

UNITED STATES  
HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM  

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CENTER FOR ADVANCED HOLOCAUST STUDIES

**The Holocaust in the Soviet Union**

Symposium Presentations

WASHINGTON, D.C.



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## Foreword

The international scholarly symposium *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* marked the first concerted effort by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to recognize, encourage and evaluate new avenues of scholarship on this critical topic. While the Museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies organized *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* as part of its continuing symposium series to draw together Holocaust scholars to share research results and encourage networking, collaborative research, and discussion of research methodologies, the timing of this particular symposium was not by chance.

In recent years, the Museum has microfilmed several million pages of archival materials from the countries of the former Soviet Union, materials that only became accessible in the wake of the dissolution of the USSR. During the years immediately preceding the symposium, the Museum had concluded new archival agreements in Russia with the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF) and the Federal Archival Service of the Russian Federation (Rosarkhiv); in Ukraine with the former Communist Party Archives in Kyiv, the Regional Archives of the Rovno Oblast, the Central State Historical Archives in L'viv, the Regional Archives of the Chernivitsi Region, and the Regional Archives of the Crimean Autonomous Republic; in Lithuania with the Central State Archives; in Moldova with the National Archives; and in Belarus with the State Committee on Archives and Record Management. Agreements with the Central State Archives of the republics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have followed, allowing the Museum to retrieve unique registration materials pertaining to the large number of Jews who fled east in advance of the Nazi attack. The retrieval of massive documentation—the so-called “trophy documents”—from the formerly secret Osobyi Archives in Moscow, underway when the symposium took place, continues to this day.

Other newly available research collections include the records of war crimes trials from the ex-KGB archives of Ukraine, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, and from the Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia (FSB); records of the Extraordinary Commission for the History of the Great Patriotic War; and records relating to anti-Nazi partisan units such as the 1st Ukrainian Partisan Division, or “Kovpak division.” Rich collections of Jewish source materials, including Jewish institutional and communal records from Ukraine and the personal archival collections

of Soviet Jewish writers who lived and wrote during the Holocaust, round out new collections that offer unprecedented opportunities for research and understanding.

The recent availability of previously sealed materials has already produced new insight and generated the nuanced scholarship presented in this symposium. These papers make a promising start in the long process of examining the real impact of the Holocaust on the USSR and on postwar Soviet political, economic, diplomatic, cultural, and intellectual life.

The symposium was organized into three sessions. The first, entitled *World War II and the Final Solution*, began with Timothy Snyder, Assistant Professor of History at Yale University, discussing Volhynian Jews under Polish rule and Soviet and Nazi occupation during the period 1939–1944.<sup>1</sup> Wendy Lower, Assistant Professor of History at Towson University, analyzed how mass murder occurred outside the killing centers in Nazi-occupied Poland, emphasizing the roles of German leaders in the “periphery,” and of the non-Jewish indigenous population. David Shneer, Director of the Center for Judaic Studies and Associate Professor of History, University of Denver, examined the work of Soviet Jewish photojournalists, who were among the first to visually document Nazi atrocities.

The second session explored the theme of *Ghettos*. Martin Dean, Applied Research Scholar at the Center, shared his research into the structure and function, as well as the regional patterns, of ghettos within the Nazi “system” in the occupied Soviet Union. Andrew Koss, former Research Assistant at the Center and currently a doctoral student at Stanford University, focused on Yiskor (memorial) books and the insights they offer about the fate of individual Jewish communities. Leonid Smilovitsky, of the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center and the Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of the Humanities at Tel Aviv University, explored both the commonalities and the unique features of the ghettos in Gomel Oblast, Belorussia.<sup>2</sup> Barbara Epstein, Professor of the History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz, examined the unusual solidarity between Jews and non-Jews in Minsk, where the Belorussian underground helped large numbers of Jews to flee the ghetto and join the resistance.

In the third session, participants discussed *The Fate of Jewish and Gentile Soviet Soldiers*. Zvi Y. Gitelman, Professor of Political Science and Preston R. Tisch Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, examined Soviet Jewish war veterans’ postwar understanding of their wartime motivations, patriotism, and eventual disillusionment with the Soviet system. Reinhard Otto, Director of the



Memorial at Former Soviet Prisoner-of-War Camp 326 in Senne, Germany, explored the fate of Soviet POWs by analyzing recently discovered and released wartime records, without which research into their fate had been nearly impossible. Amir Weiner, Associate Professor of History at Stanford University, closed the session by describing the impact of both the Holocaust and Holocaust survivors on the postwar Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup>

This symposium on *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* was made possible through the support of The Helena Rubinstein Foundation. Many members of the Center's staff deserve thanks for their work on the symposium and proceedings: Robert M. Ehrenreich, Suzanne Brown-Fleming, and Lisa Grandy for developing and organizing the symposium; Geoffrey Megargee and Vadim Altskan for their smooth moderation of panels; and Aleisa Fishman and Paula Dragosh for preparing the papers for publication. Most important, the scholars deserve our thanks for their excellent presentations and their subsequent participation in the editing of those presentations for this publication.

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## NOTES

1. See Professor Snyder's chapter "Volhynian Jews under Polish Rule and Soviet and Nazi Occupation," in *The Shoah and Ukraine*, eds. Wendy Lower and Ray Brandon (forthcoming). The subject is also treated in his recent publications: *Sketches from a Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); and *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

2. See Professor Smilovitsky's article at <http://albaruthenia.by.ru/art/eng/holo.htm>.

3. See Professor Weiner's article, "When Memory Counts: War, Genocide, and Postwar Soviet Jewry," in *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Omer Bartov, Atina Grossman, and Mary Nolan (New York: New Press, distributed by W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), pp. 191–216.

**THE HOLOCAUST AND COLONIALISM IN UKRAINE:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE GENERALBEZIRK ZHYTOMYR,  
UKRAINE, 1941–1944**

**Wendy Lower**

In the last decade, research on the Holocaust has shifted from examining the origins of the genocide at the level of state policy to events on the ground in the former Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's collapse allowed historians to study Nazi documents held for nearly five decades in former Soviet state and Communist Party archives. My work on the Holocaust in Zhytomyr, Ukraine, exemplifies this shift toward a regional view of the Holocaust. It examines how the mass murder occurred outside the killing centers in Nazi-occupied Poland and emphasizes the role of German leaders in the "periphery" Holocaust as well as the direct participation of the non-Jewish indigenous population. Rather than recount Zhytomyr's Holocaust history chronologically, this article focuses on two themes in that history and how events in Zhytomyr shed light on them. The first is the origins of the Holocaust in summer and fall of 1941; the second is the place of Nazi anti-Jewish policy within a framework of German resettlement policies and colonization of Eastern Europe.

Why focus on these themes? For years, the debate over the origins of the "Final Solution" has concentrated on the timing of Hitler's decision to pursue a genocidal solution to the "Jewish Question." Close examination of the radicalization of anti-Jewish violence in places such as Zhytomyr offers a bottom-up instead of top-down view of that process. This local perspective helps explain how the Nazi mass murder campaign actually began and was able to expand, ultimately resulting in the deaths of over 1 million Jews who resided within the borders of the Ukraine.<sup>1</sup>

My second theme, Nazi population policies, explores a recent empirical development inspired by the pioneering research of Götz Aly.<sup>2</sup> Aly has looked most closely at the causal links between the deportation of Jews and resettlement of ethnic Germans in wartime Poland. His focus on Adolf Eichmann's deportation machinery and Heinrich Himmler's blueprint for germanizing the East, known as the Generalplan Ost, has suggested that the Holocaust was, from the Nazi standpoint, simply a by-product of or a first step toward larger Nazi aims for repopulating the East.<sup>3</sup>

Besides Poland, the Ukraine figured prominently in Nazi colonization plans (although few scholars have elucidated its significance). Hitler dreamed of the Crimea

as the future German Riviera. Reichsführer of the SS-Police and the Commissioner for the Strengthening of the German Volk, Himmler also eyed the Zhytomyr region specifically as a future SS and *Volksdeutsche* colony, since the region was home to thousands of Volhynian ethnic Germans safely situated east of the Dnieper River in Right Bank Ukraine. What causal links, if any, existed between Nazi resettlement programs and the history of the Holocaust in the Ukraine, particularly Zhytomyr? Does it make sense to view the Final Solution as another historical episode of colonial genocide?

### **The Generalbezirk Zhytomyr**

The Generalbezirk Zhytomyr was one of six regional administrations that comprised the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. The Bezirk (which was 27,020 square miles, roughly the size of West Virginia) encompassed territory that had historically been part of the Polish *kresy* in the north, Kiev's Right Bank in the east, parts of Podolia in the south, and smaller pieces of Volhynia in the west. The region contained about 2.5 million inhabitants; Ukrainians made up the vast majority, representing 87.4 percent of the population. This historic borderland of the Polish-Lithuanian and Russian empires also contained several minorities. The largest was the Jews, who were nine percent of the population, followed by the Poles, who comprised 7.4 percent. The Russian minority decreased during the war, while the ethnic German minority doubled to close to three percent of the population in 1942. According to the 1939 Soviet census, there were about 266,000 Jews living in and around the region's centers of Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia, and Berdychiv; an average of thirty percent lived in the cities or larger towns. Indeed, the Zhytomyr region contained some of the largest Jewish communities in the Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> At the heart of the former Jewish Pale of Settlement, the region was a historic center of Jewish religious and cultural life. In and around Berdychiv, dubbed a "Little Jerusalem" in czarist times, there were more than eighty synagogues and *batei midroshim* (houses of prayer and study). Aside from a vibrant cultural life, the Jews developed a bustling local economy linking the farms and the towns through trade, manufacturing, and crafts; across generations they maintained strong communal ties through conservative religious and social traditions. Although culturally rich, the Jewish communities here, when compared with Western Europe, were among the poorest in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

Nazi leaders, including Himmler, perceived Zhytomyr as a “Jewish town,” indeed as a center of Bolshevism that they aimed to destroy.<sup>6</sup> During their conquest of the Ukraine in the summer of 1941, the German invaders observed that the region was extremely “backward” in that it contained the “old-Jewish” districts. At the same time, this eastern Ukrainian region had been fully subjected to Soviet rule throughout the interwar period. Thus it was also considered more “Bolshevik” than its neighboring regions to the west, Volhynia and Galicia. As such, the Germans were especially wary of the “Jewish-Communist” threat in the region and unleashed massive anti-Jewish manhunts and collective reprisal measures from the first days of the occupation. In reality there was no “threat,” but this fact did not slow the course of Nazi anti-Jewish policies. According to the historian Dieter Pohl’s recent research on the Holocaust in the Ukraine, “events in Zhytomyr show most clearly the transition from a selective policy of destruction to one of total eradication.”<sup>7</sup> The most active regional leaders who initiated the mass murder in Zhytomyr were Field Marshal Walter von Reichenau, who commanded the Sixth Army; Higher SS and Police Leader for Southern Russia, General Friedrich Jeckeln, who was Himmler’s right-hand man in the Ukraine; and Security Police Chief Reinhard Heydrich’s agents, SS-Brigadier General Dr. Otto Rasch, Commander of Einsatzgruppe C, and his deputy SS-Colonel Paul Blobel, chief of a secret police detachment of Einsatzgruppe C, known as Sonderkommando 4a.<sup>8</sup>

Although official pre-Barbarossa guidelines and agreements had effectively given army and SS and police officers a license to shoot Jews, in the first days and weeks of the invasion the Einsatzgruppen specifically targeted male Jews in so-called security measures.<sup>9</sup> Then at the end of July 1941, after the Wehrmacht had occupied Zhytomyr for about two weeks, Jeckeln directed his Order Police and Waffen-SS units to kill male and female Jews (ages sixteen to sixty) in nearby Novohrad Volyns’kyi. Jeckeln flew with his small Storch plane to the execution site and personally supervised this massacre.<sup>10</sup> One month later, Dr. Rasch’s Einsatzgruppe C detachments and Jeckeln’s SS and police forces along with some military personnel began systematically to murder all men, women, and children. In Berdychiv, they killed 23,000 Jews between August 26 and September 16.<sup>11</sup> In Zhytomyr Blobel’s Sonderkommando 4a and Waffen-SS led in the killing of more than 5,000 Jews; most of the population (over 3,000) died in one day when the Germans liquidated Zhytomyr’s ghetto on September 19.<sup>12</sup> On that same day 100 miles southward in the

town of Vinnytsia, Sonderkommando 4b and Jeckeln's Order Police Battalions 45 and 314 began to massacre about 15,000 Jews. Thus, in a matter of weeks, the Germans expanded the killing with unprecedented aggression, demonstrating their intent to destroy the Jews as a so-called race, and not the Communist Party and state apparatus per se.<sup>13</sup>

The dramatic increase in the numbers of Jews killed in August and September is indeed startling and indicates a change. But the source of this change is still unclear. What developments incited Nazi leaders in the center of the Reich and periphery of the occupied territories to intensify their murderous campaign?

In the Zhytomyr region, the transition from killing male Jews to killing Jewish women and children did not occur automatically. Reich leaders and their regional deputies had to place extra pressure on their subordinates to, as they put it, "kill more Jews" or "act more aggressively" against all Jews. To achieve this genocidal aim, Wehrmacht and SS-Police leaders had to provide the necessary manpower and material. They also needed help from the local population of non-Jews.

Although somewhat sketchy, there is some evidence of senior officials pressuring subordinates to expand the massacres from male Jews to entire communities. SS-Sturmbannführer Erwin Schulz, commander of a mobile killing unit (Einsatzkommando 5, EK5) operating in Berdychiv and Vinnytsia, testified at Nuremberg that in early August 1941 he was summoned to Zhytomyr. There, his superior, Dr. Rasch, informed him that the higher-ups were displeased because the SS-Police was not acting aggressively enough against the Jews.<sup>14</sup> It was in Zhytomyr, a member of Sonderkommando 4a (SK4a) recalled after the war, that his commander Paul Blobel announced for the first time that their aim was the total destruction of the city's Jewish population.<sup>15</sup> Although some individual SS-Police leaders had already taken the initiative to kill women and children, from the Nazi leadership's view such sporadic massacres were not sufficient to totally "solve" the Jewish problem. When Jeckeln met with Himmler on August 12, 1941, the former was also urged to act more aggressively and to report daily about the killings.<sup>16</sup>

As for the manpower and material needed to carry out such orders, between late July and early September the Wehrmacht advance halted before Kiev, allowing for the accumulation of thousands of SS, Order Police, and Army security personnel, many of whom became involved with or witnessed the Holocaust. Shortly after Hitler appointed Himmler the chief of all security and police matters in the Occupied Eastern Territories

on July 17, Himmler rolled out his plans for recruiting and utilizing Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian police auxiliaries. As the newly appointed chief of SS and police forces in the East, he decreed the formation of non-German auxiliaries, known as Schutzmannschaften.<sup>17</sup> In accord with Himmler's July 1941 order, these police collaborators were chosen from the local militias that had sprung up under the military occupation and from the screening of acceptable racial groups among the POWs, first and foremost from the Volksdeutsche and then Ukrainians.<sup>18</sup> Many of the fresh Ukrainian recruits had been active in the nationalist movement. The indigenous police and other local aides such as ethnic German translators played a crucial role in the identification, registration, concentration, and execution of the Jews.

One well-documented incident that occurred in the town of Zhytomyr in early August illustrates how all of these various forces and individuals came together and made the genocide possible in the summer of 1941. It shows how regional anti-Jewish violence escalated into a state-sponsored genocidal campaign and how the expansion of the killing was driven by individuals of diverse ethnic, class, and professional backgrounds.

The massacre was carried out by members of the German Army (Wehrmacht), SS-Police forces, and Ukrainian collaborators.<sup>19</sup> On August 7, they publicly hanged Moishe Kogan and Wolf Kieper in Zhytomyr's marketplace while 400 male Jews were forced to look on and listen to the humiliating jeers of the rowdy crowd of German soldiers and Ukrainian townspeople. Sixth Army personnel had rounded up the 400 male Jews and also publicized the event by driving through town with a loudspeaker and putting up posters about the two condemned men, who had allegedly been members of the Soviet secret police, NKVD. As the two men stood on the gallows with nooses around their necks, SS-Captain Müller asked aloud in Ukrainian, "With whom do you have to settle a score?" The crowd replied, "With the Jews." Ukrainians in the crowd began to beat and kick the gathered Jewish men for about forty-five minutes.<sup>20</sup> According to the postwar testimony of a German eyewitness, Ukrainian women held their children up high so they could see the ghastly scene. Soldiers snapped photographs. After SS-Police officials from SK4a hanged Kogan and Kieper, German officials and their Ukrainian helpers forced the 400 Jews onto trucks and drove them to the edge of town to the horse cemetery where mass graves had been prepared.<sup>21</sup>

At the mass-shooting site, German personnel from the military and SS-Police and their Ukrainian auxiliaries forced between ten and twelve Jews to line up facing the

firing squad. A platoon of Waffen-SS men shot them with rifles. But according to the SS and army participants, this method was ineffective; not every victim who fell into the pit was dead. So an impromptu meeting was held between members of SK4a (including the trained architect and SD careerist SS-Colonel Blobel) and two officials of the Sixth Army—a judge, Dr. Arthur Neumann, and a Prussian doctor specializing in forensics, Dr. Gerhart Panning.<sup>22</sup> (Panning was in the area conducting medical “research”—testing the effects of dum dum bullets on Jewish POWs.)<sup>23</sup> Together they decided that each victim should be shot in the head, but then this approach also proved inadequate because it was, as one SS official described it, too “messy.”<sup>24</sup> The army doctor and SS officials looked into the pit to make sure all were dead. According to one eyewitness who testified after the war, as many as twenty-five percent were not, but the killings continued, and many of the half-dead victims were covered with more bodies and soil. Later that evening the SS-Police and army officials convened again to discuss the type of shooting; at least one person present complained that it was “intolerable for both victims and firing squad members.”<sup>25</sup>

To be sure, preinvasion agreements (such as the Heydrich-Wagner agreement of March 1941) had already established that the security police and the army would share the task of securing the conquered territory. However, this incident illustrates the significance of ad hoc collaboration that developed across agencies in the field as the war unfolded.<sup>26</sup> To a large extent, the networks of persecution that formed among regional leaders, especially within the army and security police, made the genocide possible. There is scant evidence of lower-level German officials in the military and SS-Police who resisted outright the order to kill Jews. After all, implementing the Final Solution to the Jewish Question seemed to be one of the few things on which the Einsatzgruppen, Wehrmacht, Order Police, civil administration, and non-Jewish indigenous population could all agree. Instead, individuals including the seasoned killer and head of Einsatzgruppe C, Dr. Rasch (Blobel’s boss), voiced concern about the economic results and political backlashes of the policy. He critiqued the Nazi approach on paper but in no way took action to slow the escalation of the mass murder. In analyzing the mass murder that had just occurred in the Zhytomyr region in early September 1941, Rasch made some relatively bold statements about where the genocidal policy was headed:

Even if it were possible to carry out the immediate, 100 percent elimination of the Jews, with that we would still not have done away with



the hearth of political danger. The work of Bolshevism is supported by Jews, Russians, Georgians, Armenians, Poles, Latvians, Ukrainians; *the Bolshevik apparatus is in no way identical with the Jewish population. In this state of affairs, the aim of political and police security would be missed, if the main task of the destruction of the communist apparatus were relegated to second or third place in favor of the practically easier task of eliminating the Jews. . . . If the Jewish labor force is entirely done away with, then an economic reconstruction of Ukrainian industry as well as the development of the urban administrative centers will be almost impossible.*

There is only one possibility, which the German administration in the General Government has neglected for a long time:

Solution of the Jewish Question through the extensive labor utilization of the Jews.

This will result in a gradual liquidation of Jewry—a development that corresponds to the economic conditions of the country.<sup>27</sup>

Rasch lobbied for a more “productive” or pragmatic solution of selecting able-bodied Jews as laborers who, as he described it, could be “used up,” while all the “useless eaters”—women, children, and the infirm—could be killed right away. He also went so far as to point out what most were unwilling to see or admit: that Jews, women and children in particular, were in no way to be identified exclusively with Bolshevism. As he observed, most of his colleagues pursued the “easier” task of total destruction of the Jewish community rather than deal with the intricacies of rooting out Bolshevism across the multiethnic Soviet society and state apparatus. Rasch’s report went into bureaucratic circulation in mid-September 1941, just as his forces converged on Kiev and planned the massacre at Babi Yar.<sup>28</sup>

As of the summer of 1941, a growing number of SS-Police and other German personnel in the field adapted to the policy of mass murder, in large part by allocating certain “unpleasant” tasks to non-Germans but also by “improving” mass-shooting techniques, as was just described in the scene that followed the Kogan-Kieper hangings. German regional leaders strove for more efficient and psychologically acceptable methods that in turn enabled them to expand the killing. For example, Blobel’s deputy, subunit leader Heinrich Huhn, who along with his Ukrainian auxiliaries shot Jewish babies in Radomyshl, recounted after the war that during the liquidation of Zhytomyr’s ghetto on September 19 “die Frauen durften ihre Kinder auf den Armen halten” (“the women were allowed to hold their children in their arms”).<sup>29</sup> Not only more orderly, Huhn and his colleagues believed that this was more “humane”

under the circumstances. Thus with each killing *Aktion*, regional officials in the army and SS-Police advanced their mass murder methods and overcame organizational and psychological conflicts with the full support of their superiors. They refined their skills as policy administrators and killers.

### **Mass Murder as a Precondition for Colonization?**

Although Hannah Arendt made the connection between the Holocaust and European imperialism decades ago in her work on totalitarianism, only recently have scholars studied this theme in depth.<sup>30</sup> Few would dispute that the essence of Nazi power was destructive, but the “logic” of this brutality is often oversimplified by recent conclusions that “the Holocaust of the Jews, genocide of Soviet POWs, euthanasia, and criminal occupation policies in Poland and Russia [are] altogether elements and consequences of Generalplan Ost.”<sup>31</sup> The Generalplan Ost was Himmler’s blueprint for transforming the *Lebensraum* into an “Aryan” utopia, marked by settlement “pearls,” or colonies of Volksdeutsche farmers and SS-Police overseers. In Nazi-occupied Ukraine (home to over 200,000 ethnic Germans), the links between the Holocaust and resettlement schemes were more tenuous. Regional leaders, like the commissars and SS-Police district chiefs, approached these two occupation policies very differently, and they rarely made causal connections between the two.<sup>32</sup> Local leaders, on the one hand, “succeeded” in bringing about the Holocaust but, on the other hand, failed at rehabilitating their “racial brethren.”<sup>33</sup> Comparing the vague, utopian colonization schemes of the Germans with their explicitly violent anti-Jewish policy demonstrates more than the sad fact that it is easier to destroy than create. Rather, the contrast shows that not all local Reich German leaders in the occupation administration (as well as those at home in the Reich) shared the elite’s commitment to colonizing the East. Indeed, the entire Lebensraum scheme and the pseudoscientific and mythic racist ideas on which it was based remained abstract notions. They took shape largely in 1942 after hundreds of thousands of Jews had already been massacred, and initial propaganda efforts to encourage Reich Germans and other Germans abroad to resettle to the East started in 1943 on the eve of the German retreat. By contrast, in fall 1941 regional officials in Zhytomyr and elsewhere in the Occupied Eastern Territories clearly understood the immediate “necessity” of a genocidal Final Solution.

### **Initial Nazi “Germanization” and Colonization Efforts in Ukraine**

As the Nazi military machine advanced eastward in the autumn of 1941, personnel from the civilian government arrived in its wake and began to establish a colonial-style administration, known as the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. The administration was supposed to manage the settlement of the territory, the exploitation and development of its resources, and the governing of its inhabitants. In addition to the Holocaust, the regional governors known as Reichskommissars introduced increasingly racist, economically exploitive population policies against the rest of the non-Jewish population. In Zhytomyr, for example, Nazi thugs seized one in ten adult Ukrainians, or nearly seven percent of the population (ages thirteen to sixty-five), and sent them to the Reich as laborers.<sup>34</sup>

The most notorious, and self-described “brutal dog,” who served as the Reichskommissar of Ukraine, Erich Koch, deported thousands of Ukrainians near his Rivne estate so that their farms, homes, and villages could be turned into his private game preserve. Even before Koch arrived at his new estate, Higher SS and Police Leader for Ukraine, SS-Lieutenant General Hans-Adolf Prützmann, and Commander of the Order Police, Otto von Oelhafen, had destroyed the Jewish population of Rivne.<sup>35</sup> Those regional officials who openly took a more moderate stance were usually marginalized for not being hard enough or sacrificing enough for the Nazi cause. For example, the regional commissar of Zhytomyr, Regierungsrat Kurt Klemm, expressed concern about the loss of labor that resulted from the mass murder of the Jews and challenged his counterpart in the SS-Police who insisted that all Jewish laborers must be killed. Consequently, Klemm was summoned to Himmler’s headquarters near Zhytomyr, reprimanded, and then forced to resign in shame.<sup>36</sup>

Ukrainians mocked the German commissars, stating that the German colonizers strut about in their brown, insignia-laden uniforms like “golden pheasants.”<sup>37</sup> One Ukrainian woman wrote in her diary, “We are like slaves. Often the book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* comes to mind. Once we shed tears over those Negroes, now obviously we ourselves are experiencing the same thing.”<sup>38</sup>

The commissars were visible and influential, but their ability to shape and implement population policies on a large scale was limited by Himmler’s SS-Police agencies. At the highpoint of Nazi victory in Europe during the summer of 1942, Himmler imposed a radical time line for his racial reordering of the East. He ordered the total destruction of Jewish communities in Poland by the end of 1942.<sup>39</sup> In August

1942 the commissars learned at a large convention in Rivne that the Jewish Question was to be solved 100 percent over the weeks that followed.<sup>40</sup> Two months later, Himmler sanctioned the destruction of the Ukraine's last remaining ghetto in Pinsk.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, Himmler also pushed through the first phase in resettlement operations and experimental colonization of Volksdeutsche in the Ukraine (centered at Dnjepropetrovsk, Nikolaev, and Zhytomyr) as well as in Poland (centered in Lublin). Himmler's agents in the SS and police, Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Ethnic German Liaison Office), and the Race and Settlement Office, along with Nazi Party officials and the commissars, resettled close to 100,000 Volksdeutsche in the designated colonial spaces of the Ukraine. Together they constructed agricultural communities and established a plethora of occupational training and educational programs. Although Nazi leaders proclaimed the resettlement effort a success, most regional leaders complained that the campaign was a mess. At Hegewald, a Volksdeutsche colony adjacent to Himmler's headquarters near Zhytomyr, district SS-Police officials and NS Party officials (many of them female teachers and midwives who served as "pioneer" welfare workers in the East) found that they could not feed and care for the ethnic Germans, especially for the hundreds of kidnapped children who had been placed in makeshift orphanages. Soviet partisans attacked the Volksdeutsche settlers and raided their food supplies.<sup>42</sup> Lacking the personnel and resources, German regional administrators doubted the success of Nazi colonization, especially on the grandiose scale projected by Himmler and Hitler. The defeat of Hitler's forces by the Red Army and mounting partisan warfare behind the lines cut short Nazi colonization plans. Yet overall, regional leaders realized early in the campaign that developing productive colonies was a far more difficult task than destroying "non-Aryan" populations and cultures.

For the final killing sweeps against the remaining Jewish population carried out in late 1942–43, the SS-Police relied heavily on the German commissars to coordinate the use of local units, trucks, and ammunition and on the Ukrainian police auxiliaries to search the forests, fields, and ghettos for every last Jew in hiding. In December 1942 the Gebietskommissar of Berdychiv warned that any locals who did not give up Jews in hiding or reveal their whereabouts would also be killed.<sup>43</sup> Once those in hiding were discovered, the lowest-level German gendarmes and their Ukrainian auxiliaries shot the Jewish men, women, and children.<sup>44</sup> Over 20,000 Jews who worked on the construction of the autobahn in southern Ukraine were also killed during the Wehrmacht's hasty

retreat from the territory in fall 1943. German engineers and labor foremen from the Organisation Todt participated in the selection of the Jewish labor force; they allowed the “unfit” ones to be killed and worked the able-bodied men and women to death.<sup>45</sup> In total, the Germans and their accomplices murdered more than 650,000 Jews in the territory of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine between the summer of 1941 and spring 1944. In the Zhytomyr District alone, they killed at least 175,000 Jews. Fewer than two percent of Zhytomyr’s Jewish population survived.

Nazi dreams of an Aryan paradise in the East may have inspired Hitler and Himmler to push through a genocidal Final Solution to the Jewish Question. However, there is little evidence of lower-level leaders in the regional outposts of the Ukraine justifying, rationalizing, or referring to the killing of Jews as the first step in German colonization, or “germanization,” of the area. The local implementers of the mass murder do not seem to have been motivated by a coherent ideological vision of the future Lebensraum. The antisemitic ideas and slogans that drove the Holocaust in the Ukraine centered almost exclusively on the alleged political and security threat of Soviet Jews who were branded the bearers of Bolshevism. The murder was presented first (whether in Poland, the Ukraine, France, Serbia, or Germany itself) as a security issue on which the survival of the Reich and Germany’s dominance depended. For the many non-German perpetrators whose future under the Nazi regime was uncertain, killing Jews was motivated by other aims, some short term in nature such as material gain, or long term such as the creation of their own ethnically homogeneous nation. Some perpetrators killed Jews simply because they could and chose to do so. While a general distrust, fear, or even hatred of Jews could be found across European society, antisemitism took on different forms across Europe. Thus in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe, colonialist thinking was only one of an amalgam of destructive ideas that brought about the Holocaust. Resettlement programs influenced the timing of the mass murder in certain regions of the East, whereas the Holocaust engulfed all of German-dominated Europe including territories not subject to settlement by German colonizers.

## **Conclusion**

The ground-level approach of recent research has created a more differentiated picture of the Holocaust, one that has led to a reexamination of the decision-making process and of the context of the Holocaust as it figures in European history. Decision-making must be understood within a dynamic center-periphery context. To be sure, the

formulation of a state policy of genocide such as the Final Solution rested primarily with the leadership. As the historian Ian Kershaw succinctly put it, “No Hitler, No Holocaust.”<sup>46</sup> However, the leadership could pursue such a policy only with the confidence and knowledge that it was possible. Regional leaders such as Reichenau, Jeckeln, Blobel, and the networks that they formed with doctors, engineers, and other professionals demonstrated to superiors that mass murder was possible and even relatively easy to implement.

On a much broader historical level, the history of Nazi conquest and occupation of Zhytomyr and the entire Occupied Eastern Territories resembles a European pattern of imperial conquest, official policies of forced migration or population movement, and mass destruction of indigenous groups. That being noted, however, it must be stressed that the Holocaust occurred in what may have been a colonial context in some parts of the East, but it was neither exclusively nor necessarily a colonial genocide. Recognizing the Holocaust’s links to other genocides and historical patterns in no way diminishes its uniqueness. Instead, such a recognition opens up new areas of research for understanding the particular events of the Holocaust as an outgrowth (not aberration) of German and European history.

## NOTES

I am grateful to the Symposium participants and Center colleagues, especially Paul Shapiro, Robert Ehrenreich, Peter Black, Suzanne Brown-Fleming, Benton Arnovitz, Aleisa Fishman, and Paula Dragosh for their valuable input and expertise. Parts of this paper and similar arguments appear in Wendy Lower's *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, published in association with the USHMM, 2005).

1. Instead of looking for the radical push to genocide in the upper echelons of the Nazi hierarchy, as Thomas Sandkühler put it, the new research focus is “on the respective regional contexts with a view to potential impulses for radicalization originating at the periphery” (Sandkühler, “Anti-Jewish Policy and the Murder of the Jews in the District of Galicia, 1941–42,” in *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies*, ed. Ulrich Herbert [New York: Berghahn, 2000], p. 104). The best recent overview of the Nazi implementation of the Holocaust in the Ukraine is Dieter Pohl's “Schauplatz Ukraine: Der Massenmord an den Juden im Militärverwaltungsgebiet und im Reichskommissariat, 1941–1943,” in *Ausbeutung, Vernichtung, Öffentlichkeit: Neue Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Lagerpolitik*, ed. Norbert Frei, Sybille Steinbacher, and Bernd C. Wagner (Munich: Sauer, 2000), pp. 135–73. The borders are those of today; thus the figure includes Jewish losses in wartime Galicia and Transnistria.

2. Raphaël Lemkin and Hannah Arendt explored Nazism and the Holocaust as part of the European history of imperialism and colonialism, but with few exceptions scholars in the West did not fully develop this interpretation. See Raphaël Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of International Law, 1944); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951); Woodruff D. Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Ihor Kamenetsky, *Secret Nazi Plans for Eastern Europe: A Study of Lebensraum Policies* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1961).

3. Götz Aly, *“Final Solution”: Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews* (New York: Arnold, 1999).

4. Liubar, 70 percent; Olevs'k, 42 percent; Chudniv, 46 percent; Korosten, 35 percent; Khmil'nyk, 63 percent; Bershad, 73 percent; Illintsi, 63 percent; Tomashpil, 62 percent; Tul'chyn, 41 percent—these 1939 figures were compiled in an unpublished 1996 report by the Office of Jewish Affairs and Emigration, Zhytomyr, Ukraine. These figures appear in Mordechai Altshuler's *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust: A Social and Demographic Profile* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1998). The German figures for Ukrainians, Poles, Russians, and ethnic Germans were printed in *Holos Volyni*, 17 December 1941, newspaper collection, Zhytomyr State Archive, Ukraine.

5. The other “Little Jerusalem” to the north was Vilnius. On the history of Jews in the Pale, see Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1988); and John Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

6. Einsatzgruppe C members stressed that the region was “Jewish” and Communist, inciting their more intense manhunts in July and August 1941. See the “Operational Situation Reports” of Einsatzgruppen C, 15 July–12 September 1941, especially the 12 September report, “The Jewish Question,” United States National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), Record Group (RG) 242, T-175, roll (R) 233. As Himmler later stated to his SS men during a meeting in Zhytomyr: “Who would have dreamed ten years ago that we would be holding an SS meeting in a village named Hegewald, situated near the Jewish-Russian city of Shitomir. . . . This Germanic East extending as far as the Urals must be cultivated like a hothouse of Germanic blood. . . the next generations of Germans and history will not remember how it was done, but rather the goal.” See two drafts of Himmler’s speech, with Himmler’s corrections, “Rede des Reichsführer-SS am 16 September 1942 in der Feldkommandostelle vor den Teilnehmern an der SS-und Polizeiführer-Tagung, einberufen von SS-Obergruppenführer Prützmann, Höherer SS-und Polizeiführer Russland-Süd,” NARA RG 242, T-175/R 90/2612809-2612859.

7. Dieter Pohl, “The Murder of Ukraine’s Jews under German Military Administration and in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine,” in “The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization,” ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (manuscript under review). Quote from Pohl taken from page 28 of author’s manuscript, which is an expanded account of the “Schauplatz” essay (see note 1 above) translated into English.

8. Ralf Ogorreck, *Die Einsatzgruppen und die “Genesis der Endlösung”* (Berlin: Metropole, 1996), p. 202.

9. Heydrich to his Einsatzgruppen chiefs, 1 July 1941, in *Die Einsatzgruppen in der besetzten Sowjetunion, 1941/42: Die Tätigkeits- und Lageberichte des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD*, ed. Peter Klein (Berlin: Hentrich, 1997), p. 320. On the pre-Barbarossa guidelines and agreements, see Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Knopf, 1991), pp. 145–66.

