

# INTRODUCTION



As early as 1972, the British historian David Littlejohn remarked that “[t]he literature of resistance is prolific; that of collaboration sparse indeed.”<sup>1</sup> This statement is still accurate today. The very sensitivity of the topic has prevented researchers from approaching it for many years. Yet, as regards collaboration in the former Soviet territories, ideological considerations have also played a paramount role in preserving the topic’s “untouchable” status. Immediately after World War II, when the Cold War threatened to turn into a hot one, a trend in Western historiography sought to draw lessons from the war, especially from the German experiences in the *Ostpolitik*. One such “lesson,” which was practically taken for granted, was that Hitler’s failure in the war against the Soviet Union was due chiefly to his inability to create and use the wide-scale anti-Soviet opposition inside the Soviet Union. Such views, voiced for the first time in 1949 in *Life* magazine in an article by Wallace Carroll, the former director of the London Office of the US Office of War Information, were not confined to the mass media, but were accepted readily by Western historians.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, for example, Alexander Dallin, in the first edition of his fundamental work *German Rule in Russia*, quoted Carroll’s article no less than nine times. It is no wonder, therefore, that in this state of affairs and minds, the main focus of Western research was on the military aspect of collaboration on the part of Soviet citizens, as embodied in the various *Hilfswilligen* or *Hiwis* (literally: “voluntary auxiliaries”) and the so-called “east-

ern troops" (*Osttruppen*) that served as both sentries and antipartisan fighters.<sup>4</sup>

Subsequent research interests were drawn to the so-called Vlasov movement. Until the beginning of the 1990s, a series of studies and memoirs by former German military and civilian officials had been produced in the West which focused on military collaboration on the eastern front during World War II and emphasized the "missed chances," but did not analyze the events.<sup>4</sup> Even then, critical voices opposed the perspective of "missed chances" and strove instead to analyze the phenomenon of collaboration in the former Soviet Union as it was, not as it might have been. One of these voices belonged to the British historian Gerald Reitlinger, who in his study, *The House Built on Sand*, harshly rebuked the existing tendency to instrumentalize the history of military collaboration in the Soviet Union in an attempt to gauge current political or strategic needs.<sup>5</sup>

From the beginning, other historians, like Dallin, perceived the occupied Soviet territories as a single monolithic body, without allowing for any differentiation among the various regions. As a result, prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, any consideration of the history of Byelorussia under German occupation was mentioned only sporadically in non-Soviet research.<sup>6</sup>

During the period when access to the Soviet archives was impossible for Western scholars owing to the general political situation, virtually all of the studies published were based solely on records available in Western archives. Many of these records were captured German documents, which provided a picture of Nazi occupation from the point of view of the occupiers and presented the local inhabitants as mere objects of the occupation policies.

On the other side of the "iron curtain," the theme of collaboration was taboo. Officially, it was deemed unthinkable that "decent Soviet people" would have cooperated with the enemy of the USSR. If mentioned at all, collaborators were usually described either as "traitors from among the nationalist bourgeoisie, a small group of renegades and secret agents of the fascist intelligence," or as people who were forced—by means of threats or deception—to collaborate with the Nazis. As the leading Byelorussian military historian, Alexej Litvin, noted, for a long time "priority" in the coverage of the theme of collaboration was afforded to "investigators rather than to researchers."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, it is not surprising that one of the first persons to refer to the problem of collaboration in Byelorussia during the Nazi occupation was Lavrentij Tsanava, the head of the NKVD (KGB)

apparatus in Byelorussia in the postwar years.<sup>8</sup> The works that appeared during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in Soviet Byelorussia were intended primarily to serve Soviet propaganda, demonstrating the “anti-national character” of collaborators, and their postwar role as “agents of international imperialism.” In Minsk, in 1964, Vasilij Romanovskij published a book with the revealing title *Saŭdzel’niki ŭ zlachynstvakh* (Accomplices in the Crimes), which reported on the participation of Byelorussian collaborators in Nazi crimes. Its main function, however, was not to analyze the Byelorussian collaboration per se, even though it is based on rich documentary material and provides valuable facts. Rather, the intent of this work was to accuse “American imperialism” of using former “Nazi accomplices” for its own subversive activities against the Soviet Union.

