

Shelter from the Holocaust

Rethinking Jewish Survival in
the Soviet Union



edited by Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Atina Grossmann

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Introduction

Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union

MARK EDELE, SHEILA FITZPATRICK, JOHN GOLDLUST,
AND ATINA GROSSMANN

HISTORY

Millions of Eastern European Jews were murdered in the Holocaust. Of those who escaped that fate—the surviving remnant, known as the *She'erit Hapletah*—most remained alive because the Soviet Union had provided an often involuntary, and by and large extremely harsh, refuge from genocide. This volume investigates aspects of this history and its implications for more established historiographies. The experiences of Poland, the Soviet Union, the Holocaust, and postwar displacement and migration intersect here in dramatic ways. This entanglement has so far remained mostly unexplored. The chapters in this volume try to open up a new transnational field of research, bringing together histories that for the most part have been studied separately. Contributors focus in particular on the history of Polish Jews who survived in the Soviet Union.

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This essentially lost history has gone missing in the cracks among Jewish, East-Central European, and Soviet historiographies. Its traces can certainly be found, but have not made it, in any sustained manner, into either the standard national or Holocaust narratives. No one field has wanted to “own” such an entangled multinational and multilingual story, even as there has been a good deal of research on the Soviet takeover of eastern Poland, Poles deported to the Soviet Union, Soviet wartime evacuees, and Soviet Jewry during World War II.¹ Nor has it been integrated into our own conceptions of what we mean by Jewish experience during the Holocaust or our definitions of “survivor” and “survival.” The story of Eastern European Jews in the Soviet Union during the war remains largely unmarked in museum and cinematic (including documentary) representation, two key sites of public memory and scholarly work.² Even after the boom in Holocaust studies and commemoration over the past decades, the considerable (if often confusing, inconsistent, and scattered) information available in monographs, memoirs, and archives has not been systematically analyzed. Its status as a key part of “Holocaust history” remains contested and unclear, as does the definition of this largest cohort of Eastern European survivors; they are classified as “indirect” or “flight” survivors or simply folded into a collective “Holocaust survivor” category with their specific wartime experience effaced, mentioned, if at all, only in passing. Nor has the recent turn to transnational history led to a more complex, entangled wartime history of relations between Jewish and non-Jewish Polish refugees or with Soviet citizens of multiple nationalities and ethnicities, including mostly Muslim Uzbeks and Kazakhs, and Soviet Jews, including those from Bukhara. And yet—to many still surprising—the fact is that the forced migration away from the Soviet territories first attacked by the Germans provided the main chance for Eastern European Jewry’s survival. The fact bears repeating because it still seems so alien to the dominant narrative: the so-called Asiatics who survived the extreme hardships of the “refuge” in the Soviet interior and then Central Asia would constitute the numerical, if not the most visible or articulate, core of the She’erit Hapletah.³

Around 1.5 million Polish Jews were gathered, along with non-Jewish Poles and Ukrainians, within the redrawn Soviet borders of summer 1939 after the Germans crossed into western Poland in early September. The majority of them had become Soviet subjects because the Red Army had

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taken over their hometowns. Others had fled the advancing Wehrmacht into those parts of eastern Poland that had become Soviet after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939. Families faced wrenching, difficult, often split-second decisions about whether or not to flee, about who should go or who should stay. Grandparents often insisted on staying behind, whether because they genuinely expected the Germans to leave them unharmed or because they did not want to be a burden to the younger and stronger. In some cases, parents pushed their youth to run while they could; in others, young people defied the pleas of their parents to stay with them and instead headed for the riverbanks that carried them to the Soviet side. All these moves were made “in panic and uncertainty,” within moments, days, or occasionally weeks, depending on the changing progress of the battlefield, without any possibility of knowing the full situation, much less any inkling of what would soon transpire under Nazi control. Families expected that they would be reunited, and, in a familiar migration pattern, more men than women, more younger than older people fled, acts that would become dramatically evident in the demographics of the ghettos and death camps as well as in the composition of survivor communities.⁴

Eliyana R. Adler’s recent research reveals the complexity of this rapid-fire decision making. While age and gender were clearly determining factors, depending on the specificities of place, time, and memories of the previous war, decisions to flee or not were generally negotiated within families; sometimes persuasive were grandparents’ stories of German soldiers’ civilized behavior in World War I, a father’s conviction that his business connections could protect the family, or a mother’s desperate sense that at least part of the family should try to escape.⁵ Certainly, there were “many husbands who left their wives and children to escape deportations to the labor camps in Germany,” and “not knowing that the Nazi ‘final solution’ was to annihilate every Jewish person, these men were planning to send for their families as soon as they could.”⁶ Sometimes the Germans forced Jews across the border, and sometimes the Soviets let Jews in or even encouraged them to flee or sometimes turned them back; by November they were demanding permits, but still Jews continued to run for their lives.

Having escaped the Nazis, these Jews from now German-occupied western Poland then, in 1940, faced deportation as suspect foreigners in

a land now allied with Germany, to forced labor in so-called special settlements in what is generally referred to in memoirs as “Siberia” but in fact could serve as a cipher for other parts of the vast USSR, including the Urals, Kazakhstan, and autonomous republics such as Komi near the Arctic Sea west of the Urals. Some Polish Jews who had fled aroused suspicion by registering to return to the German side, precisely in order to find family members who had been left behind; or because of false rumors that conditions had stabilized and were less harsh than under Soviet control, when, in fact, by March all Polish currency had been invalidated, leading to further desperate impoverishment. Others tried to return out of fear of being forced to accept Soviet citizenship in the “passportization drive” of 1940 or driven into the interior, ever farther away from their families and the homes to which they hoped to return; or sometimes simply because they could find no kosher food.

At the same time, in what had been eastern Poland, some local Jews—an arbitrary mix of merchants, shopkeepers, Zionists, the Orthodox, and the (only apparently) plain unlucky—who were just adapting, more or less successfully to novel Soviet rule, were also deported in four waves. These deportations happened in winter and spring 1940 and just before the war on the eastern front started in 1941. The deportees included refugees from the Germans and a larger group of non-Jewish Poles. While the Soviets were arresting Jews as “enemies of the people” or “capitalists,” the non-Jewish Poles who shared their fate suspected them of being pro-Bolshevik and disloyal, for having fled east from the Germans, for having seen or heard enough about the Nazis’ antisemitism and their actions in western Poland to prefer or even welcome the Red Army’s presence.⁷ Recalling his youth, a man from Chelm, just west of the border at the river Bug, asserted, “I had a good feeling about these Soviets. They seemed to exude strength and security.” In the bitterly cold winter of 1939–40, his father found work, and he enthusiastically joined the peer culture of the Young Pioneers, learning Russian as well as Russian Yiddish, skating, skiing, and performing in youth plays and concerts: “In spite of my constant hunger, I started to feel good about this new country.” Yet faced with pressure from security police to move farther into the interior, the family registered to return. “Luckily for us,” he explained decades later, “the Germans refused to accept the Polish refugees,” and they were soon loaded onto the boxcars that would save them from the

