the death of another 1,512 Jews. The “*Pink-Pass*” *Atkionen* resulted in the death of roughly 400 Jews.

Karl Jager, “*The Jager Report*” (1941), excerpted, Florida Center for Instructional Technology, University of South Florida, <http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/resource/document/DocJager.htm> (accessed 12 Dec. 2012), page 5.

³⁷ Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem: Cooperative Printing Press, 1980), 156.

support of the ghetto. They had been unprovoked for so long and could see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. As in Warsaw, the Jews of Vilna had heard of the German military struggles and Russian advances in the East. By the time the massacres resumed, the overarching sentiment in the ghetto was that the German occupation would soon be at an end. And so, when the next *Atkionen* would come, and come it did, it was business as usual for the Jews of Vilna; they would obey the pronouncements of the Germans and be rounded up without protest, for they believed that the Germans still needed Jewish workers for their war effort.

Even as thousands of Jews were being deported to Estonia, even after the F.P.O. issued a manifesto to all the inhabitants calling for armed resistance to the deportations, “the inhabitants did not respond to the call for an uprising.”³⁸ Therefore the F.P.O., who had so feverishly tried to impede the slaughter of their brethren and unite the inhabitants of Vilna, abandoned the ghetto and fled to the nearby forests to become active partisan fighters. There, in the forests, the partisans from Vilna would honor their fallen friends and gain some degree of vengeance for the atrocities committed by the Germans.

The decision made by the F.P.O. to abandon its position within the ghetto and flee to become partisan fighters was not made lightly; these men and women were not afraid of death, but welcomed the chance to meet it with honor. However, in the ghetto’s greatest time of need, the majority of inhabitants had rejected the call to arms and instead favored their chances of prolonged survival in Estonia.³⁹ The F.P.O. could have initiated the uprising without the support of the population, but this would have led to the slaughter of the entire ghetto without their consent—again here they faced the problem of

³⁸ Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem: Cooperative Printing Press, 1980), 412 (see appendix for full F.P.O manifesto)

³⁹ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 468.

moral responsibility that had allowed Warsaw's political leadership to forsake its own opportunity in resisting massive deportations.

The Demographics of Vilna and Warsaw

As a result of its extensive medical care facilities and lack of contagious disease, Vilna's population had managed to maintain an element of the elderly and frail within the ghetto, while also retaining a number of newborns and children as a result of its hidden birthing facilities.⁴⁰ The F.P.O. wasn't willing to send these people into the arms of the murderous Germans, especially when they made it explicitly clear that they wanted no part in any of the underground activities within the ghetto. However, unlike in Vilna, Warsaw's population following "The Great Deportation" was considerably more youthful in its makeup and thus, they were not confronted with the same moral quandary about risking the lives of children, the elderly, or sickly, for those people had already embraced death.

The consequences of "The Great Deportation" drastically altered the demographic landscape of the Warsaw ghetto with "children under the age of ten and the elderly over the age of sixty all but totally disappeared from the ghetto."⁴¹ The disappearance of these sectors from Warsaw's population allowed the remaining Jews to focus on the impending battle with the Germans, rather than on caring for these 'weaker' elements. Even prior to the deportations in the summer of 1942 the Warsaw ghetto had been rocked by a policy

⁴⁰Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 316. "A secret delivery room functioned in the Gynecological Department at the hospital. The newborn infants were hidden in a *maline* inside the hospital, and mothers nursed their babies there. When the children grew up, they were registered in the Judenrat offices as born prior to the date of the ban." "Ban" refers to decree issued by Germans on February 5, 1942 which forbade Jews from procreating.

⁴¹ Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*, trans. Ina Friedman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 270.

of almost systemic starvation and fell victim to the endemic spread of contagious disease; these factors had already begun to change the demographic profile of the Warsaw ghetto, as these ‘weaker’ elements were the first to succumb in such dire circumstances.

Contagious disease and Health Services in Vilna and Warsaw

Along with the constant harassment at the hands of the Germans, “together with starvation, infectious diseases—especially typhus fever—were the bane of the ghetto.”⁴² Before the gates of the Warsaw ghetto were sealed, the spread of typhus fever had begun to abate and it even appeared as though there would be a relative stabilization of the disease. The conditions within the ghetto proved to be a breeding ground for typhus and the disease resurged in April 1941, when 14,661 cases were reported—twenty percent of those resulting in fatalities. Such a high mortality rate was not the result of an inadequate medical staff, as the Jewish ghetto contained a greater number of doctors per capita than the “Aryan” side of Warsaw, but was due to a “shortage of injections, drugs, and soap and the lack of proper hospitalization facilities.”⁴³ Thus, effective medical treatment couldn’t be given to all those who needed it in Warsaw. However in Vilna, which boasted a highly sophisticated medical infrastructure, such treatment saved the lives of countless individuals who, if subjected to the same conditions found in the Warsaw ghetto, would have similarly succumbed to typhus or some other burdensome disease.