The disintegration of the USSR and of the Eastern Bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s marked a certain turn in the historiography dealing with the National Socialist occupation in the East. For the first time, Western historians gained access to Soviet archives (although that access was not—and still is not—complete), and they were able to cite the testimonies of the people who lived in the occupied territories during the period. This, in turn, allowed an insight into the society under occupation not only, as previously, from the perspective of the occupiers, but also from the point of view of the occupied, an opportunity to study their reactions to the conditions imposed by the occupation. Little wonder then that from the 1990s collaboration as a response to occupation also began to attract the attention of researchers dealing with the theme of the Third Reich’s rule in the former Soviet territories. In fact, the sixteen-volume collection of articles *Europa unter Hakenkreuz* that appeared in Germany between 1994 and 1996 devotes much space to the debates on the subject.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the previous “monolithic” approach to the occupation, as expressed by Dallin, gave way to a separate analysis of each region and its events.

In the 1990s, three studies appeared dealing specifically with Nazi occupation policies in Byelorussia (one in Polish and two in German).<sup>10</sup> Of these three, only the study by Christian Gerlach dealt with the entire Byelorussian territory, whereas Yuri Turonak’s and Bernhard Chiari’s works focused solely on the territory of *Generalkommissariat Weißruthenien* (the civil administration area), thus excluding from the scope of their research the large part of occupied Byelorussia, i.e., the military administration area and the territories attached to *Reichskommissariat Ukraine*, *Gen-*

eralbezirk Litauen, and Bezirk Bialystok. At the same time, Chiari and Turonak concentrated on the social and political aspects of the Nazi occupation of Byelorussia and therefore gave careful consideration to the phenomenon of collaboration, whereas Christian Gerlach built his study around the German economic policy in Byelorussia and therefore considered the phenomenon of collaboration only very briefly. Still, notwithstanding all the shortcomings of these three studies, they can be seen as pioneering works in the research of Nazi occupation policies in Byelorussia.

The three studies mentioned above were based to a great degree upon sources from the Byelorussian archives and thus the picture they presented of Byelorussia under the occupation was as close to reality as was possible (this is especially true of Turonak's and Chiari's studies) and free of any ideological considerations. Their main significance, as noted, was in their pioneering character. At the same time when treating the theme of collaboration none of these studies devoted enough attention to the variety of the motives for collaboration with the occupiers. Similarly, they did not analyze the various forms and aspects of collaboration in Byelorussia. Moreover, by concentrating primarily on the occupation period itself, these authors did not go beyond it or gave only cursory treatment to the activities of the various Byelorussian collaborationist bodies after the German retreat from Byelorussia in 1944. For example, a topic such as collaboration in the framework of Waffen-SS remained largely outside the scope of all the aforementioned studies. In the current study, I am striving specifically to put the phenomenon of Byelorussian collaboration, with its multiple forms and facets, under a magnifying glass, to place it within the general context of German occupation policies, and to provide an analysis of Byelorussian collaboration beyond the occupation period as well.

Further impetus toward conducting a close analysis of the phenomenon of collaboration, especially of the collaboration in the implementation of the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question," was provided in the 1990s by the studies of the American scholars Christopher Browning, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen,<sup>11</sup> and Jan Tomasz Gross.<sup>12</sup> The study by Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust* (2000), constituted a major contribution to the research on the topic of collaboration in the execution of the "Final Solution" in Byelorussia and the Ukraine. Based on an abundance of factual material, it attempts to track the motives of those local inhabitants who actively participated in the persecution of their Jewish neighbors, impelled apparently by more than

mere anti-Semitism or greed. Dean's study, however, important as it is, concentrates once again upon only one aspect of the indigenous collaboration, namely the police collaboration, which was probably the most "visible" form of collaboration as the local police were inter alia directly involved in the physical extermination of the Jews. Yet, as I will show in this study, even in relation to the Holocaust this was not the only form of local collaboration.