10. See Jeckeln’s Einsatzbefehl of 25 July 1941 for Novohrad Volyns’kyi, NARA RG 242 T-501/R 5/000559-60.

11. The Berdychiv ghetto was formed on August 26. On August 27 Jeckeln ordered that 2,500 Jews be taken from the ghetto and shot (German Police Decodes, 27 August 1941, ZIP/MSGP.28/12 September 1941. G.P.D.’s period 13–31 August, p. 5,



“Executions,” NARA RG 457 Box 1386). Order Police Battalions 45 and 320 were assigned to the Berdychiv and Kamianets Podils’kyi aktionen along with Einsatzkommando 5. “Abschlussbericht” Case against Friedrich Becker, Schupo Berdychiv, 204 AR-Z 129/67, 1000. For the massacre on August 26, see German Police Decodes, ZIP G.P.D. 335/30 August 1941, 10 September 1941, NARA RG 457, box 1386. See Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, eds., *The Black Book* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1980), p. 16. See also testimonies and segments of the Extraordinary Commission Report in *Berdichevskaia tragediia*, by Ster Iakovlevich Elisavetskii (Kiev: UkrNIINTI, 1991), pp. 81–85. I am grateful to Asya Vaisman for assisting with the Russian translations.

12. See the Einsatzgruppe C report of 7 October 1941, in *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads’ Campaign against the Jews, July 1941–January 1943*, edited by Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski, and Shmuel Spector (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), p. 17.

13. Raul Hilberg introduced the significant role of the Order Police, and current scholarship has greatly expanded on his work by showing that numerous Order Police units carried out the larger “cleansing” actions. On the role of the Order Police in Barbarossa, see Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), pp. 27–68; see also Edward Westermann, “‘Ordinary Men’ or ‘Ideological Soldiers,’” *German Studies Review* 21 (1998), pp. 41–68; and Jürgen Matthäus, “What About the ‘Ordinary Men’?: The German Order Police and the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 10:2 (1996), pp. 134–50. On the decision-making and origins of the Holocaust, see Christopher Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). More recent regional studies follow Browning’s view that two fundamental decisions were made between late July and mid-December 1941, one against Soviet Jewry and the other against all of European Jewry. See Herbert, *National Socialist Extermination Policies*. For a contrasting view of the evolution of the policy that stresses the leadership’s clear intentions as of early 1941, see Breitman, *Architect of Genocide*.

14. Affidavit of Erwin Schulz, 26 May 1947, NARA RG 238 (Nuremberg Trials) NO-3644, vol. 4, pp. 135–36. Schulz, born in 1900, joined the Schutzpolizei in 1923, then switched to political-intelligence work in the SD in 1935. After March 1938, he helped establish Gestapo offices in Austria and became the inspector of the Sipo-SD in the Sudetenland. In Operation Barbarossa he was the oldest of the Einsatzkommando leaders. Prior to joining the Nazi movement, he participated in crushing the Spartacist revolt and was in the Freikorps. See Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten: Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002), pp. 573–78.

15. Ogorreck, *Die Einsatzgruppen und die "Genesis der Endlösung,"* p. 202.

16. See Peter Witte et al., eds., *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers 1941/1942* (Hamburg: Christians, 1999), p. 191; Commander of the Order Police in Ukraine, Otto von Oelhafen testimony, Nuremberg, May 1947, NARA RG 238 (Nuremberg Trials) roll 50, m1019. Secrecy was also addressed. A lower-level SS-Police official, Ernst Consee, who was in charge of recording the events of SK4a into its official war diary, revealed after the war that the “shooting of Jewish children was an issue that was not to be recorded in the war diary” (Consee statement of 6 September 1965, Trial of Kuno Callsen et al., 207 AR-Z 419/62, Bundesarchiv Aussenstelle Ludwigsburg [hereafter BAL]). See also Klaus-Michael Mallmann, “Die Türöffner der ‘Endlösung’: Zur Genesis des Genozids,” in *Die Gestapo im Zweiten Weltkrieg: “Heimatfront” und besetztes Europa*, ed. Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2000), pp. 437–63.

17. Richard Breitman, “Himmler’s Police Auxiliaries in the Occupied Soviet Territories,” *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual*, no. 7 (New York: Philosophical Library), pp. 23–39.

18. Himmler specified that these auxiliaries would also be used in mobile battalions outside their native countries; thus Lithuanian (Battalion 11 stationed in Korosten) and Latvian (Battalion 25 stationed at Ovruch) auxiliaries were active in the Zhytomyr region in 1942–43 (NARA RG 242 T-454/R 100/699). On the army formation of Ukrainian Hilfspolizei and militia groups, see 11 July 1941 order, NARA RG 242 T-501/R 5/000482–3; and 14 September 1941 order, NARA RG 242 T-315/R 2216/000098-100. Another account, though propagandistic, on the formation of Ukrainian auxiliaries is available in *Deutsche-Ukraine Zeitung* (Lutsk), 2 October 1942, Library of Congress Newspaper Collection, Washington, DC.

19. This particular period was the heyday of army-SS cooperation in anti-Jewish aktionen. Jeckeln had the previous day (August 6) temporarily given over his command of the 1st SS Brigade (IR 8/10) to Sixth Army Field Marshal Reichenau. See Fritz Baade et al., eds., *Unsere Ehre Heisst Treue: Kriegstagebuch des Kommandostabes Reichsführer SS* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1965), p. 24.

20. See eyewitness statements from a postwar trial of a former Wehrmacht soldier, P. A., Landeskriminalamt Nordrhein-Westfalen, 27 February 1964 and 26 January 1966. This statement, photographs, and an essay on the crimes of the Sixth Army are presented by Bernd Boll and Hans Safrian in “Auf dem Weg nach Stalingrad: Die 6. Armee 1941/42,” printed in the exhibit catalog, *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944*, ed. Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1996), pp. 270–72.

21. According to the statement of J. A. Bauer, Blobel’s driver, the staff of

*Wochenschau* (weekly newsreels of propaganda from the front) was present at the executions (statement of 29 January 1965, Callsen Trial, 207 AR-Z 419/62, BAL).

22. See Hans Mommsen's "Preussentum und Nationalsozialismus," in *Der Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Ideologie und Herrschaft*, ed. Wolfgang Benz, Hans Buchheim, and Hans Mommsen (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1993), pp. 29–41. Blobel's personnel file is reprinted in *Archives of the Holocaust: An International Collection of Selected Documents*, ed. Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton, vol. 11 (New York: Garland, 1989), p. 70.

23. Panning later returned to the region in July 1943 as part of a forensics commission that examined the disinterred bodies of victims of Stalin's purges in Vinnitsia (Friedrich Herber, *Gerichtsmedizin unterm Hakenkreuz* [Leipzig: Miltitzke, 2002], pp. 274–76).

24. See August Häfner, of SK4a, statement of 9 June 1965. Häfner also claimed that the Wehrmacht soldiers clubbed the Jews who were awaiting execution so that when they arrived at the pit, they were covered in blood (Callsen Trial, 207 AR-Z 419/62, BAL).

25. See Ernst Wilhelm Boernecke statement of 5 November 1965, Callsen Trial. According to one account, the brains of the victims were spraying the shooters; one shooter from SK4a named Janssen returned to the Reich to treat a skin rash on his face (August Häfner, statement of 10 June 1965, Callsen Trial).

26. A more common pattern of Army-SD collaboration is illustrated in the actions that occurred in Berdychiv before Jeckeln arrived and dominated the scene. See Ehrenburg and Grossman, p. 14. See also "Abschlussbericht," Case against Friedrich Becker, 204 AR-Z 129/67, BAL.

27. The underlines are in the original text; the italics are mine. Einsatzgruppe C Ereignismeldung, 17 September 1941, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (hereafter USHMM) Acc. 1999.A.1096 (also available at NARA RG 242, T-175, R233, frame 2722384).

28. On Rasch, see Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1981); and Ronald Headland, *Messages of Murder: A Study of the Reports of the Einsatzgruppen of the Security Police and the Security Service, 1941–1943* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992).

29. Heinrich Huhn statement of 13 October 1965, Callsen Trial, ZSt 207 AR-Z 419/62, BAL.

30. See Aly, "*Final Solution*"; Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung*:

*Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993); and Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Hitlers Ostkrieg und die deutsche Siedlungspolitik* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991). See also Robert Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy, 1939–1945: A History of the Reich Commission for the Strengthening of Germanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957); Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); and Isabel Heinemann, “*Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut*”: *Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003).

31. Müller, *Hitlers Ostkrieg*, p. 8.

32. Doris Bergen argues that the “tenuousness of the notion of ‘Volksdeutsche’ actually contributed to the intensification of anti-Semitism.” Even Himmler told his men at Hegewald to remember that the current sacrifices and hardships they endured in the East were heroic contributions toward Germany’s future Lebensraum. But the more common rationale “on paper” for killing Jews was “to secure the Reich”; this Nazi approach provided an immediate, convincing motivation for actions against the Jews, whom the Nazis deemed the most threatening. See Doris L. Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’ and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939–1945,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29 (1994), p. 578. The intersection of Volksdeutsche resettlement programs and the persecution of Jews is more apparent in Poland, especially in the Warthegau region. See Sybille Steinbacher, “*Musterstadt*” *Auschwitz: Germanisierungspolitik und Judenmord in Ostoberschlesien* (Munich: Saur, 2000); Valdis Lumans, “A Reassessment of Volksdeutsche and Jews in the Volhynia-Galicia-Narew Resettlement,” in *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy*, ed. Daniel Rogers and Alan Steinweis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), pp. 81–100.

33. In the summer of 1942, when Zhytomyr’s SD Chief, Franz Razesberger, issued a verbal order to kill the remaining Jews in Berdychiv (many of whom had labored at Hegewald), he explained the murder as a “security precaution.” On the Razesberger order, see *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen: Sammlung Deutscher Strafurteile wegen Nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen, 1945–1966*, band 16, Case against Knop et al. (Amsterdam: University Press Amsterdam, 1976), pp. 345–49.

34. Situation report of General Commissar Ernst Leyser, 30 June 1943, NARA, RG 238 (Nuremberg Trials) reel A213/088693.

35. Koch had asked Oelhafen to make Rivne “Judenfrei” before his arrival; when asked about this aktion after the war, Oelhafen told Nuremberg interrogators that “Rowno das war ein kleines Nest, 500–600” (“Rivne, that was a small nest”; “nest” in this context could mean “dump” or “hole in the ground”). Actually, the number of Jews killed was

15,000. Oelhafen commanded Order Police Regiments 10 and 11 and was BdO Ukraine from 1 September 1941 to September 1942 (interrogated at Nuremberg, 7 May 1947 and 28 May 1947, NARA RG 238, roll 50, m1019). See Shmuel Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews, 1941–1944* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990).

36. Klemm statement of 22 August 1962, Ludwigsburg, 204 AR-Z 129/67 band 3, p. 830; Statement of Franz Razesberger, 19 January 1957, Ludwigsburg, 204 AR-Z 8/80, band 3, p. 207; band 3, p. 830; Klemm memo about uniform to Rosenberg, 12 July 1943, NARA RG 242, T-454/R 91/000873.

37. Wartime letters sent from Ukraine to Reich, NARA RG242, T-454/R 92/000193–99.

38. Karel Berkhoff, “Hitler’s Clean Slate: Everyday Life in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, 1941–1944” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1998), p. 505.

39. Himmler-Berger correspondence, 28 July 1942, in *Reichsfuehrer!: Briefe an und von Himmler*, ed. Helmut Heiber (Stuttgart: DVA, 1968), p. 134; Himmler order concerning the Jews of the General Government, dated 19 July 1942, 19/1757, Bundesarchiv NS, Koblenz.

40. Records of the Polish Main Commission Warsaw, Commander of the Sipo SD Volhynia-Podolia 1942, reports dated 8 August 1942 and 15 August 1942, INRW Zbior Zespolow Szczatkowych Jednostek SS i Policji-Sygnatura 77. I am grateful to Martin Dean for these documents.

41. Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–1944* (New York: St. Martin’s in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000), p. 96.

42. The Hegewald settlement was promoted in the *Deutsche Ukraine Zeitung* (Lutsk), 5 May 1943, Library of Congress Newspaper Collection, Washington, DC. For a comparison of facilities in the Ukrainian Volksdeutsche settlements, see the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle report dated 3 August 1943, NARA RG 242 T-175/R 72/2589157; Wendy Lower, “New Ordering of Space and Race: Nazi Colonial Dreams in Zhytomyr Ukraine, 1941–1944,” *German Studies Review* 25:2 (2002), pp. 227–44. For Poland and the specific roles of Reich women, see Elisabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

43. Collection of anti-Jewish orders, propaganda leaflets, and other materials from the Judaica Institute, Kyiv, microfilm copies held at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (currently being accessioned). I am grateful to Vadim Altskan for bringing this material to my attention and assisting with the Russian translations.

44. For accounts of Jews who were discovered in hiding and shot on the spot by local gendarmes and Ukrainian Schutz männer, see SS and police district leader Behrens memo of 30 September 1942, ZSA, P1182-1-6. See numerous reports of January–July 1943 and October–November 1943, SS and police district leaders of Koziatyn and Ruzhyn, ZSA P1182-1-6 and P1452-1-2.

45. Hermann Kaienburg, “Jüdische Arbeitslager an der ‘Strasse der SS,’” *1999: Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20 Jh.* (1996).

46. Ian Kershaw, lecture, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 11 January 2001.

## SOVIET JEWISH WAR PHOTOJOURNALISTS CONFRONT THE HOLOCAUST

David Shneer

In January 1945 Evgenii Khaldei (1917–97), a young photographer working for the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), entered Budapest with the Red Army after a fierce fight against German troops.<sup>1</sup> As the lead photojournalist for the largest news agency in the Soviet Union, Khaldei's job that day was to photograph the glory of Soviet victory and the gruesomeness of the Nazi occupation of Budapest.



“Jewish Couple,” February 1945 (Evgenii Khaldei,  
courtesy of Anna Khaldei and the Union of Art Photographers, Moscow)

But among his many shots of smiling Soviet soldiers and bombed-out buildings was another photograph titled “Jewish Couple” that in recent years has become one of Khaldei's most famous images. In an interview, Khaldei described photographing the couple:

I saw them walking down the street. I was in a black leather coat, and at first they were afraid—they thought I was from the SS. I walked over and tore off their stars, first the woman's, then the man's. She got even more frightened. She said, "No, no, you can't do that, we have to wear them!" I told them that the Russians were here. I told them, "Ikh bin oykh a yid. Sholem Aleichem" (I'm Jewish too. Hello.)" Then she cried.<sup>2</sup>

As a TASS photojournalist, Khaldei traveled all over the country with the Red Army during the horrible first year of the Nazi occupation of the Soviet Union in 1941–42 and then followed the troops through the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe from 1943 until VE Day in May 1945. Khaldei was just one of many photojournalists, to this day relatively unknown outside the former Soviet Union, who built their careers documenting Soviet victories and Nazi atrocities on the Eastern Front.

Khaldei was also just one of many Soviet photojournalists who was Jewish. From Max Alpert, a lead photographer for TASS, and Abram Shterenberg for *Novosti* to Mark Markov-Grinberg, Dmitrii Baltermants, Arkadii Shaykhet, and Georgii Zelma, who were the lead photographers for a variety of publications, Jewish photographers were foremost in creating the popular images of the war for the Soviet population. They were hired as photojournalists to create a visual record of the Soviet war experience. But in the process, they also created the visual record of what has come to be called the Holocaust .

During the war, Khaldei documented the declaration of war on June 22, 1941, the Nazi firebombing of Murmansk, battles throughout the south, and the Red Army's path of liberation through Eastern Europe and Germany.



"Raising the Red Flag over the Reichstag," May 2, 1945 (Evgenii Khaldei, courtesy of Anna Khaldei and the Union of Art Photographers, Moscow)



His photograph of the raising of the Red Flag over the Reichstag remains one of the war's best-known images and became the iconic image of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany.

But what about Khaldei's photographs of the liberation of Budapest? Some historians have suggested that his shot of a Jewish couple in Budapest was his contribution to documenting the Holocaust. In Khaldei exhibits in the United States and Israel, this photograph frequently garners the most attention, because of its emotional power and because the subject is explicitly Jewish.



“Murdered Jews in a Synagogue in Budapest,” February 1945 (Evgenii Khaldei, courtesy of Anna Khaldei and the Union of Art Photographers, Moscow)

People read “Jewish Couple” and the graphic image of Jewish victims of mass execution in Budapest as Holocaust photographs, while they read “Raising the Red

Flag over the Reichstag” as a Soviet photograph. But Khaldei did not place these photographs into such starkly differentiated narratives. For Soviet photojournalists, Jewish destruction was part of the Nazi assault on the Soviet Union.

Like Khaldei, Mark Markov-Grinberg (1907–) helped create the visual record of heroic Soviet victory and Nazi atrocities. He trained with the first-generation Soviet photographers—like Shaykhet, Alpert, and Semyon Fridland, all of whom were Jewish. In the mid-1930s Markov-Grinberg earned a prestigious position as a staff photographer for TASS. During the war he was drafted, and in July 1943 he became an army correspondent for the newspaper *The Fighter’s Word* (*Slovo boitsa*).<sup>3</sup>



“Kursk Tank Battle,” 1943 (Mark Markov-Grinberg, courtesy of Mark Markov-Grinberg and the Union of Art Photographers, Moscow)

If Khaldei’s iconic photo is the raising of the Red Flag, Markov-Grinberg’s shows soldiers huddled in a trench with a tank literally driving over them (and him)

during the Kursk tank battle in 1943, the biggest tank battle in history.<sup>4</sup> But one of his lesser-known photographs is of the liberation of the Stutthof Concentration Camp that he titled “This Is Unforgettable.” Markov leaves unanswered the question of what “this” is.



“This Is Unforgettable,” Stutthof, 1945 (Mark Markov-Grinberg, courtesy of Paul Harbaugh)

Finally, Georgii Zelma (1906–81), another Soviet Jewish photographer, spent his early career doing documentary photo layouts of Central Asia, where he was born. During the war he created the heroic story of Stalingrad that became a rallying cry throughout the Soviet Union and the world.<sup>5</sup> In fact, both the 1949 Soviet film *The Battle of Stalingrad*, and the 2001 Hollywood feature *Enemy at the Gates* based their staging and set designs on Zelma’s photographs. I found his “Holocaust” photograph—a panorama of Majdanek that he took when the Red Army liberated the camp in August 1944—buried deep in his personal archive.<sup>6</sup>



“Majdanek, near Lublin,” August 1944 (Georgii Zelma,  
Courtesy of Michael Mattis and Paul and Teresa Harbaugh)

These photographs were used as evidence of Nazi crimes. We many now also recognize these as evidence of the Holocaust. But at the moment when the camera shutter clicked, did these three photographers understand their photographs to be testaments to a particular Jewish tragedy?

### **When Did the Soviet Union “Discover” the Holocaust?**

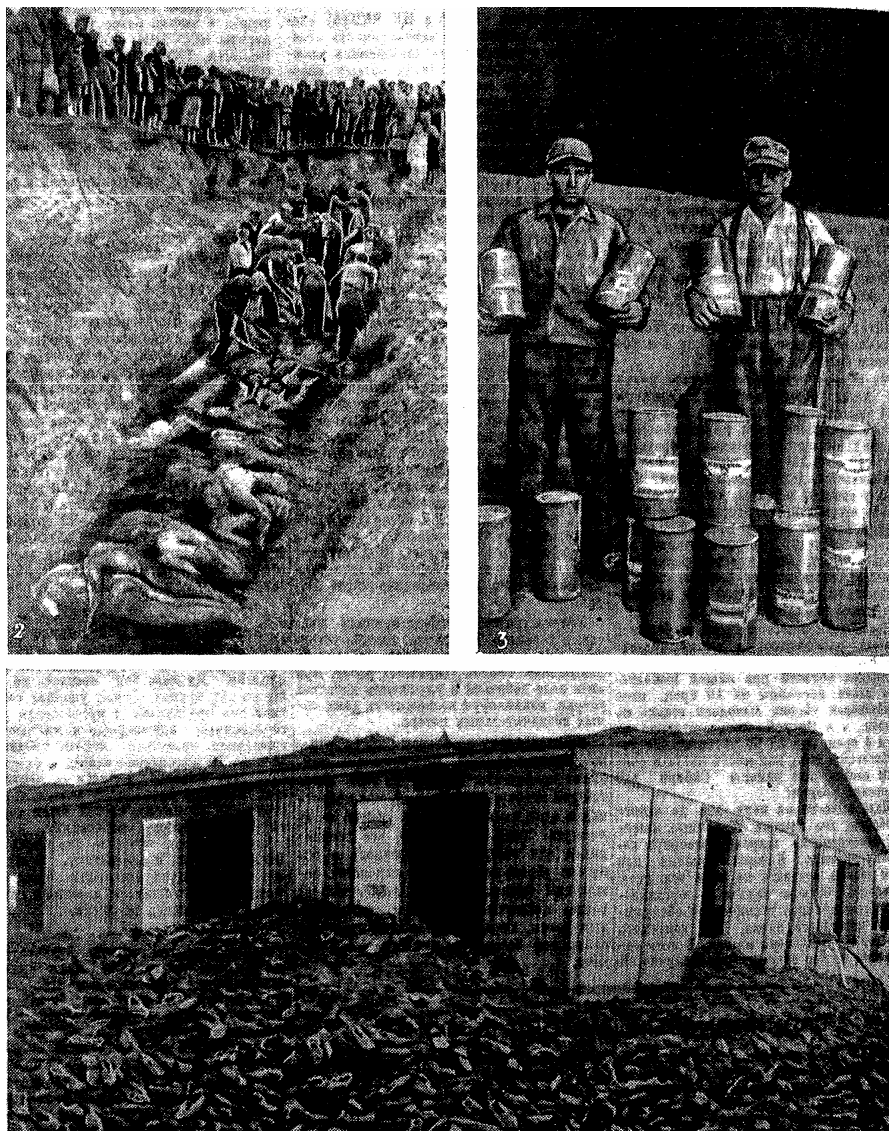
Ideologically and politically, the Soviet Union did not recognize the Holocaust. That is, it did not create a particular memory of the special persecution of the Jews by Nazi Germany and its allies. The historian of the Soviet Union, Amir Weiner, has convincingly shown that there were specific political and ideological policy shifts that erased particular Jewish suffering during and shortly after the war. Despite this official incorporation of the Jewish story into the larger Soviet one, some writers and intellectuals in the Soviet Union did focus on the special persecution of Jews. Near the end of the war, Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, two of the most well-known Soviet print journalists, compiled the *Black Book*, which documented Nazi atrocities against Jews on Soviet soil, and the *Red Book*, which celebrated Jewish participation in the Red Army.<sup>7</sup> Neither book was published in the Soviet Union. Similarly, Khaldei’s photograph of the Jewish couple was not published in Russian-language Soviet

publications.<sup>8</sup> The photographic record of the war shows that, like Ehrenburg and Grossman, photojournalists were bearing witness to and aesthetically representing several events simultaneously: Soviet victory, Nazi atrocity, and Jewish tragedy. Their editors published and fostered the first two narratives, but the final narrative, like the fate of the *Black Book*, was not told publicly. Photos of Majdanek and Stutthof were “Nazi atrocity” photographs and had nothing to do with Jews in particular.

These photographers were among the first people in the world to visually document Nazi atrocities, because many events that have come to be called the Holocaust actually took place on Soviet soil. The brutal battle for Stalingrad, the tank battles at Kursk and Kerch, and the discovery of Nazi mass murders in Rostov-on-Don, Odessa, and many other cities unfolded before the Red Army and its journalists, both print and photographic. Some, but not nearly all, of this story was published for the Soviet reader. The editors and their supervisors making the final decisions about what images and stories to disseminate had to strike a balance. Publishing too many atrocity photos would have emphasized victimhood, rather than victory, and might have lessened the population’s resolve to continue fighting the war. But at some point, repeated exposure to visual images of Nazi atrocities made them less shocking to the Soviet audience.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Soviet readers, the American and British audiences had neither the firsthand experience nor the early visual record of Nazi atrocities. It took the publication of gruesome photographs of Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, and Buchenwald in major American and British news outlets in April–May 1945 to convince people that these events actually took place. And even then, it took a while for photographs to function as proof. As late as May 1945, eighty-four percent of the American public still believed that stories about Nazi atrocities were exaggerated.<sup>10</sup>

But the graphic photos of Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, and Buchenwald were not the first camp photos that people had seen. The Red Army had liberated extermination camps and extermination sites in Poland and Belorussia in the summer of 1944. Of all of them, the liberation of Majdanek had the greatest impact, as photographs circulated worldwide. Samari Gurarii (1916–), a Soviet Jewish photojournalist also working for *Izvestiia*, captured images of bones and empty gas canisters that were splashed onto the pages of *Izvestiia* and other Soviet newspapers.<sup>11</sup>



“German Death Camp near Lublin” (Samarii Gurarii, *Izvestiia*, August 12, 1944)

At the end of August, *Life* magazine published a pictorial spread of Majdanek that provided pictures of ovens with granulated bones.<sup>12</sup> But in terms of documentary evidence and emotional appeal, the Soviet photos of Majdanek, Sobibor, and Belzec from 1944 did not capture people’s attention in the same way that American photos of Dachau and other German camps did in 1945. Why not?

First, and this is a dark irony of the Holocaust, the extermination camps in Poland did a more complete job of extermination—of both bodies and the relics of destruction—than did the concentration camps in Germany. As the Wehrmacht retreated from Poland back to Germany, it brought many of its prisoners back on death

marches, like the one described by Elie Wiesel in *Night*. Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, and Buchenwald, which had been concentration camps for a wide variety of prisoners throughout the war, became, effectively, death camps in 1945, as people died en masse from disease and starvation. At the same time, the extermination camps of Poland were virtually empty when the Red Army liberated them. There was little moving imagery to capture, and few material relics with which to memorialize the millions industrially gassed in Poland. Photos of gas canisters were not, and are not now, as compelling as color photographs of American soldiers staring at heaps of bodies at Dachau or a picture of emaciated survivors picking through the detritus of the Holocaust in Bergen-Belsen.

Second, because the extermination camps were liberated by a Communist country just as the Cold War was developing in the final years of the war, American and British audiences distrusted the Soviet record. Many in the West felt that although in the United States and England, photojournalism documented “the truth,” in the Soviet Union photographers were chiefly propagandists. *Life* magazine even undercut its own photographic story of Majdanek by doubting the “Russian sources that gave the information.”<sup>13</sup>

The political scientist and historian of Soviet Jewry Zvi Gitelman has argued that the Soviet Union had a harder time recognizing a particular Jewish tragedy during the war precisely because Nazi atrocities and mass destruction took place extensively on Soviet soil.<sup>14</sup> The murder of two million Soviet Jews could easily be absorbed into the staggering twenty–thirty million Soviet deaths overall, especially since Soviet newspaper readers had spent three years reading about and experiencing Nazi atrocities committed against the Soviet people.

So is either Markov’s photograph of a hand in an oven at Stutthof or Khaldei’s photograph of bodies in a synagogue a “Holocaust photograph”? Were they taking photographs to bear witness to and create a memory of a particular Jewish story? Khaldei’s photo of bodies with Jewish stars is easier to mark as an explicitly Jewish photograph. It is this explicit marking that scholars give as the reason it was not published in the Russian-language press. But what about atrocity photos without explicit Jewish markings? Does the fact that they were situated in a Pan-Soviet context mean that the photographers, or the readers for that matter, did not read a Jewish narrative into these images?

When Markov-Grinberg took that picture, he was bearing witness to several tragedies simultaneously. As a Jew, he and other Jewish journalists covering the war saw their own personal and national tragedies in what they witnessed, and each of them used his tools of journalism to document this story, even if the photographs and the *Black Book* were not published, and even if these photojournalists saw themselves as Soviet journalists, not as Jewish documentarians.<sup>15</sup>

No matter how the photographers and their readers personally responded to these photographs, officially many of the images became icons of the Great Patriotic War.<sup>16</sup> Zelma's landscape of Stalingrad became the official visual record of the battle. Khaldei's famous photograph of Marshal Zhukov on his horse inspired a statue that today still sits at the entrance to Red Square. And yet, despite the iconic status these images achieved as emblems of Soviet victory, after the war many of these photographers experienced their Jewishness directly during the antisemitic anticommunist campaigns of 1948–52. Khaldei lost his job; Markov-Grinberg shed the second part of his name. Zelma's work was not exhibited in the Soviet Union from 1948 to 1958.<sup>17</sup> In the early 1960s, during the thaw in cultural policy, each of these photographers experienced something of a renaissance. Dmitrii Baltermants's series of photographs, *Grief*, was republished and circulated widely for the first time in 1965.<sup>18</sup>



“Grief,” original, 1942 (Dmitrii Baltermants, Courtesy of Michael Mattis)  
This is the 1965 republished version.



Zelma's Stalingrad work began being shown throughout the Soviet Union and Communist bloc, and in 1961, the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko published his famous poem *Babi Yar*, which opened a tiny amount of political space to begin talking about a particular Jewish memory of the war.

Susan Sontag has argued that images “do not tell [people] anything . . . they were not already primed to believe. In contrast, images offering evidence that contradicts cherished pieties are invariably dismissed as having been staged for the camera.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, “photographs cannot create a moral position.”<sup>20</sup> They merely reinforce what we already believe. Sontag reminds us that we situate photographs in our own ideological world and with our prior experience. A reading audience contextualizes a photograph both by what it has already seen and by what it has not yet seen.

The Soviet reading audience could integrate photographs of the Holocaust into the already developing canon of Soviet heroism and victory and Nazi atrocities and defeat, which American audiences had not yet seen. Newspapers and other press outlets had shunned graphic battle images, because of an unstated code of propriety. That is, until Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, and Buchenwald. Photos of Dachau with trainloads of bodies and ghostly survivors presented big questions to newspaper editors about the sensitivities of their readers. Despite Sontag's bold claim that photographs do not create moral positions, the impact of these Holocaust photographs was unparalleled. Sontag herself describes her first encounter with these photographs as life altering. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum designers placed them at the opening of the permanent exhibit. Unlike Dachau photographs by American photographers, which documented the emotional revulsion these journalists felt on discovering concentration camps, Soviet photojournalists had already spent three years both documenting and experiencing atrocities. Khaldei's entire family, for example, was murdered by the Nazis in 1941 in his hometown of Stalino (Yuzovka). He *had* already seen.

Photographs, like memorials, are contextual. They are created and seen at particular times and places by particular people with biases and prejudices. Once an image is photographed, it is up to the viewer to make meaning out of it. James Young, who has written extensively about Holocaust memorials, reminds us that “memorials remain inert and amnesiac, dependent on visitors for whatever memory they finally produce.”<sup>21</sup> Some of these photographs have already had a long history of “being read”—by the photographers who took them, the editors who decided which ones to

publish, the newspaper reader who saw them, and more recently, by museum visitors and gallery-goers around the world. Others were only living in the private collections of these photographers until recently

Here, in this article, Markov-Grinberg's "This Is Unforgettable" becomes a Holocaust photograph. On the editor's layout table during the war it was a Nazi atrocity photograph. In the hands of the individual Soviet reader, it meant many different things. But even at the time, when "the Holocaust" did not exist conceptually, these Soviet Jewish photographers understood that their photographs were not simply filler accompanying news stories. They would become documents of a crime and memorials of personal and collective tragedies. Even if the editors shunned a particularly Jewish reading of Nazi atrocity photos, even if the photographers may not have expected their photographs to be read "Jewishly," Markov-Grinberg, Zelma, Baltermants, Khaldei, and other Soviet Jewish photographers did take Holocaust photographs, even if only today, we understand them to be so.

## NOTES

1. The photographs and some of the archival material for this project come from various sources, each of which has helped me move this project forward. I would like to thank first and foremost Paul Harbaugh, and also Michael Mattis, Howard Schickler, the Markov-Grinberg family, Maria Zhotikova, Tatiana Baltermants, *Fotosoyuz*, and *Russkoe Pole* photo gallery. Finally, thank you to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for inviting me to present this material at the symposium on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.

2. Alice Nakhimovsky and Alexander Nakhimovsky, eds., *Witness to History: The Photographs of Yevgeny Khaldei* (New York: Aperture Publications, 1997), p. 10. In the book, the Yiddish phrase comes out in Hebrew, “Shalom,” an unlikely rejoinder, given that Khaldei did not speak Hebrew. The version in the documentary film about Khaldei includes the more likely Yiddish version. See the 1997 film *Evgueni Khaldei: Photographer under Stalin*.

3. Biographical information on Mark Markov-Grinberg comes from several sources including personal conversations with his family and friends, archival materials from the Howard Schickler Gallery in New York, the Markov-Grinberg archive in Scarsdale, New York, and a video interview with Markov-Grinberg. Markov-Grinberg is one of the only war photographers still alive. Because of Grinberg’s poor health, I was unable to interview him.

4. Markov-Grinberg printed this photograph in 2003 and included it in his top ten photographs of his career.

5. *Georgii Zel’ma: Izbrannye fotografii* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Planeta, 1978). See also the as yet unpublished catalog of the Georgii Zelma exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico, which includes several excellent articles about Zelma.

6. “Majdanek,” *World War II Photographs*, Georgii Zelma Archive, managed by Michael Mattis, Scarsdale, New York.

7. See, among others, Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

8. The wartime Soviet Yiddish newspaper *Unity (Eynikayt)* did publish several of Khaldei’s Budapest photographs, “Jewish Couple” included. The crafting of a particular Soviet Jewish war narrative in Yiddish is the topic of my forthcoming article.

9. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), p. 82.

10. Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 142. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Web site has the best collection of American and British photographs ([www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)).

11. "Nemetskaia fabrika smerti pod liublinom," *Izvestiia*, 12 August 1944, p. 3. This image comes from the original newspaper and thus was printed on poor quality paper that had deteriorated by the time I reproduced the image. See also Samarii Gurarii, *Eto istoriia* (Moscow: Verein, 1995).

12. Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, pp. 50–51.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

14. Zvi Gitelman, "Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 14–42.

15. These photographers took pictures that would foster revenge in Red Army troops and would also become part of the Soviet case against Nazi Germany. Many of these photojournalists were involved in the Special State Commission Establishing and Investigating the Crimes of the German-Fascist Occupiers and Their Collaborators. Within that commission there were special divisions for each place in which atrocities were discovered. The one for investigating Majdanek was called the Polish-Soviet Special Commission to Investigate German Crimes Carried Out in the Camp of Annihilation at Majdanek in Lublin. See USHMM Archives, RG 22.001-22.007 and the special archival file "Majdanek" in the USHMM Archives.

16. In the Soviet Union, the war from June 22, 1941, to May 9, 1945, was referred to as the Great Patriotic War until the 1990s. In the 2000s, that term is only used when referring to historical references about the war and in contemporary commemorations of the event. In other words, although the Victory Memorial and Museum in Moscow refers to the event as the Great Patriotic War, most Russian scholars and journalists now use the term *Second World War*.