⁴² Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*, trans. Ina Friedman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 110.

⁴³ In reality, the number of Jews who most likely contracted typhus palled in comparison to those who actually reported it to the *Judenrat* administration. Jews were fearful of reporting the illness because it might bring sanctions down upon not just the family of those infected, but upon the entire apartment building as well. Gutman, *Jews of Warsaw*, 110.

In Vilna, both the *Judenrat* of Ghetto No. 1 and Ghetto No. 2 sought to begin establishing various medical facilities in order to combat the spread of contagious disease. Within the first few days of the ghetto being cordoned off the hospital, which would be located on the premises of the city's former Jewish hospital, would include departments for internal medicine, surgery, gynecology, children, contagious disease, X-ray, and even a laboratory.⁴⁴ As in Warsaw, Vilna was fortunate enough to be staffed by a variety of competent medical professionals whose "devotion, initiative, and a capacity for improvisation" made effective medical treatment a distinct possibility even within the confines of the ghetto. Yet, Vilna succeeded where Warsaw failed in managing to ascertain the necessary equipment to effectively manage and treat contagious disease, even if it had to be obtained from outside the ghetto.⁴⁵

Those within the ghetto knew that combating contagious disease would be undoubtedly the most crucial element of the *Health Services* sector and so extensive precautions were taken in preventing the spread of typhus. "Extensive informative programs, lectures, and discussions on hygienic requirements and the combating of contagious disease" were held by a team of doctors and nurses in order to ensure that the Jews would strive to maintain a clean environment in which disease would be less likely to spread.⁴⁶ As a result of its dutiful planning and efficient execution, the health services department managed to impede the spread of contagious disease throughout the area. In the year 1942, when Vilna enjoyed a brief spell of immunity from planned executions, "the number of deaths in the ghetto was 522, or 2.9 percent of the population, as compared with an average annual rate of 1.9 percent among the Jews of Vilna during

⁴⁴ Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem: Cooperative Printing Press, 1980), 315.

⁴⁵ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 129.

⁴⁶ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 317.

1932-1937.”⁴⁷ Still a slight increase in rate from its pre-war numbers, the Jews of Vilna held a considerably better mortality rate than was found in Warsaw—a result of its health care facilities and an unwitting barrier in the road to a unified resistance movement.

Procurement of Weapons and Contact with Polish Underground in Warsaw and Vilna

A seismic shift in the psychological makeup of the Warsaw ghetto occurred in the wake of “The Great Deportation”—“every man and woman, even every child, resolved not to give in to the German demands, to resist by all means possible, and not to go to Treblinka.”⁴⁸ The anger and resentment that resonated within every last Jew fostered an atmosphere ripe for resistance within the Warsaw ghetto. Even the Orthodox yeshiva students who had previously stayed away from the resistance organizations were now, with the approval of their rabbis, eager to join; however, in order to effectively counter the next German *Atkionen*, the Jews would need to procure a large quantity of weapons and ammunition.⁴⁹

To accomplish this, the resistance movements hoped to construct a working relationship with the Armia Krajowa, or AK, the domestic authority for the Polish government-in-exile in London. At first both the ZZW (*Żydowski Związek Wojskowy* or Jewish Military Union) and ZOB (*Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa* or Jewish Fighting Organization), the two distinct fighting organizations within the Warsaw ghetto, met limited success in initiating such contacts, resorting instead to purchasing weapons from

⁴⁷ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 318.

⁴⁸ Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*, trans. Ina Friedman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 284.

⁴⁹ Moshe Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto: The Untold Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Jerusalem: Green Publishing House, 2011), 150.

the “Aryan” side of Warsaw.⁵⁰ Funding for these arms purchases were obtained through two channels; first the American Jewish Joint Distribution Center, through their Polish proxy and ZOB member Yitzhak Gitterman, provided some financial assistance from abroad that found its way to the ZOB commanders (these funds were provided solely to the ZOB and excluded the ZZW as the funds were reserved for those affiliated with the Joint Distribution Center). The second manner in which the resistance movements obtained funds came from raids on Jews who had accumulated wealth as a result of unscrupulous dealings within the ghetto.⁵¹

The ZZW, sought to capitalize on the amiable pre-war relationship that existed between the Revisionist followers of Jabotinsky and the Polish government, but had been unsuccessful in their attempts to solicit help from the Polish underground. That changed when Pawel Frenkel entered into negotiations with Janusz Cezary Ketling-Szemley (or simply Ketling), a leader of a Polish nationalist underground group Polska Ludowa Akcja Niepodleglosciowa (PLAN), a group associated with the AK.⁵² While Ketling admired the Jews willingness to fight, he himself did not have the authority to negotiate on behalf of the AK or even reply to the Jews requests for arms and superficial military training.