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virtual total liquidation of all Jews in the region.⁸ As one woman laconically recalled this apparent catastrophe, “Little did we know that ours would be the last deportation train to leave Bialystok before the arrival of the Germans.”⁹

Multiple memoirs and testimonies by Jewish and non-Jewish Poles describe the shock of this journey in essentially similar terms: the arrests in the middle of the night or the early morning hours, with at most a few hours to collect as many belongings as possible, and the lack of food and water or any privacy in the trains’ unheated boxcars, in which they were carried in fits and starts eastward under brutal conditions, which some—or many, again there are no accurate figures—did not survive. At times, when a parent or child disembarked at one of the unpredictable stops to barter or beg for food and was left behind as the train pulled out, families were suddenly separated, sometimes forever, sometimes until an implausible, seemingly miraculous but frequently recounted, reunion at another railway siding or train station. Some remember Jewish and non-Jewish Poles sharing the same car, with varying degrees of solidarity; others remember traveling in separate cars, but only for the Jews did it later become clear that even though “unimagined misery awaited” them, they were being inadvertently driven away from “certain destruction by the Germans.”¹⁰

By this “twist of history”—versions of the term appear with telling frequency in survivors’ retrospective accounts¹¹—which intersected in complicated ways with the general mass evacuation (rather than “deportation”) of civilians into the vast Soviet interior after the German invasion in summer 1941, as well as broader deportations of non-Jewish Poles and other suspect “foreigners” (including probably 1 million-plus ethnic Germans), Polish Jews escaped the exterminatory German onslaught that followed the invasion in June 1941. As David Lautenberg (Laor), a young Zionist activist who in 1942 became the director of the orphanage in Tehran set up for the Jewish children who escaped Central Asia, succinctly stated: “The Soviet deportations were not planned to save Jewish lives. However, that is what transpired.”¹²

Jewish deportees labored in factories, mines, or forests or on collective farms, enduring hunger, disease, exhaustion, mistreatment, and sheer shock and bewilderment at their sudden uprooting into completely unfamiliar terrain and circumstances. Trains dropped them off at seemingly

random villages and towns, where in the midst of forests in freezing temperatures, without any idea of where they had landed, they were enjoined to build new lives in exile and, in keeping with the motto of Soviet labor camps, warned to “work or die.” Guards and overseers announced that “those who do not learn to live here will perish” and, in a curiously often-repeated recollection, ominously predicted that, at best, “you will live, but you will never want to fuck!”¹³ Mostly urban Poles struggled to adapt to demanding and often dangerous work in an extreme climate, learning to fell trees at literally breakneck speed. Reports about relations between Christian and Jewish Poles vary, although the dominant tone is one of mutual mistrust and dislike, if not outright enmity.¹⁴ Conditions in the archipelago of urban and village settlements, collective and state farms, prisons and labor camps varied widely, not to say wildly, and it is especially the descriptions of the prison camps that use a language of incarceration more commonly associated with the Holocaust; people died, went crazy, became zombies (*dokhodiaga*), the Soviet version of *Muselmänner*.¹⁵

At the same time, in contrast to the situation in Nazi-occupied Poland, these conditions did not specifically or exceptionally affect Jews but, to one degree or another, affected all Poles, Jewish and Christian, and in many ways, as war came, all inhabitants of the beleaguered Soviet Union. Families tried to stay together and clung to one another when some members died. Children were sent to school, where they were often better fed than in camp barracks or villages and where they learned algebra and recited Russian poetry while imbibing a Communist ideology that taught ancient history by glorifying Spartacus as a proletarian leader. Babies were born, prisoner and local physicians tried to provide decent medical care, and makeshift barter and bribe systems were mastered. Sometimes clandestine aid from Jewish Red Army or People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) officers, who revealed themselves by surreptitiously speaking Yiddish or mumbling a Hebrew prayer, made the difference between life and death.¹⁶

Despite deportations, arrests, labor mobilization, and voluntary migration to the Soviet hinterland, the majority of Jews who had become Soviet subjects were still in the western borderlands when the Germans attacked on 22 June 1941. Some were evacuated as part of an organized effort by the Soviet state to move to safety essential workers and functionaries as well

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as the intelligentsia.¹⁷ Recognizing that they were in particular danger, others managed to attach themselves and their families to these evacuations or fled on their own steam using whatever transportation was available. Finally, Jewish men either volunteered or were drafted into the Red Army and sometimes escaped to fight another day.

The experiences of flight, deportation, evacuation, and everyday life in the Soviet Union varied by gender and generation. As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, young men were more likely to flee the German invasion and occupation of Poland. And everyday survival both in the camps and special settlements and in the Soviet hinterland was defined by age and gender. Women had to take on much of the responsibility for preserving the life of their families, while men were more likely to be either arrested or drafted into the Red Army.¹⁸

Destinations varied as much as the groups involved. Deportations and arrests moved people to labor camps and special settlements in northern Russia, Siberia, or Kazakhstan; evacuation could lead all the way to Central Asia or could end elsewhere in the Soviet hinterland. The separate groups of evacuees and deportees merged after a Soviet “amnesty” of formerly Polish citizens (12 August 1941), which led to the gradual release of most from detention. Their complex further trajectories led in various directions. Those released from labor camps or prison colonies were able to settle elsewhere, far away from the war zones. Almost all chose to head for the Central Asian republics, to cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Djambul or smaller towns, villages, and collective farms. Many remained in these areas until the end of the war. Some, particularly younger males, later took part in military action. The Soviets allowed the formation of an army under the Polish general Władysław Anders, in 1941–42 (sometimes referred to as the “Polish army-in-exile”). This army of 70,000 troops, including a few thousand Polish Jews, was permitted to leave the Soviet Union via Iran and later was able to join the Allied forces fighting the Germans in Italy.

By mid-1943, with the German forces on both the European and Eastern fronts now overextended, the Soviets proposed the formation of a second Polish army under General Zygmunt Berling that consisted of Polish soldiers and noncommissioned officers commanded almost entirely by Soviet personnel. These Polish forces, including several thousand Polish Jews, played a direct role in the retaking of Poland by the

Soviet military in 1944. In the process of pursuing the retreating German army, they were involved in liberating a number of Nazi concentration camps, including Majdanek. There were also Polish Jews—some now “officially” Soviet citizens, others not—who were called up and served in the Soviet army.

After the war, the Soviet Union sought to establish compliant Communist governments in Eastern Europe, including Poland. With this in mind, they announced a second “amnesty” that would allow those Poles, including the Polish Jews, who had survived the war in the Soviet Union to return to the “new” Poland.