17. *Georgii Zel'ma: Izbrannye fotografii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Planeta, 1978), p. 10.

18. Several *Grief* photographs appeared in the photo magazine *Ogonek* in March 1942, but the photographs became known as evidence of Baltermants' photographic skill only with their wide circulation in the 1960s as art photographs.

19. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 10.

20. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (1977; repr., New York: Picador, 2001), pp. 17–19.

21. James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), p. xiii.



## **GHETTOS IN THE OCCUPIED SOVIET UNION: THE NAZI “SYSTEM”**

**Martin Dean**

The predominant image of the Holocaust in the German occupied territories of the Soviet Union is that of the mass shootings organized by the Einsatzgruppen. The enormity of more than 600,000 people shot within the first ten months of the German invasion can lead to the false assumption that the majority of Jews caught behind German lines were murdered within a few days or weeks.<sup>1</sup>

In hundreds of locations, however, the first sweep of shootings in the summer and fall of 1941 was only the start of Nazi terror. In many towns and cities, especially in western Belorussia and western Ukraine, the German administration established ghettos and forced labor camps where more than 700,000 Jews who survived the initial massacres were confined and put to work.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the ghettos were then liquidated in brutal clearance actions during 1942, with a number of “work ghettos” surviving into 1943.

Until recently there was not even a rough estimate of the number of ghettos created during the occupation within the post-1945 borders of the Soviet Union. Gudrun Schwarz, in her authoritative study of the Nazi camp system published in 1989–90, admitted candidly that the number of ghettos in the occupied and annexed territories of the then Soviet Union was “not known to this day.”<sup>3</sup> In English, Roman Mogilanski’s *Ghetto Anthology*, published in 1985, listed sixty-two “Nazi death-traps for Jews in pre-war Polish Eastern territories, presently part of the USSR,” which more or less represented the state of knowledge prior to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup> Schwarz did list thirty-one ghettos for Eastern Galicia (Distrikt Galizien), reflecting the order issued by Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer Friedrich Wilhelm Krüger in November 1942, and also fifteen for Lithuania [*sic*], although several of these were in areas that belonged to Belorussia both before and after the German occupation.<sup>5</sup> Schwarz lists sixty ghettos for Romanian-occupied Transnistria but gives only a handful of ghettos for Belorussia and the Ukraine, not even mentioning that there were also ghettos on occupied Russian territory.<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately, since 1991 the extent of our knowledge has improved. The opening of the Soviet archives, increased access to postwar criminal investigations, and the collection of further testimonies and eyewitness accounts have made it possible to research the topic in greater detail. In particular, considerable progress is now being made in piecing

together the history of the many smaller ghettos from scattered archival collections in various languages. For example, Shmuel Spector, in his groundbreaking regional study of the Holocaust in the former Polish province of Volhynia, included a table of forty-six ghettos and establishment and liquidation dates for each, as well as population estimates for 1941 and 1942 for many of them.<sup>7</sup>

During the 1990s Spector's work was followed by several detailed regional studies, especially by German authors, that have helped disseminate a much more refined knowledge of the essential facts and sources, although most did not follow Spector in specifically listing all ghettos in tabular form. For example, for Belorussia, the work of Christian Gerlach, Shalom Cholawksy, Leonid Smilovitsky, and others has greatly increased our knowledge of where ghettos existed.<sup>8</sup> Cholawsky gives a figure of 106 ghettos for "western Bielorussia," broken down according to the former Polish provinces (Wilno, forty-four; Polesie, twenty-seven; Nowogrodek, thirty-five), but unfortunately he does not provide a full list of these.<sup>9</sup>

For Eastern Galicia, Dieter Pohl's impressive research provides a sound basis for identifying most of the main ghettos, supplemented by other important regional studies.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise, the Ukraine is unfortunately less well served than Belorussia. Wendy Lower recently completed her study of the Zhytomyr region (Generalbezirk), and Alexander Prusin has started work on a similar study of the Kiev region, while Pohl has also published several essays looking at aspects of the Holocaust throughout the Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> Most useful for my specific purposes have been Aleksandr Kruglov's encyclopedic efforts, which provide an excellent synthesis of the Soviet Extraordinary Commission reports together with the main German sources, to which must still be added available material from Jewish sources, especially the firsthand accounts in the many *Yizkor* books.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of identifying ghettos, the recent publication of the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Life* by Yad Vashem has also proved invaluable.<sup>13</sup> The short entries here mention many ghettos unknown in the general literature or other previous encyclopedias, although the absence of any references is a significant shortcoming. Finally, Vadim Doubson has recently published his findings about the existence of twenty-eight "ghettos" on the territory of the Russian Federation, also providing opening and closing dates as well as ghetto population figures.<sup>14</sup> The combination of these vital new sources and research has radically changed estimates for the number of ghettos on occupied Soviet territory.

Also worthy of mention are two recent official archival publications, directories of



camps and ghettos prepared by the archival authorities in Belarus and Ukraine.<sup>15</sup> These publications attempt to list all known ghettos in these countries, primarily pulled together from a detailed examination of the reports of the Soviet Extraordinary Commission and other local archival sources. The great strength of the volumes is their logical organization by district, the inclusion of archival references, and usually a brief summary of the contents of the available sources. Unfortunately, both collections are marred by some blurring of the distinctions between ghettos and forced labor camps for Jews (and other camps), such that a critical reading is necessary for their use. Another useful volume, by Marat Botvinnik, documents Holocaust memorial sites in Belarus and also has considerable information on ghettos, much of it unique to this volume.<sup>16</sup> Finally, I should add that the detailed research of other individual scholars, most notably Daniel Romanovsky and Alexander Prusin, has also helped me identify several smaller (and often short-lived) ghettos in eastern Belorussia and central Ukraine, adding further to our knowledge of the Holocaust in these regions.<sup>17</sup>

Given this considerable recent progress, it is opportune that the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies is now preparing its encyclopedia volume of all ghettos under German occupation, intended both as a guide for scholars and as a document of the sites of the Holocaust. It will form the second volume of the Center's larger multivolume encyclopedia project of concentration camps, ghettos, and other places of detention in Nazi-dominated Europe, funded with the support of the Bader Foundation. Ghettos under satellite control, especially those in Transnistria and Greater Hungary, will be dealt with in a subsequent volume, covering all the camps of the satellite states.

This essay presents a sampling of the initial results of research so far on the ghettos volume, for which more than 150 entries have now been received. First, I discuss the definition of a ghetto in conjunction with actual Nazi policies in practice. I analyze the three main types of ghettos identified: open ghettos, closed ghettos, and "destruction" ghettos. Then I look at the main functions of ghettos within the Nazi administrative system and the development of the Nazis' genocidal policies toward the Jews. Next, I examine some of the preliminary results achieved so far in terms of the numbers of ghettos identified in each of the German regions of occupation, followed by a brief analysis for each region. I conclude with a few comments on methodology.

It is important to stress the provisional nature of these initial results, which are based primarily on the evaluation of recently published secondary sources. The full results of the project will not be known until the last entry has been completed.

**Definition and Typology**

In more than 950 cities, towns, and shtetlach of Nazi-dominated Eastern Europe, Jews were confined to ghettos, a form of holding place and twilight zone where they suffered humiliation, persecution, and exploitation prior to their destruction. Yet this central theme in the topography of the Holocaust still remains comparatively under researched and not fully understood. For instance, was a fence or wall the defining characteristic of the ghetto, or were there also so-called open ghettos, where Jews were not contained by any physical barrier but nevertheless could be shot on sight if they transgressed the boundary of the “Jewish residential district”?<sup>18</sup>

I am working with three main types of ghetto. I have defined as “destruction ghettos,” those that were short-lived, and that primarily facilitated the killing of the Jewish population; most of those existed for less than six or eight weeks.<sup>19</sup> In addition, there were many “open ghettos,”<sup>20</sup> where the Jewish community was resettled into a distinctive part of town and separated from the gentile population, but no wall or fence was created to imprison them. Rather, any Jews found outside their “residential areas” without permission were strictly punished.<sup>21</sup> Both these types of ghetto require some distinction from the more common “enclosed ghettos,” most of which existed for several months at least. Thus both open ghettos and destruction ghettos will be identified and described as far as possible in the encyclopedia, to help differentiate them from the many enclosed ghettos. The usual litmus test will be the language to be found in the sources, although probably some forced labor camps (*Zwangsarbeitslager für Juden*, or ZAL) are more broadly denominated as ghettos by the guards or former inmates.

Three critical elements, which I have identified with regard to almost all ghettos, are the resettlement of Jews into a clearly defined residential area; their physical separation from the surrounding population; and also some threatened punishment for leaving the area. Several other characteristics were common to many ghettos, such as the existence of a Judenrat, the presence of guards, or some physical barrier, but these were not necessarily common to all ghettos and were present in other types of camps.

**Open Ghettos**

From my preliminary research, it is clear that open ghettos existed in both Poland and the occupied Soviet Union and were clearly recognized as such by both perpetrators and victims. For example, the International Tracing Service (Arolsen) catalog refers to open ghettos in Dąbie and Zdunska Wola in Poland.<sup>22</sup> Research on the Lublin District,

especially, has revealed a large number of open ghettos, where Jews were confined without there being a physical barrier.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, the pre-twentieth-century history of ghettos also included both closed and open variants.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, there still remains a fine and sometimes difficult distinction to be drawn between the practice in many German towns, such as Bielefeld, of relocating Jews into a few specifically Jewish houses and the existence of an actual open ghetto.<sup>25</sup> For the town of Radziejow, for instance, located in the Incorporated Eastern Territories of the Reich (Warthegau) in 1939–45, German documentation speaks clearly of relocating the Jews into a specific part of town but is careful to insist that this was not a ghetto.<sup>26</sup> In terms of definition, the encyclopedia ghettos volume will rely primarily on the language used in contemporary accounts or immediate postwar testimonies given by eyewitnesses, permitting as far as possible the sources to speak for themselves rather than attempting to force an artificial definition onto each specific case. Thus it is intended that a number of borderline cases will be included as the exceptions, so to speak, that help prove the rule, as the research has to be conducted anyway before a decision on inclusion or exclusion can be made.

In any case, I argue that the open ghettos, where Jews were forced to live within strictly defined Jewish quarters, deserve recognition, insofar as there was a forced resettlement collecting all Jews together, and strict regulations controlled those entering and leaving “the ghetto.” For example, according to the research of Aleksandr Kruglov, in the Ukrainian city of Uman, the “Jewish district” was not physically isolated and only lightly guarded, but Jews were forbidden to leave, and those who did were severely punished.<sup>27</sup> Certainly in a number of Volhynian towns, such as Maniewicze and Tuczyn, no fence was put up around the town until just before the murder of the majority of the Jews.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the combination of restrictions, especially on the freedom of movement of Jewish inhabitants, makes a case for classifying these sites as ghettos, especially where contemporary and eyewitness sources make use of the term. In particular, the common practice of forcibly moving Jews in from the surrounding villages created conditions of overcrowding and food shortages similar to those found in the closed ghettos.

In a number of eastern Belorussian towns, such as Chashniki, the Germans also did not establish enclosed ghettos. According to the Israeli historian Daniel Romanovsky, this was possibly because the whole Jewish population lived in the center of town. Some Jews were resettled and their houses made available to non-Jews. However, all Jewish houses were marked with plywood Magen Davids, and all Jews were forbidden to leave

town or communicate with non-Jews. This form of open ghetto was also found elsewhere in Belorussia, as well as parts of the Ukraine. In Chashniki this situation existed until just prior to the mass shooting of the Jews in mid-February 1942, that is, for about six months.<sup>29</sup>

### **Enclosed Ghettos**

The identification of enclosed ghettos is much easier, as the sources usually record the existence of a physical barrier, which permits more precise dating of the ghetto's establishment. Nevertheless, the enclosed ghettos took many different forms and often changed their boundaries or were relocated during their existence. For example, the Riga ghetto went through several changes of borders, while other ghettos such as Glebokie were at times divided into separate sections for "specialist workers" and others who were to be murdered shortly after the division took place.<sup>30</sup> In some places, such as Mir, there were actually two successive ghettos, one initially within the town; then in about May of 1942 the entire Jewish population was resettled to the nearby ruined Mir castle, presumably because it could be guarded more easily.<sup>31</sup> A similar ready-made structure was also used in Daugavpils, where an old military barracks became the "ghetto."<sup>32</sup>

### **Differentiation from ZALs**

It is often hard to distinguish an enclosed ghetto from a forced labor camp for Jews (Zwangsarbeitslager für Juden, or ZAL), especially as many remnant ghettos were converted into ZALs or even subcamps of concentration camps. According to my interpretation, a key distinction was that ghettos were usually established in urban centers of established Jewish residence, whereas many labor camps, such as some of those linked to the DG IV road construction project (Transit Highway IV) in the Ukraine, were established in the countryside close to the labor sites. Of course, many ZALs were located within towns, but generally these contained only a part of the Jewish population, specifically selected for a work task, whereas ghettos were set up for the entire Jewish population, including, initially at least, those unfit for work.

Very often the existing Jewish quarter would form the basis for the ghetto, with only a part of the Jewish population having to be resettled. This was the case especially in many smaller rural ghettos like Domaczewo, Horochow, Byten, or Letichev.<sup>33</sup> The preparatory German orders for the establishment of ghettos also sometimes refer to this key point. For example, the preliminary guidelines for the treatment of Jews in

Reichskommissariat Ostland, presented by Reichskommissar Hinrich Lohse to Alfred Rosenberg, the Reichsminister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, on August 13, 1941, contained the following section: “The Jews are to be concentrated as far as possible in towns or sections of large towns that already have a predominantly Jewish population. Ghettos are to be created there. The Jews are to be forbidden to leave the ghetto.”<sup>34</sup> The same document refers also to the clearing of the countryside (“das flache Land”) of Jews and confirms the important role of ghettos in concentrating as well as containing the Jewish population. For example, in the Brest District of the Volhynia-Podolia region, the civil administration reported by March 1942 that “throughout the entire district the Jews have been collected into ghettos. The Jews in the smaller places have been moved to larger places.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Destruction Ghettos**

As Wendy Lower has pointed out in her recent essay on ghettos in the Ukraine, in several places German military leaders and SS-Police chiefs herded the Jews into makeshift ghettos in bombed-out buildings, freight cars, and barns as a deliberate part of the destruction process, without even a pretense of creating sustainable living conditions.<sup>36</sup> As she also explains carefully, this reflected in part the ad hoc and decentralized development of ghettoization policy: decisions were widely delegated to local leaders, and especially in the occupied Soviet territories the overlap between the escalation of genocide from the summer of 1941 and the main period of ghettoization caused these two policies to become inescapably intertwined.

Therefore, I have developed Lower’s analysis a bit further by adopting the concept of destruction ghettos, or “Nazi death traps,” as they are sometimes described, which served only as staging areas to facilitate the mass shootings or deportations. Nonetheless, there remain also a few cases (some clearer than others) where it appears that plans for ghettoization initiated independently by the military, civil, or even the collaborationist administration for local reasons became hijacked or usurped by the intervention of the Einsatzgruppen or other police authorities, which then murdered the inmates abruptly as a result of orders received through a separate chain of command.

One possible such example was in Parichi, in the Gomel District, where the local commandant reported: “The above listed objects were secured in the Jewish quarter [*Judenviertel*] of Parichi. On October 18, 1941, a Security command of the SD in Bobruisk appeared in Parichi and liquidated the Jews living here.”<sup>37</sup> Paul Eick, the local

military administrator responsible for the establishment of the ghetto in Orsha, maintained vigorously during postwar investigations that he did not know of the intention to murder the Jews living there until just prior to the liquidation, although he clearly was aware of the poor living conditions (“schlechte Bedingungen”) inside the ghetto.<sup>38</sup>

In Khar’kov, where the Germans utilized twenty-six residential “barracks” attached to a machine-tool factory as a makeshift ghetto for more than 10,000 Jews in December 1941, the intention to murder the entire Jewish population was clearly known to the relevant Einsatzgruppen command (Sonderkommando 4a) from before the creation of the ghetto.<sup>39</sup> Yet this was not necessarily apparent to the local municipal administration, which demanded the resettlement of the Jews into one district as part of a package of restrictions on the Jewish population.<sup>40</sup> In other places, as Lower also argues, the creation of ghettos may have accelerated the genocide as a result of the intolerable conditions in the makeshift camps. This appears to have played a role in Dzhankoi in the Crimea, according at least to a literal reading of the local German military reports.<sup>41</sup>

In any case, regardless of the actual motivations and the specific local sequence of events, a large number of “ghettos” existed only briefly and therefore had little opportunity to develop many of the main characteristics of other ghettos, such as an internal self-administration. Since many of these sites are referred to as “ghettos” in the sources, research for the ghettos volume will attempt to identify and describe them as far as possible, while also noting how they differed from other ghettos that existed for longer. I have therefore chosen to treat both open ghettos and destruction ghettos as separate categories, in order to make clear how they differed from most other ghettos.

### **Structure and Function**

What was the function of ghettos within Nazi plans for the “Final Solution”? Essentially, the ghettos were never more than a stopgap, a point of concentration and transit, used for exploiting Jewish labor and material resources on the way to mass murder. In many places temporary destruction ghettos were used simply to contain Jews for only a few days or weeks before their annihilation, as seen in Khar’kov. This was particularly common in Lithuania. In consequence, it is probable that only a few towns in Lithuania will receive separate entries in the ghettos volume, most being covered by a general entry describing the nature of these brief and murderous destruction ghettos.

The Nazi German administration in the East sought the isolation of the Jewish population for various ideological, economic, and practical reasons that resulted in many

regional differences in implementation. Very often the establishment of ghettos was left up to the initiative of German officials on the ground, reacting to local circumstances.<sup>42</sup> For example, Christian Gerlach has shown that in Belorussia problems of accommodation in places that had suffered destruction during the initial German advance caused ghettos to be established in several towns.<sup>43</sup>

Two other main reasons cited by Gerlach and others for the creation of ghettos were the limitation of Jewish access to food and also the restriction of Jewish trade with the local population.<sup>44</sup> In addition, security and even health concerns were further arguments sometimes given by German officials to justify establishing and also liquidating ghettos. Part of the philosophy behind establishing ghettos was simply the German concern to isolate Jews. This is expressed clearly in the draft guidelines prepared by Reichsminister Rosenberg: “One first main objective of the German measures must be to separate strictly the Jews from the rest of the population.”<sup>45</sup> That lower-ranking officers, tasked with implementing policy, shared this perception can be seen from the postwar interrogations of Paul Eick, the German military officer responsible for establishing the ghetto in Orsha. He stated that the ghetto was meant to isolate the Jews from the surrounding Russian population, referring to his knowledge of certain Polish ghettos prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union as the model.<sup>46</sup>

Gerlach also insists that exploitation of Jewish labor was not a motive for the formation of ghettos, as this could be done just as well without them. Rather, he claims that one motive for establishing them may even have been the exclusion of Jews from the labor market.<sup>47</sup> This is also partially to be found in Lohse’s draft guidelines, which stress that local economic interests are not to be affected by the use of Jewish forced labor, while Rosenberg’s guidelines stress also the use of Jewish labor only in tasks where Jews could be replaced quickly. Yet at the same time Rosenberg’s guidelines stress a preference for forming ghettos in locations where Jewish labor could be exploited fully. Thus I think Gerlach goes too far in ruling out the exploitation of labor from the motives for creating ghettos, as generally they were created in locations where Jewish labor was a significant factor in the local economy.<sup>48</sup> Once created, ghettos also facilitated the exploitation of Jewish labor in a number of ways. Indeed, over time the remaining ghettos were transformed into forced labor camps, as in many places those unfit for work were selectively murdered first.

In practice, the actual functioning of ghettos revealed several inherent contradictions in German policies. In many places Jews left the ghetto daily in order to

work outside, and bartering with the local peasants proved almost impossible to prevent, especially in the open ghettos.<sup>49</sup> Guards consisting usually of local policemen were often easily bribed or turned a blind eye to barter across the ghetto boundary. The economic incentives of a ghetto population willing to trade valuable items for food were simply too great for local peasants to resist.<sup>50</sup>

Roughly speaking, in the three main western regions of Reichskommissariats Ostland and Ukraine (Weissruthenien, Volhynia-Podolia, and the southern part of the Zhytomyr region) the civil administration had a policy of establishing ghettos, but usually only in the main *rayon* (or subdistrict) towns. In most parts of these areas the Germans brought in the Jews from surrounding villages to the nearest rayon center at some point between the fall of 1941 and the main wave of ghetto liquidations in the summer and fall of 1942. For the Ukraine, Reichskommissar Erich Koch issued an order in September 1941 that no ghettos were to be formed in places where the Jewish population was less than 200.<sup>51</sup> In Eastern Galicia, many of the more than thirty enclosed ghettos were not formed until the fall of 1942, following large-scale deportations to Belzec, and this was closely linked to the final stages of concentration and forced labor exploitation.<sup>52</sup> Thus the ghettos performed an important function in concentrating the Jewish population, facilitating its exploitation for work, controlling its food supply, and also preparing for its destruction.

Contrary to the often-stated view of Jews as unwitting and therefore largely helpless victims, by early 1942 most ghetto inmates had a strong sense of foreboding about what was to come. Many made extensive preparations, which would at least make the destructive task of the Germans and their local collaborators more difficult. As arms were almost impossible to obtain and the chances of a successful armed revolt were almost negligible, the most common form of resistance was the preparation of hiding places in concealed bunkers or behind false walls. Survivor accounts recall the incredible tension experienced by those in hiding, as they overheard the conversations of local policemen searching the ghetto for Jews and looting after the initial clearance sweep.

### **Organization of the Ghettos Volume**

In mapping out the structure of the encyclopedia volume, a geographic framework has been used to reconstruct the German administrative districts of the occupation. This approach helps unravel which towns had ghettos and also the fate of Jews from surrounding villages, as it mirrors both the German documentation and Soviet



Extraordinary Commission reports, both of which are based on the rayon system. Place-names, however, will be in accordance with prewar spellings, and the current geographic location will also be mentioned in the entry.

It is reasonable to assume that more than a half million Holocaust victims in the Soviet Union passed through the ghettos, yet these ephemeral communities have been viewed primarily through the prism of mass murder, with little detailed examination of what conditions there were like. In preparing the entries, authors have been requested to answer a wide variety of questions, not just when the ghetto was established and liquidated but also details of property expropriation, examples of living conditions and food rations, or the existence of resistance organizations. Basic data to be recorded include the names of prominent community leaders and also of both German and non-German perpetrators. Each entry will also contain available demographic information about the Jewish community and the results of German “actions” (murder operations), including an estimate, where possible, of the number of Jewish survivors. In this way the encyclopedia can also provide demographic data on the Holocaust, from the bottom up, in addition to its function of describing conditions inside the ghettos.

Another key aspect of the German ghettoization policy was the creation of Jewish Councils and often a Jewish police force. The Germans intended to use these institutions to control the Jewish population, holding Jewish leaders responsible for any “trouble” that occurred.<sup>53</sup> These controversial institutions have for many survivors inevitably become symbols of Jewish collaboration and betrayal, but the evidence demonstrates that the councils could also mitigate living conditions, and in some places such as Riga the Jewish police also provided a basis for Jewish resistance.<sup>54</sup> Some remnants of Jewish cultural life also continued to subsist within the ghettos, as there was a degree of private space and community not possible in the concentration camps and forced labor camps.

In terms of numbers of ghettos, Table 1 lists the results so far by region.

### **General Comments**

Clearly, previous estimates of probably not more than 200 ghettos having existed in the occupied Soviet Union now have to be revised upward and probably will reach as many as 400 or more, similar to the number in Poland, even if many of the destruction ghettos and open ghettos are excluded. Of these, the numbers for the Russian Federation, eastern Belorussia, but also for central Ukraine are particularly surprising, although it is also clear that there were more ghettos in Volhynia-Podolia and even Eastern Galicia than

previously thought. Research has clearly focused on those locations where some Jews survived into the second wave of mass killings in 1942, and there might be some further changes in the final figures, or shifts from the EG (enclosed ghetto) category to DG (destruction ghetto) or OG (open ghetto) categories; however, it is unlikely that the final total will decline much, as this is already a core estimate that could also still be revised upward.

## **REGIONAL ANALYSES**

### **Baltic States**

The very large and currently undetermined number of destruction ghettos is a particular problem here. At this point it is not entirely clear how this section will look within the Ghettos encyclopedia volume. Currently, one or several general essays on the destruction ghettos are planned, but it may also best be handled in tabular form.

### **Eastern Bialystok**

There were approximately twenty ghettos in the eastern Bialystok District, many of which were established only shortly after the German invasion of Soviet territory. Most of these existed for quite a long period, up to November 1, 1942, when nearly all were liquidated rapidly in a series of coordinated deportations to Auschwitz and Treblinka, usually via holding camps. Reference also has to be made to the local concentration of Jews in some ghettos in this region (e.g., Pruzhany), and especially the use of transit camps, as most Jews were deported from the region rather than being shot locally.

### **Eastern Belorussia**

As noted, quite a number of ghettos have been identified for this region, although some qualify as open ghettos or destruction ghettos where makeshift facilities were used briefly for concentration before killing. Here the Einsatzgruppen began to liquidate entire communities by September 1941, but quite a number survived into early 1942, creating a few problems of identification from the meager sources available. Recent research, however, as noted, has made considerable strides in this region, by bringing together the available sources.<sup>55</sup>

### **Russian Federation**

On this region the recent article by Vadim Doubson is most useful, although I have also

identified one or two possible new finds from the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Life* and other sources. Ghettoization, where it took place, usually began shortly after the arrival of German troops. Clearly, many were only destruction ghettos that survived for less than two months. In Il'ino, however, it is notable that 200 Jews were liberated by the Red Army when the town was recaptured on January 25, 1942.

### **Generalkommissariat (GK) Weissruthenien (western Belorussia)**

Here the ghettos were also an essential part of the concentration process. For example, when the ghetto was established in Ostryna in the Lida District in October 1941, 500 Jews from the neighboring town of Nowy Dwor were also brought into the ghetto.<sup>56</sup> Various policies were pursued toward Jews in the outlying villages (clearing of the flat lands). For Nowogrodek, orders to bring Jews into that town from the surrounding *rayony* left some ghettos, such as Korelicze, rather short-lived (February to May 1942, according to the Yizkor book). In any case, the entry for Nowogrodek is a key one, since groups of Jews from throughout the district (*Gebiet*) appear to have been brought there. In the Slonim District, however, the army participated in clearing villages by shootings, at least for a while during the fall of 1941. Nevertheless, separate ghettos existed in most rayon centers. In the Mir rayon, it was the gendarmerie and local police who dealt with small Jewish communities in the countryside, conducting small-scale shootings in early 1942. The main wave of ghetto liquidations began in the early summer of 1942, but a number of ghettos still existed into 1943, by which time they were converted into forced labor camps just prior to their liquidation.<sup>57</sup> Where the history of specific forced labor camps is inextricably intertwined with that of the ghetto, their histories will be included in the ghetto entry (with appropriate cross-references within the overall encyclopedia project).

### **GK Volhynia-Podolia**

The ghetto in Krymno, Volhynia, was formed only in May 1942 and liquidated at the start of September.<sup>58</sup> According to the calculations of Shmuel Spector, a number of Volhynian ghettos were established in the late spring and early summer of 1942, only to be liquidated some three or four months later. However, this still allowed for some semblance of ghetto life, such that it was not necessarily apparent to the inmates that their destruction was just a few weeks away. And generally these had been some kind of open ghetto since the fall of 1941, as it was difficult for Jews to leave town. According to Spector, the open ghettos in Maniewiczze and Tuczyn were enclosed only in the process of destruction, a few days

prior to liquidation. The ghetto in Vysock also existed for only some six weeks, putting it on the borderline between the various categories.<sup>59</sup> More than 100 ghettos here, with little previous research on either Podolia<sup>60</sup> or Polesia,<sup>61</sup> make this a key region for the encyclopedia. The existence of many Yizkor books and some survivor testimonies also provides a range of Jewish sources for the region.

### **GK Zhytomyr**

The most striking feature is the difference between the northern part of the Zhytomyr region, where there were few ghettos (mostly destruction ghettos) and the southern part, where a number of “killing actions” during the second wave in the spring of 1942 seem to indicate the existence of several smaller ghettos.<sup>62</sup> However, there was also some overlap with the DG IV camps in the area, which were also replenished with more Jews from Transnistria during 1942 and 1943.<sup>63</sup>

In Samgorodok the ghetto lasted only from mid-May 1942 to shortly before the beginning of June, when it was liquidated.<sup>64</sup> Thus this was an example of a destruction ghetto, established during the second wave, similar to some ghettos in Volhynia and also Weissruthenien, which were also enclosed only a few weeks before their destruction (in Byten, south of Slonim, for example, the ghetto was set up only in May or June of 1942 and was then liquidated in mid-August).<sup>65</sup> As Wendy Lower notes, some large ghettos, such as Berdichev and Zhytomyr, were established with the idea of destruction more or less in mind, and largely liquidated within only a few weeks. Yet the existence of ghettos that existed for longer in places such as Zhornishche, Brailov, Kalinovka, and Chmelnik is documented, and in other smaller Jewish communities, such as Gnivan, Jews appear to have lived in open ghettos prior to mass killings in the early summer of 1942.<sup>66</sup>

### **Central and Eastern Ukraine**

New research has revealed a few little-known ghettos here, especially in the Kiev District. In some cases, however, it appears there is insufficient documentation for a reasonable entry, so Alexander Prusin, after writing up the main ghettos, probably will cover the remaining poorly documented sites in a survey entry on ghettoization in the Kiev District.

### **Distrikt Galizien (Eastern Galicia)**

The chronology of ghetto formation was quite different in Distrikt Galizien. Most ghettos were not formally established until the end of 1942, quite late in the destruction process,

with the exception of those in the various *Kreis* capitals. The destruction process also generally took longer in this region, included within the General Government, continuing well into 1943. However, there were frequent deportations to the Belzec death camp from March 1942, and most of the Jews from the outlying villages and small towns were concentrated in the larger towns just prior to the main deportations in the summer of 1942. Thus ghettoization was only a short and comparatively late phase of the overall concentration and destruction process here. For example, in Bobrka, the ghetto was not formed until December 1, 1942, whereas Jews had been brought in from the neighboring towns and villages in August 1942, just prior to a large deportation to Belzec.<sup>67</sup>

In October 1941 Hans Frank ordered that any Jews found outside the ghettos in the General Government were liable to be shot. As Dieter Pohl has shown, this order was extended to Distrikt Galizien only in December 1941, but its implementation remained problematic, as only a few ghettos existed at that time.<sup>68</sup> It is possible to argue that the effects of this order made many Jewish communities into de facto open ghettos by 1942, but detailed local research will be required to resolve this uncertainty.

A further difficulty is that there were in Distrikt Galizien a number of labor camps that partly overlapped with ghettos. Therefore some fine distinctions will be required to disentangle the ghettos from the ZALs in this region. There are also some discrepancies between survivor accounts and German sources both about when ghettos were established (e.g., L'vov) and about whether a ghetto existed at all.

### **Archival Sources**

As mentioned in the introduction, the time is now ripe for a more integrated history of the Holocaust to be written, combining the perspectives of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders from the full array of sources now available. In addition to providing basic data on each ghetto, the encyclopedia volume also intends to list available sources, citing some of the main primary documentation in endnotes. Each entry will also contain brief annotated surveys of the primary and secondary sources that are distinctive for that ghetto.

With regard to ghettos, the main official archival sources are contemporary German documents, postwar Soviet Extraordinary Commission reports, and war crimes investigation records. The German war crimes investigations held at the Central Office in Ludwigsburg and other regional archives have been a mainstay of Holocaust research for some twenty years. However, more recently the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has begun microfilming and making accessible many KGB trial records from the

former Soviet Union. Large collections from the Baltic States and Russia are already available, and the Museum archives are now receiving a growing collection from the Ukrainian state security services.

These key sources, largely in the German and Russian languages, have to be combined with survivor accounts, preserved as written, oral, and video testimonies mainly in Yiddish, Hebrew, or English, scattered throughout many archives. It will not be possible to track down all survivor testimonies for every ghetto, but the ghettos volume aims to examine at least a representative sample and provide a comprehensive guide to the location of relevant sources. Published memoirs, of both Jews and non-Jews, are also viewed as primary sources. The most important genre, however, is clearly that of the Yizkor books, written mainly in Yiddish and Hebrew, describing the life and death of many Eastern European Jewish communities. I have delegated to my colleague Andrew Koss the task of describing these unique sources in more detail.<sup>69</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In terms of understanding Nazi policy, it is important to recognize that the establishment of ghettos was always a means to achieving specific goals and not an end in itself. Thus the Nazi policy appears to be very ad hoc, with considerable regional differences and shifts in policy over time. In the occupied Soviet Union, in particular, it was largely decentralized and determined in practice by the local authorities. Thus it could be argued that there was no Nazi “system” of ghettoization, but rather ghettos were used to achieve various ends until the completion of genocide, achieved mostly in the form of local mass shootings.

Nevertheless, my own approach of studying ghettos initially by reconstructing the German geographic and administrative structures has proved effective in establishing where ghettos were created and what regional patterns can be identified. It is notable that most of the history of the ghettos in Eastern Europe under Nazi rule has been written from the perspective of the few Jewish survivors. By combining these rich and unique Jewish sources with contemporary German documentation and also postwar investigations, it becomes possible to document the Holocaust in its full terrible extent and establish the context of Jewish responses to the deadly threat that Jews faced.

**Table 1. Enclosed ghettos (EG), open ghettos (OG), destruction ghettos (DG), and possible ghettos (G?) by German administrative regions, 1941–1944 (preliminary results as of 12/14/04)**

<b>Region</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>OG</b>	<b>DG</b>	<b>G?</b>	<b>TOTAL*</b>
Lithuania	6	–	35+	–	41
Latvia	3	–	7+	–	10
Eastern Bialystok	18	1	1	3	20
Eastern Belorussia	51	20	16	12	87
Russian Federation	24	–	5	7	29
GK Weissruthenien	87	1	4	12	92
GK Volhynia-Podolia	99	6	1	9	106
GK Zhitomir	28	4	9	13	41
GK Kiev	10	–	2	–	12
GK Nikolayev	1	1	1	1	3
Eastern Ukraine	9	1	4	5	14
Distrikt Galizien	54	4	–	7	58
Totals	390	38	85	69	513

\* Total does not include “G?”.

**MAIN SOURCES:** Shmuel Spector and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life before and during the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001); Aleksandr I. Kruglov, *Katastrofa ukrainskogo evreistva 1941–1944 gg.: Entsiklopedicheskii spravochnik* (Khar’kov: “Karavella,” 2001).

## NOTES

1. For a summary of the killing totals of the various Einsatzgruppen units from their own and other reports, see Ronald Headland, *Messages of Murder: A Study of the Reports of the Einsatzgruppen of the Security Police and the Security Service, 1941–1943* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), p. 105.