⁵⁰ While the resistance fighters in Vilna abandoned their ideological concerns in pursuit of a unified fighting organization, the F.P.O, no such unity prevailed in Warsaw even after the mass deportations of 1942. There were two established Jewish fighting organizations in Warsaw—the *Żydowski Związek Wojskowy* or ZZW and the *Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa* or ZOB. The ZOB was notably left-wing and comprised itself of members affiliated with the recognized youth political movements in Warsaw (i.e Socialist Zionists (*Hashomer Hatzair* and *Dror*), the Jewish Socialist *Bund*, and *Augudat Yisrael*). The ZZW, founded by the Revisionists and members of *Betar*, on the other hand, were much less selective in their acceptance policy and allowed those not affiliated with political organizations to join their ranks. Attempts at unity sprouted up at various time prior to the uprising, but again ideological differences prevented the assimilation of both fighting groups.

⁵¹ Moshe Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto: The Untold Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Jerusalem: Green Publishing House, 2011), 133.

⁵² Arens, *Flags over Warsaw*, 137.

Ketling was, however, “prepared to take upon [himself] the task of trying to arrange for the assistance that you are requesting.”⁵³ Thus, he provided the ZZW with explosives and Molotov cocktails when he next visited the ghetto and provided their fighters with detailed instruction of their use. These actions, however, were summarily dismissed by General Stefan Rowecki, commander of the AK, and eventually led to Ketling being court martialed. The reasoning behind General Rowecki’s reluctance to provide the Jews of Warsaw with weapons was the fact that he had “no assurance that they will use these weapons at all.” His opinion would change the following January, when the ZOB and ZZW engaged the German foe as they entered the ghetto in an attempt to send more Jews off to Treblinka.

Armed with a small arsenal of pistols and Molotov cocktails, the defenders of the Warsaw ghetto battled the Germans as they entered through the ghetto’s gates on January 18, 1943. While the strategic accomplishments of this one-day insurrection were minute, this event became a turning point for how the AK viewed the Jewish military entity within Warsaw. When news of the organized military resistance became known on the “Aryan” side of the ghetto, the AK responded in kind by delivering a desperately needed shipment of “fifty pistols, grenades, and explosives to ZOB.” At the same time, the German defeat at Stalingrad had caused the arms market in “Aryan” Warsaw to explode.⁵⁴ Pistols, the default weapon of choice for a ghetto defender, became readily available for purchase; all that was needed was the expropriation of funds from the wealthy Jews of Warsaw—a task made considerably easier following the string of assassinations against those who had joyfully collaborated with the Germans. By the

⁵³ Arens, *Flags over Warsaw*, 139.

⁵⁴ Arens, *Flags over Warsaw*, 168.

time the final uprising began in April, both resistance movements had accumulated a substantial arsenal to use against the German murderers.

The smuggling of firearms into Vilna was perhaps the most difficult and hazardous task entrusted to a ghetto inhabitant; still, by the time the F.P.O. abandoned the ghetto for the forests in September 1943 they had succeeded in arming the majority of their 300 fighters. This enterprise was accomplished completely devoid of aide from the Polish underground leaders (AK), who were perplexed by the ideological composition of the F.P.O. Were they Communist? Would they side with the Soviet Union once the Germans had been expelled? Despite the F.P.O.'s declaration that this was "an organization fighting the Nazis, in which Communists were included but were not the majority" and that the fate of Vilna after liberation was not relevant to its primary objective of combating the German threat, the A.K operating in the Vilna region remained rooted in their anti-Jewish stance.⁵⁵ The F.P.O. had managed to initiate talks with the Soviet partisan group "Alksnis," led by A. Kunigenas, who had parachuted into the Rudniki forests in the second half of 1942. This loose affiliation, and any further contact with Moscow, however, was severed after a few months following the liquidation of the partisan group by the Germans.