For the tens of thousands of Polish Jews who came under Soviet authority after September 1939, life, as refugees and deportees and, after the German invasion, as “amnestied” Poles in Central Asia or serving in military units, was terribly difficult and sometimes lethal. But it did offer the opportunity for survival, a significant contrast to the systematic genocide the Nazis unleashed on the territories under their control.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

This history of how Eastern European Jews survived the Holocaust via deportation or evacuation by a different totalitarian regime—Stalin’s Soviet Union—has not found its place in any of the established historiographical traditions. Neither historians of the Soviet Union nor Holocaust scholars, let alone historians of Poland, considered themselves “in charge” of this history, which, at best, is pushed to the margins and, at worst, forgotten altogether.¹⁹ Scholars have addressed the 1939–41 period in the newly incorporated territories but usually have not integrated this history into a wider perspective covering the entire war. They look at the fate of Polish Jews as a local problem, not with reference to the Soviet Union as a whole.²⁰ Likewise, the historiography on Jews in the Soviet Union during the war usually focuses on those who had been Soviet citizens before 1939 and does not connect their story to that of the fate of the formerly Polish Jews.²¹ The opening of secret Soviet and Polish archives, a growing memoir literature, determined efforts to interview the last remaining Holocaust survivors, and the growing interest in the histories of displaced persons (DPs) and migration are beginning to change this situation.²² The scholars contributing to this volume are at the forefront

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of developing this new field of transnational study, which seeks to integrate scholarship from the areas of the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the history of Poland and the Soviet Union, and the study of refugees and DPs. There are four historiographical contexts for this integration: the history of the Soviet Union; the history of the Holocaust; the history of Poland, including the Polish diaspora; and the history of migration and displacement. These different historiographical traditions will be disrupted in different ways (and to varying degrees).

For the history of the Soviet Union, the reintegration of the story of Polish Jews could push the boundaries, quite literally, in the emerging literature about displacement in the Soviet Union and integrate it into the historiography of forced and other migration in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond.²³ The story of Polish Jews shows in an exemplary manner the extent to which displacement was not a Soviet but a transnational Eurasian affair.²⁴ In a similar vein, the history of wartime antisemitism in the Soviet Union begins to look quite different once connected—as in Sheila Fitzpatrick’s contribution—to both the incorporation of the new territories in the west and the evacuation to the Soviet hinterland.²⁵ More broadly, this history could also transform the narrative of what is still known as the Great Patriotic War. In this established Soviet and now Russian historiography, this war was a determined fight of good versus evil. The Soviet Union was a victim, and the fight against Nazism was quite obviously a positive achievement: the rescue of the world from fascism.²⁶ That the continued existence of the Soviet Union ensured the survival of so many of Poland’s Jews could be read as part of this positive narrative. Yet this history also drives home the political and moral ambiguities of the Soviet Second World War: rescue depended in many cases on prior victimization (by the Soviets rather than the Nazis), and many did perish as a result of arrest, deportation, and executions.²⁷

Meanwhile, the paradox that deportation or arrest in 1940 or 1941 in the long run often meant rescue from the Holocaust might also be used as an argument against histories that focus on the period of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939–41 as the dark period of the Soviet Second World War. From a Jewish perspective, even during this period, let alone from 1941, Stalinism was clearly the “lesser of two evils.”²⁸ Such a defense of the Soviet war record is increasingly popular in Russia today, propagated by President Vladimir Putin in semipublic meetings with

historians.²⁹ One can be critical of this approach from a Russian domestic perspective, but it does serve to complicate the facile equation of Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil because they were both equally totalitarian.³⁰ This perspective has taken hold of much of Eastern Europe today, and it may not be a surprise that many in Russia feel insulted by this tendency.³¹ At least for Polish Jews, the differences between the two totalitarianisms were a matter of life and death, as a man we will meet again in Mark Edele and Wanda Warlik's chapter noted. Michael Goldberg, who during his time in the Soviet Union transformed from a pro-Soviet youth to a fiercely anti-Soviet adult, nevertheless wrote the following in his memoirs:

Looking back to the East I could state to myself that the only positive note about the Soviet Union which we should never forget was that in the darkest hours of our Jewish tragedy, when the Western free world was deaf and blind to our destruction and kept all doors closed to the US, even turning back the refugees to Nazi ovens, the Soviets were the only ones who admitted hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews who found a place of refuge. As an eyewitness I can state that in the worst years of hunger and misery they shared the little they had with the refugees, and if thousands of us found ourselves in the Soviet gulags and many died, that was a product of the mad dog Stalin who destroyed the best of his own people as well.³²

Such ambiguities also shaped major fault lines of the emerging historiography about the Soviet Union written in the English-speaking world. The later adviser to Ronald Reagan and eminent Cold Warrior Richard Pipes escaped the twin invasions of his country by going to the United States in 1939. This former Polish "nonobservant Orthodox Jew" made it his life's work to equate Stalinism and Nazism as equally totalitarian "evil empires."³³ His particular trajectory of departure had not given him firsthand experience of life in the Soviet Union, however. Who knows whether, had he chosen to go east instead of west in 1939, he might have ended up with a different perspective, perhaps closer to that of another prominent historian of the Soviet Union. Moshe Lewin, who eventually also arrived in the United States, did so only after fleeing east into the Soviet Union

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in 1941, living among the Soviet people and serving in the Soviet army during the war, before departing via Poland and proceeding on to France, Israel, and England, before moving to the United States. He became influential among “revisionist” social historians opposed to the idea of totalitarianism who were bugbears to Pipes in the 1970s. Lewin’s position was partially ideological, of course: he had always been a man of the Left. But his particular stance toward the Soviet Union in general and Stalinism in particular was also born out of experience. In the final analysis, much of his scholarship was an attempt “to save the Soviet Union, which was the country that had saved him.”³⁴

If we consider the history of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union as part of the history of the Holocaust, Stalin’s state becomes the greatest (although inadvertent) rescue organization. This history is not entirely untold.³⁵ Indeed, the allegation of a concerted Soviet effort to save Jews in the summer of 1941 was one of the claims the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee made on behalf of the Soviet Union, a thesis sometimes picked up and often refuted by Western scholars in the postwar years.³⁶ Likewise, the experience of survival in the Soviet Union was very much present after the war, when reports by American Jewish journalists, memoirs of survivors themselves, and a significant, especially Yiddish-language, cultural production reflected this history.³⁷ So what this volume does in one way is to pick up, develop, and reinvigorate an older discourse about the Soviet Union, the Holocaust, and the Second World War, which fell silent shortly after the war.

By and large, however, an overarching and often undifferentiated story of *the* Holocaust, its victims and survivors, has effaced the highly ambiguous role of the Soviet Union as the site where—with critical, if limited, support from American Jewish aid organizations—the great majority of the tiny postwar remnant of Polish Jewry had survived the war.³⁸ Given such a “remapped” history, arguments about definitions of “survivors,” generally considered in terms of differences among prewar refugees and survivors of Nazi occupation, become even more vexed. In fact, as Atina Grossmann notes, if we exclude the “Asiatics,” the number of actual survivors (and their descendants) becomes dramatically smaller, with hard to imagine consequences for our by-now well-established rituals of commemoration, which, if anything, are expanding rather than narrowing the range of those included. Today “survivors” are counted

and identified collectively, but we do not know the story of their wartime experience, nor have they been recognized as such when they apply as individuals for reparations. Indeed, anxiety about explicitly disaggregating that collective persists today, certainly, but not only in Germany. As the generation with any living memory of the Holocaust inexorably disappears, those committed to preserving memory fear that postwar German (and Allied) accusations positioning most Jewish DPs as refugees from Communism and not “genuine” victims of Nazism might be reactivated. If the majority of survivors had in fact experienced the more “normal” horrors of wartime rather than the particular catastrophe of genocide, then, this scenario suggests, German guilt is relativized and the unique nature of Jewish persecution during World War II obscured. At the same time, however, a precisely opposite conclusion might emerge: that understanding how very few “direct” survivors there really were and that much of the “saved remnant” had survived only because it had escaped Nazi control only underscores the deadly sweep of the “Final Solution.”