Although in Byelorussia itself the theme of the local population's collaboration with the Germans is still a rather marginal topic, a number of studies have appeared there dealing with this topic. Especially fruitful in this respect was the period of relative liberalization—covering approximately the first half of the 1990s—that followed the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Of note are such works as those of Alexej Solov'ev, dealing with the Byelorussian Central Council, and of Sergej Zhumar, dealing with the Byelorussian-language "legal press" (i.e., the press that published with the permission of the German occupying authorities), as well as the more recent studies by I. Servachinskij and by Alexej Litvin, which deal with the topic of Byelorussian collaboration at large.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, recent years have witnessed an emerging tendency inside Byelorussia to return to the old pattern of historiography.

Once again, the themes of resistance and partisan warfare are taking center stage in the local research on the occupation period in Byelorussia. Typical is the work of Vladimir Kuz'menko *Intelligenciia Belarusi v Period Nemecko-Fashistskoj Okkupacii (1941–1944)* (Byelorussian Intelligentsia in the Period of German-Fascist Occupation), which deals mainly with the participation and subsequent role of the Byelorussian intelligentsia in the resistance movement during the occupation period. Moreover, Byelorussian historiography, returns to the style of describing collaborators' characteristics, labeling them as "traitors, self-seekers, cowards, perjurers who, for miserable hand-outs and current interests, betrayed the most sacred of all: the homeland."<sup>14</sup> This approach has little to do with balanced historical analysis. A number of studies produced by Byelorussian authors living abroad, recently published in Byelorussia, are also of interest. Most often the theme of collaboration in such works is either mentioned very briefly, as in the study by Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus' na Histarychnykh Skryzhavannjakh* (Minsk, 1996), or presented apologetically, as in the study by Lyavon Yurevič, whose work is based on the memoirs of former members of the Union of Byelorussian Youth.<sup>15</sup>

Reviewing the state of research in the field reveals the absence of a study analyzing the various aspects of the phenomenon of collaboration that covers the entire territory of Byelorussia, one that considers the motivations of the local collaborators as well as the perceptions of the German occupying authorities, military and civilian. This book aims to fill this lacuna in the historical research of World War II.

As in other occupied countries, collaboration in Byelorussia was not something monolithic; rather, it took various forms and included many spheres of life. At the same time, like every historical phenomenon, it was by no means static. In this case, its development (and variations) stretched over the entire occupation period. Moreover, the phenomenon of collaboration cannot be understood outside the context of the reality of the occupation. And finally, collaboration constitutes a perfect case study of the destructive social influences of the Nazi occupation, which resulted in the disintegration of all existing social ties. The present work takes all of these points into consideration.

To be sure, the phenomenon of collaboration was not unique to Byelorussia but existed in all countries that found themselves under Nazi occupation between 1939 and 1945. The first chapter of this work therefore provides a general overview of the phenomenon of collaboration in various occupied countries.

Obviously, readiness to collaborate with the invader did not appear out of a void, neither in Byelorussia nor in other Nazi-occupied territories. Collaboration with the Germans during World War II had its roots in the period preceding the German occupation, so the second chapter of this book is dedicated to an analysis of the historical background and the genesis of Byelorussian collaboration.

Since one of the chief factors that influenced the decision to collaborate with the German authorities was Nazi occupation politics themselves, the third chapter presents a general overview of these politics, so as to examine to what degree they did or did not encourage the collaboration.

Chapter 4 deals with political forms of collaboration in Byelorussia. The main focus here is on bodies such as the "local self-administration," the Byelorussian Self-Aid Organization (BNS), the Byelorussian Central Council (BCR), and the Union of Byelorussian Youth (SBM). Primarily the occupying authorities saw all these organizations as important tools for maintaining control of the population in Byelorussia as well as for exploiting local resources to supply the Germans' war needs.

But did these organizations have their own aims? If the answer is affirmative, how much did the occupation authorities know about these aims and how far were they prepared to tolerate them? This chapter aims at addressing these questions.