While the ZZW and ZOB had the luxury of seeing an influx of weapons available within the close proximity of "Aryan" Warsaw following the German defeat at Stalingrad, the Jews of Vilna faced graver prospects as the collective pool of weapons available were substantially sparser. As a result of this limited supply and the risk involved in selling weapons to Jews, the price of weapons skyrocketed and forced the

⁵⁵ Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem: Cooperative Printing Press, 1980), 248.

F.P.O. to hold a fund-raising drive amongst its members, where “cash, gold rings, watches and clothing” were all contributed.⁵⁶ To ensure the secrecy of its operations and to prevent possible backlash against the entire ghetto community, the F.P.O. did not solicit funds from the other ghetto residents—preferring instead to send emissaries to Warsaw to obtain funds from the Joint Distribution Center through their representative Yitzhak Gitterman .⁵⁷

Conclusion

When the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto emerged from their carefully concealed hiding places following “The Great Deportation” of 1942, the grave consequences of their actions were realized and, amidst the chaos, a clear sense of unity and purpose materialized amongst the survivors. Those who remained alive in a once flourishing Jewish city were plagued with guilt for having been left alive, for having allowed the helpless to be effortlessly taken off; the all-consuming urge to survive and outwit the Germans subsided and a resolute desire for vengeance emerged in its stead. The Jews were cognizant of their mistakes: they understood full well that they should have resisted from the start, but prior to the massive deportations that sent close to eighty-percent of the Warsaw Jews to Treblinka, “a clever and intelligent people had lost its ability to think clearly” and allowed themselves to be lulled into apathy by a cunning and manipulative adversary.⁵⁸

The Jews of the Vilna ghetto were not afforded such a cataclysmic moment that would shock them into action and tear away at the delusional sense of security that had

⁵⁶ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 256.

⁵⁷ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 243.

⁵⁸ Moshe Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto*, 151.

pervaded the ghetto since the cessation of massacres in January 1942. Within Vilna existed an ideologically unified resistance movement, comprised of three hundred armed members, who were willing to shed blood and lay down their lives in the pursuit of Jewish vengeance. To counter their call to arms, however, existed Jacob Gens' philosophy of "Work To Live," which had been dutifully corroborated through the deliberate actions of the German administration. The series of "work-pass related" *Atkionen* established within Vilna a keen belief that through work, the Jews would be able to outlive the German occupation and the actions of a resistance movement would only impede this path to survival.

In the end, it wasn't about food or weapons, it wasn't about health and disease; the Jews of Warsaw had a psychological awakening in the midst of their torment and resolved to die as heroes, enshrining an epic tale of heroism in the pages of Jewish history during the time of their greatest suffering. The mindset of the Jews in Vilna, however, remained locked in the deluded fantasy of self-preservation, ignoring the plight of those around them and through this inaction, sowing the seeds of their own destruction.

Appendix:

F.P.O September 1, 1943 manifesto calling for Vilna's inhabitants to rise together in resistance: *Ghetto in Flames* page 411-412

“Jews Defend yourselves with arms! The German and Lithuanian hangmen have arrived at the gates of the ghetto. They have come to murder us! Within a short while, they will lead us group after group through the gate. Thus they led out hundreds on the Day of Atonement! Thus they led us out on the night of the White, the Yellow, and the Pink Passes. Thus they led our brethren and sisters, our mothers and fathers, our children. Thus were tens of thousands taken out to their death! But we shall not go! We shall not stretch our necks like sheep for the slaughter! Defend yourselves with arms! Do not believe the statements of the traitors> Anyone who goes out of the ghetto gate has only route- to Ponar. And Ponar means death! Jews! We have nothing to lose, death will snatch us up in any event. And who still believes he will remain alive when the assassin is obliterating us with systematic consistency? The hand of the hangman will fall upon every person. Flight and cowardice will not save life! Only armed resistance can save our lives and honor. Brothers! Better to fall in battle in the ghetto than to be led as sheep to Ponar. And know ye: There is an organized Jewish force within the walls of the ghetto that will rise up with arms. Lend a hand to the revolt! Do not cower in hideouts and *malines*. Your end will be to die as rats in the grip of murderers.

Jewish masses! Go out into the street! Whoever has no weapons, take up a hatchet; and whoever has no hatchet, take steel and cudgel and stick! For our fathers. For our murdered children! To revenge Ponar, hit the murderers! In every street, in every courtyard, in every room. Inside the ghetto and outside it. Hit at the dogs! Jews! We have nothing to lose! We shall save our lives only if we wipe out the murderers. Long live freedom! Long live armed defense, death to the murderers!