Why has this complex history been lost? For one, survival in the Soviet Union was the default story of those who lived to see the postwar years and hence perhaps less interesting than the exceptional experiences of those who survived on German-occupied territory. The shock of the confrontation with the almost total devastation caused by the Final Solution engendered the sense that the Soviet story, as painful as it might have been, was not worth telling. The need to build a unified (and increasingly Zionist) Jewish community among the “remnant” pushed in the same direction, and the emerging Cold War added another reason not to talk about the contribution of the Soviet Union. Finally, the sheer ambiguity of this experience and the difficulty of narrating this highly confusing trajectory also added obstacles to representing this history in commemorative culture, both immediately after the war and as part of the “memory boom” that emerged in the 1980s. As Eliyana R. Adler’s article in this volume shows, interviewers of Holocaust survivors were often dismissive of those who tried to tell their story of survival in the Soviet Union. Therefore, the actual wartime experience of so many survivors is not adequately represented today in museums, film, and commemorative ritual. Even the transmission of this memory to the second

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and third generations is affected, now that we are reaching the end of living memory.³⁹

Picking up the story of survival in the Soviet Union is a challenge to Holocaust studies, which by and large do not integrate this experience. One impact is on the question of who counts as a survivor, which also has implications for the transmission of memory to the second and third generations. It casts in a new light the role of the Soviet Union in Jewish history, at the same time underscoring the tragedy of how few Eastern European Jews were indeed able to survive this genocide. It fundamentally raises the question of the border between Holocaust studies and histories of the war in general. It may also illuminate the debates currently so active on how to talk about Holocaust studies in relation to comparative genocide studies, simultaneously highlighting the singularity of the Final Solution while also possibly “normalizing” and opening to comparison the experience of many survivors of forced migration and wartime deprivation.

The history of the survival of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union is similarly subversive when integrated into the history of Poland and of the Polish diaspora. Since the fall of Communism more than a quarter century ago, the narratives of historians at home and abroad have converged to recount the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939 as the latest chapter in a centuries-old conflict between Poland and its eastern neighbor over territory and the very right to existence of an independent Polish state—a conflict in which Poland has died many deaths and always been reborn.⁴⁰ The deportations in particular have assumed almost legendary status, symbolic of Soviet persecution and Polish suffering, but also a prelude to Polish heroism.⁴¹ Once the history of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union is integrated into this narrative, it challenges what Polish historiography has portrayed as a uniquely Polish story and reveals a common experience with Jews as the connecting link.⁴²

The effects of this move could be far-reaching. Currently, no ethnic Pole would be likely to tell a story of Soviet survival like the following: “When Mir was occupied by the Russians he ran away to Wilno [Vilna] which was Lithuanian then and lived in our house with his family. The Russians caught up with him and he alone was deported in June of 1941. Our family had escaped the Russian deportation. Unfortunately so did

the uncle's family—they did not survive the Nazi occupation whereas my uncle came back from Siberia after the war.”⁴³

But, indeed, why should there not be similar stories involving non-Jewish Poles? The Polish Jewish experience in the Soviet Union—flight, deportation, arrest, and rescue—might well complicate even the history of ethnic Poles. After all, not all those who fled to Soviet-held territory in 1941 were Jews. While the level of mortal threat was different between the two communities, why not assume that for some ethnic Poles, too, flight or even deportation to the Soviet Union might have been lifesaving? How many of the Poles in prisons, labor camps, and special settlements in the Soviet interior would have survived the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in 1943 in Volhynia and eastern Galicia, for example?⁴⁴ And how many of them might have been killed as a direct result of German occupation policies?⁴⁵ Clearly, even where ethnic Poles are concerned, the history of Soviet occupation and—later—liberation can be told in more than one way.⁴⁶

A NOTE ON STATISTICS

The numbers involved in this history are contentious. There are competing statistics, of different dates and provenances. Some were collected by the Polish exile government during the war, others by the Soviet authorities, and still others by Jewish organizations or repatriation agencies in Poland after the war. Scholars, including those contributing to this volume, do not always agree on which numbers to trust. Sometimes historians cite old numbers from earlier publications, not realizing that more reliable numbers have since emerged from the archives. In this volume, contributors have been guided by the numerical ranges presented, after exhaustive comparative evaluation of the sources, in the six tables appended to Edele and Warlik’s contribution. But they have been free to offer alternatives with an explanation of why they prefer them and, in a few cases, have done so. Indeed, even the best available numbers can provide no more than an orientation, given—as Adler points out in her chapter—the constant back-and-forth of many of the groups involved. Nevertheless, a basic overview is necessary.

Prewar Poland had a Jewish population of approximately 3 million, the Baltic states about 255,000, and Romania 756,000.⁴⁷ In 1939–40, as a

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result of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, the Soviet Union occupied and annexed the whole of the Baltic states, eastern Poland, and part of Romanian Bessarabia, adding about 2 million Jews to the Soviet population.⁴⁸ These included 1.3 million Polish Jews from the former eastern Poland, and adding refugees from the German-held territories of Poland brings this number to between 1.4 and 1.6 million.⁴⁹

Of the formerly Polish Jews, some 68,000–71,000 were deported before 22 June 1941 and another 23,600 arrested; perhaps 10,000–21,000 were drafted into the Red Army. To these altogether 101,600–115,600 who had been coercively removed from the path of the Wehrmacht, we need to add 40,000–53,000 who volunteered to work in the Soviet hinterland before the Nazi storm broke over Soviet lands. At a minimum, then, 141,600 and maybe as many as 168,600 were thus saved from the German Einsatzgruppen. In addition, perhaps 210,000 Jews evacuated or fled east once the Germans attacked. These figures mean that, at the very least, 146,100 and as many as 384,600 were saved from the Holocaust by the often harsh haven of the Soviet Union.⁵⁰ This range is consistent with the figure of 200,000–230,000 used by many recent historians. As Edele and Warlik show in their analysis of these numbers, the lower of the two series is clearly too low.

OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

This volume focuses on one particularly large group of Holocaust survivors: formerly Polish Jews.⁵¹ John Goldlust's chapter 1 gives a general overview of their history and the process of postwar forgetting and focuses on those who ended up in Australia. Building on this sketch, Edele and Warlik, in chapter 2, map the basic wartime trajectories of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union. One group traveled, equipped with Japanese exit visas, across the entire Soviet Union to Vladivostok and on to Japan. If they did not immediately emigrate elsewhere, they usually ended up in Shanghai for the rest of the war. A second group either was deported or traveled voluntarily to the Soviet hinterland and exited the Soviet Union with the Anders army via Iran in 1942. A third group later joined the nominally Polish Berling army and returned with it to Poland at war's end. A fourth group left only after the war during "repatriation" to Poland, and a fifth group remained in the Soviet Union for good. The chapter also uses declassified

Soviet and Polish archival materials to give estimates for the relative sizes of these various groups.