2. Shalom Cholawsky, *The Jews of Bielorussia during World War II* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998), p. 70, gives the figure of 175,000 Jews in sixty-six ghettos for the Vilno and Novogrodek districts of “Western Bielorussia”; Dieter Pohl, “Schauplatz Ukraine: Der Massenmord an den Juden im Militärverwaltungsgebiet und im Reichskommissariat, 1941–1943,” in *Ausbeutung, Vernichtung, Öffentlichkeit: Neue Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Lagerpolitik*, ed. Norbert Frei, Sybille Steinbacher, and Bernd C. Wagner (Munich: Saur, 2000), p. 155, gives the figure of about 300,000 Jews living in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine at the beginning of 1942; at the beginning of 1943, by which time ghettoization had been completed in Distrikt Galizien, there were some 160,000 Jews still alive, mostly in ghettos (see Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien, 1941–1944* [Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996], p. 245). To these must be added the Jews of the Minsk ghetto (probably 50,000–60,000, according to Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941 bis 1944* [Hamburg: HIS, 1999], p. 625) and many other smaller ghettos in eastern Belorussia and the Russian Federation (ca. 18,000–20,000 in twenty-eight ghettos, according to Vadim Doubson, “Ghetto na okkupirovannoy territorii rossiiskoy federatsii (1941-42)” in *Vestnik Evreyskogo Universiteta. Istorija. Kultura. Tsivilizatsiya*. No. 3 (21) 2000, 157-184, p. 159), as well as the six major ghettos in the Baltic states (Riga, Daugavpils, Liepaja, Wilno, Kaunas, and Siauliai) and also Grodno (25,000) and other smaller ghettos of eastern Bialystok.

3. Gudrun Schwarz, *Die Nationalsozialistischen Lager* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1990), p. 131. This echoes the wording of the 1979 Arolsen list: “Statistiken über die Zahl der Ghettos aus der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus sind dem ITS nicht bekannt. Ebenso hat er bisher noch nicht die Gesamtzahl der in seinen Unterlagen erwähnten ghettos ermittelt” (see *Verzeichnis der Haftstätten unter dem Reichsführer-SS (1933–1945)* (Arolsen: ITS, 1979), p. 40 (see also the legalese warnings included in the catalogue - “Keine Gewähr für die Vollständigkeit—Irrtum vorbehalten—Ohne Anspruch auf Rechtsverbindlichkeit”). By contrast, Schwarz gives the figure of 399 ghettos having been formed by the Germans on the territory of modern-day Poland between October 1939 and October 1942 (see Schwarz, *Nationalsozialistischen Lager*, p. 111). This provides the basis for the figure given in the permanent exhibition of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum of there having been in excess of 400 ghettos in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe.

4. Roman Mogilanski, ed., *The Ghetto Anthology: A Comprehensive Chronicle of the Extermination of Jewry in Nazi Death Camps and Ghettos in Poland* (Los Angeles:



American Congress of Jews from Poland and Survivors of Concentration Camps, 1985).

5. Ibid., p. 131; for a more accurate assessment of those ghettos actually formed as a result of Krüger's order of November 1942, see Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung*, pp. 243–44. As Pohl notes, the Krüger order is published in *Faschismus—Getto—Massenmord: Dokumentation über Ausrottung und Widerstand der Juden in Poland während des 2. Weltkrieges*, ed. Tatiana Berenstein (Jüdischen Historischen Institut in Warschau) (Frankfurt/Main: Röderberg-Verlag, 1960), pp. 344–45. In addition, my own research indicates that there was no ghetto at all in Eishyshok (see Yaffa Eliach, *There Once Was a World: A 900-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok* (Boston: Little Brown, 1998).

6. Schwarz, *Nationalsozialistischen Lager*, pp. 131–33.

7. Shmuel Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews, 1941–44* (Jerusalem: Achva Press, 1990), pp. 366–67.

8. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*; Leonid Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941-1944 gg.* (Tel Aviv: Biblioteka Matveia Chernogo, 2000); Cholawsky, *Jews of Belorussia*. For Belorussia, see also Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weissrusland, 1941–1944* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1998); and Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (London and New York: Macmillan, and St. Martin's in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000).

9. Cholawsky, *Jews of Belorussia*, pp. 70–76.

10. Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung*; on Eastern Galicia, see also Thomas Sandkühler, “Endlösung” in Galizien: *Der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz, 1941–1944* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996); and Jakob Honigsmann, *Juden in der Westukraine: Jüdisches Leben und Leiden in Ostgalizien, Wolhynien, der Bukowina und Transkarpatien, 1933–1945* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 2001).

11. Wendy Lower's PhD thesis is published under the title *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2005); see, for example, Pohl, “Schauplatz Ukraine”; and Dieter Pohl, “Ukrainische Hilfskräfte beim Mord an den Juden,” in *Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* ed. Gerhard von Paul (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002), pp. 205–34.

12. Aleksandr I. Kruglov, *Katastrofa ukrainskogo evreistva, 1941–1944 gg.: Entsiklopedicheskii spravochnik* (Khar'kov: “Karavella,” 2001).

13. Shmuel Spector and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life before and during the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001).

14. Vadim Doubson, "Getto na okkupirovannoy territorii rossiiskoy federatsii (1941–1942 gg.)," *Vestnik Evreiskogo Universiteta. Istoriya. Kultura. Tsvilizatsiya* 21:3 (2000), pp. 157–84; see especially the table on p. 159; see also Il'ia Al'tman, *Zhertvy nenavisti: kholokost v SSSR 1941-1945 gg.* (Moscow: Fond Kovcheg, 2002), pp. 93-101, which lists 45 ghettos for the territory of the Russian Federation (including Crimea), based, however, much on Doubson's research.

15. Nationalarchiv der Republik Belarus u.a., ed., *Handbuch der Haftstätten für Zivilbevölkerung auf dem besetzten Territorium Belarus* (Minsk, Nationalarchiv der Republik Belarus et al., 2001); Staatskomitee der Archiven der Ukraine u.a., ed., *Handbuch der Lager, Gefängnisse und Ghettos auf dem besetzten Territorium der Ukraine (1941–1944)* (Kyiv: Derzhavnyi komitet arkhiviv Ukraïny: Ukraïns'kyi natsional'nyi fond "Vzaiemorozuminnia i prymyrennia" pry kabinetni ministriv Ukraïny, 2000).

16. Marat Botvinnik, *Pamyatniki Genotsida Evreev Belarusi* (Minsk: Belaruskaya Navuka, 2000). I am grateful to Leonid Smilovitsky for bringing this volume to my attention during the discussion sessions held at the Museum prior to the symposium; however, some care has to be taken, especially with the statistics provided by Botvinnik.

17. See especially the excellent draft entries submitted for the ghettos volume by Daniel Romanovsky, covering most of the ghettos of the Vitebsk Oblast.

18. Pohl, "Schauplatz Ukraine," p. 158, notes that in the Ukraine many ghettos resembled more the open ghetto model.

19. On destruction ghettos, see especially Wendy Lower, "Facilitating Genocide: Nazi Ghettoization Practices in Occupied Ukraine, 1941–1942," in *Life in the Ghettos during the Holocaust*, ed. Eric J. Sterling (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

20. For example, in the Lublin District of the General Government, and also in the Volhynian region of Reichskommissariat Ukraine.

21. Aleksandr Kruglov, draft entry for Uman.

22. *Verzeichnis der Haftstätten*, p. 39. The catalog notes that these were both enclosed before their liquidation.

23. Provisional work done with the assistance of Robert Kuwalek indicates there were probably more than twenty-five open ghettos within the Lublin District. The

*Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), p. 545, clearly acknowledges the distinctions between open and closed ghettos, although it draws examples only from Poland.

24. See the article titled “Ghetto” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, published in 1903.

25. Spector and Wigoder, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Life*, p. 145.

26. Records of the Gendarmerie Kreis Hermannsbad, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (USHMMA), RG-15.013M, reel 1, file 7, Gendarmeriekreis Hermannsbad an den Herrn Kdr. Der Gend, 30 May 1941: “Ghettos und ähnliche Einrichtungen sind nicht vorhanden, doch wurden die Juden in Petrikau und Radziejow auf bestimmte Strassen zusammengesiedelt und ihnen im allgemeinen das Betreten der anderen Stadtviertel (verboten, [Ed., added by hand]). Den Anordnungen kommen die Juden stillschweigend nach.”

27. Kruglov, draft entry for Uman.

28. Jack Nusan Porter, draft entry for Maniewicze: “Local Jews were allowed to remain in their homes but restricted to the area of the town.” See also Spector, *Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, pp. 366–67.

29. Daniel Romanovsky, draft entry for Chashniki. Other examples of open ghettos in this region include Beshenkovich and Ostrovno.

30. Katrin Reichelt, draft entry for Riga; *Memorial Book of Glebokie*, a translation into English of *Khurbn Glubok* by M. and Z. Rajak, which was originally published in 1956 in Yiddish in Buenos Aires by the Former Residents’ Association in Argentina, (Canton, N.Y.: Kendall Taylor, 1994).

31. Martin Dean, draft entry for Mir.

32. Katrin Reichelt, draft entry for Daugavpils.

33. See draft entries on these towns by Martin Dean, Ester-Basya Vaisman, Andrew Koss, and David Chapin, respectively.

34. 1138-PS Lohse to Rosenberg, 13 August 1941, in *Trial of the Major War Criminals* (Nuremberg, 1948), vol. 27, pp. 18–25: “Die Juden sind tunlichst in Städten oder in Stadtteilen grosser Städte zu konzentrieren, die bereits eine überwiegende jüdische Bevölkerung besitzen. Dort sind Ghettos zu errichten. Den Juden ist das Verlassen der Ghetto zu verbieten.” This document is quoted by Schwarz, *Nationalsozialistischen Lager*, p. 128.

35. Situation report of March 1942, Bundesarchiv Berlin (BAB), R 94/7.
36. Lower, "Facilitating Genocide."
37. BAB, R 2104/25 OK I(V)324 Parichi, n.d., quoted in Martin Dean, "Jewish Property Seized in the Occupied Soviet Union in 1941 and 1942: The Records of the Reichshauptkasse Beutestelle," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14:1 (2000), p. 85.
38. Interrogations of Paul Eick, Minsk, December 1945, USHMMA RG-06.025\*.03, 517–523.
39. Aleksandr Kruglov, draft entry for Khar'kov.
40. On the role of the local administration in the formation of ghettos in a number of Belorussian cities, see Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 530–31.
41. See Aleksandr Kruglov, draft entry for Dzhankoy.
42. See, for example, Lower, "Facilitating Genocide," p. 7. For further references to the generally vague military orders on the establishment of ghettos, see also Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 524–25: on August 19, 1941, the Oberkommando des Heeres (Army High Command) apparently ordered that "ghettos [were] only to be established in places with a large Jewish population if necessary or useful ('sachdienlich')."
43. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 526–27.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 527–28.
45. 212-PS unsigned, undated guidelines for the treatment of the "Jewish Question," in *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, vol. 25, pp. 302–6.
46. Interrogations of Paul Eick.
47. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 527–28.
48. See 1138-PS (note 35) and 212-PS (note 46). These draft guidelines are somewhat problematic, as they were drawn up in the summer of 1941, just as the activities of the Einsatzgruppen further escalated the mass killings by wiping out entire Jewish communities, clearly rendering ghettos unnecessary in such locations. Nevertheless, in the areas under civil administration, many of the ideas outlined in the guidelines were implemented, at least provisionally, until the second wave of killings starting in 1942 liquidated much of the remaining Jewish population.

49. See, for example, Reichelt, draft entry for Riga:

Another specific aspect about the Riga ghetto is the fact that most of the working places of the Jews were located outside the ghetto, and in many cases at a remarkable distance from the ghetto. To use the maximum of their labor force, many companies or other employers of ghetto Jews kept them overnight for several weeks to avoid the long march to the ghetto twice a day. In this way many of the Jews of the Riga ghetto spent most of their working time outside the ghetto borders. These conditions contradicted the need of the German authorities to isolate the Jews and made it possible for them to contact the local population and organize some extra food to survive or even to escape.

50. Ester-Basya Vaisman, draft entry for Horochow: “Because food was so scarce, twenty youngsters built a tunnel under the fence as a way of getting out of the ghetto. They would take off their stars and look for food for their families. They always had to barter items, such as clothing or jewelry, for the food” (Horochow survivor Charlene Schiff, interview by Ester-Basya Vaysman, 19 June 2003).

51. Reichskommissar Koch to Gebiets- und Generalkommissare in Volhynia-Podolia, 5 September 1941, USHMMA, RG-31.002M (Selected Records from the Central State Archive in Kiev), reel 2, 3206-1-69.

52. Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung*, p. 244.

53. See, for example, Ortskommandantur Pinsk order to the Local Mayor on the establishment of the Jewish Councils, 30 July 1941, Brest Oblast Archive, 2135-2-127, p. 3.

54. Reichelt, draft entry for Riga. Jürgen Matthäus in his draft entry for Kovno notes also that “even the ghetto police supported underground activities.”

55. On the ghettos of the Gomel Oblast, see especially Smilovitsky, this volume.

56. Siarhej Pivovarchyk, draft entry for Ostryna.

57. Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, pp. 78–104; Michael Walzer-Fass, ed., *Korelits-Korelitsh: Hayeha ve-hurbanah shel kehilah Yehudit* (Tel Aviv, 1973).

58. Aleksandr Kruglov, draft entry for Krymno.

59. Spector, *Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*, pp. 366–67.

60. See, however, the on-going research of Vadim Altskan; see also Dana Voskoboynik,

“The History of Jews in Proskurov, Ukraine,” (unpublished MA thesis, Union College 2001, in the possession of the author); and David Chapin and Ben Weinstock, *The Road from Letichev: The History and Culture of a Forgotten Jewish Community in Eastern Europe*, vol. 2 (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2000), chap. 16.

61. See Stephen Pallavicini, “The Liquidation of the Jews of Polesie: 1941–1942” (PhD diss., Sydney University, 2003).

62. Aleksandr Kruglov, *Unichtozhenie evreiskogo naseleniia Ukrainy v 1941–1944 gg.: Khronika sobytii* ([Mogilev Podolski]: A. I. Kruglov, 1997), pp. 41, 79.

63. See Ermittlungen wegen Verbrechen im Generalkommissariat Schitomir und an der DG IV, Zentrale Stelle (now Bundesarchiv Aussenstelle) Ludwigsburg, AR-Z 20/1963. I am grateful to Andrei Angrick for this reference.

64. Translation of Extraordinary Commission Report of 26 October 1944, ZSL, II 204a AR-Z 188/67 Verfahren gegen Richter u.a. (Samgorodok), pp. 221–24.

65. Andrew Koss, draft entry for Byten.

66. See Martin Dean, “The German *Gendarmerie*, the Ukrainian *Schutzmannschaft*, and the ‘Second Wave’ of Jewish Killings in Occupied Ukraine: German Policing at the Local Level in the Zhitomir Region, 1941–44,” *German History* 14:2 (1996), pp. 168–92.

67. Aleksandr Kruglov, draft entry for Bobrka.

68. Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung*, pp. 163–64.

69. See Koss, this volume.

## ***YIZKER BIKHER* AS PRIMARY SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF GHETTOS IN THE GERMAN-OCCUPIED SOVIET UNION**

**Andrew Koss**

Memorial books—*sifre zikaron* in Hebrew and *yizker bikher* in Yiddish—are written to commemorate destroyed Jewish communities. Their history begins in the Middle Ages, when Jewish communities in Germany were ravaged during the Crusades.<sup>1</sup> This article deals with memorial books created in response to the Holocaust. The very first of these was produced in the United States in 1943 by Jewish immigrants from Łódź as a desperate plea to the world on behalf of their brethren in the Łódź ghetto.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent memorial books—which began to appear as early as 1946—served a primarily commemorative purpose. By the 1950s memorial books were being published for towns and cities all over Eastern Europe, as well as Jewish communities in Germany and the Netherlands. My focus is on memorial books dedicated to towns in Poland, Belorussia, and the Ukraine, most of which contain chapters in both Yiddish and Hebrew, and sometimes a brief section in English as well.

For the most part, these books were a collective effort, as befits a collective history. They were usually published under the auspices of organizations called *landsmanshaftn*, which brought together Jewish émigrés from the same town in Europe and were generally centered in New York, Israel, or Buenos Aires. Occasionally, separate *landsmanshaftn* in different locations would produce distinct, sometimes rival, memorial books.<sup>3</sup> Members were asked to submit whatever they wished: a poem, a reminiscence about life in the town before the war, or the story of their own experiences. In some instances, a member of the editorial staff put together a researched piece on some aspect of the town's history and demise.

Memorial books tend to adhere to a basic formula. An introductory section gives the history of the town and its Jewish community since the earliest records of Jewish settlement there. Next, a section on the interwar period includes articles on various aspects of Jewish life. Then there is a section on the Holocaust. A final section deals with émigrés in Israel and America. (For towns in eastern Poland, the Soviet occupation of 1939–41 sometimes gets its own section, but often it is subsumed under the individual chapters of the Holocaust section.) The Holocaust section itself—usually titled *Hurban ve-Shoah* or *Khurbm un Umkum (Destruction and Holocaust)*—sometimes begins with an overview of the Nazi occupation of the town, written by a

main contributor. Then follows a series of more personal accounts, which can range from under a page to over a hundred pages. The majority usually take place in the town in question. Others tell of the experiences of a survivor, born in the town, who spent the war years elsewhere—for example, hiding in the forests with the partisans, imprisoned in another ghetto or concentration camp, or fighting in the Red Army. The accounts often overlap and editorial oversight is minimal.

How do these books serve as a tool in researching life and death in the ghettos of the Nazi-occupied Soviet Union? First, there are numerous memorial books for small towns (or *shtetlach*) in this area—in particular for those located in eastern Poland between 1921 and 1939.<sup>4</sup> Because the general German policy in these areas was to establish ghettos in towns that already had significant Jewish populations, towns for which memorial books were written tended to be the ones where ghettos were established. For the researcher interested in ghettos, memorial books provide a useful collection of survivor accounts that mention the ghetto in question. For smaller *shtetlach*, where perpetrator sources are usually scant, memorial books can be the only sources available. They come, of course, with all the problems of reliability associated with postwar testimony and the memoir as a primary historical source, issues with which Holocaust scholars have already dealt extensively. The poor editing of many memorial books frequently compounds these problems.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these limitations, the material found in memorial books often goes a step or two beyond other forms of personal testimony or memoir. According to David Roskies, a noted scholar of Jewish literature, the Jewish memoirist writing of war and catastrophe traditionally “submerged his personal experience so as to highlight the broad panorama of Jewish suffering.”<sup>6</sup> For obvious reasons, when writing their stories for inclusion in memorial books, survivors tended to feel a particular need to focus not only on their own experiences but also on the stories of their communities as a whole.

This tendency can pose certain problems for the historian, as it can sometimes be difficult to differentiate between what an author witnessed firsthand and what is merely hearsay or speculation. On the other hand, a historian researching ghettos is looking for what happened to the community as a whole, and in this respect memorial books are particularly helpful. In western Belorussia and the Ukraine (Reichskommissariats Ostland and Ukraine) in particular, Nazi policy resulted in a degree of continuity between the community that existed before the war and that which



existed inside the ghetto. This stands in pointed contrast to the experiences of Jews in most concentration camps, where social and communal life was largely disrupted by physical dislocation and extreme conditions.

In Poland's eastern borderlands—the areas that had been annexed by the Soviets in 1939 and then by the Germans in 1941—Jews often constituted the majority or plurality in towns. Despite the effects of modernization, which was accelerated by Soviet social reforms, these Jewish communities were quite traditional. Assimilation was minimal, even in urban centers such as Grodno and Białystok. For instance, the vast majority of the Jews in this area spoke Yiddish as their first language.<sup>7</sup> (This situation was quite different in areas that had been under Soviet rule since 1921, where two decades during which Jewish organizations were illegal—with the exception of the Communist Party's own Jewish Section—had taken their toll.) When the Germans gained control in 1941, they tended to choose individuals who already had positions of communal authority to sit on the Judenrat and play similar leadership roles. Preexisting political organizations were frequently transformed into underground resistance organizations. Familial and social relations among the inmates of the ghetto remained intact until the ghetto's liquidation. Although other Jews were brought into the ghettos from surrounding villages, there was a general feeling of unity among the ghetto inhabitants, as they tended to see themselves as members of a community.<sup>8</sup> The feeling of community continued among the survivors after the war, as evidenced by the collaborative projects of memorial books.

The remainder of this article points to a few patterns along these lines that have emerged from my work with memorial books. These observations mainly apply to ghettos formed in shtetlach in western Belorussia—that is, the areas that belonged to Poland in the interwar period and now lie within the borders of Belarus—since I have done the most extensive research on these ghettos. The first observation concerns the role of the Judenräte.<sup>9</sup> I have found little criticism of these councils. The opinion expressed by Kalman Lichtenstein in *Pinkas Slonim*, Slonim's memorial book, is typical: "There are different opinions about the Judenräte in Poland. As far as our town is concerned, I am able to say, wholeheartedly, that they were all good Jews, trustworthy and willing to make sacrifices for the community."<sup>10</sup> Generally, the only accusation leveled at the members of the Judenräte is that they were naive, but the authors rarely claim to have been any less naive themselves.<sup>11</sup> The positive evaluation of the Judenräte—which gained notoriety elsewhere—may, in part, be due to the close-

knit nature of these communities. Often the council members were the same individuals who coordinated resistance efforts, which typically amounted to little more than the construction of underground bunkers in which to hide during the *Aktionen*, but occasionally led to some of the earliest ghetto revolts against the Germans.<sup>12</sup> Survivors were probably also reluctant to express criticism in memorial book entries when council members, or their families, were among the intended readership.

The way the Judenräte were formed varied. Often the town's rabbi, clearly being an authority figure, was asked to nominate members. In other instances, as in the community of Byten, German officials stopped a Jew at random and ordered him to assemble a council.<sup>13</sup> Usually the people chosen had the community's respect from the outset. There are also numerous instances of refugees who fled from central Poland in 1939 sitting on Judenräte in eastern Poland, usually because they had better secular education or knowledge of German. In addition, the officially recognized communal governments—the *Kehilot*—had been dismantled by the Soviets between 1939 and 1941, sometimes creating a lack of experienced leaders.<sup>14</sup>

Another topic of note is that of collaboration and the attitudes of local non-Jewish populations. Historians such as Christopher Browning and my colleague Martin Dean have pointed to a tendency among survivors to emphasize the role of local collaborators, an aspect generally de-emphasized in other sources. Besides the involvement of local police units (*Hilfspolizei*) in the murder of Jews, memorial books point to behaviors that lie on a spectrum between outright collaboration and apathy. Local non-Jews taunted Jews while they were being led away to be killed, extorted them while they were confined to the ghettos, and plundered their property after their deaths—or, in a few instances, in anticipation of their deaths. In one town, after hundreds of young men had been taken away to be killed, the gentile townspeople informed the remaining Jews that the men had merely been sent to a forced-labor camp. The townspeople then offered to bring packages with food and other items to the camp inmates. Only several weeks later did the Jews learn that their relatives had been murdered and that their “helpful” neighbors had been keeping the care packages for themselves.<sup>15</sup> Such anecdotes contrast with accounts of gentiles helping Jews survive in various ways. In fact, the vast majority of Jews who lived to tell their stories in memorial books depended on gentile assistance at one point or another.

Despite the often embittered descriptions of the activities of their neighbors, memorial book authors rarely accuse them of having been hostile before the war. In

marked contrast to memoirists from central Poland—or even from larger cities such as Grodno<sup>16</sup>—there is little mention of antisemitism in the interwar period. The National Democratic Party and other antisemitic Polish political movements had less sway in eastern Poland, probably because of the area’s ethnic makeup. Since these areas were populated primarily by Ukrainians and Belorussians, the Polish minority was not in a position to persecute Jews. Survivor accounts from the memorial books of eastern Poland may mention that certain individuals were known as Jew-haters (or general thugs) before the war, but they rarely talk about a general atmosphere of antisemitism, a trope that does appear in memorial books from central Poland.<sup>17</sup> Their narrative is not one in which years of hatred culminated in the annihilation of the Jewish community during World War II, but rather one in which their former friends and neighbors viciously turned on them.<sup>18</sup>

These are only a few examples of what can be learned about the Jewish experience in the ghetto from this invaluable resource. Other researchers will undoubtedly discover much more. However, I want to conclude on a more existential note. The term *yizker bukh* is a reference to a series of prayers for the deceased traditionally recited on Jewish holidays. The original purpose of *yizker bikher* was to record the names of the deceased so that survivors could recite them at the Yizkor service. The service itself gets its name because it includes a series of prayers beginning with the words *Yizkor Elohim*—“May God Remember.” Unfortunately, this added layer of meaning is lost in the English term *memorial book* (and its Hebrew equivalent, *sefer zikaron*).<sup>19</sup> In some sense, these books are not simply memorials but pleas that someone, whether human or divine, remember the Jewish communities and their horrific fate. Perhaps historians who employ the memorial book as a primary source can see themselves as somehow aiding in the answering of this plea.

## NOTES

1. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), p. 46.
2. United Emergency Relief Committee for the City of Lodz, *Lodzsher Yizker Bukh* (New York: United Emergency Relief Committee for the City of Lodz, 1943).
3. Compare, for instance, *Sefer Sants*, ed. Raphael Mahler (Tel Aviv: Sandzer Society in New York, 1970), with Shlomo Zalman Lehrer's 1994 *Tsanz, di heylige farshvindine shtot*; available in English as *The Vanished City of Tsanz*, trans. Leizer Strassman and Shlomo Zalman Lehrer (Southfield, MI: Targum Press in conjunction with Mishnas Rishonim, 1997). Lehrer wrote *Tsanz* as an alternative to *Sefer Sants*, which, he felt, unduly emphasized secular culture at the expense of religious life.
4. By contrast, there are relatively few memorial books written for the Jewish communities located in the Soviet Union prior to World War II, even for towns that were historically important Jewish centers (e.g., Shklov and Medzhibozh). The reason for this paucity is the overwhelming efforts of the Soviet government to uproot Jewish communal structures and integrate the Jewish population. For a survey of these books, complete with a bibliography, see Robert Moses Shapiro, "'Yizker Bikher' as Sources on Jewish Communities in Soviet Belorussia and Soviet Ukraine during the Holocaust," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1993). Shapiro lists only twenty-one memorial books for Jewish communities located in the Belorussian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics prior to 1939. There are at least 300 for the same republics with their post-1945 borders.
5. For a general discussion of the problem of historical accuracy in memorial books, see Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, "'Yizker Bikher' and the Problem of Historical Veracity: An Anthropological Approach," in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman et al. (Hanover, NH: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1989), pp. 519–36; and Abraham Wein, "'Memorial Books' as a Source for Research into the History of Jewish Communities in Europe," *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance* 9 (1973), pp. 252–72.
6. David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 137. Here, Roskies is speaking specifically of S. Ansky's *Khurbm Galitsye*, a chronicle of the destruction of Jewish communities in Poland during World War I. This "quintessential Jewish war memoir . . . was later to inspire Ringelblum, Kaplan, Kruk, and other ghetto diarists" (*ibid.*).

7. Tikva Fatal-Knaani, *Zu lo ota Grodno: Kehilat Grodnoh u-sevivatah ba-Milhamah uva-Sho'ah, 1939–1943* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001), pp. 30–35; Sara Bender, *Mul mavet orev: Yehude Byalistok be-Milhemet ha-'Olam ha-Sheniya, 1939–1945* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1997), pp. 31–32, 46.

8. See, for instance, T. Kunitsa-Goldshteyn, “Okupatsye, geto, umkum,” in *Sefer Lutsk* (Tel Aviv: Irgun yots'e Lutsk be-Yisra'el, 1961), pp. 418–21. Here the author makes explicit a fairly typical sentiment.

9. Isaiah Trunk incorporated a large amount of memorial book testimony into his groundbreaking work on this subject, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

10. Kalman Lichtenstein, ed., *Pinkas Slonim*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: Irgun 'ole Slonim be-Yisra'el, 1961–79), p. 43.

11. “None of us could have predicted the misfortunes that the Judenrat would have to struggle with and the horrible conditions that the Hitlerist German people would heap on the defenseless Jewish population. At that time, none of us could imagine the tragedy of the members of the Judenrat, who would later become the target for all the poisonous bullets of the murderous authorities, when the Judenrat, as an executive organ, was forced to carry out all the orders of the German attacks against the Jewish people” (Dodl Abramovitsh, “Khurbm un vidershtand,” in *Pinkes Biten: Der oyfkum un untergang fun a Yidisher kehile*, ed. Dodl Abramovitsh and Mordkhay V. Bernshtayn [Buenos Aires: Bitener Landslayt in Argentine, 1954], p. 323).

12. For resistance in these ghettos, see Shalom Cholawsky, *'Al naharot ha-Nyemen veba-Dnyeper: Yehude Byelorusyah ha-ma'aravit be-milhemet ha-'olam ha-sheniyah* (Jerusalem: ha-Makhon le-Yahadut zemanenu, ha-Universitah ha-'Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim, 1982), available in English as *The Jews of Bielorussia during World War II* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1998), pp. 103–208. Cholawsky relies heavily on the memorial books. Dov Levin's *Lohamim ve-'omdim 'al nafsham: Milhemet Yehude Lita ba-Natsim, 1941–1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1974), available in English as *Fighting Back: Lithuanian Jewry's Armed Resistance to the Nazis, 1941–1945*, trans. Moshe Kohn and Dina Cohen (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), focuses on the resistance in Lithuania, which has many similarities to that in the small ghettos of Belorussia.

13. Abramovitsh and Bernshtayn, *Pinkes Biten*, pp. 322–24.

14. *Ibid.* For a more comprehensive treatment of this subject, see Trunk, *Judenrat*, pp. 14–28.

15. Chaim Rabin, *Vishnivits: Sefer zikaron li-kedoshe Vishnivits she-nispu be-Sho'at ha-Natsim* (Tel Aviv: Irgun 'ole Vishnivits, 1979), pp. 313–14.

16. Dov Rabin, ed., *Entsiklopedya shel galuyot: Krakh teshi'i: Grodna-Grodne* (Jerusalem: Hevrat "Entsiklopedya shel galuyot," 1973), pp. 231–33, 243–54.

17. See, e.g., Yosef Honigsberg, "Hadim me-'emek ha-bakha," in *Sefer Virzbnik-Starakhovits*, ed. M. Schutzman (Tel Aviv: ha-Va'ad ha-Tsiburi shel Yots'e Virzbnik-Starakhovits, 1973), p. 240: "The Polish environment was persecutory and anti-Semitic. The difficulties of living as Jews in the areas inhabited by Poles were unbearable. Naturally, a way was sought out of this suffocation."

18. For example, see A. P., "The Annihilation of the Jewish Community," in *Yizkor: Kehilot Luninyets/Kozhnhorodok*, ed. Yosef Ze'evi (Tel Aviv: Irgun yots'e Luninets ve-Koz'anhorodok be-Yisra'el, 1952), p. 66: "They were brought to the pit of slaughter . . . before the eyes of the large gentile population, which had lived with the same Jews for dozens of years in peace and tranquility [*she-hayta im otam ha-yehudim asarot shanim be-shalom uve-shalva*]."

19. For the importance of the memorial book as a memorial in the usual sense, see Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, preface to *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (New York: Schocken, 1983), pp. 10–13, 18–19. Kugelmass and Boyarin pay special attention to the use of terms such as *matseva* (tombstone) by memorial book authors.

## **JEWISH-BELORUSSIAN SOLIDARITY IN WORLD WAR II MINSK**

**Barbara Epstein**

In his book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*,<sup>1</sup> Jan T. Gross tells the story of what happened in one Polish town, half Jewish, half ethnically Polish, after the Germans took power. The occupying Germans indicated to the town's Polish mayor that he and his supporters could do what they liked with the Jews. The mayor then coordinated a massacre in which gangs of Poles killed virtually the entire Jewish population. Gross's book raised a furor, in Poland and elsewhere, because it showed the extent of local collaboration with Nazi antisemitism. But it also underlined what was already taken to be a central message of the Holocaust: the Jews had few, if any, reliable allies. During the occupation, members of the local population assisted the Germans, or at best stood by, while the Jews were annihilated.

In many parts of occupied Eastern Europe this was in fact what happened. The major Jewish underground movements, in the ghettos of Warsaw, Bialystok, Vilna, and Kovno, were able to find few allies outside the ghettos. There were individual non-Jews who risked their lives either helping Jews to escape or assisting the Jewish underground movements, and there were small organizations that tried to help. But there was no substantial, organized solidarity from outside the ghettos, either in Poland or in Lithuania. In Poland, the Council to Aid Jews, more commonly known by its code name, *Zegota*, saved the lives of thousands of Jews. *Zegota* consisted of a small number of Poles, many in positions of influence within the Polish underground, determined to do what they could to aid Polish Jews; unfortunately, such concerns were not widely felt in the Polish underground as a whole. It is unlikely that the Nazi massacres of Polish Jews could have been prevented by efforts within Poland. Most of the Jews of Eastern Europe were killed during 1942, when the Germans were at the height of their power, and when they were engaged in killing not only Jews but also Poles, Belorussians, Ukrainians, and others. But if non-Jewish organizations with substantial influence and resources had done what they could to help the Jews, more Jews would have escaped and survived, and hopeful views of the human capacity for courage and generosity of spirit might have survived the war more nearly intact.

### **The Jewish-Belorussian Underground in Minsk**

The German Army occupied Jedwabne en route to the traditional territories of the Soviet Union. On June 27, 1941, the Germans reached Minsk, the capital of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belorussia. The Communist government fled to the east, along with the Red Army. First, German planes bombed the city, then the German Army arrived and took control, as it had elsewhere to the west. Within the traditional lands of the Soviet Union, Belorussia, and the Ukraine, the Germans were if anything less restrained in their violence toward Jews than they had been outside the Soviet Union or in the areas that had been under Soviet control only since 1939, which included western Belorussia, which was part of Poland during the interwar period. In Belorussia (i.e., eastern Belorussia, which, during the interwar years, comprised the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belorussia), the Germans rounded up Jews and shot them, or drove them into ghettos, which the Germans soon destroyed along with the inhabitants. In many cases these massacres were conducted in plain sight of local non-Jews. To the west of the occupied Soviet territories the Germans had gone to some lengths to conceal their massacres. In Belorussia the Germans proceeded as if they were not concerned with attitudes of locals toward the violence or assumed that attacks on Jews would receive local support.