The fifth chapter considers the Church's view of the collaboration phenomenon in Byelorussia and its role in it. The Orthodox Church occupies the center of these discussions. Among other issues, this chapter considers the limits of collaboration as drawn by the Church's top officials.

Chapter 6 deals with so-called "ideological" collaboration. As this chapter demonstrates, a group of people in Byelorussia identified themselves almost completely with the goals of the occupying power. These people played an important part in the "legal" mass media, such as in the largest Byelorussian newspaper of the time, *Belaruskaja Hazeta*, and were supposed to provide propagandistic cover for various measures of the Nazi occupation authorities.

One of the main *raison d'être* of the very existence of the collaboration movement in Byelorussia, as well as in other occupied countries, was the Nazis' need to maintain "peace and order" (*Ruhe und Ordnung*). In the main, this meant the elimination of "undesirable" elements. Chapter 7 analyzes the role of local collaborators in this process. Since Jews were at the top of the list of undesirables, this chapter is devoted mainly to Byelorussian collaboration in the Holocaust. Here it is important to examine to what extent the participation of local residents in Byelorussia accelerated the implementation of the "Final Solution." The chapter discusses the various forms this participation took, ranging from the denunciation of Jews to the seizing of their property, with some being murdered while others were still alive but left to perish. In addition, this chapter also analyzes the role of local collaboration bodies in the repression of other groups also defined by the Nazis as undesirables, including the Roma (gypsies), Soviet prisoners of war, and strangers (*Ortsfremde*).

The last chapter examines the role of Byelorussians in the Third Reich's military efforts during the different stages of World War II. The various military and paramilitary frameworks in which Byelorussian collaborators were integrated are delineated. The chapter's main thrust is on the policies of the German authorities towards the people serving in various auxiliary police and military bodies, and it describes the perpetual, unresolved Nazi conflict between reality and racially ideological dogmatism.

## Notes

1. David Littlejohn, *The Patriotic Traitors* (London, 1972), xiii.
2. Wallace Carroll, "It takes a Russian to beat a Russian," *Life Magazine* (19 December 1949), 80–88, quoted in Gerald Reitlinger, *House Built on Sand* (London, 1960), 22–23.
3. The Hiwis were paramilitary formations created spontaneously by various Wehrmacht units at the very beginning of the offensive against the Soviet Union. Consisting chiefly of Soviet POWs, and civilians from among the local population, they performed mainly logistic duties.
4. See Peter Kleist, *Zwischen Hitler und Stalin* (Bonn, 1950); George Fisher, *Soviet Opposition to Stalin* (Cambridge, MA, 1952); Sven Steenberg, *Vlasov* (New York, 1970); Wilfried Strik-Strikfeldt, *Gegen Stalin und Hitler* (Mainz, 1970); the chapter "Soviet Union" in D. Littlejohn, *Patriotic Traitors* (London, 1972); Reinhard Gehlen, *The Service*, trans. D. Irving (New York, 1972; Russian translation quoted below); Jürgen Thorwald, *Die Illusion* (Zurich, 1974); Alex Alexiev, *Soviet Nationalities in German Wartime Strategy, 1941–1945* (Santa Monica, 1982) (Alexiev states in the preface to his work: "This study should be of interest to military and strategic planners who are beginning to address the Soviet nationality issue in a strategic perspective," iii); J. Lee Ready, *The Forgotten Axis* (Jefferson and London, 1987); Catherine Andreyev, *Vlasov and the Russian Liberation Movement* (Cambridge, 1987).
5. Reitlinger, *House Built on Sand*.
6. Among the studies that do touch upon this topic are Nikolas Vakar's *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA, 1956) as well as Ivan Lubachko's *Belorussia under Soviet Rule 1917–1957* (Lexington, 1972). Both works dedicate only two chapters to German occupation, significantly marginalizing the theme of local collaboration. The only work appearing in the West before 1991 that dealt exclusively with Byelorussian collaboration during the war was that of John Loftus, *The Belarus Secret* (New York, 1982), but the fact that it was written not by a historian but by the former federal prosecutor in the Office of Special Investigations of the Criminal Division of the US Justice Department made it more of an indictment than a piece of objective research.
7. Pjotr Pospelov et al. (eds.), *Istoria Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojny Sovetskogo Sojuza 1941–1945* (Moscow, 1961). A. Litvin, "Kalabaracijnizm na Terytorii Belarusi ŭ Gady Vjalikaj Ajchynnaj Vajny: Da Preamble Vyvuchennja," in *Akupacyja Belarusi* (1941–1944), (Minsk 2000), 195–203.
8. Lavrentij Tsanova, *Vsenarodnaja Partisanskaja Vojna v Belorussii protiv Fashistskikh Zakhvatchikov*, Part II, (Minsk, 1951), 642–852.
9. See, for example, Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, "Die Rolle der Kollaboration für die deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen und 'Weißruthenien,'" in *Europa unter Hakenkreuz*, ed. W. Röhr, Band: *Okkupation und Kollaboration* (Heidelberg, 1994), 191–216; Valentin Bojzow, "Aspekte der militärischen Kollaboration in der UdSSR von 1941–1944," in *ibid.*, 293–317; Werner Röhr, "Okkupation und Kollaboration," in *ibid.*, 59–84.
10. Yury Turonak, *Belarus' pad nyameckaj Akupacyjaj* (Minsk, 1993); Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front* (Dusseldorf, 1998); Ch. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde* (Hamburg, 1999).

11. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1992). Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996).
12. Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors* (Princeton and Oxford, 2001). See Loftus' highly controversial book quoted above, note 6; Shalom Cholawski's *Be-Sufat ha-Killayon* (In the Eye of the Hurricane), (Tel Aviv, 1988). In German: Jürgen Matthäus, "'Reibungslos und Planmäßig'. Die zweite Welle der Judenvernichtung im Generalkommissariat Weißruthenien (1942–1944)," *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, 4 (1995), 254–74; M. Dean, "Polen in der einheimischen Hilfspolizei. Ein Aspekt der Besatzungsrealität in den deutsch besetzten ostpolnischen Gebieten," in *Die polnische Heimatarmee*, ed. B. Chiari (Munich, 2003). In English: M. Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust* (New York, 2000); Yehoshua R. Büchler, "Local Police Force Participation in the Extermination of Jews in occupied Soviet Territory 1941–1942," *Shvut* 4, no. 20 (1996), 79–99; Daniel Romanovsky, "Soviet Jews under Nazi Occupation in Northeastern Belarus and Eastern Russia," in Z. Gitelman, *Bitter Legacy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1997). In Russian: D. Romanovsky, "Kholokost v Vostochnoj Belorussii i Severo-Zapadnoj Rossii Glazami Neevreev," *Vestnik Evrejskogo Universiteta* 2, no. 9 (1995), 56–92; Leonid Rein, "Otnosheniie belorusskogo naseleniia k evreyam vo vremya Katastrofy. 1941–1944 gody," *Evrei Belarusi. Istoriia i Kul'tura*, 6 (2001), 181–205; Ilya Altman, "Zhertvy Nenavisti" (Moscow, 2002); Emanuil Yoffe, *Belorusskije Evrei* (Minsk, 2003), 179–93.
13. Alexej Solov'ev, *Belorusskaja Tsentral'naja Rada* (Minsk, 1995); Sergej Zhumar, *Okkupatsionnaja Periodicheskaja Pechat' na Territorii Belarusi v Gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj Vojny* (Minsk, 1996); I. Servachinskij, *Kollaboracionizm na okkupirovannoj Territorii Belarusi* (Minsk, 1999); A. Litvin, *Akupatsyja Belarusi (1941–1944). Pytanni Supracivu i Kalabaracyi* (Minsk, 2000).
14. "V usluzhenu u gitlerovcev," *Belorusskaja Niva*, 18 September 1996, quoted in Lyavon Yurevič, *Vyrvanaja Bachyny*, (Minsk, 2001), 5.
15. Yurevič, *Vyrvanaja Bachyny*.