In chapter 3, Sheila Fitzpatrick considers the effects that the wartime displacement of Jews to the Soviet Union had on Soviet society at large. Under the secret treaties of the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939, the Soviet Union acquired territories on its western borders with a population of 23 million, 2 million of whom were Jews. The Jewish population of former eastern Poland included refugees from the west, now occupied by Germany. When the Germans attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, many Jews were evacuated or fled on their own to the east, into the Soviet hinterland. Thus, largely unwittingly, the Soviet Union provided a haven that enabled hundreds of thousands of European Jews to survive the Holocaust. But there were other consequences. In the first place, the sudden arrival in the Russian hinterland of large numbers of Jews, many of them penniless and non-Russian-speaking, was quickly followed by a rise of popular antisemitism. In the second place, the concern for the plight of the Polish Jews on the part of Soviet Jewish public figures, such as the theater director Solomon Mikhoels and the Yiddish poet Perets Markish, was a major factor in the creation a few years later of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, a remarkable body, quite anomalous in Soviet terms, that for some years, until its postwar liquidation, acted as a forceful and influential lobbyist for Jewish interests in the highest councils of the Soviet government and party, as well as being a very effective international fund-raiser for the Soviet war effort.

Turning to more positive interactions, Natalie Belsky focuses in chapter 4 on encounters and interactions between Soviet Jews and Polish Jews on the Soviet home front. The chapter considers the bonds and tensions that existed between the distinct contingents of the Jewish displaced population across the Volga and Ural regions and Central Asia. Belsky demonstrates that while a shared Jewish background helped forge networks of mutual support, these encounters also demonstrated the distinct political and cultural mentalities and attitudes that had evolved over the interwar period.

In chapter 5, Atina Grossmann focuses on what happened to Polish Jews in Central Asia and once they had left the Soviet Union during the war. Iran became a central site for Jewish relief efforts as well as a crucial

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transit stop for the Polish army-in-exile and the “Teheran Children” on their way to Palestine. Jewish refugees, both allied and “enemy alien,” were also a significant presence in British India, in internment camps, orphanages, and the Jewish Relief Association of Bombay. The chapter integrates these largely unexamined experiences and lost memories of displacement and trauma into our understanding of the Shoah. Seeking to remap the landscape of persecution, survival, relief, and rescue during and after World War II, Grossmann asks how this “Asiatic” experience shaped definitions (and self-definitions) as “survivors,” in the immediate postwar context of repatriation to Poland and further flight to DP camps in Allied-occupied Europe. She suggests also that such memories, including a very recent “boomlet” of narratives (electronic and hard-copy publications, republications, and translations into English) about “surviving the Holocaust” in or via the Soviet Union, might well be important to consider in the present complicated—and sometimes competing—context of the globalization of Holocaust and postcolonial memory.

Seeking to complement historical and documentary sources with personal memoirs and testimonies, Goldlust’s chapter 6 is part of a larger attempt at exploring written and oral accounts illustrative of the various pathways taken by Jews born in Poland who spent the war years under Soviet authority. Over the course of the war and through the following postwar decade, most were subject to a series of geographical relocations. As well as having to readjust to new places, people, and surroundings, they were also constantly required to negotiate a shifting, often bewildering, and frequently contradictory mélange of structural and political forces that not only impinged on their family loyalties, communal connections, and personal liberties but also, in some instances, challenged the very core of their personal understandings, beliefs, and values. Goldlust suggests that, taken together, such potentially destabilizing encounters required this disparate group of serially displaced Jews to continually readjust and reevaluate their subjective attachments to both previous and more recently “acquired” social, religious, political, and ethno-national identities.

Chapter 7 shows how such identity ascriptions can lead to the silencing of the history we are exploring in this volume. Adler explores the varied ways that Polish Jewish survivors of the Second World War in the Soviet Union talk about their experiences and identity regarding the

Holocaust in their oral testimonies. The chapter argues that by choosing, on a given day, to flee from Nazi occupation to the Soviet zone, they not only evaded the Holocaust, but they have since evaded clear classification. With a focus on interviews conducted by the Visual History Archives of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, the chapter examines how some of the flight survivors struggle to articulate their status as survivors, while others are confident either that they did survive the Holocaust or that they did not. This exploration of the borders of Holocaust testimony sheds new light on a less prominent, yet widespread, survival experience while also problematizing both Holocaust testimony and the borders of survival.

In the epilogue, Maria Tumarkin reflects on the themes of this volume from the perspective of family history. A literary monologue, it serves as the conclusion to the book. It is an attempt to piece together an evocative and historically precise portrait of the author's family's experiences in Uzbekistan during World War II. Tumarkin's grandmother and great-aunt were evacuated to Uzbekistan from Ukraine shortly after the Soviet Union was invaded by Germany in the summer of 1941. They spent nearly two years at Station Malyutinskaya in the Samarkand region—her great-aunt worked as a doctor, and her grandmother took care of, at first, two, then three, children. Her mother was that third child, born in Uzbekistan: her great-aunt's first real-life delivery. The family was close to death from starvation and disease (typhus, malaria) many times. They survived. Tumarkin feels compelled to tell their story. Why? So much of the best historical work is about meaningful, judicious compression of fact, memory, and experience. This necessary compression, she believes, needs to be balanced with its seeming opposite—the slow telling—unraveling of a singular story.

The contributions in this volume present much new information and analysis. They amount to a first exploration of a developing field. Indeed, the extent to which this research is still a moving target is reflected by the disagreements between authors concerning not only interpretation but also some of the facts involved. Most notably, we have not always found consensus regarding the often murky statistics. The wide-ranging geography and the diversity of the affected groups make telling one, single story difficult. Nonetheless, we hope that this volume has presented a first overview, opening the way to more research. Such a history would be

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relevant perhaps also to contextualizing historical and contemporary geopolitical crises concerning refugees and migration.

Notes

1. See, for example, Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*, expanded ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Katherine R. Jolluck, *Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); and *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012), special issue on Jews in the wartime Soviet Union.
2. The permanent exhibit of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) lacks any display referencing the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, its official definition is extremely broad: “Survivors and Victims” are “any persons, Jewish or non-Jewish, who were displaced, persecuted, or discriminated against due to the racial, religious, ethnic, social, and political policies of the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945.” See “Survivors and Victims,” USHMM, <https://www.ushmm.org/remember/the-holocaust-survivors-and-victims-resource-center/survivors-and-victims> (accessed on November 22, 2016). Yad Vashem’s current definition acknowledges that “no historical definition can be completely satisfactory” and includes “Jews who lived for any amount of time under Nazi domination, direct or indirect, and survived.” It has now added to an evolving interpretation, that “from a larger perspective other destitute Jewish refugees who escaped their countries fleeing the invading German army, including those who spent years . . . deep in the Soviet Union, may also be considered Holocaust survivors,” a statement that has potential financial implications for Jews who survived in the Soviet Union and are now seeking eligibility for reparations. See “Digital Collections: FAQs,” Yad Vashem, <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/resources/names/faq.asp> (accessed November 22, 2016). The Soviet aspect is highlighted in the old exhibit at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; it is less prominent in the story presented at POLIN, the new Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and was addressed in an

exhibit on Jewry in postwar Europe, focused on Poland, Germany, and France, at the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris (January 27–October 30, 2016), documented in the 2016 catalogue *Après la Shoah: Rescapés, Réfugiés, Survivants, 1944–1947*, ed. Henry Rousso (2016).