If the Germans assumed unanimous local support, at least in Minsk they turned out to have been wrong. A powerful resistance movement emerged, organized by rank-and-file Communists, Komsomol members, and others. It united a Jewish underground organization in the ghetto with a Belorussian underground organization outside the ghetto, in the “city” (as the area outside the ghetto was referred to by both Jews and non-Jews). With the help of this united underground movement, and also of many Belorussians who were not members of the underground, thousands of Jews fled the ghetto and joined partisan units in the surrounding forests. No one knows for sure how many from the Minsk ghetto survived to join partisan units, but they numbered in the thousands; some estimate as many as 10,000. Nowhere else in occupied Eastern Europe were such large numbers of Jews able to flee the ghettos and engage in resistance. What made this possible was the alliance of Minsk Jews with non-Jews outside the ghetto.<sup>2</sup>

My account of resistance in the Minsk ghetto is based on more than fifty interviews with ghetto survivors and a slightly larger number of written memoirs, most of them by ghetto survivors, including members of the ghetto underground and a smaller number by members of the Belorussian underground outside the ghetto.<sup>3</sup> These



accounts show that there was widespread resistance in the Minsk ghetto and that it took a different form than the much better-known resistance movements in Polish and Lithuanian ghettos, as in Warsaw and Vilna. In these ghettos, as in others in Poland and Lithuania, Jewish underground movements attempted to mobilize revolts within the ghetto walls. Such efforts were successful only in the Warsaw ghetto, where a revolt of great magnitude took place. Elsewhere, however, underground movements were unable to mobilize such revolts, because it was clear that such revolts would be defeated. But given the absence of allies outside these ghettos, it was difficult to find an alternative to such internal revolts. In the Minsk ghetto, there was no effort to mobilize an internal revolt. Instead, the main aim of the underground movement was to send as many Jews to the forest as possible to join the growing Soviet-aligned partisan movement. Flight to the partisans also became the aim of large numbers of ghetto Jews who did not belong to the underground; in effect, it became the major strategy of resistance of the ghetto as a whole.

Several factors encouraged efforts to escape the ghetto and made escape more feasible here than in many of the major ghettos to the west. First, in Minsk the Germans began killing Jews in the ghetto, and driving them out of the ghetto by the thousands to their deaths, soon after the establishment of the ghetto. In many of the ghettos in Poland and Lithuania the Germans conducted massacres at the same time, but here they were often more successful in leading surviving ghetto inhabitants to believe that those who had been taken out of the ghettos had been taken to work elsewhere. In the Minsk ghetto, everyone knew that the thousands driven out of the ghetto were being taken to their deaths. In the ghettos outside the occupied Soviet territories, the Germans told the Jews that those being removed from the ghetto were being taken to work elsewhere; in Minsk, the Germans made no such efforts to disguise their intent. Furthermore, the Germans were conducting massacres of Jews in towns outside Minsk, and survivors of these massacres who made their way to the Minsk ghetto described what they had seen. In August 1941 the Germans conducted a series of actions that the Jews called raids, in which a total of a thousand young Jews were seized. On November 7, 1941, the first of a series of what the Jews called pogroms took place, in which thousands of Jews were marched out of the ghetto to death camps in or near Minsk, and shot. Several survivors of the November 7 pogrom returned to the ghetto and described what they had seen. The pogroms made it clear that remaining in the ghetto meant death.

The Minsk ghetto was also easier to escape from than many other ghettos. On July 19, 1941, a few weeks after having arrived in Minsk, the Germans announced that all Jews would be required to move into the old Jewish neighborhood, an area of about twenty blocks, crosscut by several major streets but otherwise laced by winding alleys. This was the area where Jews had traditionally lived, but by the time of the war many Jews lived elsewhere in the city. Ordering all Minsk Jews into the ghetto was something like ordering all New York Jews to move to the Lower East Side. In their order establishing the ghetto, the Germans announced that a brick wall was to be built around it.<sup>4</sup> But instead they constructed a barbed-wire fence, and they assigned patrols, rather than fixed sentries, to guard it. This relatively lax security probably reflected strained resources: the German administration also oversaw many prisoner-of-war camps in Minsk, and the Germans may have been more worried about POW uprisings than about resistance in the ghetto.<sup>5</sup>

In comparison with some other ghettos, the Minsk ghetto was porous. It was dangerous, but nevertheless possible, to crawl under the barbed-wire fence at a moment when there was no patrol in sight. Many Jews were captured doing this, and killed. But the Germans supplied virtually no food for ghetto inhabitants, except those who worked for the Germans outside the ghetto and who received small amounts of food at work. Many Jews, especially children and teenagers, regularly left the ghetto to obtain food for their families. Jews who decided to flee the ghetto could crawl under the fence at an opportune moment or leave the ghetto with a column of Jews being taken out to work, and then escape from the column. Jews were required to wear yellow patches on their outer clothes; those going in and out of the ghetto illegally had to find ways of attaching these so that they could be taken off and put back on quickly.

Another factor that made it possible for Jews to flee the Minsk ghetto was the proximity of the forest and of partisan units located in it. Soon after the ghetto was established, rumors that there were partisan units in the forest began to circulate throughout the ghetto. By the summer of 1942 Belorussia had become the center of the growing Soviet partisan movement, and increasing numbers of units based themselves in the forests around Minsk.<sup>6</sup> But gaining access to these units was difficult. They moved frequently, making it difficult to establish and maintain contact; most units would accept only those who brought weapons. The ghetto underground managed to establish contact with a few partisan units, but most contacts were made through the

Belorussian underground, whose members had much more ability to move through the countryside and thus were able to contact many more partisan units.

The fact that the Minsk ghetto was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, and the presence of partisan units in the nearby forests, created preconditions for escape. But these could not have been realized on anything like the scale that they were without sustained, organized cooperation between Jews in the ghetto and Belorussians outside it. As soon as the ghetto was established, Communists, Komsomol members, and others began forming secret groups in the ghetto to discuss means of resistance. Meanwhile, outside the ghetto, a parallel process was taking place. In late November or in December 1941, a citywide underground organization was established; the ghetto underground was a component of it and was represented on the City Committee that governed the underground as a whole. It was widely believed among the rank-and-file Communists who formed the City Committee that the leaders of the Communist Party must have left behind a committee with instructions to form an underground organization. Because of this conviction, they called the organization that they formed the Second (or Auxiliary) Minsk City Committee, in deference to the First City Committee, which they expected to find. No First City Committee was ever found; in fact, the Communist Party leaders had left none behind when they fled. Over time, the members of the underground ceased using the terms *Second* or *Auxiliary* and spoke simply of the City Committee. The Jewish and Belorussian underground organizations functioned separately to a considerable extent, because of the very different conditions inside and outside the ghetto, and the great efforts and dangers involved in every communication between the two. Nevertheless, the two underground organizations worked closely to send large numbers of Jews to the partisans. Some groups of Jews were sent from the ghetto to the forest; some Jews were included in groups leaving from the city.<sup>7</sup>

That there was an underground organization sending Jews to the forest became known throughout the ghetto, partly because the Germans fulminated, in public, against the underground and its connections with the partisans. Many Jews would have liked to have joined the underground, or to have been included in the groups it was sending to the forest, but had no way of finding it. Inspired by the example set by the underground, many Jews set off for the forest without its help, usually in groups, sometimes alone. Over time the numbers of those leaving the ghetto without help from the underground increased. Fleeing the ghetto was dangerous, but remaining in it was

even more so. Ghetto survivors estimated that of those who left without guides or instructions from the underground, two out of three were killed along the way, because of German patrols, the continuing hostility of part of the rural population, and even antisemitism in some Soviet partisan units. Nevertheless, thousands of Jews from the Minsk ghetto reached the forest and were taken into Soviet partisan units without the assistance of the ghetto underground.

Sending Jews to the forest was not the only aim of the ghetto underground. Underground groups in the ghetto also engaged in sabotage. The head of the Minsk Judenrat, Ilya Mushkin, and most of its members worked closely with the underground; as a result, the underground was often able to place its members in German military factories, where they could damage military goods produced for the German Army, or in weapons factories, from which they could steal weapons parts. In some cases groups of Belorussian and Jewish underground members, working in the same factories, supported each other in engaging in sabotage. The two underground organizations also worked together to create an underground printing press, which produced leaflets and an abbreviated “newspaper” of several pages providing news of the war, and to distribute these materials throughout Minsk, in the ghetto and outside it. They also worked together to rescue children from the ghetto. Jewish women underground members inside the ghetto took children under the wire and delivered them to Belorussian women underground members, waiting outside, who then took the children to Belorussian orphanages with directors willing to hide them, or to the homes of Belorussian underground members. Hundreds of children were saved in this way.

Resistance was not limited to members of the underground in Minsk, either in the ghetto or outside it. Virtually every underground campaign or effort included the involvement of some people outside the underground organizations; this was particularly the case in regard to the effort to send Jews to the partisans. The great majority of Jews who fled the ghetto and reached the partisans received assistance from one or more Belorussians, in some cases members of the underground, in some cases not. Some Jews received help from friends or former neighbors, schoolmates, or coworkers; some received assistance from strangers, whose identities they never learned. Of course, those who were later able to describe their flight were those who survived; those who received no such help were much less likely to survive. It is nevertheless clear, from the regularity with which Belorussians offering help appear in

my interviews and in written memoirs by ghetto survivors, that there were many such people.

Resistance to the German occupation in Minsk was based on dense networks of Jews and Belorussians, members and nonmembers of the underground, comrades, friends, acquaintances, and strangers. The Minsk underground organization was at the center of resistance efforts and in a general way provided leadership or at least inspiration to those outside it, but the large numbers, Jews and Belorussians, who engaged in resistance from outside the organized underground also played a crucial role, creating a culture of solidarity between Jews and non-Jews. The fact that there were many Belorussians willing to take some risks to help Jews meant that Jews had a better chance of escaping the ghetto and reaching the partisans than they would have had otherwise. Belorussian efforts to help Jews derived mostly from personal ties among friends, former neighbors, and others but also included those who acted on principle rather than on the basis of personal connections. Many Jews, while in the ghetto, maintained contact with friends and former neighbors outside the ghetto; sometimes these connections became bases for networks of resistance. There were Jews in the ghetto who never found the ghetto underground but instead joined or worked with underground groups outside the ghetto. There were Belorussians outside the ghetto who did not join the Belorussian underground organization in the city, perhaps because they could not find it, but formed their own underground groups and either made contact with underground groups in the ghetto or set about rescuing Jews from the ghetto. The stories of two ghetto survivors whom I interviewed help illustrate the networks of Jews and non-Jews, and of members and nonmembers of the underground, which formed the basis for Jewish resistance in Minsk.

### **Mira Ruderman's Story**

Mira Ruderman was fifteen when she and her family were taken from the village outside Minsk where they had lived and forced into the Minsk ghetto.<sup>8</sup> Mira, her parents, her younger brother, Marek, and the baby, Nyoma, moved in with Mira's uncle and his family, who had lived in the Jewish neighborhood before it was designated as a ghetto. Every morning Mira left the ghetto in a column of Jews; she worked in a German-run cinema house in the city as a cleaning woman. At work she was given thin, watery soup and bits of bread; she did her best to bring food home for her family.

One day when Mira happened to be near the barbed-wire fence surrounding the ghetto, she saw a young Belorussian woman, Shura Yanoulis, on the other side, beckoning to her. Before the war, Shura and her family had frequently spent summers as renters in the Ruderman's house, as a rural vacation from the city. Mira went to speak to Shura through the fence. Shura asked if Mira would be willing to help the underground. A leader of the underground, Ivan Kabushkin, had been arrested, and the underground was looking for a Jew who worked in the Minsk prison and who would be willing to relay messages to and from him. Perhaps, Shura said, Mira could find such a person. Mira, like everyone else in the ghetto, knew that the underground had contacts with partisan units. If she were to help the underground, she asked Shura, would the underground help her reach the partisans? Shura said that it would, and Mira agreed to look for someone to pass messages to Kabushkin. Two young girls, the Knigovy sisters, Tanya and Frieda, who lived in the same courtyard where Mira and her family lived, worked at the prison; as cleaners, they regularly entered Kabushkin's cell. In response to Mira's request, they agreed to serve as liaisons to Kabushkin. A chain of communication was established. A member of the underground would meet Mira in the ladies' room of the cinema house where she worked and give her a message to be relayed to Kabushkin. Back in the ghetto, Mira would convey the message to the Knigovy sisters, who would take it to Kabushkin. His answer would be returned along the same chain.

After some time, the underground found a prison guard willing to give Kabushkin a copy of the key to his cell and to look the other way while he escaped, in return for a fur coat and some gold coins. A member of the underground brought the coat, coins, and key to Mira. The guard had previously conveyed the key to the underground, to be copied, so that he would not be left without a key and thus obviously complicit in Kabushkin's escape. This was early spring; during the cold months, Mira wore a sheepskin coat that she had brought into the ghetto with her. That evening she went back to the ghetto wearing the fur coat, with the coins and key in its pockets, under her sheepskin coat, and she gave the coat, coins, and key to the Knigovy sisters. But before the coat could be delivered, the plan was somehow leaked to the Germans. There was a wave of arrests of underground members in the city. Someone from the underground gave Mira morphine and cyanide tablets, in case she should be arrested. A few days later, Mira looked out of the window of her house in the ghetto and saw German soldiers entering. She took the morphine but not the cyanide. By the

time they reached her room she was out cold. The soldiers did not hurt her; presumably, they thought she was dead. After the soldiers left, a physician from the Jewish hospital in the ghetto, which was a center of underground activity, came to the house, pumped Mira's stomach, and forced her to walk.

When Mira recovered, she decided that she had lived in the ghetto long enough and that it was time to go to the partisans. She was not sure if the Germans who entered her house had been looking for her or if they had been on some entirely unrelated mission. But if they had been looking for her, it would not take them long to learn that she was alive and come looking for her again. She decided not to contact the underground for its help but to flee immediately; from her underground connections, she knew which way to walk, once out of the ghetto, to reach an area where there were partisan units. She asked the Knigovy sisters if they would go with her, but they refused, saying that they were committed to staying with Kabushkin, who was now being tortured. The Germans later discovered the Knigovy sisters' connection to the underground and executed them.

Mira persuaded her brother, Marek, and her father to go with her. One evening, toward dusk, the three Rudermans left their house and walked toward the fence. It often happened that if someone walked toward the fence at dusk, looking purposeful, others would follow them, thinking that they were on their way to the forest and perhaps had connections with the partisans. A crowd gathered behind the Rudermans and followed them out under the wire. As Mira held the bottom wire up with her handkerchief, bits of metal, attached to the wire for just this purpose, jangled and alerted a nearby policeman, who came running. He was unarmed but called to other nearby police; in the confusion, the Rudermans managed to get away. They walked through the edges of the city and then westward through the forest; they continued walking all night. Along the way, they saw corpses. Mira assumed that these were the bodies of Jews who, like themselves, had escaped the ghetto but who had died trying to find a partisan unit to join. These bodies served as reminders of the risk that the Rudermans had taken by leaving the ghetto, especially without the underground's help. The Rudermans had no weapons; Mira was young, and female; her brother was too young to be a fighter; and they were Jews. They had little reason to believe that they would have better luck in finding acceptance by a partisan unit.

In the morning, the Rudermans entered a village and encountered a man who asked them if they were looking for the partisans and, when they said they were,

volunteered to show the way to a partisan base. Mira followed him, leaving her father and brother to wait for her; she had the impression that her guide, a Belorussian, was helping the partisans in the hope that he, too, would be accepted into the unit. He led her to a partisan base in the forest and to its commander, a Ukrainian, Semyon Ganzenko. Ganzenko asked Mira what her name was and where she was from. When she responded that her name was Ruderman and that she was from the Minsk ghetto, Ganzenko exclaimed, "My wife's name is also Ruderman, and she's from Minsk! Perhaps you are my in-law." It was true, as Mira found out later, that Ganzenko's partner was a young woman named Fanya Ruderman from Minsk; she and Ganzenko had met in the partisan unit. Ganzenko admitted Mira, her father, and her brother to his unit; Mira and her father were given weapons and became fighters, while Marek was included in the unit's family group, which consisted of women and children who could not fight; they cooked and cleaned for the unit. All three Rudermans survived the war. Mira believed that Ganzenko had admitted them to the unit on the strength of their presumed family connection and out of his love for his partner, Fanya. Later during the war, Mira said, many more Jews were included in the unit.

What Mira did not know, at that time at least, was that Ganzenko had more reasons than his love for his wife to be open to including Jews in his unit. He was a former Red Army commander and, until the early spring of 1942, some months before the Rudermans arrived in the forest, Ganzenko had been a POW in a camp in Minsk. This was the Shirokaya Street camp, where the ghetto underground had found jobs for several of its members; their task was to help POWs escape to the partisans. One underground member, Sonia Kurlandskaya, was translator and secretary for the camp's commander; several others had the job of taking garbage out of the camp. The ghetto underground had sent a group to the forest, which had joined with a group of Belorussians to form a new partisan unit. Word had gotten back to the ghetto underground that the group needed a commander with military experience. When Kurlandskaya learned that a prisoner in the camp, Ganzenko, was a former Red Army commander, the underground decided to rescue him and send him to the forest. Ganzenko and several other POWs were put into barrels of garbage and given straws to breathe through. The underground members put the barrels onto a truck and drove the truck out of the camp.<sup>9</sup> At a prearranged place on the road, a liaison from the partisans, Tanya Lifshitz, a young Jewish woman, was waiting for them. The men were taken out of the barrels, and Lifshitz led them to the forest, where Ganzenko was made



commander of the new unit.<sup>10</sup> Ganzenko rose in the partisan hierarchy; he came to be widely regarded as a decent man and also as a friend of the Jews. Perhaps he would have included the Rudermans in his unit even if the Jewish underground, and a Jewish liaison, had not saved his life. But it seems likely that Ganzenko's own history played a role in his willingness to go out of his way to help Jews.

By the spring of 1943, a year after Ganzenko arrived in the forest, when Minsk was the largest of only a handful of ghettos and Jewish work camps still in existence in Belorussia, Jews were fleeing the ghetto in large numbers, and many were wandering around the forest looking for partisan units to join. Some Jews from the ghetto underground had gained leadership positions in the partisan units that they had joined; many Jews in the forest were convinced that the Germans would soon destroy the Minsk ghetto, as they had already destroyed many others. Several Minsk Jews who were now part of the partisan hierarchy, of whom the most influential was a man named Shimon Zorin, approached Ganzenko with the suggestion that he form a large family camp as a refuge for Jews wandering in the forest, especially women, children, and old people who could not become fighters. The Minsk Jews also argued that liaisons should be sent into the ghetto to bring people out, so as to save as many as possible, and that those who could not fight could be placed in this family unit.

At first Ganzenko refused. From a military point of view, this was an entirely unconventional idea: it would require assigning military resources, including fighters, to a unit that had no military purpose. But Ganzenko changed his mind. He named Zorin commander of Division 106 (more popularly known as "Zorin's Brigade") and contributed eighteen of his own fighters. Ganzenko sent liaisons throughout the countryside to find Jews and into the ghetto to bring Jews out. Those who could not fight were placed in Zorin's Brigade, and those who could were either added to its fighting unit or placed in other units. Ultimately, the brigade included 558 people (all Jews except for one Belorussian), of whom 137 were fighters; of these, 121 were men, sixteen were women. The remainder, members of the family camp, consisted of 421 unarmed women, children, and old people. The brigade supported other fighting units by producing shoes and clothing and operating a bakery, laundry, and hospital. The fighting unit protected the brigade from the Germans, sometimes by engaging in battles, ultimately by moving the entire brigade deeper into the forest, out of German reach. Other than some casualties among the fighters, Zorin's Brigade survived the war intact.<sup>11</sup>

**Raissa Chasenyeovich's Story**

Raissa Grigorievna Chasenyeovich was twenty-seven years old when she was forced into the ghetto, along with her two children, Leonid, four, and Eleanora, two, her sister, and her nephew.<sup>12</sup> Both women's husbands were in the Russian east, with the Red Army. Their father, Grigorii Sherman, had left Minsk soon after the Germans arrived; he predicted that the Germans would kill all the Jews and begged his family to go with him. But Raissa's son and her nephew were both in kindergartens, which for the time being could not be reached because of the German bombing of the city, and the women refused to go without the children. Grigorii left by himself; he managed to get across the border, and he survived the war. By the time Raissa and her sister retrieved their children, it had become impossible to leave the city.

Raissa's house was bombed when the Germans attacked Minsk; she and her children got out in time, but all their possessions were destroyed. For the next month, before the ghetto was established, they alternately stayed with Raissa's friend Katya Kremiez and lived on the street. The fact that Raissa was Jewish and Katya was Belorussian in no way interfered with their friendship; in Soviet-ruled Belorussia interethnic friendships and, for that matter, marriages were taken for granted by young people, especially those with higher education. Raissa and Katya had become friends while students at a Minsk polytechnic institute, and they had also met their husbands there. Raissa's husband was a Tatar; Katya's, a Jew. The two couples had remained close friends after their student days. Raissa and her husband were both Komsomol members, and Katya and her husband were also supporters of the Soviets. When the Germans attacked Minsk, Katya and her husband had fled the city, joining the large numbers of people trying to reach the Russian border. A German plane flying overhead had dropped a bomb, and Katya's husband was killed. Katya returned to Minsk alone.

Raissa's documents had been destroyed when her house was bombed, and Katya proposed that she should accompany Raissa to a police station, to help her get a new passport. Raissa's old passport had identified her as a Jew; like all Russian internal passports, it gave the nationality of the bearer. Katya said that she thought the Germans were going to be hard on the Jews. She suggested that Raissa, who until this time had used her maiden name, Riva Sherman, might instead use her husband's Tatar name, Chasenyeovich, and identify herself as a Tatar. Raissa took Katya's advice, partly because she remembered that her father had made similar predictions about the Germans. The two women decided on the name "Raissa," the Russian equivalent of

Riva, and invented a plausible story, including a place of birth (the shtetl where Raissa had been born was not a likely birthplace for a Tatar) and an account of why and when she had come to Minsk. At the police station Raissa identified herself as a Tatar on the passport application form. The woman clerk looked at her skeptically and commented that she looked more like a Jew than a Tatar. The two young women responded to this vociferously: Raissa pointed out that the woman clerk, who had long dark hair, looked more like a Jew than she did, and Katya announced that she was a German (her last name, Kremiez, allowed her to make this claim) and that she would never hang around with a “Zhid” (the Russian equivalent of “kike”). The woman clerk gave Raissa her passport, identifying her as a Tatar. This passport probably saved Raissa’s life. It enabled her to leave the ghetto and walk through the streets of Minsk in relative safety, and it protected her against charges that she was actually the Jew, and supposed Communist, Riva Sherman. (In fact, when the war broke out, Raissa, or Riva, as she was called at the time, was a member of the Komsomol, the Communist Party youth group, but not of the Communist Party itself.)

When the Jews were ordered to move into the ghetto, Raissa, her sister, their mother, and the three children moved in together; having nowhere else to live, they slept on the floor of an abandoned cinema house. Raissa left the ghetto regularly to get food for the family. Unlike her mother and sister, Raissa spoke Russian fluently and without a Yiddish accent; she had learned Russian as a teenager, studying for a time in Moscow, and in her subsequent job in Minsk, as an inspector in a wood factory, she had come to speak it fluently. Raissa frequently left the ghetto by crawling under the wire fence; in the city, people readily gave her food for her family. When she was in the city, Raissa often dropped in to see a woman named Tamara Sinitza, whom Raissa had first met when her daughter was an infant. Tamara also had a baby, and the women had met at a children’s kitchen where baby food was provided to new mothers. During the first weeks of the occupation Tamara had happened to come upon Raissa and her children in the street, and the two women had a conversation about the need for resistance to the occupation. This conversation led Raissa to think that she and Tamara could work together. The first time Raissa left the ghetto she went to see Tamara and found that Tamara was taking care of five children, three of them her own, the other two those of her brother. Tamara’s brother had been married to a Jewish woman who had died of tuberculosis just before the war; the brother had gone into the Red Army; and Tamara had taken the children. Thus Tamara was hiding two Jewish children.

A week or so after this first visit, when Raissa dropped in to see Tamara again, Tamara told Raissa that, against German orders, she had hidden a radio; she was organizing a group that would meet to listen to Soviet broadcasts about the war, take notes, and write leaflets containing information about the war and urging resistance. She invited Raissa to join the group, and Raissa agreed. Her task would be to take leaflets back to the ghetto with her. After this, when Raissa left the ghetto for food, she also met with her underground group or did other work for the underground, such as distributing leaflets.

Katya had in the meantime found an unoccupied basement on Revolutzionaya Street, just outside the ghetto, and had shown it to Raissa, suggesting that she stay there during her trips out of the ghetto. Tamara asked the members of her group to assemble at her house on November 7, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, to listen to the speech that Stalin was to give on that day and write leaflets. Raissa left the ghetto the day before, taking her children with her, and stayed overnight in the apartment on Revolutzionaya Street. On November 7, Raissa and her children went to the meeting at Tamara's house, then returned to the basement apartment. A few hours later Katya appeared, so distraught that she could barely speak; she told Raissa that there had been a pogrom in the ghetto and that thousands of Jews had been loaded onto trucks and taken to be shot. The pogrom had taken place in the part of the ghetto where Raissa's family lived. The next day Raissa and Katya went into the ghetto and discovered that Raissa's mother, sister, and nephew were gone. Katya implored Raissa to remain in the basement apartment and not go back to the ghetto. Raissa refused. The underground's rules of conspiratorial work forbade her to explain to her friend that she was working with the underground and had to deliver leaflets to the ghetto. Katya may have guessed as much; she never pressed her friend to explain her activities.

Katya continued to help Raissa. She arranged a meeting with her Tatar in-laws, which resulted in their taking Raissa's son, Leonid. She also took Raissa to work. Katya had a job in a German oil distribution firm located in central Minsk, not far from the basement apartment. The director of the firm, his secretary, and one or two other employees were Germans, but the rest of the staff consisted of Belorussian women. Raissa became friendly with several of these women, including the German secretary, and when the firm needed an extra employee, Raissa was often given the job. This enabled her to discover where German oil supplies were stored in Minsk and to pass the information to the underground, which relayed it to the partisans, resulting in a

bombing raid. The jobs that Raissa acquired through the firm also gave her much-needed income. After the November 7 pogrom she spent most of her time outside the ghetto. A neighbor in the house on Revoluzionaya Street, Vera Ivanovna Nestorovich, took a liking to Raissa's daughter, Eleanora, and offered to take care of the child while Raissa was "at work" (which often meant, on missions into the ghetto). Katya also helped care for Eleanora.

Raissa frequently met friends and acquaintances in Minsk; some of them helped her, in most cases by giving her food, and others did nothing to harm her. But one day, as she was walking through central Minsk, she felt that she was being followed. She was near Katya's workplace; she went there quickly and ran up the stairs to Katya's office. A policeman came through the door after her and announced that she was under arrest as a Communist and a Jew. Despite Raissa's insistence that she was neither a Communist nor a Jew but a Tatar, the policeman insisted on taking her to the police office, where she found a former coworker, Volsky, waiting for her, wearing the uniform of a policeman serving under the Germans. In 1934, when the popular Communist leader Sergei Kirov was assassinated, Volsky had said at a meeting of workers at the wood factory that he was glad that Kirov had died, and he hoped more Communists would be assassinated. Volsky had lost his job. Since Raissa was the head of his department, he may have assumed that she had reported his remark (which in fact she had not done) and caused him to lose his job. He was an anticommunist, he assumed that Raissa was a Communist (actually, she was a member of the Komsomol, but not of the Communist Party), and he was determined to get revenge.

Raissa said that she had never met Volsky before, and she produced her passport to prove that she was not Riva Sherman but rather Raissa Chasenyevich. Volsky said that she was lying. The head policeman suggested that Volsky find a witness to back up his claim, and he left. A few hours later he came back with a man named Maditzky, whom both Volsky and Raissa knew well. Maditzky looked at Raissa blankly and said that he had never seen her before; Raissa said that she did not recognize him either. Volsky shouted that they were both lying, but they insisted. Maditzky said that Volsky must have made a mistake. He wrote a statement to this effect, and he left. Volsky went out again to try to find another witness. Raissa said that this was clearly a mistake and suggested that the police let her go. The head policeman said that he was inclined to agree with her, but that Volsky had filled out a complaint against her, as a Jew and a Communist who had mistreated him before the war. This, he

said, required him to turn her over to the Gestapo. He assured her that the Gestapo would certainly discover the truth. He assigned a policeman to take her to the Gestapo and also sent along the statements signed by Volsky and Maditzky.

Raissa was placed in a cell filled with women, two of whom were ill with typhus; most of the women were facing accusations similar to those leveled against her. After several days she was taken out of the cell to a room where she was interviewed; she was asked to provide names of people who could attest that she was not a Jew. Raissa gave the names of several people whom she could trust to attest that she was not a Jew; she did not give the names of anyone in the underground. She went back to the cell. Several days later she was taken out again and told that she was free: no evidence against her had been found. She was probably saved by the fact that Maditzky's testimony contradicted Volsky's, by the testimony of those whose names she had supplied, and perhaps also by the fact that Volsky had mistakenly identified her as a Communist. The Germans had a list of members of the Belorussian Communist Party. If they had looked for the name of Riva Sherman (or Raissa Chasenyeovich) on that list, they would not have found it.

After being released from prison, Raissa came down with typhus and went into the Minsk hospital; a member of her underground group, a nurse, came to see her every day to take care of her. When she was released from the hospital, a member of the hospital staff told her that a man had frequently come to ask about her, but, oddly, he had never asked to see her. Raissa understood that Volsky was still after her. He may have simply been tracking her, or he may have hoped to identify Jewish friends and relatives who might have visited her. Raissa's impression that she was still in danger from Volsky was reinforced when, several weeks later, she went to the home of another former coworker, Anya Petroskaya, now an employee at the railroad station, to obtain a train schedule for the partisans. At the sight of Raissa, Anya went pale and demanded that Raissa leave immediately. "Hasn't anyone told you," she asked, "that Volsky has been showing your photograph around, that he brought Nadezhda Lazarevna Dudo [another former coworker] to the police station, and that she certified that you are Jewish and that your name is Riva Sherman?" After obtaining a promise that Anya would give the train schedule to someone else, who would come later, Raissa left. She went to Nadezhda's house and confronted her. "I had no choice," Nadezhda said. "You must leave Minsk, there's no other way to protect yourself."

Raissa went straight to Tamara's house and told her that Volsky was still pursuing her and that it was time for her to go to the partisans. Tamara agreed. The problem was that the underground group had no weapons. At this time, partisan groups usually refused to admit volunteers who came to them without weapons. Another member of the group pointed out that the partisans also needed typewriters; perhaps Raissa could obtain one. Raissa knew that the director of Katya's firm had a typewriter and that he was out of town. She went to the firm, took the typewriter from the director's office, and, with the help of a young Belorussian on the staff, put it into a box and left by the back door, out of fear that Volsky might be waiting at the front door. Raissa took the typewriter to Tamara's house and was hidden, with Eleanora, in the home of another underground member for several days, until a liaison from the partisans arrived. Raissa was taken to the partisans but was forced to leave Eleanora behind, in Tamara's care. Once admitted to a partisan unit, she was soon transferred to the general partisan headquarters, along with her German typewriter, which she learned to use, producing leaflets directed to German soldiers. Several months after Raissa's arrival at the partisan headquarters, Tamara came, bringing Eleanora, who remained with her mother for the duration of the war. After the liberation, Raissa returned to Minsk, retrieved Leonid from her in-laws, and was reunited with her husband, who had returned from the East.

### **Why Was Minsk Different?**

Mira Ruderman's and Raissa Chasenyevich's stories illustrate the extent to which resistance to the German occupation in Minsk involved the intertwined efforts of Jews and Belorussians. Raissa's story especially illustrates the cosmopolitan quality of life in Minsk before the war, especially among young people. Interethnic friendships were taken for granted, and interethnic marriages were common. These ties led to solidarity during the war, including providing help to friends and supporting resistance. As elsewhere in occupied Eastern Europe, there were collaborators in Minsk willing or eager to turn Jews in, and there were many people whose main concern was to keep their heads down and stay out of trouble. Nevertheless, the degree of solidarity between Jews and Belorussians in wartime Minsk contrasts sharply with relations between Jews and non-Jews to the west, in Poland and Lithuania.

The main reason that Belorussians and Jews were able to work together, to the extent that they did, against the German occupation was that the Communist Party

provided a framework for joint resistance, and two decades of Soviet rule had fostered Jewish assimilation and extensive ties between Jews and Belorussians. For Belorussian Jews, Soviet rule had been in many ways harsh and repressive. The Soviet campaign against religion had led to the destruction of traditional Jewish communities and the loss of much of Jewish culture; the Soviets' determination that no organization should be allowed to challenge the Communist Party had led Jewish organizations of all kinds, secular as well as religious, to be closed down. These policies were not in themselves antisemitic: churches, and non-Jewish parties and organizations, were also destroyed. The campaigns to close down the synagogues and Jewish organizations were enthusiastically pursued by Jewish Communists; such internal divisions did much more to undermine Jewish communities than had czarist repression, which operated as an external force.

But while Soviet rule weakened Jewish culture, it also provided opportunities for individual Jews, especially young Jews. Young Jews flooded into the universities and into the Communist Party, where they formed bonds with non-Jews. For many Belorussian young people, Jews and non-Jews, Communism meant the possibility of entering the modern world and came with a set of attractive universalist values: social equality, an end to class oppression and antisemitism, and "the brotherhood of peoples of different nationalities." At least in Minsk, where the influence of the Communist Party was strong, many people, especially young people, took these ideals seriously.

The Communist Party was the sole locus of political activity before the war. Before Belorussia became a Soviet republic, Minsk had been a center of activity for Zionism of various stripes and also for the Bund, the revolutionary Jewish workers' organization, which worked toward the defeat of the czar and the establishment of socialism, hoped for an alliance of Jewish and Russian workers toward this end, and helped organize the Russian Socialist Party (later the Communist Party). The Bund came into conflict with Lenin and his followers over its demand for some degree of Jewish autonomy within the Russian Socialist Party and was expelled from the party as a result. After the Revolution of 1917, the Soviets did not tolerate challenges to their power and thus discouraged or repressed all political organizations that did not subordinate themselves to the Communist Party, including the various Zionist organizations, and the Bund. By the thirties the Communist Party had become the only vehicle for political activity. During the war, Jewish Communists used ties to non-Jews, forged before the war in the Communist Party, in the service of resistance to the



Germans. Though the underground organization, inside and outside the ghetto, was Communist-initiated and led, many noncommunists participated in it, and it was part of a larger web of resistance that involved the efforts of noncommunists who were not members of the underground but who either assisted it or engaged in resistance outside it. Here, too, outside the underground organization, resistance often involved cooperation between Jews and non-Jews, often drawing on prewar ties. The extent of Jewish assimilation in prewar Minsk, as in other Soviet cities, and the influence of Communist ideals among young Jews shaped resistance outside as well as within the underground organization.<sup>13</sup>

Along with the influence of the Communist Party, there was another factor behind the solidarity between Jews and non-Jews in wartime Minsk: the relative absence of nationalism in Belorussia. In neighboring areas of Eastern Europe, including Poland, Lithuania, and the Ukraine, strong nationalist movements had deep social roots and long histories. Especially in the interwar years, major elements in these movements understood nationalism as the pursuit of mono-ethnic states and cultures. Such definitions of nationalism necessarily excluded Jews, and movements that held such views often came to regard Jews as a major obstacle to nationalism. During the interwar years, mono-ethnic nationalist movements in Eastern Europe were also anticommunist and tended to identify Jews with communism, thus giving new life to antisemitic beliefs.<sup>14</sup>

This is not meant to suggest that the majority of Belorussians, in Minsk or elsewhere, defied the Germans by acting in solidarity with Jews. Everywhere in German-occupied Eastern Europe the great majority of non-Jews remained passive, neither helping the Jews nor helping the Germans kill them; everywhere, there were collaborators, and there were those who acted in solidarity with the Jews, despite the risks involved. In Minsk, and perhaps to a lesser extent elsewhere in what is now eastern Belarus (that is, the territory of Soviet Belorussia, before the war), relations between Jews and non-Jews differed in subtle but nevertheless important ways from relations between Jews and non-Jews to the west, in Poland and Lithuania. According to the reports of Germans and others, many Belorussians, especially those in the countryside, at first welcomed the German invaders, no doubt in the hope that German rule would be less onerous than Soviet rule had been. But in the early days of the occupation the Germans reported that, in contrast to their experience elsewhere, they were unable to provoke the Belorussian population into pogroms against the Jews.