The stories are there—in memoirs, in some USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education and other oral history interviews, in documentary films (such as *Saved by Deportation: An Unknown Odyssey of Polish Jews*, directed by Slawomir Grunberg [United States, 2007]), in reminiscences and diaries now being compiled and translated from (mostly) Yiddish or Polish by the second and third generations, as well as in social media and other reports about “memory tourism” by former Jewish refugees; they are also in the only recently available voluminous and difficult-to-navigate records of DP files stored in the International Tracing Service (ITS) records in Bad Arolsen, Germany, and apparently in still inaccessible NKVD archives.

3. For the term *Asiatics*, see, for example, Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York: Random House, 1970), 26ff. Bauer refers to youth movement activists (especially the socialist Hashomer Hatzair) who returned to liberated Poland and quickly took on a leadership role in (re)organizing Zionist groups as well as establishing clandestine routes to Palestine and the U.S. zones of occupied Germany and Austria.
4. Shimon Redlich, *Life in Transit: Jews in Postwar Lodz, 1945–1950* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 54. Redlich notes the reversal of the prewar Jewish gender ratio. In 1931, Lodz counted 109 females for 100 males; after 1945, among a much smaller cohort, 54.3 percent were male and 45.7 percent female.
5. Eliyana R. Adler, “Hrubieszów at the Crossroads: Polish Jews Navigate the German and Soviet Occupations,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 28, no. 1 (2014): 1–30.
6. See Suzanna Eibuszyc, *Memory Is Our Home: Loss and Remembering; Three Generations in Poland and Russia, 1917–1960s* (Stuttgart: ibidem Press, 2015); “A Memoir: ‘Beshert—It Was Meant to Be,’” by Roma Talasiewicz-Eibuszyc, trans. Suzanna Eibuszyc; in pt. 2: “‘The Troubles I’ve Seen’ (Southwestern Russia and Uzbekistan, November 1939–March 1946),” <http://www.beshert-book.com> (accessed 30 July 2012).

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7. David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 61. Engel states unequivocally, “The Jews in the regions east of the Ribbentrop-Molotov line did indeed, by and large, greet the invading Soviet forces not as conquerors, but as liberators.” Other scholars, for example, Elazar Barkan, Elizabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve, have stressed that there was no “monolithic Jewish attitude” and that attitudes toward the Soviets within the Jewish communities were “sharply divided.” Elazar Barkan, Elizabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve, eds., *Shared History—Divided Memory: Jews and Others in Soviet-Occupied Poland, 1939–1941*, Leipziger Beiträge zur Jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur, no. 5 (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007), 39. Moreover, it is important to note that the deportees from former eastern Poland constituted only a small proportion—tens of thousands at the most—of the over 1 million Jewish residents of the region.
8. Bob Golan, *A Long Way Home: The Story of a Jewish Youth, 1939–1949*, ed. Jacob Howland, with a preface by Bette Howland (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 13, 26, 37.
9. Rachel Patron, *Flowers in the Snow* (unpublished memoir), quoted in Redlich, *Life in Transit*, 122.
10. Golan, *Long Way Home*, 37.
11. See, for example, Mietek Sieradzki, *By a Twist of History: The Three Lives of a Polish Jew*, with an introduction by Antony Polonsky (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2002).
12. Quoted in Devora Omer, *The Teheran Operation: The Rescue of Jewish Children from the Nazis; Based on the Biographical Sketches of David and Rachel Laor*, trans. Riva Rubin, from the Hebrew *Hatahana Teheran* (Washington, DC: B’nai B’rith Books, 1991), 59. The translation’s title speaks directly to the paradoxes of this history because, strictly speaking, the children were rescued from terrible conditions in Soviet Central Asia and not from the Nazis.
13. Itzhak Kotkowski, *The Wiles of Destiny: Memoirs of Itzhak Kotkowski* (self-published, 1991), 105.
14. Katherine R. Jolluck, “Gender and Antisemitism in Wartime Soviet Exile,” in *Antisemitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland*, ed. Robert Blobaum (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 214–15. Jolluck notes that 67 percent of Polish women’s testimonies gathered by the Polish government-in-exile have negative references to Jews. Her

- finding that mainly women and children populated the special camps because men had been more likely to be arrested, drafted, or able to evade deportation is not reflected in Jewish memoirs. Further research on gender is clearly necessary.
15. Recollection of David Lautenberg (Laor) in Omer, *Teheran Operation*, 68.
 16. In one of many similar stories, Norbert Adler, a Berlin-born Polish Jew, recalls that in a camp somewhere in "Siberia," a NKVD officer named Aschheim secretly recited the Jewish prayer *Sh'ma* to identify himself and saw to it that Adler, then a teenager, had access to jobs that provided some extra bread for his family or for barter. USC Shoah Foundation interview, 24 September 1997, accessed at USHMM, Washington, DC, 24 January 2012. Diary entries, written in Yiddish, by Lena Jedwab Rozenberg poignantly document sincere patriotic and socialist zeal and the effort to provide better food (as well as the impact of antisemitism and sexual harassment) in a children's home in the autonomous republic of Udmurtia. Lena Jedwab Rozenberg, *Girl with Two Landscapes: The Wartime Diary of Lena Jedwab, 1941–1945*, trans. Solon Beinfeld, with a foreword by Irena Klepfisz and an introduction by Jan T. Gross (New York: Holmes and Meier, 2002).
 17. On the numbers, see the debate between Vadim Dubson ("Toward a Central Database of Evacuated Soviet Jews' Names, for the Study of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Territories," 95–119) and Sergei Maksudov ("Evacuation Documentation and Testimonies as Sources for the Study of Soviet Jewish Population Losses during World War II," 120–30) in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012).
 18. Much more research on this aspect is necessary. For now, see Jolluck, *Exile and Identity*, which focuses on non-Jewish Polish women. See also Natalie Belsky, "Encounters in the East: Evacuees in the Soviet Hinterland during the Second World War" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014); and Adler, "Hrubieszów at the Crossroads."
 19. For early references, see Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46* (Hounds mills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991).
 20. Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Jan T. Gross, eds., *War through Children's Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939–1941*, with a foreword by Bruno Bettelheim and an introduction by Jan T. Gross, trans. Ronald Strom and Dan Rivers (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1981); Engel, *Shadow of Auschwitz*; Keith Sword, ed., *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939–41*

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- (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry under Soviet Rule, 1939–1941* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995); Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*.
21. Belsky, “Encounters in the East”; Zeev Levin, “Antisemitism and the Jewish Refugees in Soviet Kirgizia 1942,” *Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe* 50, no. 1 (2003): 191–203; Yitzhak Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner: Soviet Jews in the War against Nazi Germany* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2010); Harriet Murav and Gennady Estraikh, eds., *Soviet Jews in World War II: Fighting, Witnessing, Remembering* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014); Anna Shternshis, “Between Life and Death: Why Some Soviet Jews Decided to Leave and Others to Stay in 1941,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, no. 3 (2014): 477–504. See also the contributions in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012).
22. See, for example, Nora Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917: Paradox of Survival* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990), vol. 1; Yosef Litvak, “Jewish Refugees from Poland in the USSR, 1939–1946,” in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 123–50; Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 373–99; John Goldlust, “A Different Silence: The Survival of More than 200,000 Polish Jews in the Soviet Union during World War II as a Case Study in Cultural Amnesia,” *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 21, no. 1 (2012): 13–60 (a revised version of which forms chapter 1 of this collection); Atina Grossmann, “Remapping Relief and Rescue: Flight, Displacement, and International Aid for Jewish Refugees during World War II,” *New German Critique* 39, no. 3 (2012): 61–79; Adler, “Hrubieszów at the Crossroads”; Markus Nesselrodt, “From Russian Winters to Munich Summers: DPs and the Story of Survival in the Soviet Union,” in *Freilegungen: Displaced Persons—Leben im Transit: Überlebende zwischen Repatriierung, Rehabilitation und Neuanfang*, ed. Rebecca Boehling, Susanne Urban, and René Bienert (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2014), 190–98; and Nesselrodt, “I Bled like You, Brother, Although I Was a Thousand Miles Away: Postwar Yiddish Sources on the Experience of Polish Jews in Soviet Exile during World War II,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 46, no. 1 (2016): 47–67.

23. Paradigm-setting on migration in the Soviet orbit is Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad Is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014). On postwar displacement beyond the Soviet orbit, see, e.g., Mark Wyman, *DP: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945–1951* (London: Associated University Press, 1988); Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan Van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich: Refugee Jews 1933–1946* (New York: Norton, 2009), 218–230; Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (London: Vintage, 2011); and Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
24. Mark Edele, “The Second World War as a History of Displacement: The Soviet Case,” *History Australia* 12, no. 2 (2015): 17–40.
25. Gennadii V. Kostyrchenko, *V plenu u krasnogo faraona* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1994); Shimon Redlich and Gennadii V. Kostyrchenko, eds., *Evreiskii Antifashistskii Komitet v SSSR, 1941–1948: Dokumentirovannaya istoriya* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1996); Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
26. Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Lisa Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995: Myth, Memories, and Monuments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).
27. On these ambiguities, see Mark Edele, “Russia Still Struggles with a Violent Past, Seventy Years after the Defeat of Nazism,” *Conversation*, 6 May 2015, <http://theconversation.com/russia-still-struggles-with-a-violent-past-70-years-after-the-defeat-of-nazism-41031>.
28. Levin, *Lesser of Two Evils*.
29. President Rossii (Vladimir Putin), “Vstrecha s molodymi uchenymi i prepodavateliами istorii,” 5 November 2014 (Moscow), <http://news.kremlin.ru/news/46951/> (accessed 22 January 2015).
30. For criticism from a Russian domestic perspective, see Mark Edele, “Fighting Russia’s History Wars: Vladimir Putin and the Codification

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of World War II,” *History and Memory* 29, no. 2 (September 2017). For an actual comparison between Nazism and Stalinism (rather than their equation), see Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, eds., *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

31. For a particularly tendentious example, see the “documentary” *The Soviet Story*, directed by Edvins Snore (Latvia, 2008). A more nuanced approach is Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Bodley Head, 2010).
32. Michael Goldberg, “Memories of a Generation,” n.d., USHMM, RG-10.120, 117–18. For similar evidence, see Goldlust, “A Different Silence.”
33. Richard Pipes, *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-belonger* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). His self-identification as a “nonobservant Orthodox Jew” is on p. 23.
34. Ronald Grigor Suny, “Living in the Soviet Century: Moshe Lewin, 1921–2010,” *History Workshop Journal* 74, no. 1 (2012): 192.
35. See, for example, Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945* (New York: Harper, 2007), 82, 83–84, 86–87, 193–94, 632; Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, chaps. 2–4, 7; and Evgeny Finkel, *Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).
36. Dov Levin, “The Attitude of the Soviet Union to the Rescue of Jews,” in *Rescue Attempts during the Holocaust: Proceedings of the Second Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, April 8–11, 1974* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1977), 225–36.
37. Jockusch and Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost?” Much of the early memoir material was written or spoken in Yiddish, including one from Moshe Grossman, an already well-known prewar Yiddish writer of novels and short stories from Warsaw who fled into eastern Poland in 1939. Moshe Grossman, *In the Enchanted Land: My Seven Years in Soviet Russia* (Tel Aviv: Rachel, 1960). This extensive memoir of the years Grossman spent under Soviet rule—titled with obvious irony—was first published in Yiddish in 1949. On Yiddish-language literature, see also Nesselrodt, “I Bled like You.”
38. On the Joint Distribution Committee’s (JDC) determined efforts, see JDC Archives, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1933–1944; see also Georgette Bennett and Leonard Polonsky Digitized JDC Text Archives, Item

- #866652, Viteles Report JDC Archives, Records of the Istanbul Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1937–1949.
- Between 1942 and 1946, the JDC spent some \$5,500,000 (equivalent to approximately \$75,000,000 in 2017) on aid to refugees in the Soviet Union. See Atina Grossmann, “JOINTFUND:Teheran: The Jewish Lifeline to Central Asia,” in *The Joint Distribution Committee: 100 Years of Jewish History*, ed. Avinoam Patt, Linda Levi, Maud Mandel, and Atina Grossmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018 [forthcoming]).
39. Goldlust, “A Different Silence,” 74–78 (in this volume).
 40. For Poland as the “Christ of Nations,” see Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), vol. 2.
 41. Jolluck, *Exile and Identity*; Krystyna Kersten, “A History of Forced Migration,” in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948*, ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 43–72; Tadeusz Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollections of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal throughout the World* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004); Anna M. Cienciala, “An Unknown Page of History: The Poles Deported to the USSR in 1940–1941,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 22, no. 3 (2009): 301–14; Kenneth K. Koskodan, *No Greater Ally: The Untold Story of Poland’s Forces in World War II* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2009); Anuradha Bhattacharjee, *The Second Homeland: Polish Refugees in India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2013) and “Polish Refugees in India, during and after the Second World War,” *Sarmatian Review*, no. 2 (2013): 1743–56, <http://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=81367>; Paul Sendziuk, “Forgotten People and Places: ‘Stalin’s Poles’ in Persia, India, and Africa, 1942–50,” *History Australia* 12, no. 2 (2015): 41–61.
 42. For an attempt at such a history, see Wanda Warlik, “Polish Refugees from the Soviet Union during and after the Second World War: Iran, Africa, and Australia,” PhD diss. in progress, University of Western Australia.
 43. William Z. Good, memoirs, n.d., USHMM, RG-02.046, 14.
 44. Timothy Snyder, “The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing, 1943,” *Past and Present* 179, no. 1 (2003): 197–234.
 45. Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weißrussland 1941–1944* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1998);