Throughout Eastern Europe the Germans relied on local collaborators, men whom they had hired as police, to round up and kill Jews in the massacres that took place in the fall of 1941 and on an even larger scale beginning in the spring of 1942. The Germans reported that the Belorussian population as a whole, rather than taking satisfaction from these attacks on Jews, were shocked by German brutality and dismayed by the thought that they might be next. One German report attributed this response to the “stupidity” of the Belorussians: they apparently failed to understand the “racial threat” posed by the Jews.<sup>15</sup> A Nazi official reported, with surprise, that in the eyes of the population, the Germans appeared as “barbarians and hangmen, the Jew being held to be as much of a human being as the Belorussian.”<sup>16</sup>

The vast majority of Belorussians, in Minsk and outside it, remained passive in the face of German brutality toward the Jews and toward other groups: prisoners of war, Communists, Gypsies. Active collaboration was largely restricted to those whom the Germans were able to attract to the police force with offers of pay and status, but in apparently insufficient numbers that impelled the Germans to bring squadrons of Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and others to Belorussia. There were also small numbers of Belorussian nationalists who actively supported German rule, but most had left Belorussia during the Soviet period and returned with the Germans; their links to the Belorussian population were weak.<sup>17</sup> The Communist Party, on the other hand, did have links to the population, through networks of members and other supporters. Despite the widespread resentment of Soviet rule, the fact that the Communist Party had been the only arena of public life, and the only political authority, for two decades gave its members a degree of influence that communists lacked in many other parts of Eastern Europe. During the war, as German brutality toward Belorussians increased, Belorussian opposition to the Germans grew, and with it identification with the Jews as fellow sufferers.

The tenor of Jewish-Belorussian relations differed between Minsk and other cities, where the Communist Party was strong and the influence of the churches was weak, and the countryside, where traditional culture remained stronger. Relations between Jews and non-Jews also had a somewhat different character in eastern Belorussia, where Minsk was situated, than in western Belorussia, which had been part of Poland during the interwar years, occupied by the Soviets between 1939 and 1941, and whose population included a much larger number of ethnic Poles. During the interwar years antisemitism had gained considerable strength in Poland, through the

growing influence of nationalist groups that depicted Jews as obstacles to national aspirations and as carriers of communism. Non-Jews, especially the ethnic Poles who lived in this area in large numbers, were influenced by these trends.

The Soviet occupation of western Belorussia, along with the rest of eastern Poland, further strengthened antisemitism. Though the great majority of Jews did not belong to or vote for the Communist Party, most preferred Soviet to German rule. Many Poles regarded Jewish support for the Soviets as a betrayal of the national interests of Poland. Antagonism toward the Jews was further heightened when the Soviets appointed Jewish Communists to positions in the new Soviet authorities. Antisemitism thus ran high in western Belorussia, before and during the war, as in other areas occupied by the Soviets during 1939–41.<sup>18</sup> Antisemitism was stronger among ethnic Poles than among ethnic Belorussians living in western Belorussia. The war pitted Poles against Jews because Poles had traditionally regarded Russia as a threat; for most Poles, Soviet communism intensified the fear of Soviet occupation. Few Jews supported the Communist Party, but most greatly preferred Soviet to German rule. Furthermore, Polish national identity was highly developed, and the right-wing version of Polish nationalism that held sway in this period portrayed Jews as a foreign element in Poland.

Belorussian national identity, on the other hand, was weak and did not hamper relations between Jews and Belorussians. In eastern Belorussia, the area that had been under Soviet control for two decades, ethnic Poles were a small minority and nationalism was weak; its influence was restricted to a small sector of the population. Traditional, religious-based antisemitism persisted in eastern Belorussia, especially in the countryside, but it was no longer the fiery ideology that it once had been. The new fiery version of antisemitism, based on nationalism, had little force in eastern Belorussia. The relative weakness of antisemitic ideologies among the Belorussian population did not mean that all Belorussians behaved well during the war. There were Belorussians who took advantage of Jewish vulnerability, turning Jews in for the pints of salt that the Germans offered, taking over Jews' apartments, or stealing Jewish property. There were many motives for such acts; antisemitism was not necessarily the main one.<sup>19</sup> The absence of antisemitic popular enthusiasm left room for the expression of solidarity, especially in Minsk, where it was supported by the ideology of cooperation between nationalities and promoted by an organized underground movement.

Unlike its neighbors, each of which could cite historical precedents for nationhood, Belorussia, before it became a Soviet republic, had for centuries been the poor backwater of one empire after the next, united by little more than a language widely dismissed by outsiders as merely a deformed Slavic dialect. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the entrepreneurial class and intellectuals formed the basis of nationalist movements. Into the twentieth century, Belorussia was an agrarian region, dotted by cities populated largely by Jews along with members of other ethnic minorities, and the vast majority of ethnic Belorussians were peasants. Thus Belorussia lacked the social basis for a strong nationalist movement. Also, despite forced collectivization and the purges of the thirties, anticommunism did not take hold in Belorussia in the way that it did in Poland, Lithuania, or western Ukraine, and Jewish participation in the Communist Party did not lead to popular anticommunism. It is difficult to measure the impact of an absence as a factor in shaping a culture. But it seems clear that the strength of Jewish-Belorussian solidarity, in Minsk, owed something to the absence of the sort of right-wing nationalism that had taken root elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

## NOTES

1. Jan T. Gross, *The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

2. There are two published accounts of the Minsk ghetto underground, both by Hersh Smoliar (transliterated as Smolar in his second book): *Resistance in Minsk* (Oakland, CA: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1966); and *The Minsk Ghetto: Soviet-Jewish Partisans against the Nazis* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989). Smoliar, a surviving leader of the Minsk ghetto underground, estimates that by the end of the war, close to 10,000 Jews from the ghetto had managed to “get to the forest” (i.e., join partisan units) (*Minsk Ghetto*, p. 158). But he gives no basis for this figure. Ya’akov Greenstein, a former member of the ghetto underground, echoed this estimate in my interview with him in Israel on November 12, 2000. Greenstein also estimated that half of those who reached partisan units had been sent by the underground and that the rest arrived without the underground’s help. The size of the ghetto’s population is similarly uncertain. In *Resistance in Minsk*, Smoliar gives the figure of 80,000 as the ghetto population’s highest level (p. 9); in *The Minsk Ghetto*, he gives the figure of 100,000 (p. 52). Solomon Swartz, in *Di Yidn in Sovetn-Farband: Milkhome un Nokh-Milkhome Yorn, 1935–1965* (New York: Yidisher Arbiter-Komitet, 1967), cites Smoliar’s figure of 80,000, but adds that Kuzma Kisiliev, a Belorussian who was Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs, said in a conversation with the correspondent of the *Morgn Freiheit* just after the war that the Minsk ghetto first contained 75,000 Minsk Jews, but that the population was increased to 100,000 by those brought to the ghetto from surrounding towns and cities and from Central Europe (Swartz, *Di Yidn in Sovetn-Farband*, pp. 41, 65–66; he cites the *Morgn Freiheit*, 23 May 1945).

3. My knowledge of the Minsk ghetto and its underground movement is based on fifty-two interviews with ghetto survivors, thirty-six conducted in Minsk and the rest in Israel; forty-two written memoirs, ten of them by Belorussians who were in contact with the ghetto underground, the rest by Jews, mostly members of the ghetto underground; the transcripts of five interviews, conducted in Israel in the late sixties, with survivors of the Minsk ghetto; several published memoirs by ghetto survivors, in Yiddish; the papers of Chasya Pruslina, a leader of the ghetto underground who survived the war but who is no longer alive; miscellaneous documents concerning the ghetto and its underground movement; and miscellaneous interviews with Belorussians who helped Jews escape the ghetto, descendants of deceased ghetto survivors, and Minsk residents for other reasons knowledgeable about the ghetto and its underground movement.

4. An English translation of the German order establishing the ghetto has been published (together with a facsimile of the German original and a Russian translation) in “Nazi Gold” from *Belarus: Documents and Materials* (Minsk: National Archive of the Republic of Belarus, 1998), pp. 18–22.

5. Raissa Chernoglazova (editor of *Prisoners of War 1941–56: Documents and Materials* [Minsk: Izdatel Skakn BB, 2003]), interview by author, Minsk, 15 September 2003.

6. Kenneth Slepyan, “The Soviet Partisan Movement and the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14:1 (2000), p. 10, gives the figures of 70,000 Soviet partisans in June 1942, which had risen to 120,000 by January 1943 and at least 180,000 by June 1943.

7. The evolution of the ghetto underground, the creation of a Minsk-wide underground, and the subsequent history of ghetto resistance is described in Smoliar’s two books and also in Anna P. Kupreyeva, “The Minsk Ghetto Underground,” National Archives of the Republic of Belarus (hereafter NARB), fond 4683, opis 3, file 1197; Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, “Report of the Secretary of the Underground Group of Ten in the Minsk Ghetto,” NARB f. 4683, op. 2, f. 77; Anna Semyonovna Machis, “The Minsk Ghetto” (a report written by a former member of the ghetto underground, in a partisan unit, December 1943), NARB, f. 3, op. 86, f. 6546; Anna Semyonovna Machis Levina, “Documents on the Underground Struggle in the Minsk Ghetto during the Great Patriotic War,” 1977 (with an 1981 addendum), NARB, f. 4683, op. 3, f. 1196; Anna P. Kupreyeva, “Study of the Activity of the Territorial Underground Group That Functioned in the Ghetto in the Area of Tatarskaya Street,” NARB, f. 4683, op. 3, f. 1198; and Ya’akov Greenstein, *Umkum un Vidershtand afn Vaysrusishn Erd, 1941–45*, Yad Vashem Archives, 033/459.

8. The following account is based on my interviews with Mira Ruderman in Minsk on 8 October 1999, 20 July 2000, and 11 September 2003.

9. Ya’akov Greenstein, interview by author, Givatayim, Israel, 12 November 2000.

10. Tanya Lifshitz Boyko, interview by author, Bat Yam, Israel, 10 November 2000.

11. Ganzenko’s rescue from the Shirokaya Street camp, his role as a “friend of the Jews” in the partisan movement, and his part in the formation of Zorin’s Brigade are described in Abrasha Slukhovsky’s memoir of his experiences in the Minsk ghetto and with the partisans, *Fun Geto in di Velder* (Paris: Farlag Oyfsnai, 1975), pp. 134–37. In Greenstein’s *Umkum un Vidershtand afn Vaysrusishn Erd* (his memoir was published in Hebrew in 1969 as *Ud Mi-Kikar Ha’Yovel, Kibbutz He-Meukhad*), Greenstein describes Ganzenko’s rescue from the Shirokaya Street camp and his role in the establishment of Zorin’s Brigade (pp. 74–77). My statistics on Zorin’s Brigade are from an untitled document, NARB, fond 3500, opis 5, delo 402.

12. The following account is based on my interviews with Raissa Grigorievna Chasenyeovich in Minsk on 13 October 1999, 11 July 2000, and 16 September 2003.

13. In *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), Zvi Gitelman traces the repression of Zionist and other noncommunist Jewish organizations by the Soviets (pp. 74–82). Gitelman shows that the Soviets, while destroying traditional Jewish culture and communities, encouraged the assimilation of individual Jews into the Soviet educational system and economy, and that many Jews, especially young Jews, enthusiastically adopted Soviet internationalist ideals (pp. 108–11). Gitelman’s book is concerned with the Soviet Union as a whole, not Belorussia in particular. But his account fits developments in Minsk.

14. The development of a mild social democratic nationalism in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Belorussia is described in Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus: At a Crossroads in History* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993), pp. 62–64; and in Nicholas P. Vakar, *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 84–92. Timothy Snyder, in *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), describes the emergence of varieties of right-wing nationalism in the interwar period, though his treatment of Belarus rests on the western area, which was outside Soviet Belorussia until after World War II. In “Belarus: From Statehood to Empire?” in *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations*, ed. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 276–82, Zaprudnik and Michael Urban point out the importance of Belorussia’s peasant character in its failure to develop a strong nationalist movement while nationalism was gaining strength elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

15. See *Judenfrei! Svobodno ot Evreyev! Istoriya Minskovo Geto v Dokhumentakh* (*Free of Jews! The History of the Minsk Ghetto in Documents*), ed. R. A. Chernoglazova (Minsk: Asobni Dakh, 1999), documents 113 and 118, pp. 162, 167. Leonid Smilovitsky, in “Righteous Gentiles, the Partisans, and Jewish Survival in Belorussia, 1941–44,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11:3 (1997), pp. 301–2, writes that in their cumulative account for October 1941, the SD noted their conclusion that the Belorussians were unprepared to take part in pogroms and that the Germans would have to enact all “energetic” measures against the Jews themselves. Martin Dean writes, in *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (New York: St. Martin’s in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000), p. 21, that as of the writing of his book evidence regarding initial pogroms in Belorussia had only been found for former Polish areas, and that among local Belorussians, there were fewer organized nationalist activists to support German massacres.

16. Solomon Schwartz, *The Jews in the Soviet Union* (New York: Arno, 1972), p. 313. In *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation*, Nicholas Vakar, who cites Schwartz, writes that the Belorussian population largely supported the German invasion until the massacres of the Jews began (p. 302).

17. See Vakar, *Belorussia*, pp. 188–89.

18. In *The Jews of Bielorussia during World War II* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1998), pp. 271–80, Shalom Cholawsky describes the escalation of ethnic tensions, especially between ethnic Poles and Jews, in western Belorussia before and during the war, and the growth of antisemitism. He notes that national identity was less salient among ethnic Belorussians than among Poles and that relations between Belorussians and Jews were generally better than Polish-Jewish relations. In footnote 6 on page 284, Cholawsky points out that the Germans' complaints about the unwillingness of the civilian population to take part in pogroms was directed primarily toward eastern Belorussia, not western Belorussia. Cholawsky cites Yad Vashem document DDN/58/2-E.M (Einsatzgruppen Report) No. 67, 29 August 1941.

19. In *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, Martin Dean writes that the motives of those who joined the police included personal greed, alcoholism, anticommunism, careerism, and peer pressure, as well as antisemitism (p. 161). The motives of civilian collaborators were no doubt equally mixed.



# **INTERNATIONALISM, PATRIOTISM, AND DISILLUSION: SOVIET JEWISH VETERANS REMEMBER WORLD WAR II AND THE HOLOCAUST**

**Zvi Y. Gitelman**

For millions, it was the worst of times. For some of those who survived, it appears to have been the best of times. About twenty-six million Soviet citizens died during World War II; about 8,668,400 of them were in the military.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, many surviving combatants remember the war as a time of great moral purity, camaraderie, virtue, and achievement. No doubt, they would not have chosen to be caught up in the most horrendous war of the twentieth century, but, in retrospect, for many the glory outweighs the gore. In part, this may be due to the place the war was given in the Soviet media, literature, and history. The war, rather than the revolution, became the legitimizing myth of the system itself. For a half century, Soviet politicians and propagandists tried to convey the message that the war was won against great odds and with enormous sacrifice because of the genius, first, of Stalin and, later, of the Soviet people and the Soviet system. Whatever the shortcomings of the agricultural and consumer sectors, the lags in technology and the persistence of social problems, not to mention the political repression that was rarely acknowledged, the system had justified itself in the war.

War veterans may also see their war experiences in a rosier light as the years go by because for some it was the time during which they felt they had achieved the most, the cause to which they could contribute unequivocally, the effort that was to gain worldwide admiration, and the event that would be studied by successive generations. But just as time may have healed some of the veterans' wounds and colored some of their recollections, time may also be eroding the Soviet mythology of the war. In a national poll taken in Russia in 2003, a remarkably high seventy-three percent remembered that "the Great Patriotic War" began on June 22.<sup>2</sup> But about two-thirds of the 1,500 people polled believed that the date has been decreasing in significance. In fact, almost a third (twenty-nine percent) of people under age thirty-six agreed that "young people these days know little about it and don't want to know." For those ages eighteen to thirty-five, thirty-four percent "had trouble even saying what was meaningful about June 22."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM) conducted a similar survey showing "that the 'heroizing' of the war

that was especially typical of Brezhnev-era propaganda is being replaced in the public mind by feelings of bitter sorrow and even horror. Only a fourth of the 1,600 Russian citizens surveyed called the Great Patriotic War ‘heroic.’ For the majority, it remains not only ‘great,’ but also ‘bloody,’ ‘tragic,’ and ‘horrific,’ and one-tenth of the respondents actually called it ‘ignoble’ [*podlaya*].”<sup>4</sup> The newspaper report concluded with an interesting observation: “What troubles Russians the most is not the past but the . . . situation of the veterans”; only ten percent thought the state was doing all it could for them, while a quarter believed that it was doing virtually nothing.

Jewish war veterans may have a somewhat different understanding of the war and their role in it. After all, part of the war was what is called in the West, but only recently in the former USSR, the Holocaust, the mass murder of Jews because they were Jews. Might Jewish veterans of the Soviet armed forces have construed their efforts, at least in part, as a form of resistance against the Holocaust perpetrated not only by the Nazis and their foreign allies (Romanians and Hungarians in particular on the Eastern Front) but also by significant numbers of people who had recently had Soviet citizenship forced on them (the Baltic peoples, Ukrainians, and Belorussians in what had been eastern Poland, and Romanians in Bessarabia and Bukovina)? To use Marxist terminology, the answer is “objectively, yes” and “subjectively, no.” Soviet Jewish soldiers, sailors, and pilots, both men and women, who fought the Nazis were indeed fighting against the perpetrators of the Holocaust, but that was not the motivation of most of them. Indeed, many seem not to have been aware that the Shoah was taking place in their country until they participated in the liberation of the western areas of the USSR in late 1943–44. Their reasons for fighting were no different from those of other Soviet citizens. Their motivations were in all cases to defend themselves, their families, and their homelands; in most cases to defend the Soviet system and its leader, Joseph Stalin; and in some cases, largely among those from territories annexed by the USSR in 1939–40 who had fled or were sent to the Soviet interior, to stop the annihilation of Jews.

However, there was a subtle Jewish motivation for fighting, one that could not be stated in public but seems to have been felt by many Jewish combatants. They fought in part to prove, perhaps even to themselves, that Jews were capable of fighting, that they were not laggards or shirkers, and that they would excel even in the military arts. Moreover, though many of them began the war with what would have been described in Soviet terms as an “internationalist” consciousness, one that relegated

ethnicity—in this case, Jewishness—to irrelevance, if not to the garbage heap of history, many had their Jewish consciousness raised, especially in 1943–44 when the tide of war on the Eastern Front had turned, and signs of discrimination against Jews began to appear in the armed forces and from the government. Convinced internationalists and reluctant Jews began to reassess who and what they were, largely in reaction to such a reassessment by officialdom. We now know that secret directives had been issued in 1943 to treat Jews with suspicion and deny them access to positions of great responsibility. For example, the editor-in-chief of the main Red Army newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, was told to purge the editorial board of Jews, and he himself, a Jew named David Ortenburg, was removed from his post.<sup>5</sup> The implementation of such directives led to feelings of puzzlement, incredulity, frustration, and anger. Jewish suffering also began to be downplayed. In January 1943 a leaflet of the Communist underground in the Ukraine pointed to the Jewish tragedy, but “ten months later, with the liberation of the region already in sight, Jews were omitted entirely from the list of the suffering Soviet peoples. . . . In a public letter on 17 August 1944 from the population of Vinnytsia to Stalin, recording the Nazi atrocities, the massacres of Jews, which counted for the majority of human losses, were not mentioned.”<sup>6</sup> Many Jews became disillusioned with “friendship of the peoples” and the system that proclaimed it as one of its great achievements.

Jewish consciousness, perhaps of a negative sort, was increased by the ever more blatant governmental anti-Semitism of the postwar years and by grassroots anti-Semitism that flourished undisturbed. When trying to reclaim apartments, and regain jobs or places in institutions of higher education, many Jewish veterans were rebuffed. As an *Izvestiia* correspondent put it in a letter to the Jewish politburo member Lazar Kaganovich, “I know of many instances where decorated *frontoviki* who [wish to] return to their former jobs are not allowed to return to them . . . only because they are Jews.”<sup>7</sup> The purge of Yiddish cultural institutions during the “black years” of 1948–52, the “anticosmopolitan” campaign that involved the firing or demotion of thousands of Jews, and the “doctors plot” (1952), which threatened to evolve into the mass deportation of Jews to Siberia, signaled to Soviet Jews that the state for which they had fought regarded them as undesirables and pariahs. Their patriotism crushed—though some continued to be true believers—the veterans transmitted their disillusion to their children, few of whom dreamed the visions of egalitarianism and socialism their parents had before World War II. Those children and their children, in turn, led the

massive exodus from the Soviet Union and its successor states to the point where over 1.2 million of two million Jews who lived in the USSR emigrated in the 1970s.

This, then, is a story of dream and disillusion, of patriotism rebuffed. It is a story that needs to be told partly by oral histories, despite their shortcomings, because of the nature of Soviet historiography, whose shortcomings were as great if not greater. Soviet historiography ignored the Jewish role in World War II, for reasons I shall explore. Yet the topic is important to Soviet and post-Soviet Jews (as well as to others) partly precisely because it was ignored by the Soviets. As Amir Weiner puts it, “Memory was a key political arena where the exclusion of certain groups from official representation of the Soviet fighting family, along with the denial of their unique suffering, left those groups politically invisible, without official recognition of their distinct, collective identities.”<sup>8</sup> The recovery of history based on memory is vitally important to those who feel that their exclusion from history was deliberate and unjust. This is manifested in the ever-growing number of articles and books published on the Shoah in the former Soviet Union (FSU) and on the Soviet Jewish diaspora, almost all of them by nonacademics.<sup>9</sup>

One way to supplement amateur historiography and to fill in gaps in our knowledge is by taking oral testimonies from participants in the war. This has been done successfully by some popular historians in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Oral history has serious limitations, of course.<sup>11</sup> It probably should not be used to establish facts, especially at a distance of more than fifty years and in regard to events fraught with great meanings and emotions. Oral history allows for embellishment, cover-ups, falsifications, and distortions. But as one who has studied Gestapo records observes, “The written records can not be taken as ‘gospel,’ against which the ‘flawed’ spoken testimony can be found wanting,”<sup>12</sup> and this is certainly true of Soviet historiography. On the other hand, oral history tempts those who lack the linguistic or disciplinary tools to burrow into archives, read documents, study the historical context in which events take place, and immerse themselves in the secondary literature in many languages. This is certainly a problem when “post-modernist” poseurs deal cavalierly with facts on the ostensible grounds that all reality is perception anyway, and when, in some quarters, ignorance of the relevant languages, history, and culture does not deter people from embarking on what they see as both interesting and relatively undemanding work. That said, oral history can nevertheless be most useful, especially in establishing

perceptions; that is, not so much what happened—though that should not be dismissed—but what people think happened, or now think happened then.<sup>13</sup>

Why should we care about these veterans' perceptions? Because the way people interpreted what happened profoundly influenced, as I shall show, their views of themselves, their fellow citizens, and the country in which they lived. World War II was the most important event of their lives, and it transformed them. Moreover, oral histories can give us detailed insights into what happened during the war on the micro level. What was the experience like for the ordinary soldier, partisan, or ghetto prisoner, and for some extraordinary ones? What, in brief, was the experience of war for Soviet Jews? How, if at all, do they connect their experiences as combatants with the Holocaust? Were they aware of what was being done to Jewish civilians and did that play any part in their motivation to fight or how they saw their personal role in the war?

Because of my broader interest in ethnic relations in the USSR and its successor states, I am especially interested in ethnic relations in the Soviet armed forces during the war. Respondents ought to be able if not to describe those relations with accuracy at least to convey how they remember them, perhaps through rose-colored or perhaps through dark glasses, depending on how one thinks postwar events affected their views of the wartime situation.

### **Soviet Jewry during World War II**

We do not yet know the number of Jews murdered in the Soviet Union during World War II, and we may never know this. One carefully worked-out estimate is that 2,711,000 Jews who were Soviet citizens in 1941 died during the war.<sup>14</sup> This includes about 6,000 children who died because of harsh conditions and seems to include an estimated 85,000 Jewish prisoners of war<sup>15</sup> and approximately 180,000 Jewish combatants who died in battle. Since about 26,700,000 Soviet citizens died in World War II, this would make Jewish losses more than ten percent of the Soviet total, though Jews were only 2.5 percent of the population at the beginning of the war. Even if we accept a lower estimate of about 1.5–2 million Soviet Jews murdered by the Nazis (excluding combatants and POWs),<sup>16</sup> they would still constitute one-third of the total number of Jewish victims of Nazism. Yet we seem to know much less about the Shoah in the USSR than we do about parallel events in places with much smaller Jewish populations, such as those of Greece, Slovakia, or France. This is partly because Soviet

archives were closed until about a decade ago, but also because many Western researchers lack the languages and fortitude needed for research in Soviet and post-Soviet conditions and are not prepared to invest in learning the arcana of Soviet history.

For Soviet and post-Soviet Jews, on the other hand, what happened during the war is of extraordinary interest, for obvious reasons. But, unlike in the West, there is no theorizing about the psychological, sociological, or theological dimensions of the Shoah, perhaps because we are dealing with a culture in which the collective is more important than the individual. It would regard much of the literature of individual suffering as narcissistic and egotistic. Instead, the focus seems to be on what actually happened to the Jews as a group, the extent of collaboration by local inhabitants in murdering the Jews, and how the Soviet Union and its successor states dealt and are dealing with the issue.

The second difference from the West is that there seems to be as much interest in the role Jews played in fighting the Nazis as there is in the sufferings of the Jews. The reason for that is not only understandable pride but also a desire to combat the apparently widespread myth that the “Jews fought the war in Tashkent.” This was a common canard in the USSR during and after the war and arose from the sudden appearance in large numbers of three kinds of Jews in the Urals, Siberia, and Central Asia. These were people evacuated by the Soviet authorities—officials, skilled technicians, and engineers; exiled Jews from territories acquired in 1939–41; Jews who fled the Nazi invasion of Poland and later the Baltic states as well as the western areas of the USSR. Together, there were probably some 250,000 non-Soviet refugees in these non-European areas. Together with the Soviet evacuees and refugees, there may have been nearly a half million Jews who came to Central Asia and Siberia during the war.<sup>17</sup> The sudden appearance of huge numbers of Jews where there had previously been few created the impression that “the Jews” had fled the front and the fighting for safe havens. Since Jews knew full well that they had fought hard and in large numbers, this myth pained them, especially the veterans, deeply. Even nonveterans were insulted by what they perceived as a mark against their national honor. They resented being portrayed as shirkers and exploiters.

Moreover, since the “Great Patriotic Fatherland War” had become the main legitimating myth of the Soviet system, replacing the revolution and civil war and the formerly heroic years of socialist construction, then tainted as years also of Stalinist repression, it became especially important for Jews to claim their place in this greatest

of achievements of Soviet society. In the USSR in 1966, I observed people combing through *Einigkayt*, the Yiddish wartime newspaper of the Soviet Jewish Antifascist Committee. When I inquired about what they were researching, they told me they were documenting the number of “Heroes of the Soviet Union” because they had to prove to their own satisfaction that Jews had borne more than their share of the war burden. As a matter of fact, there were at least 147 Jews who won the highest military decoration, Hero of the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup> Only four nationalities (Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Tatars) won more Hero titles than Jews, though in 1959 Jews were only the eleventh-largest Soviet nationality. There were 305 Jewish generals and admirals.<sup>19</sup> Jews were probably overrepresented in the general officer ranks because they were more urbanized and educated than the overall Soviet population. They were also heavily represented in the medical, engineering, and other technical corps for the same reasons. Well before the war, Jews had been prominent in the military and also among the military victims of the purges, especially in 1937 (e.g., Yona Yakir, Yan Gamarnik, Grigory Shtern, Boris Feldman, and others).

Why then was there no literature about the role of Jews in the war? The Soviet myth was the Soviet peoples had fought the war, and, except in Stalin’s (in)famous victory toast in the Kremlin in 1945 in which he singled out the Russian people for praise as those most responsible for the victory, no distinction was made among Soviet nationalities in the war effort (except, of course, for those deported because of real or putative collaboration—Chechens, Ingush, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, Kabardino-Balkars, and others). Indeed, in the West it is only ethnic groups themselves who would write books about, for example, the role played by Jews in the armed forces of the United States or United Kingdom. Indeed, several important British works on the war do not so much as mention Jews and the Holocaust.<sup>20</sup> So one could not reasonably expect a literature on Jewish participation in the Soviet war effort. However, there is evidence suggesting that Jewish participation was downplayed or even ignored entirely in Soviet historiography of the war, and that process began during the war itself. “As the war drew to a close, Jews were no longer marked as a separate group in either public presentations of war heroism or in confidential reports.”<sup>21</sup> Is this part of a Soviet posture toward the Shoah? It may be, because in both areas there is a tendency to downplay or ignore either Jewish suffering or Jewish heroism.

### **Soviet Historiography of the Holocaust and Its Ideological-Political Underpinnings**

William Korey writes of “the Kremlin’s suppression of all reference to the holocaust until now.”<sup>22</sup> This is somewhat exaggerated. (The term *Holocaust* was unknown in Soviet literature until the late 1980s when the words “kholokost” and “katastrofa” began to appear.) First, while most Soviet writers either ignored the Holocaust or submerged it within more general accounts of the period, none denied it and some did treat it not simply as German atrocities but as a uniquely Jewish fate. A survey of Soviet writings reveals that they vary significantly in the prominence and interpretations they give to the Holocaust, despite the popular assumption that all Soviet writing followed a single party line. Most Soviet works either pass over the Holocaust in silence or blur it by universalizing it. Some works do acknowledge and describe the Holocaust, while others discuss only some aspects of it.<sup>23</sup> For example, a fairly close examination of the six-volume official Soviet history of the war reveals not a single reference to Jews. Nor do the terms *anti-Semitism* or *Holocaust* appear in the index. In the third volume, the Nazi occupation of the USSR is referred to as “a regime of terror and occupation,” and the Einsatzgruppen are mentioned, as is Babi Yar, but the word *Jew* does not appear in any of these connections.<sup>24</sup> A large history of the Ukraine, published in 1982, does not mention Jews even once, not even in connection with the Holocaust, even though Jews have lived there for centuries, played a major role in its economy and culture, and died there in the hundreds of thousands during the Holocaust.<sup>25</sup> In striking—almost ludicrous—contrast is a study of wartime Estonia. In 1939 there were more than 1.5 million Jews living in the Soviet Ukraine and only 5,000 in “bourgeois” Estonia. Yet, while at least two histories of the Ukraine passed over Jewish history and the Holocaust in silence, the study of Estonia presented a sympathetic account of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust and an undistorted account of Jewish participation in the armed struggle against the Nazis. The editors commented, “Implementing their monstrous racial theories, the German fascists and their collaborators in Estonia exterminated each and every Jew and Gypsy.”<sup>26</sup> Even Estonian collaboration with the Nazis was discussed.

One Soviet study refers to the Nazis’ “pathological anti-Semitism,” and this foreshadowed the “fate that the German racists prepared for the Jews.”<sup>27</sup> Further details are not given, and it should be noted that this is an academic monograph, published in a relatively small edition. A documentary history of the Soviet Union that devoted an



entire chapter to World War II included no references to the Nazis' racial policy. An excerpt from the diary of Masha Rolnikaite, a Jewish girl in the Vilnius ghetto, does not mention the word *Jew*.<sup>28</sup> The authoritative *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* admitted that anti-Semitism "found its most extreme expression in fascist Germany." It stated succinctly that "the Nazis carried out a policy of mass extermination of the Jews; about six million Jews were murdered in World War II."<sup>29</sup> Thus Soviet audiences were generally not exposed to even the most elementary details of the Holocaust, though in the 1960s, a few volumes were published that did provide more information. Significantly, at least some were translations from other languages.<sup>30</sup>

Second, the Holocaust was seen as an integral part of a larger phenomenon—the murder of civilians—whether Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Gypsies, or other nationalities. It was said to be a natural consequence of racist fascism. The Holocaust, in other words, was but one of several reflexes of fascism, which was, in turn, the ultimate expression of capitalism. Thus, the roots of the Holocaust lay in capitalism, expressed in its most degenerate form. Armed with the theory of "scientific socialism," the Soviets were able to explain in a facile way how so many were murdered. In the West there is a vast body of literature that seeks to understand how the Holocaust happened. There are cultural explanations, psychological and sociological ones, and political and bureaucratic ones. There is an extensive theological literature that seeks to confront God with the Holocaust. I know of no book published in the USSR that seeks to explain the Holocaust as *sui generis*. Simply put, for the Soviets there was no mystery about the Holocaust.

Third, while the Holocaust was downplayed or ignored in the literature and media aimed at general Soviet audiences, it was much publicized in a highly ideological way among a specialized and shrinking audience, Yiddish readers and speakers. Almost every issue of *Sovetish heymland*, the officially sponsored Soviet Yiddish monthly that appeared from 1961 to 1991 (originally with a circulation of 25,000, later reduced to 7,000 and less), contained material on the Holocaust—stories, poems, memoirs, factual information. The journal consistently featured certain themes that served a didactic political purpose. These were (1) gentiles frequently saved Jews in Occupied Eastern Territories; (2) Jews who resisted did so for universal, not parochial, reasons; (3) there was much cooperation among all nationalities against the Nazis; (4) the only collaborators with the Nazis were fascists, and nearly all of them now live in the West. The first theme is illustrated by documents such as a letter from a

woman now living in New York who described how a Lithuanian couple named Ruzgis, a Polish doctor named Hrabowiecka, and a Russian family named Yakubovsky saved her daughter. Short stories presented Russians, especially workers, saving Jews, and wealthy Jews serving on Judenräte (Jewish Councils).<sup>31</sup>

Why did the Soviets ignore or downplay the Holocaust? In the absence of explicit archival or published evidence, one can only speculate. Perhaps the authorities felt that discussing the Holocaust would raise the sensitive issues of collaboration with the Nazis, especially among Ukrainians and the Baltic nationalities. This would undermine the myths of “druzhba narodov” (“friendship of the [Soviet] peoples”) and of a united Soviet domestic front against fascism and might poison relations between Jews and other nationalities. Second, publicizing the Holocaust would inevitably raise Jewish consciousness, as it has elsewhere, and cause Jews to question the viability of their continued existence in a state where their parents and grandparents had been murdered by some of their neighbors or their neighbors’ parents and grandparents. Third, it would raise the uncomfortable questions of anti-Semitism in the Red Army and in the occupied territories. Moreover, it would “divide the dead” and anger other nationalities who had suffered worse casualties than the Jews, though in absolute and not relative terms. Finally, since World War II had become critical to the Soviet “political formula” (the rationale for the system), “giving it [the war] to the Jews” would seriously undermine the formula. The Great Patriotic Fatherland War was too valuable a political asset to be awarded to the Jews. Amir Weiner adds, “In the ravaged and humiliated societies burdened with the task of national revival, the mobilizing power of the myth of active heroism was undeniably greater than that of victimization anchored in the shame and guilt-ridden memory of defeat. Above all, memories of victimization bore the troublesome particularism associated with the Jewish minority.”<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the posture toward the Shoah helps explain why some Soviet literature also seems deliberately to avoid Jewish participation in the war effort. One of the most popular Soviet works on the war treated the Holocaust most curiously. Sergei S. Smirnov’s three-volume work appeared in an edition of 100,000, and Smirnov was a popular participant in media features on the war. In the work Smirnov referred several times to the suffering of the Jews, but seemed to go out of his way to avoid references to Jews as fighters and resisters.<sup>33</sup> For example, describing the defenders of the Brest fortress, he mentioned “the Russians Anatoly Vinogradov and Raisa Abakumova, the

Armenian Samvel Matevosian, the Ukrainian Aleksandr Semenenko, the Belorussian Aleksandr Makhnach . . . the Tatar Petr Gavrilov” and even “the German Viacheslav Meyer.” The one hero whose nationality is not mentioned is Efim Moiseevich Fomin. Lest there be any doubt about his nationality, he is described as “short . . . dark haired with intelligent and mournful eyes,” a political commissar from a small town in the Vitebsk area, the son of a smith and a seamstress. All these are stereotypical characteristics of the Jew. Yet Fomin is identified only as “the renowned commissar of the Brest fortress, a hero and a true son of the Communist Party, one of the chief organizers and leaders of the legendary defense.”<sup>34</sup> When referring to the other heroes, Smirnov pointed out their nationality (Gavrilov, the Kazan Tatar; Matevosian, “of a poor Armenian family”; and Kizhevator, “the son of a Mordvin peasant”).<sup>35</sup> Smirnov followed the same pattern when describing Soviet partisans in Italy.<sup>36</sup> Why did Smirnov describe Jewish martyrdom in detail and assiduously ignore Jewish identity? Was this in line with an official directive? Was it the compromise he reached with himself or, more likely, with a censor? We cannot tell, of course, but the pattern is too consistent to be accidental and, indeed, can be found in other postwar publications as well.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Place of the Holocaust in Jewish National Consciousness Today**

Soviet attempts to keep the Holocaust out of Jewish national consciousness have not succeeded. During the war, discussion of the Jewish role in the military was conducted almost exclusively on the pages of *Einigkayt*, which was widely distributed outside the USSR. Clearly, the purpose was to rally support for the Soviet war effort among Soviet and foreign Jews. The general Soviet press did not pay much attention to the Shoah, with the exception of some well-known articles by Vasili Grossman and Ilya Ehrenburg.<sup>38</sup> Since the early 1990s, many books and pamphlets have been published on Soviet Jewish participation in the war, and scholarly literature on the Holocaust as well as articles in newspapers and magazines have appeared in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Baltic states.<sup>39</sup> Especially among those Jews who served in or lived through the war, Soviet treatment of the Holocaust and the absence of information on Soviet Jewish combatants was deeply resented, propelling the post-Soviet outpouring of works on these subjects.<sup>40</sup> As in the Western world, in recent years there have been commemorations of the Holocaust in the FSU, and exhibitions, museums, conferences, and symposia dedicated to its remembrance. The presidents of Russia and Ukraine

participated in the ceremonies at Auschwitz marking the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the camp (January 2005). Attempts have been made to introduce it into school curricula and, in the Baltic states, even into the education of military recruits.

Is the Holocaust much in the consciousness of post-Soviet Jews? On the one hand, almost all European (Ashkenazi) Jews in the USSR had close relatives who were victims of the Holocaust or had served in the armed forces. On the other hand, had Jews in the USSR followed the Soviet line, they would have regarded their relatives as “victims of fascism” or as Soviet citizens who did their duty, rather than as Jewish victims and Jews who fought. In two surveys that I and two colleagues conducted in three cities in Russia and five in Ukraine, encompassing 3,300 Jews, during each survey (1992–93 and 1997–98), we inquired about the place of the Holocaust in the consciousness of our respondents. Several measures indicate that it is quite prominent. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents said that the Holocaust had a “strong influence” on the development of their Jewish consciousness. As might be expected, there was a steady decline from generation to generation in the influence of the Holocaust. Among the oldest, those who for the most part experienced the Holocaust, five out of six said it greatly or somewhat influenced their Jewish consciousness, whereas among the young only half the respondents said this. In the later survey (1997–98), among all respondents, the statement that the Holocaust had a “strong influence” on ethnic consciousness was found more frequently than in the first survey. Thus, among the youngest and those thirty to thirty-nine years old, it was 1.3 times more frequent than it was five years earlier. The most likely explanation for this seemingly paradoxical change—five years more had passed from the actual events when the second survey was taken—is the suddenly increased availability of information on the subject, as mentioned above.

In another measure, eighteen items were presented to respondents, who were asked to rate them as essential, desirable, or of no significance to being considered a “genuine Jew.” “Remembering the tragedy of the Holocaust” ranked third among Russian and Ukrainian Jews in the first survey, third among Ukrainian and fifth among Russian Jews in the second survey. In 1997 in Russia, more than three-quarters stated that to be a “genuine Jew” it would be obligatory to remember the Holocaust, and in Ukraine eighty-three percent did so. The proportions were almost as high in 1992. Nine of ten respondents in 1993 in Ukraine identified remembering the Holocaust as crucial to being considered a “genuine Jew,” whereas less than two-thirds of those younger

than thirty shared this view. (To put this in perspective, it should be noted that fewer than twenty percent thought that one needs a basic knowledge of Judaism to be considered a “genuine Jew” and far fewer thought that observing Jewish religious commandments was necessary). It should be noted, however, that only seven percent of the youngest group thought that it is neither necessary nor desirable to keep the Holocaust in mind in order to be a “genuine Jew.”<sup>41</sup> When queried about the extent to which the Holocaust influenced their Jewish self-consciousness,<sup>42</sup> about two-thirds in Russia and over seventy percent in Ukraine said it influenced their consciousness “strongly.” The place of the Holocaust in the consciousness of Ukrainian Jews was slightly greater, probably because all of the Ukraine fell under the Nazi occupation, while only the western regions of the Russian Republic did so. Hence a higher proportion of Ukrainian Jews fell victim to the Nazi policy of genocide.

The Holocaust was also more prominent in the minds of older respondents. Indeed, as one goes up the age scale, the proportion of those who said that to be a “genuine Jew” one must remember the Holocaust increased. Similarly, the older one is, the more the Holocaust is said to have influenced one’s Jewish self-consciousness. Thus, for example, in both Russia and Ukraine, in the later survey sixty-three percent of the sixteen to twenty-nine year olds said it is necessary to remember the Holocaust, but 87–88 percent of those over sixty—and over ninety percent of those over seventy—made that assertion. While half of the youngest group said the Holocaust strongly influenced the formation of their Jewish consciousness, four-fifths of those over sixty said so.

Memories of the Holocaust are apparently so deeply held by older people that they do not exclude the possibility that it could be repeated. The older the respondent, the more he or she thinks that another Holocaust is possible in the future. Half the Russian Jews sixty and over in both surveys thought another Holocaust was possible, and nearly two-thirds of the Ukrainian Jews in the same age group thought so as well. In the second survey, however, only forty-five percent of that group of Ukrainian Jews agreed that there could be another Holocaust, which was the average for the entire sample of Ukrainian Jews. In Russia and Ukraine, the overall proportion who thought another Holocaust possible dropped significantly from the early to the late 1990s, from sixty-five percent to fifty-eight percent in Russia, and from sixty-three percent to forty-four percent in Ukraine. This probably reflects the fading of fears that had welled up in the early and late 1980s when it appeared that the state was “losing control” of society,

and anti-Semitic organizations and publications appeared suddenly and with much publicity, inside and outside the FSU. By the late 1990s social and political stability had increased, and fears of pogroms or even a Holocaust diminished.

Another correlate of believing that another Holocaust could occur is personal experience of anti-Semitism. In Russia and Ukraine those who had more encounters with anti-Semitism were more inclined to think that another Holocaust was “probable” or “very probable” than those who rarely met up with anti-Semitism. Similarly, those who confronted anti-Semitism more often were more likely to believe in 1992–93 that pogroms could break out in their respective cities. In 1992 nearly half the Russian respondents thought a pogrom “rather probable” or “highly probable,” though whereas nearly three-quarters of residents of Moscow and Saint Petersburg thought so, “only” forty-eight percent of Ekaterinburg residents shared that fear. In Ukraine, only forty percent thought pogroms “rather probable,” and less than one percent, ninety-two people, thought them highly probable. As in Russia, the proportion expecting pogroms was roughly the same in all the cities, the exception being Chernovtsy, where only eighteen percent thought a Holocaust probable, though we cannot be sure why.

It is interesting to note where respondents thought a future Holocaust might occur. Russia was named in both years by Russian Jews as the most likely venue—in 1997, sixty percent of those who thought a future Holocaust probable named Russia as its location, and only four percent named Ukraine. While more Ukrainian Jews who thought a Holocaust probable named Ukraine as its likely location than any other place, it was only a quarter of the respondents who did so, and nearly as many—twenty percent—named Russia as the place a Holocaust might occur. Thus Russian Jews were much less secure about their own country than Ukrainian Jews were about theirs, belying the image of Ukraine as a hotbed of anti-Semitism. This unexpected finding is probably the consequence of more visible and widespread anti-Semitic agitation in post-Soviet Russia than in Ukraine, with the possible exception of western Ukraine. It should be noted that about a quarter of the respondents felt that a future Holocaust could happen “in any country.” A quarter of Ukrainian respondents pointed to Germany as the country where it could happen—the same proportion that named Ukraine—but only twelve percent of Russian Jews did so. Ironically, over 100,000 Jews from the FSU have immigrated to Germany in recent years.

The Holocaust occupies a significant place in the consciousness of Russian and Ukrainian Jews. It has been more salient to those who lived through World War II, but

recent public treatments of it have apparently raised the awareness of postwar generations, and we observe an increase in its importance to them. To many, another Holocaust is imaginable, even in their own countries.

### **Jews in the Soviet Armed Forces**

Before the war the proportion of Jews in the Red Army seems to have been at least commensurate with their proportion in the population, and it remained so at the end of the war.<sup>43</sup> In 1926, when the first Soviet census was taken, “there were 24% more Jews in the military than their proportional share in the total male population (Jews made up 1.7% of the male population, but 2.1% of the Red Army), despite the fact that those who had been disenfranchised (the *lishentsy*) were as a rule not drafted and, proportionally speaking, more Jews were denied the vote than any other group” (because they had been “bourgeois” or clericals before 1917).<sup>44</sup> Jews were overrepresented in senior positions. Among junior officers and lower ranks, their numbers were eight percent lower than their share in the male population. In early 1939, there were 34,525 Jews (all but 169 of them, men) in the military, or 1.64 percent of all military personnel, “slightly above the percentage of Jews in the male population” of the USSR at that point.<sup>45</sup> Mordechai Altshuler estimates that forty percent of the Jews in the services in 1939 were career military, whereas only nineteen percent of all those in the service were career military. Jews were underrepresented in the twenty- to twenty-four-year-old cohort in the military, mainly draftees, because “a larger percentage of Jews than non-Jews in this age group were continuing their education; they received military training as part of their studies and did not serve in the army.”<sup>46</sup>

One cannot simply extrapolate the number of Jews in the military in 1939 to that when the war broke out, for several reasons. First, this was a period of great purges of elites, and though the purge of the military had occurred mostly in 1937–38,<sup>47</sup> there may have been some Jews purged between 1939 and 1941—one well-known example is Air Force Lt.-Gen. Yaakov Shmushkevich, who was shot on October 28, 1941. Second, the Finnish war of 1940 brought in new draftees and volunteers. Third, and perhaps most numerically significant, the annexation of eastern Poland and the Baltic states in 1939 and Bessarabia-Bukovina in 1940 meant that thousands more Jews were eligible for military service. Therefore, unless further archival research turns up new data, we cannot know how many Jews were in the military during the war. Some estimate the number to be about 400,000–500,000, and most sources speak of about

180,000 Jewish combatants who were killed, including prisoners of war who died in captivity, a casualty rate of 35–40 percent. As Jews were concentrated in the western Soviet Union where the Pale of Settlement had been, and since in 1941–42 the forces confronting the invading Germans and their allies were drawn largely from the local population, Jews were likely concentrated in those units that bore the brunt of the early fighting. They were probably overrepresented among the millions surrounded and captured by the Germans in the first months of the war—about a million in Kiev alone. Of 5.7 million Soviet POWs during the entire war, 2.8 million died in the winter of 1941–42.<sup>48</sup> So Jewish participation was extensive, and a high proportion of Jews were involved in combat.

### **The Interviews**

The effort to gather oral histories from Soviet Jewish war veterans began as a project in Michigan local history and mushroomed. Of the 221 histories that have been taken, 108 were in Michigan; sixty-eight in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Cleveland; twenty-one in Israel, and the rest in Moscow. Three Heroes of the Soviet Union and several generals were interviewed. Most were soldiers and some were officers, a few were partisans and ghetto survivors, and there were about forty women. Most were born in the Ukraine, some in Belorussia, Russia, and elsewhere. Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed in Russian, translated into English, and edited.

### **Observations**

The following observations are based on less than half the interviews collected. I am omitting the fascinating descriptions of combat and field conditions, descriptions of people like Leonid Brezhnev or Marshal Rokossovsky, revenge against collaborators and treatment of German POWs, reactions to America or Israel, and other topics. Instead, I concentrate on some distinctly Jewish aspects of the experiences of the veterans and on the role the Holocaust might have played in their consciousness.

Perhaps the major point to emerge from the interviews is that while all were born to two Jewish parents and the great majority had childhood experiences with traditional Jewish life, they did not fight in the war as Jews but as Soviet citizens. For most, but not all, the ongoing Holocaust did not motivate their fighting. Their commitment and consciousness were Soviet, not primarily Jewish. Some mentioned that they fought harder because they wanted to show that Jews were fighters, not



slackers, but most did not even mention this, let alone claim that they fought as Jews against Nazis. They knew they were Jewish and had a clear sense of what being Jewish meant, but it simply did not matter much to them. This makes sense if we listen to what they said about their ethnic consciousness before the war.

The majority claimed that before the war, ethnicity didn't matter much. There was some "bytovoi" (everyday) anti-Semitism, but it was not taken seriously. Many pointed out that they took no notice of others' nationalities, and, presumably, most others took no notice of theirs. Asya Balina, who grew up in Baku, said of her thirty-two classmates: "Eighteen of them were guys. The class was international. There were Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Georgians, Jews. All of us were very close. . . . We were friends and there were never any discussions or even an idea about who you were [by ethnicity]. . . . There is nothing negative I can tell you. I did not feel it [anti-Semitism]. Not in school, in the university, never. I did not feel that I was Jewish." After serving as a physician in the army, she moved to Moscow and married. It was only in 1952–53, she said, that "unfortunately, for the first time in my life I found out that I was Jewish, they let me know." These same descriptions of excellent relations among nationalities come even from Ukraine or Belarus. Yosif Kvasha, born in Medzhibozh, Ukraine, said, "You know what I think? The war years were the purest years of my life. Before the war, nobody cared about anyone else's nationality. If a person did his job well, he was a good man, and if he didn't he was a bad man, and it didn't matter who or what he was." Yet Kvasha and others expressed the idea that Jews should not have had too high a profile. "I was the commander of an artillery battery, and there were four officers under me. So once, the commander of the division, being slightly drunk, says to me, 'You know what? I'll make it an all-Jewish battery. I'll give you another Jewish officer.' I asked him not to do that. . . . I thought it was a terrible idea, to accentuate the number of Jewish officers in a single battery." Kvasha's reaction seems to indicate that despite the apparent good relations between Jews and non-Jews, anti-Semitism did exist.

Quite a few express the feeling that Jews had to prove themselves, to do better in the military to prove that they were not shirkers. Kvasha again, responding to a question about whether being Jewish played a role in his service: "The only way I ever understood my Jewishness was to always do my very best—to serve, fight, work so that nobody could say I don't do my job well, so that I would cast no shadow on my people, that's how I understood being Jewish." Abram Lindenboim in Chicago said, "That's

why I always tried to do my best—so that nobody could shove it in my face that I was Jewish. My division commander sent me to the most dangerous areas.” Misha Yablonovski said that in the army nationality was irrelevant: “We really had not time to discuss these things—whether one was Jewish, or Tatar or Russian. We all looked out for each other and paid no attention to nationality. Because, you know, a person could be next to you one moment and then dead at the next. . . . We had to look out for each other, such is the way of war. Otherwise, it would never have worked.” In answer to what the relationship between Jews and non-Jews was like, Yablonovski answered, “I was the only Jew in the battalion and in the company as well. Most of us were from the Urals, pure Russian blood there. And it was really better not to stand out for me, not to show that I was somehow different.”

It might just be that the prewar period is being seen retrospectively as better than it actually was because in comparison with the rapidly deteriorating relations between Jews and others after 1944 or 1945 it appears as a halcyon period. Perhaps in trying to understand how the system they had so fervently believed in could betray them so badly, the veterans point to the war and late Stalinism as a great divide when things changed for the worse. After all, the Soviets themselves acknowledged the existence of anti-Semitism before the war and for a time fought against it.<sup>49</sup> How could the veterans not have noticed it?

There is another possibility. Experience of combat masked whatever tensions there might have been before. As Boris Revich put it,

Starting with the academy until the end of the war I saw no antagonism between the Jew, Ukrainian, Russian, Belorussian. We really had “friendship of the nations.” Now I see that maybe it’s not that way. But we were friends, we loved each other. There was Sergeant-Major Begashvili, a Georgian, and there was an Uzbek, Rustem Rustamov. I remember them perfectly, so many years have passed. We had a friendship, *a friendship of the front. This is not to the credit of Soviet rule, this is due to the camaraderie that is created in difficult circumstances.* (emphasis added)

The late Motl Margulies told his interviewer that when he was stationed in Germany after the war, a Lieutenant Maleyev arrived.

We noticed that he would always eat at the officers’ mess that served really disgusting spaghetti. We never ate it—we had our own channels for getting food. We always had food because we exchanged products for

cigarettes, things like that. . . . We often organized dinners at different people's places. We never went to the mess hall. Our windows looked out onto the lake; the homes belonged to the aviation staff—it used to be a German aviation school. So this Maleyev came over with his pot of spaghetti, whatever he could get at the cafeteria. Well, a new comrade had arrived, one must have a little drink. So he [Maleyev] drank some and says . . . that the Jews never took part in any fighting. I kept myself in hand. I am usually a hot-tempered man, but I kept calm. Two of my friends got up, opened the door to the balcony, picked the guy up by his arms and legs, and threw him into the lake, together with his pot.

When asked if the men who threw Maleyev out of the window were Jewish, Margulies replied, “Russian, Russian guys. All my frontline buddies were Russian. It was at the time when I was still with the regiment. So they threw him out, and a day later, an order came to send him back to Russia” (emphasis added). Perhaps the camaraderie of the war is both exaggerated and projected back before the war, but this is what the veterans remember.

A second matter of consensus is that in late 1943 to early 1944 the feeling that nationality does not matter begins to change. Medals and promotions seemed to be denied to Jews who fought in the same battles and had the same experiences as others who got the decorations and promotions. Some reported incidents in which by 1945 they were told by superior officers that, because of their nationality, they could not be decorated or promoted. “Whenever I was nominated to receive an award, the superior officers suggested an award a degree or two lower. Instead of the Red Banner, a Red Star,” said one respondent. Indifference to nationality changed profoundly in 1945–46 when veterans returned home, especially in the Ukraine, and some met with unconcealed hostility by neighbors and, especially, by those who had moved into the former apartments of the veterans' families. Many of the veterans complained, took other actions, and sometimes won the apartment back. As Mordechai Altshuler noted, “For many Jews this policy aroused deep feelings of pain and humiliation. They believed that in view of the Holocaust . . . and of their loyalty to the Soviet Union during the war, not only should they not be discriminated against, they should even be accorded preferred treatment.”<sup>50</sup> Why did anti-Semitism flourish in the Ukraine precisely after such anti-Jewish atrocities had been perpetrated? Altshuler and others suggest several reasons for this: (1) German propaganda defamed Jews during occupation; (2) Ukrainians had gotten used to seeing Jews murdered and humiliated; (3) Jews had disappeared and their return was regarded as unnatural; (4) a housing

shortage existed; (5) tensions flared over property taken by the local population after Jews were killed and over claims of returnees.<sup>51</sup> By 1948, of course, Jews confronted open anti-Semitism in higher education, employment, and on the street.

In reaction, many became more consciously and socially Jewish. A former intelligence officer, Lev Kupershtain, said, “When I returned we quickly organized a circle of friends, fifteen people and not one non-Jew. We really became friends, there were always wonderful meetings and we celebrated holidays together and everything. . . . I would say it was defensive nationalism. We became interested in questions of Jewishness . . . because of militant anti-Semitism. Plus we felt that especially in Kiev they did not go after those who had served the Germans, the *Polizei*.” Anatoly Vodopyanov commented: “Even as something as trifling as a lunch break at the SKB where I was working. At a table for four sat four Jews. They didn’t spread out. And if one Jew was sitting, a second would definitely come up to him and then there would eventually be four at the table. Jews were trying to get closer to each other and Yiddish words began to slip into the conversation, though no one really knew Yiddish. . . . An interest and an understanding that you were Jewish began to develop.”

Alexander Kalish, formerly of Leningrad and now in Michigan, recalled: “To tell the truth, before the war I did not feel that I was Jewish. I knew I was Jewish by nationality and that my parents were Jews. But my Jewish self-consciousness had only begun to develop. Especially after the war, during the Stalin regime . . . I understood.” (He was refused admission to a military academy in Leningrad and had a hard time finding a job or even being readmitted to the Leningrad Polytechnic Institute where he had been a student in 1941.)

Though many veterans claimed that they were hardly aware of their Jewish identities before the war, their parents were often traditional Jews, and their grandparents certainly so, especially those from the shtetlach of the Ukraine, Moldavia, and Belorussia, that is, the former Pale. While grandparents were often fully traditional, parents were often selective in observance, or one parent would be significantly more observant than the other (and it was not always or even usually the mother). For the most part, the veterans were passive participants or onlookers in the observances of their parents or grandparents. This is similar to American immigrant Jewish patterns (which reinforces my argument, made elsewhere, that the changes among those who left the Pale for America parallel the changes among those who left it for the big cities of Belorussia and the Ukraine or for the Russian Republic). Except for the veterans

from Moscow, Leningrad, and Baku, most recall Passover seders and even Sabbath and other festival meals at their grandparents—it is worth noting how often food is at the center of their memories and associations—and some tell of having gone to synagogue until their teenage years or until “they closed the synagogue,” or until “it became dangerous,” or “I became a Pioneer or a member of the Komsomol.” Ayzik Fainshtein recalled: “Before the war, in my childhood, before 1929, while we lived with my grandfather, I went to the synagogue, especially on holidays. And then, when we went to Kiev, and from Kiev to Gorki and after the war I didn’t go anymore.”

Mera Galant, born in Kremenchug, the Ukraine, in 1915, reminisced: “I remember when my older sister had her first grandson, they did a circumcision. . . . My father and the boy’s father left the house—they could not be present [get into political trouble]. I was there, and as it’s usually done with Jews, I held the boy. I don’t know what it’s called” (*sandek*). Her father was a lawyer in the People’s Commissariat of Justice, her brother-in-law an engineer, both non-Party, but they had to leave the house. “My grandfather insisted on the circumcision, that’s why we did it.” Her own parents were nonobservant, “but we had matzos for Peysakh [Passover]. But together with the matzos we always ate bread. Nobody then believed in anything sacred.” Yet she said immediately, “I remember that my mother always observed Yom Kippur, all her life she fasted. And my sister and I took on the tradition. . . . Father never did that, only we. And we also brought that tradition here. My sister and I fast on Yom Kippur, and so does my eldest grandson. He decided to do it all by himself. He has just graduated from college and he always observes Yom Kippur. I don’t know the history of this holiday. I just know that’s how it was in my family. . . . As for the rest . . . I must tell you, it didn’t really stay with me.” Her nonobservant father “had this saying always, ‘*in Erets Yisroel*.’ I never understood what it meant, but I understood that it was something profoundly Jewish. But he said it only among us, in the family.”

Something similar happened with Yiddish. Many veterans began by speaking Yiddish to parents (though for many, Yiddish was already a “secret code” for parents who did not want children to understand, as in America), but most spoke Russian or Ukrainian to friends or even siblings, and then parents began speaking Russian with the children. Several respondents said that they spoke Yiddish in the shtetl, but when they moved to Leningrad or Moscow, they changed over to Russian. One respondent even said, “Until 1925 we spoke Yiddish but after that we spoke Russian.”

The veterans did not spontaneously describe tensions between their grandparents and parents, although we did not ask explicitly about this. Remarkable by its absence is any description of tension among the generations, which one might have expected from the first generation of sincere, believing Soviet citizens. Perhaps they wanted to avoid this subject or have repressed or forgotten their conflicts with parents and grandparents. One or two reported celebrating when “*Bobeh* [Granny] finally ate *trayf*,” but that’s exceptional. Contrast this with the Haskalah literature, which parallels the Russian “fathers and sons” theme. The difference might be that the first generation of *maskilim* was fighting a conscious ideological battle and was in a minority, struggling against inertia, whereas the Soviet youth were riding the tide of the times, were strongly supported by the regime, and were content to treat their elders not as ideological enemies but simply as “old-fashioned people” who belonged to an earlier time, whereas the youth were confident that the future belonged to them. Grandparents were often highly observant, parents much less so or not at all, and the respondents became Komsomoltsy, Communist Party members, good Soviet citizens. Yet the vets described going to seders well into the 1930s. Almost never did they mock a grandparent for having been religious or say, “You know, they had not yet outlived superstitions and old-fashioned customs.” One exception is Semen Gartsman, born in 1922 in Kiev. His grandparents

were very religious people, even fanatics. My grandfather, when I was still a boy, would visit us in Kiev [from Khabna]. And his first duty was to put on something and then stand and pray. I was ashamed in front of the Russian boys, when they would come in and see that my grandfather was praying. At that time religion was prohibited. And I was a Pioneer, and I was afraid I would be laughed at, that I was religious. And we were always instructed against religion. They broke up the synagogues at that time. I would go with my father when I was seven years old, my father would take me to the synagogue, it was all broken up and had been turned into a warehouse for iron and scrap. . . . My mother would yell at my father, “What are you doing? You’ll leave me with two orphans! Don’t go—you’ll be arrested.”

### **Conclusion**

It seems that Jews who fought in the Soviet military saw themselves as fighting for their homeland, not for the Jews. Relatively few of those we interviewed said they were motivated by knowledge of atrocities against the Jews, though most said they knew

about them from newspapers and lectures at the front, and not one said that they did not care at all about the USSR and fought only out of Jewish motivation. Abram Tulman, a former air force colonel, when asked whether he had any personal reasons for participating in the war, answered,

My main reason was that I was a Soviet citizen and a patriot. I was a patriot. I had a Motherland and I loved my Motherland. I loved it because I paid a high price for it. . . . All the suffering I went through when I was little: the orphanage, hunger, lack of clothing, no place to sleep. I remembered all of that. I knew that I was defending my Motherland. We talked among ourselves that we'd win the war and start living well. But it didn't turn out that way, unfortunately. It didn't. That's how it goes.

They believed in the Soviet system, in socialism. One gets the impression that they simply assumed that this was their system, that there was every reason to support it. They were not necessarily fervent ideologues, but unquestioning supporters of the system. They were too young to have experienced or considered alternatives (most were born in 1915–25). A few maintained the faith until they left the service, especially the career military officers (some of whom left as late as the 1980s)—the same people who denied that anti-Semitism existed and (one) who argue(d) that those who complained of anti-Semitism were just using this as an excuse for their own incompetence. Some in Moscow even lamented the dissolution of the Soviet Union and asserted that the best thing for the Jews would be if it were to be reconstituted. For them, the fall of the USSR led to outbursts of nationalism, and that was not good for Jews.

Most of the veterans spoke quite dispassionately about the murders of their relatives, perhaps because they did not witness the killings. However, survivor testimonies from other countries are similar in this respect, perhaps because the survivors have lived with this for so long and thought about it so many times, or because they are trying to minimize the pain. Perhaps this is a military or Soviet stoicism. They displayed remarkably little emotion when describing the horrors of war, including even their own wounds and suffering, except for the women, who spoke much more freely. One exception was Abram Gulko, who spoke with passion about Germans, Stalin, and the Soviet system. He also mentioned that he had nightmares about the war and saw himself being murdered. But he is nearly unique in this—unlike the American ethos, suffused with the values and jargon of social work and psychology

(two largely unknown fields in the USSR, especially at the time these veterans were growing up), where there is much talk about various postbattle “syndromes.” This may be due to a Soviet ethos of men not dwelling on suffering, being stoic and matter-of-fact, while women can and should show emotion. It’s also possible, though highly unlikely, that the veterans have told their stories so many times that their emotions connected to the subject are dulled.

Take, for example, the testimony of Iosif Ushomirski, from Detroit. On February 13, 1945, part of his finger was shot off, and the commander said: “When we take the dike, we’re about to start a softening up shelling, so when we take the dike . . . you can go to the medical unit. But now you have to get your platoon ready and as soon as you hear the order, start the offensive.” Ushomirski’s orderly bandaged the wound and told him to shoot with a good finger. Ushomirski said that after a shell exploded, “I lost my left eye, the right eye was slightly wounded and a few fragments got into my skull. At that time there wasn’t any serious artillery fire. That was just a single shell.” They took him from near Frankfurt to a hospital near Poznan.

That was the only eye hospital for the entire front. In two days they had operated on me. Captain—I don’t remember her name—operated on me. In those days they didn’t have any anesthetics or anything. They tied me to the operating table and she just operated on me. And the pain was so bad. She said, “Your left eye is gone, so I have to clean it out, sew up the nerves and take out the fragments in your skull. And then I’ll find a great glass eye for you, you’ll still be very handsome.”

He was not discharged but assigned to noncombat duties and eventually wound up in the NKVD fighting Polish anti-Soviet bands. “I was so patriotic.”

Semen Gertsman states matter-of-factly: “Fourteen of my first cousins died at the front. My aunt, uncle, two sisters and three male first cousins died in Babi Yar. My uncle, my father’s brother, died at the front.”

What does rankle the veterans most is the betrayals of their relatives by former friends and neighbors. There is a great sense of perplexity and injury among those who mentioned that their relatives were murdered by former neighbors, friends, and classmates. This seems to have made a greater impression than the German atrocities—understandably. After all, from German “invaders, occupiers, enemies” one expected such behavior.



In the final analysis, the Jewish veterans remained “Soviet people” in at least two senses, though many ceased to be Soviet patriots. They were true “internationalists” and paid little heed to ethnicity before the war. As Israel Barsky expressed the change he observed after the war: “We [Soviets] ceased to be one people; we started differentiating ourselves from others, that is, Jews from people of [other] Soviet nationalities.” Another “Soviet” trait is that the veterans tended to lapse into clichés (*shablony*) in answer to our last set of questions regarding what lessons could be derived from the war. Very few admitted to taking revenge or to wild behavior, and very few mention instances where German POWs or civilians are mistreated or dispatched. Perhaps even their idyllic picture of interethnic relations before the war is a Soviet cliché, made credible by contrast to the postwar situation. They may even be rationalizing their belief in the Soviet system, saying, in effect, “it was just fine before the war when we were enthusiasts. After the war things changed—and so did we, commensurately.”

These veterans, and perhaps the people a decade or so older than they, are the only generations of true “Soviet men.” The generations who came afterward were no longer the true believers. They were not the people who had fought the good fight for a just and holy cause and for a land they truly loved, but the sons and daughters of those same people who had learned that their love had gone unrequited.

## NOTES

1. The total number of deaths in the Soviet Union has been revised many times in both Soviet and post-Soviet publications. This is due most likely to the uncertainties created by chaotic wartime situations, Soviet and post-Soviet political considerations, and different methods of enumeration. On a visit to the Russian memorial complex at Poklonnaya Gora, Moscow, on June 2, 1996, I noted that according to the displays there, 37.2 million Soviet people died during the war. It is not clear if that includes what might be reckoned as natural deaths. The number of military deaths given at Poklonnaya Gora was repeated by the Russian General Staff to *Argumenty i fakty* (no. 22), a Moscow newspaper, in 2001. See "Soviet, Russian Military Combat Deaths Detailed," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 4, 2001. These figures are undoubtedly for all Soviet territory, defined as all areas incorporated into the USSR in 1939 (eastern Poland) and 1940 (Romanian Bessarabia and Bukovina; Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), as well as the pre-1939 territories.
2. While teaching an upper-level course on East European politics in 2001, I asked a class of sixty-four juniors and seniors at the University of Michigan on what date the United States had entered World War II. Only one student, a Japanese citizen, named December 7, 1941.
3. Georgy Ilyichov, "Russian Citizens View the Great Patriotic War as More Tragic Than Heroic," *Izvestia*, 21 June 2003, p. 1, translated in *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 55:23, 23 July 2003, p. 13.
4. Ibid.
5. See Gennadi Kostyrchenko, *V plenu u krasnogo faraona* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1994), p. 16, translated as *Out of the Shadows* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1995).
6. Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 212.
7. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 116.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
9. See, among others, Vladimir Levin and David Mel'tser, *Chernaia kniga s krasnymi stranitsami: Tragediia i geroizm evreev Belorussii* (Baltimore, MD: Vestnik, 1996); Gershon Shapiro, *Evrei—Geroi sovetskogo soiuzna* (Tel Aviv, 1982); Aron Abramovich, *V reshaiushchei voine: Uchastie i rol' evreev SSR v voine protiv natsizma*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: n.p., 1982) and vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: n.p., 1992); B. E. Volovel'skaya and Ts. N. Segal, *Odna na vsekh pobeda: Samarskie evrei na frontakh Velikoi Otechestvennoi (Book from Samara)* (Samara, 1995); David Fudim, comp., *Nam dorogi eti pozabyt'*

*nel'zia* . . . , 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 1995); Fedor D. Sverdlov, *Evrei-generalny vooruzhennykh sil SSSR: Kratkie biografii* (Moscow, 1993) (the Hebrew edition is *Generalim yehudim batsava hasovieti b'milkhemet haolam hashniya* [Tel Aviv: Misrad Habitakhon, Maarachot, 1996]); Leonid Smilovitskii, "Minsk Ghetto: An Issue of Jewish Resistance," *Shvut* 1–2 (1995), pp. 17–18, and the works cited therein.

10. See, for example, Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997); and Ambrose, *D-Day, June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

11. I have found very useful the article by Mark Roseman, "Surviving Memory: Truth and Inaccuracy in Holocaust Testimony," *Journal of Holocaust Education* 8:1 (1999).

12. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

13. The influence of national identity on collective memory is discussed in "Collective Memory and National Identities: German and Polish Memory Cultures: The Forms of Collective Identity," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 28:7, pp. 255–61.

14. Mark Kupovetsky, "Estimation of Jewish Losses in the USSR during World War II," *Jews in Eastern Europe* 24:2 (1994), p. 34.

15. The estimate made by Shmuel Krakowski, "The Fate of the Jewish POWs of the Soviet and Polish Armies," in *The Shoah and the War*, ed. Asher Cohen, Yehoyakim Cochavi, and Yoav Gelber (New York: Lang, 1992), pp. 229–30.

16. Mordechai Altshuler asserts that "estimates of the number of Jewish Holocaust victims in the Soviet Union fluctuate between 2.5 million and 3.3 million" (*Soviet Jewry since the Second World War* [New York: Greenwood, 1987], p. 4). A later assessment is Yitzhak Arad, "The Holocaust of Soviet Jewry in the Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union," *Yad Vashem Studies* 21 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1991), p. 47. According to Arad, "Out of a total of 2,750,000–2,900,000 Jews . . . under German rule in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union . . . very few had survived. . . . To the victims of Soviet Jewry in World War Two we should add between 120,000 and 180,000 Jews who fell . . . while serving in the Soviet Army, as well as about 80,000–85,000 shot in POW camps. Together with other Soviet citizens, tens of thousands of Soviet Jews died due to hard living conditions, shellings and bombings." In his most recent and comprehensive work, Arad concludes that between 2,509,000 and 2,624,500 Jews who were in Nazi-occupied Soviet territories died during the war (*Toldot ha-Sho'ah: Brit ha-Moetsot ve-hashtakhim ha-mesupakhim*, vol. 2 [Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004], p. 1014).

17. Kupovetsky says that “between 300–585,000 Jewish refugees came to the USSR in 1939–June 1941, a much higher estimate than most” (“Estimation of Jewish Losses in the USSR,” p. 29).
18. See Shapiro, *Evrei*.
19. See Sverdlov.
20. See, for example, M. Howard, *History of the Second World War: Grand Strategy*, vol. 4 (London, 1972); J. Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, vol. 5 (London, 1956); J. R. M. Butler, *History of the Second World War: Grand Strategy*, vol. 11.
21. Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, p. 219.
22. *Hadassah Magazine*, September 1991, p. 10. In another place he writes that “a veritable blackout was to engulf the Holocaust in Soviet Russia” (William Korey, “Anti-Semitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in the USSR/CIS,” in *Anti-Semitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Eastern Europe*, ed. Randolph Braham [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994], p. 209).
23. For details, see Zvi Gitelman, *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), chap. 2.
24. Petr Nikolaevich Pospelov, ed., *Istoriia velikoi otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskogo Soiuz, 1941–1945* gg, 6 vols. (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1962–65). See volume 3 (1962), pp. 438, 442, 443, 446.
25. Yuri Yurevich Kondufor et al., *Istoriia Ukrainskoi SSR*, 10 vols. (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1981–85).
26. L. N. Lentsman et al., *Estonskii narod v velikoi otechestvennoi voine Sovetskogo Soiuz, 1941–1945* (Tallin: Eesti ramaat, 1973–80), p. 437.
27. Yuri Yakovlevich Orlov, *Krakh nemetsko-fashistskoi propagandy v period voiny protiv SSR* (Moscow: Moscow State University, 1985), pp. 95, 61.
28. Viktor Ivanovich Vinogradov, *Istoriia SSR v dokumentakh i illustratsiakh* (Moscow: Prosveshcheniia, 1981).
29. *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, vol. 9 (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. 293. There is no “Holocaust” entry in the encyclopedia. On the way Holocaust materials were censored, see A. Blium, “Otnoshenie Sovetskoi tsenzury (1940–1946) k probleme kholokosta,” *Vestnik Evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve* 9:2 (1995), pp. 156–67.

30. See, for example, F. Kral, *Prestuplenie protiv Evropy* (1963) and *SS v deistvii* (1961).
31. See, for example, Henrikh Hoffman, “Dos iz geshen in Taganrog,” *Sovietish heymland (SH)*, no. 2 (1966), pp. 119–24; Hirsh Dobin, “Der koiech fun lebn,” *SH*, no. 3 (1966), pp. 44–68; and Yekhiel Falikman, “Der shvartser vint,” *SH*, no. 8 (1967), pp. 39–87.
32. Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, p. 232.
33. Sergei S. Smirnov, *Sobranie sochinenii*: vol. 1, *Brestkaia Krepost', krepost' nad Bugom*; vol. 2, *Rasskazy o neizvestnykh geroiakh*; vol. 3, *Stalingrad na Dnepre*; vol. 4, *Na poliakh Vengrii*; vol. 5, *Liudi, kotorykh ia videl'* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1973).
34. Smirnov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, pp. 227, 187, 194.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 44, 235.
36. Smirnov, *Rasskazy o neizvestnykh geroiakh*, pp. 131, 214–15.
37. Amir Weiner cites a mass circulation book published in 1952, “which specified the ethnic breakdown of recipients of military awards in general and Heroes of the Soviet Union in particular, [in which] Jews were dropped from the list. The nationality of some Jews was not even mentioned, as in the case of Yeidl [*sic*] Khaiat, one of the fallen heroes in the famous ‘Pavlov House’ at the battle of Stalingrad” (*Making Sense of War*, p. 220).
38. See Lev Besymenski, “Was das Sowejetvolk vom Holocaust wusste,” in *Der Spätstalinismus und die jüdische Frage*, ed. Leonid Luks (Cologne: Bohlau Verlag, 1998).
39. See Leonid Smilovitsky, “Historiography of the Holocaust in Belorussia: 1996–1998,” *Shvut* 23:7 (1998) for a review of much of the Russian-language literature in that period. See also Smilovitsky, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorusii, 1941–1944* (n.p., 2000); Levin and Mel'tser, *Chernaia kniga s krasnymi stranitsami*. The most systematic treatment of the Holocaust in the USSR to appear in Russian, to my knowledge, is Ilya Altman, *Zhertvy nemanisty: Kholokost v SSSR 1941–1945 gg* (Moscow: Fonda “Kovcheg,” 2002). Other works based on archival and other research include Aron Abramovich, *V reshaiushchei voine: Uchastie i rol' evreev SSSR v voine protiv natsizma*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1992); Marat Botvinnik, *Pamiatniki genotsida evreev Belarusi* (Minsk: Belaruskaya navuka, 2000); Raisa Andreyevna Chernoglazova et al., eds., *Judenfrei! Svobodno ot evreev* (Minsk: Asobny Dakh, 1999); Faina Vinokurova, *Evrei Vinnichiny v period vtoroi mirovoi voiny*, vol. 3 (Vinnitsa: Anteks, 2000);

Evgenyii Semenovich Rozenblat and Irina Eduardovna Elenskaia, *Pinskie evrei, 1939–1944* (Brest: University of Brest, 1997); Iakov Khonigsman, *Katastrofa evreistva zapadnoi Ukrainy: Evrei vostochnoi Galitsii, zapadnoi Volyni, Bukoviny i Zakarpat'ia v 1933–1945 gg.* (Lvov, 1998); Ster Ia. Elisavetskii, ed., *Katastrofa ta opir Ukrainського evreistva* (Kiev: Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Political and Ethnonational Research, 1999); Fedor D. Sverdlov, *Podvigi soldat-evreev v boiakh*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Izd-vo “Biograficheskii klub,” 1994, 1998); Leonid L. Mininberg, *Sovetskie evrei v nauke i promyshlennosti SSSR v period vtoroi mirovoi voiny, 1941–1945 gg.* (Moscow: Its-Garant, 1995); G. Aronov et al., *Katastrofa evropeiskogo evreistva pid chas drugoi svitovoi viyni* (Kiev: Institut Iudaiki, 2000). A recent American work with much relevant material is Amir Weiner’s *Making Sense of War*.

40. Some examples are Iakov Shepetinskii, *Prigovor* (Tel Aviv, 2002); Itshak (Mikhail) Iuzhuk and Ruven Iuzhuk, *Darovano vyzhit* (Pinsk: KUIP, 2002); Andrei Plotkin, *Podvigov ne sovershal* (Moscow: Fond “Kholokost,” 2000); Ruven Evilevich, *Ia ne damsia tebe, drakon!* (Jerusalem, 1995); David Stavitskii, *Epizody* (New York, 1998); Grigorii Braziller, *Razbuzhennie vospominania* (New York, 1997); V. L. Tamarkin, *Eto bylo ne vo sne* (Moscow-Jerusalem: Zhag-VM, 2002); Mosei Rechester, *My srazhalis protiv natsizma, 1941–1945* (New York, 1982); Sergei Berkner, *Zhizn' i borba Belostotokskogo getto* (Moscow: Fond “Kholokost,” 2001); Abram Rubenchik, *Pravda o Minskom getto* (Tel Aviv, 1999); O. Arkadieva et al., *Na perekrestkakh sudeb* (Minsk: Chetyre chetverti, 2001); I. M. Shaikin et al., *Rasskazhi synu svoemu*, 2 vols. (Kiev, 1998); E. Levin and I. Spektor-Makarova, *Voiny doma iakova* (Yalta: Adonis, 2001); Volovel'skaya and Segal, *Odna na vsekh pobeda*.

41. Similarly, in Ukraine (in the 1993 survey) the older one is, the more the Holocaust is reported to have influenced one’s Jewish self-consciousness. Even among those under thirty, only seven percent said it did not influence their Jewish consciousness at all. The great majority saw the Holocaust as their own personal tragedy. Nearly two-thirds of all respondents think that the Holocaust could happen again.

42. The question was worded, “To what extent did the Holocaust influence the formation of your Jewish consciousness?”

43. Mordechai Altshuler, “A Note on Jews in the Red Army on the Eve of the Second World War,” *Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* 18:2 (1992), p. 37.

44. Mordechai Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust: A Social and Demographic Profile* (Jerusalem: Centre for Research of East European Jewry, 1998), pp. 19–20.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

47. See Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), chap. 7; and Seweryn Bialer, *Stalin and His Generals: Soviet Military Memoirs of World War II* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), pt. 1.

48. *Istoriia otechestva* (Briansk–Saint Petersburg, 1994), p. 107, quoted in Krakowski, "Fate of the Jewish POWs." The USSR had not signed the Geneva convention, and Soviet captives were not treated as were those of other nations. In many instances, they were surrounded by barbed wire, deprived of food and drink, and left to die. Many were used as slave labor. Nazi policy was to immediately kill all Jews or Communists who were captured. According to John Garrard and Carol Garrard, Germans were ordered to "show special preference when releasing Soviet POWs. German military documents demonstrate that by the end of January 1942, 280,108 Soviet POWs had been released. . . . Not a single soldier was Russian, but an astonishing total of 270,095 were Ukrainians. . . . These young men, healthy and trained in the use of weapons, then formed the core of the *Polizei* . . . though some were employed in a variety of jobs, such as farm work and harvesting" (*The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman* [New York: Free Press, 1996] pp. 9–10).

49. See Solomon M. Schwarz, *The Jews in the Soviet Union* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1951), pt. 2.

50. Mordechai Altshuler, "Anti-Semitism in Ukraine toward the End of the Second World War," *Jews in Eastern Europe* 22:3 (1993), p. 43.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 44–48.





# **THE FATE OF SOVIET SOLDIERS IN GERMAN CAPTIVITY**

**Reinhard Otto**

On September 25, 1941, about three months after the beginning of the war between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, a twenty-seven-year-old lieutenant in the Red Army, Aleksej Wassiljewitsch Schurawljos, was captured unhurt near the small town of Borislav. He was unmarried, a fitter by profession, of Russian nationality, born near Moscow. For some weeks he stayed in the prisoner-of-war camp (Stalag) 360 Rowno in western Ukraine, from where he was transferred to Stalag 365 Wladimir-Wolynsk near the former Polish border. There he was registered with a so-called personal card, issued an identity disk with a special number, and photographed. From Wladimir-Wolynsk he was taken to Czestochowa in the Generalgouvernement and then, on August 4, 1942, to a special Soviet Officer-Camp at Hammelburg, north of Würzburg in Germany. Because of hard work and prolonged insufficient nourishment, the five-foot-four Schurawljos arrived at Hammelburg weighing ninety-five pounds. His emaciated condition may have caused him to contract incurable tuberculosis of the lungs. In the camp hospital he died on March 28, 1943, and was buried in grave number 518 in the camp cemetery. Schurawljos's fate is typical for an ordinary Soviet officer in German captivity,<sup>1</sup> but as far as his relatives are concerned, he is still listed as missing.

## **A New Important Source: The Card Index of the Soviet POWs**

Only a few years ago historians said it would be impossible to discover the fate of any Soviet POW in this precise way. Because of the racial—Nazis considered Slavs an inferior race—and anticommunist war against the Soviet Union, Germans treated these captured soldiers much worse than those of other countries.<sup>2</sup> The Germans justified such treatment with the argument that the Soviet Union had not signed the Geneva Convention of 1929. This convention demanded, among other things, registering each POW's basic military and personal data. Registration meant some legal security because all the names were posted to the International Red Cross and from there to the home country, so it constituted a kind of responsibility toward those who had been captured. But in the case of the Soviet POWs, the German Army did without registration because the Germans were not interested, historians said, in the fate of "communists," and if many of them died, it would not be the Germans' problem.

The example of Aleksej Schurawl'jow shows that this opinion is incorrect. As far as the bureaucracy was concerned, he was treated in nearly the same way as any American or British soldier in German captivity. He was registered in the second camp he came to, and his death was registered as well. And it was just normal procedure for the Hammelburg camp administration to forward his file cards later to Berlin to the Wehrmachtauskunftsstelle (WASSt), which officially collected all information on German soldiers as well as on POWs (e.g., transfers to other camps, hospitalization, or death).

Because of the increased bombing in 1943, all these POW files of the WASSt were taken to Meiningen (Thuringia), where they were discovered by American troops in April 1945. Four months later they handed over the card index of the Soviet POWs to the Red Army. And from that moment on, the files vanished. Their absence, and the lack of bureaucratic sources on Red Army soldiers in the German archives at all, seemed to substantiate the opinion of those historians mentioned above.

But in fact the cards of the confirmed dead were brought to what is called today the Central Archive of the Russian Ministry of Defense (CAMO), at Podolsk.<sup>3</sup> The cards of Soviet soldiers thought to be still alive were checked by the secret service, the NKVD, and afterward kept in its archive for the oblast in which they lived. And all these indexes are still in the possession of its successors in the Belorussian KGB Archives of Minsk, Brest, Witebsk, and the other oblast capitals as well as in that of the Russian secret service (FSB) in Moscow.<sup>4</sup>

In 1997 my fellow historian Rolf Keller and I were invited by the Russian General Staff to see the WASSt files in Podolsk. After our return we published a paper on our results and in which we publicly asked that these files be completely opened for scientific and humanitarian reasons, and for the work of the memorials in all the countries German troops had run POW camps. Supported by institutions such as the German Bundesarchiv and the Red Cross in Germany, Russia, and Belarus, a combined German-Russian project was launched in September 2000 (Belarus took part in 2002). It included opening up the card index of some 50,000 captured Soviet officers. The work at Podolsk and Moscow was finished at the end of 2002, and as a result the personal card of Aleksej Schurawl'jow can be seen. After that the project started to work on noncommissioned officers and enlisted men, and in the end their names will be released, too—more than 400,000 in total.<sup>5</sup> This number will be doubled by all the files that lie—still unrevealed—in the archives of the various secret services. The following

short survey on the fate of the Soviet POWs is based mostly on the Podolsk and KGB material and on that of the German Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv.

### **The Annihilation of the Soviet Ideology**

“The fate of the Soviet POWs is a tragedy of the greatest extent,” said Alfred Rosenberg, the Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, in March 1942.<sup>6</sup> He was right. More than two million had died up to then, and there were still three years of captivity left.<sup>7</sup> About three million people were to die by May 1945, that is, fifty percent of all Soviet POWs, compared with one percent of captured Americans.

The war against the Soviet Union was a war of annihilation. Nazi Germany wanted to extinguish the “evil of communism” and those who were looked upon as supporters of that ideology. From the beginning, hatred was concentrated on the political officers of the Red Army, the commissars and *politruks* (captains). More than two weeks before the invasion, the German High Command laid down in the infamous commissar order that “political commissars of all kinds, who are the real bearers of resistance, can be expected to mete out treatment to our prisoners that is full of hate, cruel and inhuman.” Consequently, they were, “as a matter of principle, to be finished off immediately with a weapon,”<sup>8</sup> that is, at the point of capture but also in the first camp they came to. Without these political officers and the fear of them, there would be no resistance by the regular Red Army soldier, the Germans thought. The commissars were regarded as the personification of Bolshevism, and Bolshevism and Jewishness were the same. So the commissar was the Jew and the Jew the commissar. “Slay all commissars and Jews! They are your disaster, your ruin,”<sup>9</sup> reads a German flier for the Red Army.

In German eyes, officers and politics were mutually exclusive, and therefore each political commissar was an irregular, not a regular, soldier and therefore could not be a POW and be treated as such. So officers of the Wehrmacht had an ideological and a formal argument for having commissars killed either by their own troops or by the commands of the security police.

But how could a commissar be recognized? He had certain badges on his uniform, but he might pull them off and appear as a normal POW, and maybe be transported to Germany and work there. That was a dangerous ideological situation in Nazi eyes: such men might poison their surroundings and even the German people. Therefore in July 1941 Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the security police and the SD

(secret service of the NSDAP), ordered in coordination with the German High Command all Gestapo authorities to send so-called Einsatzkommandos (task forces) to the POW camps in their sphere of responsibility to check that all Soviet soldiers were ideologically “tolerable.”<sup>10</sup> But commissars were not the only “intolerable” ones. That group also included all important Soviet functionaries, leading persons of the authorities and the economy, Jews, “communist fanatics,” intellectuals, and “professional revolutionaries.”

Supported by military intelligence in the camps and by other POWs, three or four policemen decided after some minutes of interrogation the fate of each prisoner examined. “Guilty” meant discharge from captivity, being sent to a concentration camp, and being killed there. In Eastern Europe the execution often happened just outside the camp. In a brief report the policemen listed the reasons why the suspicious person had to be executed.

In the case of Grigorij Efimowitsch Ladyk, a thirty-six-year-old chief politruk, the three-sentence record reads as follows: “I made false statements about my personal data at that time because I was afraid of being recognized as a political leader and of being shot afterwards. In the hospital I was betrayed by a comrade of my former unit. Now I am giving you my correct personal data.” It was April 15, 1942, in POW Stalag 308 Neuhammer, in Lower Silesia. Only one day later he was shot and cremated at Gross Rosen Concentration Camp.<sup>11</sup> In just one camp, Stalag 326 Senne, in eastern Westphalia, 4,556 men were handed over to the Einsatzkommando up to March 1, 1945, and most were sent to Buchenwald Concentration Camp. At least 1,000 of them were shot before August 1942, and later the others were forced into slave labor or murdered.<sup>12</sup> Rudolf Höß, commander of Auschwitz, conducted his first gas-chamber “experiments” at the beginning of September 1941: about 600 Soviet POWs were taken there from the Neuhammer camp and murdered some hours later. Here perhaps was the beginning of the Holocaust.<sup>13</sup>

Like Ladyk, at least 40,000 men were executed in POW camps in Germany itself until the summer of 1942. So far there have not been exact figures concerning Eastern Europe, and nothing about the remaining three years of war—but now, with the material available in the archives of the former Soviet Union, we can analyze personal cards in the project mentioned above and determine the fate of many missing persons handed over to the Gestapo.

### **The Living Conditions**

As for those accepted as “tolerable,” they were not assured of survival. Christian Streit and Karel Berkhoff describe very precisely the dreadful travel conditions in the East and most particularly from the eastern theater to Germany. Marching for long distances, with hardly any water or food, and traveling in unheated box cars in winter claimed thousands of victims. The camps the Red Army soldiers were brought to in 1941–42 were not at all prepared for them. At first they had to live in the open air without shelter. The earth caves they then built would often collapse, suffocating the inmates. And barracks they built in winter became overcrowded.<sup>14</sup> From the spring of 1942 onward, accommodations improved, but the housing of Soviet POWs was normally simpler and at the same time more overcrowded than that for other POWs.

As a result of this situation, diseases were already breaking out in August 1941. First it was dysentery, followed by spotted fever (typhus) in the autumn, and finally tuberculosis from 1942 until the end of the war. In the Senne camp, for example, about 600 people died of dysentery in the second half of 1941, and nearly seventy percent of those 1,600 dead (of an estimated 15,000 people buried there) already known today by the project and prior research were killed by tuberculosis by 1945.<sup>15</sup>

Nazi Germany justified these casualties by citing the huge number of Soviet soldiers. There had been far more than they had expected, many German officers said after the war. So there were not enough railroad cars available to transfer them to Germany, and the camps were not finished because of a lack of materials. These were justifiable reasons in wartime and might have been a part of the problem, but some facts undermine this defense. The German Army service regulation for building new POW camps stipulated that they should be ready within ninety days, and the first conferences concerning Soviet POW questions started in March 1941, three months before the first transports arrived in Germany. And there are many examples of transportation units that refused to transport Soviet soldiers because of fear of lice or simply because it was so-called Russians being shipped to the West.

But in the areas of nutrition and treatment by military personnel, the German High Command, the National Socialist Party, and representatives of big business did officially announce that Soviet POWs should be handled in a way quite different from the provisions of the Geneva Convention.

After the experiences of World War I, it was a main principle of the German government that its own people and its own troops should not go without food. Soviet

soldiers were thought to be communists, and their home state had refused to sign the Geneva Convention. So there were two reasons to give them smaller rations than all other POWs, and these rations gradually decreased up until the winter of 1941–42. Orders were issued in each camp administration: nonworking and weakened soldiers, meaning those who still had to recover, received the smallest rations. And the camp administrations followed that order. After a tour of inspection, a district POW commander in Belorussia wrote about the army's Michailowski POW collecting point on December 1, 1941, reporting that it held more than 10,000 Red Army soldiers at that time. The previous night 144 of them had died. Nutrition was completely insufficient. Working POWs officially got 200 grams of bread, one kilogram of potatoes, and 200 grams of cabbage, nonworking prisoners about half of that quantity, but in fact it was less.<sup>16</sup> Quartermaster General Wagner described it with one short sentence: "Non-working POWs in the camps must starve."<sup>17</sup> And so they did—in the Occupied Eastern Territories as well as in Germany. Guards in various camps took pictures, horrific testimonies of inhumanity.

At the end of 1941 the German government recognized that in the future it would urgently need the Soviet POWs as workers in its economy. Therefore on December 18 the High Command ordered measures to restore the working power of the Red Army soldiers. But it did not put forth humanitarian reasons for this. The measures were tied to a specific purpose (i.e., workers were needed) and would not change the ideological attitude toward the Soviets, German officials said. But at that moment it was impossible to increase rations, they added, and so the camps should try to give them two warm meals instead of one—with the same quantity.

And so for the men concerned nothing changed. They still had to endure constant hunger that forced them to eat anything that seemed to be edible. Witnesses talk of cannibalism in some camps, and there are not only witnesses; terrifying photos exist, some of which are in my personal possession, and there were orders to execute those found guilty of this. Years later a camp doctor remembered having seen completely undernourished prisoners who could not be restored to working power even by normal rations. American, British, or French POWs were able to receive parcels from their families, containing cigarettes, chocolate, and coffee, so that their standard of living was often higher than that of their guards, while Soviet POWs begging for food were part of everyday life in wartime Germany. Germans who were children in those days always remember the meager figures of half-starving Soviet soldiers

staggering to their workplaces. Giving them bread meant being threatened with imprisonment. Their casualties were often caused by “exhaustion,” “cardiac insufficiency,” or “wasting away,” which may certainly be true in many cases, but which surely does not explain the many deaths of normal males ages eighteen to forty.

The reason for this bad treatment was the designation of all Soviet human beings as subhuman creatures. As officially decreed by the Nazi government, their survival did not matter.<sup>18</sup> An incident at Krupp Steel in February 1942 serves well as an example. The head of the boiler construction department urged additional food rations for undernourished Russian POWs working for him. They received 300 grams of bread in the early morning and the next ration after 6 p.m. At first, he was successful and got extra food, but then the head of the German Arbeitsfront accused him of having pity on Bolsheviks. The former answered that the POWs were sent as workers in the first place, not as communists, and undernourished people would not be able to produce locomotives. The latter replied that those who work were not more useful than those who did not. Bolsheviks were soulless people; if the first 100,000 perished, then another 100,000 would come to replace them.<sup>19</sup>

From the beginning the Nazi leaders demanded such an attitude. To the German soldiers the Soviet POW was no comrade, Hitler said in March 1941. Consideration would be wrong, even dangerous, because the Soviet POW would use any opportunity to harm the German people. And therefore the utmost caution was advised. On September 8, 1941, the High Command published an order for all guarding Red Army soldiers; the document was headed: “Bolshevism is the sworn enemy of National Socialist Germany.” There were six points, and the first one read as follows: “Ruthless measures have to be taken at the least signs of insubordination and disobedience. To break resistance use weapons without mercy. Fleeing POWs are to be shot at once without a warning and with the real intention of hitting.” The fourth read: “Softness even toward POWs who are willing to work and be obedient is wrong. He will interpret that as weakness and draw his own conclusions.”<sup>20</sup>

The guards followed the instructions rigorously. The first death list of Stalag Bergen-Belsen from August 7 to October 10, 1941, contains 380 people; thirty-six of them, nearly ten percent, were shot reportedly attempting to escape or resisting.<sup>21</sup> In case of doubt, divergent behavior was to be interpreted as resistance and dealt with accordingly. In Bad Vöslau in Austria the POWs of a working unit got their ration at noon on October 26, 1941. The guards told their leader, a sergeant, that one Soviet was

not obeying, and that his mess gear was dirty. His ration was halved immediately. At the moment he got his soup he suddenly tipped his gear and spilled it on the sergeant. The latter took his pistol and shot the POW at once, in the head. The medical report gives the impression of normal proceedings.<sup>22</sup> Many other examples exist.<sup>23</sup> The personal cards also reveal how common this brutal treatment was: the camp administrations often wrote on the cards, “shot because of escape” or “shot because of resistance.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Soviet POWs: Victims of Two Dictatorships**

Finally, however, in spring 1945 or earlier in the Occupied Eastern Territories, liberation came. But liberation did not mean the end of pain, and, most of all, it did not mean freedom. Many of the weakened men died in the first weeks after the arrival of the Allied troops because of the consequences of years of malnutrition and exploitation. The American, British, and Soviet authorities forced the survivors to go back to the USSR, although many of them refused to do so, for they knew what would happen to them. They knew the Stalin order of August 16, 1941, in which he called each POW a traitor to the Soviet Union because he had not fought to the death.<sup>25</sup> Many of the former POWs committed suicide, some even in the United States or in Great Britain.<sup>26</sup>

The NKVD established so-called filtration camps where those being repatriated were asked what they had done during German captivity. All the documents they had were confiscated so that they would have no chance to prove that they put up anything like resistance. Their secret service file included many documents that stemmed from German captivity, too, and would accompany them for the rest of their lives. About 1,800,000 Soviet POWs were liberated and returned to the Soviet Union, a considerable number were forced into slave labor or sentenced to ten to twenty-five years imprisonment in Siberian or Arctic camps. Many of them died there.

All repatriated POWs, even those who returned unpunished, became second-class people. After their return they were obliged to move to a given town or village not necessarily their own. There they had to register within one month. Later, they had great difficulties finding a job, let alone having any career prospects or pursuing higher education. Travel to foreign countries was hardly permitted, and there were a lot of setbacks in everyday life.<sup>27</sup> Not until the dissolution of the USSR did the few survivors begin to talk about their past and to point out the injustices done to them. Even within



their own families they had often kept silent, not wanting to reveal the shame it meant to have been a POW.<sup>28</sup>

According to international law, the former POWs have no particular entitlement to compensation, but perhaps they do in a moral respect. These people—victims of two dictatorships—suffered from, in some cases, more than sixty years of injustice and adversity, longer than any other group did, and they should not remain anonymous. Some memorials such as Senne, Bergen-Belsen, or Zeithain, in Germany, and the German-Russian-Belorussian project, are attempting to bring the POWs' fates into the wider public eye. This is a responsibility toward those whose lives were destroyed by German captivity.

## NOTES

1. For more examples, see Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, ed., *Gedenkbuch verstorbener sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener* (Kassel: Friedhof Hammelburg Bayern, 2002).
2. The only exception is that of the so-called Italian Military Internees. Italy left the Rome-Berlin axis in summer 1943. Italian soldiers were disarmed afterward by German troops and treated as traitors. Because of that, they also got the status of internees, not POWs. See Gerhard Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich, 1943 bis 1945: Verraten, verachtet, vergessen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990).
3. There they are part of two departments of the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation; both deal with “irrevocable losses,” those who did not come back to the USSR. Department 11 contains the personal files of officers; department 9, those of noncommissioned officers and enlisted men. See Sergej A. Il’enkow, “Concerning the Registration of Soviet Armed Forces’ Wartime Irrevocable Losses, 1941–1945,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 9:2 (1996), pp. 440–42.
4. Some one thousand cards are also to be found in the Deutsche Dienststelle Berlin, successor of the WAST.
5. Rolf Keller and Reinhard Otto, “Das Massensterben der sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen und die Wehrmachtbürokratie: Unterlagen zur Registrierung der sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941–1945 in deutschen und russischen Institutionen: Ein Forschungsbericht,” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 1 (1998), pp. 149–80.
6. Nuremberg-document PS-081, Institut für Zeitgeschichte München.
7. The numbers differ considerably. See Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941–1945* (Bonn, 1997), pp. 128–90, 244–49 (3.3 million dead POWs); Alfred Streim, *Die Behandlung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener im “Fall Barbarossa”* (Heidelberg: Müller, 1981), pp. 224–48 (2.53 million dead POWs). For a summary, see Manfred Zeidler and Ute Schmidt, eds., *Gefangene in deutschem und sowjetischem Gewahrsam 1941–1956: Dimensionen und Definitionen*, in *Berichte und Studien*, no. 23 (Dresden: Hannah-Arendt-Institut Dresden, 1999). It is an important aim of the project to arrive at correct numbers because they were often misused in the political discussion. For Soviet statistics, see G. F. Krivoseev, *Russland und die USSR in den Kriegen des 20. Jahrhunderts: Verluste der bewaffneten Kräfte* (Moscow: Statistische Forschungen, 2001), pp. 235–40.
8. 6 June 1941, RH 2/v.2082, Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv Freiburg.
9. Cf. Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, p. 86.

10. Einsatzbefehl Nr. 8 vom 17.7.1941, valid for East Prussia and the Generalgouvernement (Nuremberg-document NO 3414); Einsatzbefehl Nr. 9 vom 21.7.1941, valid for camps with Soviet POWs in Germany (NO 3415); Ergänzende Richtlinien vom 27.8.1941, valid for all camps and working commands in Germany (NO 3448)—all at Institut für Zeitgeschichte München.

11. Personal cards and record in the Minsk KGB-Archive, file 9932/11, p. 102. There was an incorrect interpretation of Ladyk's card and many others with the remark "Gestapo" by the Soviet secret service. They thought these people were collaborators with the Germans and therefore the files do not belong to those of the dead but to those of the survivors, often with the remark "to observe until 1970 or 1980," although these persons had been dead for years.

12. Monthly statistical report, 1 March 1945, 7021-105-7, GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation) Moscow.

13. For the complex of the so-called Aussonderungen, see Reinhard Otto, *Wehrmacht, Gestapo und sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im deutschen Reichsgebiet 1941/42* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1998).

14. See Nuremberg-document USSR 422 (1): 17.10.1941, Institut für Zeitgeschichte München, barracks for about 80 POWs should be changed in a way they could shelter some 300 ones, Order of the Chef Heeresrüstung und Chef des Ersatzheeres 17.10.1941.

15. For more information on the Senne camp, see Karl Hueser and Reinhard Otto, *Das Stammlager 326 (VI K) Senne 1941–1945: Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene als Opfer des Nationalsozialistischen Weltanschauungskrieges* (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1992). On the cemetery of that camp, see Reinhard Otto, "Die Rekonstruktion von Gefangenenfriedhöfen am Beispiel des Lagerfriedhofes des Stalag 326 (VI K) Senne in Ostwestfalen," in *Für die Lebenden—der Toten gedenken* (Dresden: Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten, 2003), pp. 104–19.

16. RH 22/251, Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv Freiburg.

17. Nuremberg-document NOKW-1535, Institut für Zeitgeschichte München.

18. For example, there was the Sauckel's program, April 20, 1942, for employing foreign workers and POWs in German war industries. See Nuremberg Document 016-PS, Institut für Zeitgeschichte München. See also the commissar-order.

19. Nuremberg-document 361-D, Institut für Zeitgeschichte München.

20. Nuremberg-document 1519-PS, Institut für Zeitgeschichte München.

21. CAMO (Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation) Podolsk, Dep. 9, 977532-110 (2-110/1959).

22. RH 53-17/181, Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv Freiburg.

23. See an order of the commander of the military district VIII Breslau in Silesia from 7 November 1941. Cases in which the guards shot Soviet POWs because of petty reasons were increasing. But the high number of dead POWs showed that sometimes they were so weak that they could not follow an order, which should not be interpreted as resistance (GARF Moscow 7021/148/214).

24. The CAMO database contains the cards of at least 301 officers with the remark “shot while trying to escape.”

25. See Bernd Bonwetsch, “Die Geschichte des Krieges ist noch nicht geschrieben: Die Repression, das Militär und der Große Vaterländische Krieg,” *Osteuropa* 39:11–12 (1989), pp. 1021–38.

26. In the Deutsche Dienststelle Berlin there are files of about 30,000 former Soviet POWs who had been captured by the U.S. Army, some 30,000 by British troops, most with the remark “transferred to Russia” or “repatriated.” Some of them definitely said they did not want to go back because they were sure to be shot by the NKVD. See a list of former officers in the file of Feliks Sbotow, who committed suicide with two others.

27. On repatriation and the number of repatriated persons, see Pavel Polian, *Deportiert nach Hause: Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im “Dritten Reich” und ihre Repatriierung* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001); Vladimir Naumow and Leonid Reschin, “Repressionen gegen sowjetische Kriegsgefangene und zivile Repatrianten in der USSR 1941 bis 1956,” in *Die Tragödie der Gefangenschaft in Deutschland und der Sowjetunion, 1941–1956*, ed. Klaus-Dieter Müller, Konstantin Nikischkin, and Günther Wagenlehner (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1998), pp. 335–64; Ulrike Göken, “Von der Kooperation zur Konfrontation: Die sowjetischen Repatriierungsoffiziere in den westlichen Besatzungszonen,” in Müller, Nikischkin, and Wagenlehner, *Tragödie der Gefangenschaft*, pp. 315–34.

28. Because the Soviet authorities were not familiar with the bureaucracy of the German Army, but maybe because of political reasons as well, the families of missing persons seldom got information about their relatives. Most often, the officials wrote only “missing in Germany,” although it was possible in many cases to inform the family about the cemetery or even the grave—see the example of Aleksej Schurawlow. That means that, in a certain way, the families of the dead were discriminated against, too.

## **Appendix: Biographies of Contributors**

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