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- Alexander Brakel, *Unter Rotem Stern und Hakenkreuz: Baranowicze 1939 bis 1944. Das westliche Weißrussland unter sowjetischer und deutscher Besatzung* (Paderborn, Germany: Schöningh, 2009).
- 46. Mark Edele, “Soviet Liberations and Occupations, 1939–1949,” in *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, vol. 2, *Politics and Ideology*, ed. Richard J. B. Bosworth and Joseph A. Maiolo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 487–506.
 - 47. USHMM, “Jewish Population of Europe in 1933: Population Data by Country,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005161> (accessed 7 April 2016).
 - 48. Figures from *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke: Istoricheskie ocherki*, vol. 2, 1940–1959, ed. Iu. A. Poliakov and V. B. Zhiromskaia (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001), 10.
 - 49. See chapter 2, by Edele and Warlik, table 1.
 - 50. Ibid., tables 2–3.
 - 51. Memoir and semi-fictional literature on the experience of Romanian, Czech, and Austrian refugees includes Norbert Weinberg, *Courage of the Spirit*, an independently published account of the author’s father, a German-speaking Czech Jew, Rabbi William Weinberg; Edith Sekules, *Surviving the Nazis, Exile, and Siberia* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2000); and, on the complex, diverse trajectories of Romanian Jews, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

I

A Different Silence

The Survival of More than 200,000 Polish Jews
in the Soviet Union during World War II
as a Case Study in Cultural Amnesia

JOHN GOLDLUST

Some of it was truly bizarre. They were on this train which arrives out in the middle of central Asia where Stalin had earlier sent a whole bunch of Jews and these Jews who'd settled there before all came out to the station and asked them to get off and settle there too.

—From interview with “Abe” quoted
in Ruth Wajnryb, *The Silence*

In *The Silence*, Ruth Wajnryb explores the multilayered and sometimes fraught, intergenerational dynamics experienced by many in Australia growing up as children of Jewish immigrants from Europe whose lives had been “dislocated or traumatised during the twelve-year period of the Third Reich.”¹ The vignette above recounted by Abe—one of the twenty-seven adult children of Holocaust survivors she interviewed in the course

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Epigraph: Ruth Wajnryb, *The Silence: How Tragedy Shapes Talk* (Crows Nest, New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 2001), 236.

of her research—is presented in her book to illustrate Wajnryb's point that we might best characterize the way some children hear their parents' experiences of “The War” as a kind of “leaking out.” By this she means that over many years, during their childhood and even beyond, they tend to catch on to, but only partially absorb, numerous unanchored events that come to them in the form of disparate, hazy, and disjointed bits of information. It is not surprising, then, that when they later try to recall or retell one of these stories, even though they may have heard versions of it many times before, as with Abe, they are still, as Wajnryb puts it, a little “baffled by their own lack of knowledge of their parents' background” and acutely aware that the “bits don't compute in your head; they roll around and are unconnected to anything else in your world.”²

But this is only one of the reasons I chose to begin with this brief and garbled version of what, for Abe, who grew up in mid-twentieth-century Sydney, was understandably a “truly bizarre” parental wartime story, exotic and distant both in locale and in time. Also, it was his somewhat bemused presentation of the incident—one that placed his parents during the war deep inside the “Asiatic” portion of the Soviet Union—that fortuitously provides a number of useful entry points into the historical events I explore in this chapter.

For one thing, there is Abe's throwaway reference to this “whole bunch of Jews” whom his parents, while on their train journey, suddenly encountered at some unnamed railway station in “the middle of central Asia.” Who were these Jews? Where did they come from? When and why had Stalin “sent” them there, and why did they want to entice Abe's parents to join them? In all probability, the event took place at the trans-Siberian railway station in the Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan, the tiny, remote area located deep in the far eastern region of Siberia where, in 1934, the authorities had tried to establish their own version of a “national homeland” for the Soviet Jews, with Yiddish as its official “national language.”

But traveling in other parts of Soviet Central Asia, in particular Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the early 1940s, one would have been just as likely to come across a much larger population of mostly Yiddish-speaking Polish Jews who also found themselves in these places as a result of political decisions made by Stalin. While the ultimately unsuccessful

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Soviet experiment of “Jewish” Birobidzhan remains an almost forgotten historical curiosity, of greater interest here is why seventy-five years later, for many of us, the probably more significant experiences of this other “bunch” of Polish Jews continue to remain vague, confused, and incompletely documented, to the extent that they have been somewhat reluctantly—and, I would contend, only marginally—incorporated into the broader historical narrative of Jewish wartime experiences.

A subtler, but equally important, consideration is that while Wajnryb’s sample of Australian interviewees included twenty-seven “second-generation” adult children, Abe’s are the only “survivor” parents whose flight to evade the Nazis led into the Soviet Union, and even here they were literally only “passing through.”³ Yet, for quite some time, it has been widely known, certainly by historians and researchers of the period, that, first, a considerable majority of the several hundred thousand Polish Jews who remained alive when Germany surrendered to the Allies in May 1945 spent most, if not all, of the war years in territory controlled by the Soviet Union⁴ and, second, that around half of the European Jewish immigrants who settled in Australia in the late 1940s and early 1950s were Polish Jews. Therefore, statistically—unless this was a very unusual cohort—we would expect that the immigrants who settled in Australia in the immediate postwar years included, at the very least, 4,000–5,000 Polish Jews who had “survived” the war inside the Soviet Union.⁵ Yet none of these Polish Jews, or their Australian-reared children, made it into Wajnryb’s sample of “survivor families”—Abe’s parents were only traveling through the USSR on their way to their eventual destination, Shanghai. One could reasonably ask: Does this suggest that there is a broad consensus in place that the term *Holocaust survivor* should be applied only to those Jews who were liberated from the Nazi concentration and labor camps, or who remained in hiding somewhere in Nazi-occupied Europe, or who found shelter with some anti-Nazi resistance or partisan group?

This thought receives added support when we look more closely at an earlier study of Holocaust survivors carried out in Melbourne, the city in Australia where by far the greatest number of postwar Polish Jews chose to settle.⁶ Naomi Rosh White, for her book *From Darkness to Light*, undertook extensive interviews in the 1980s with eleven Holocaust survivors—five women and six men—all Polish Jews who were in Nazi-occupied

Europe between 1939 and 1945. Among the eleven she selected for her study, and whose stories make up the bulk of the book's narrative, she included only one male survivor who spent any period of the war years inside the Soviet Union.⁷

In this chapter I endeavor to provide a broader political and sociological context for why and how the geographical trajectories, personal experiences, and stories of survival of the large number of Polish Jews who escaped probable extermination only because they chose to flee “eastward” have remained, for a variety of confluent reasons, a largely under-examined and shadowy presence within the larger Holocaust narrative. One might suggest further that, as a consequence, in the absence of a contextualized and more coherent understanding of these events, the particular family histories of many thousands of children and later descendants of these Polish Jews, now resident in Australia and elsewhere, will remain, at best, impoverished and, at worst, in danger of being relegated to a rapidly vanishing trace within Jewish cultural memory and collective history.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND DATA

My aim is to contextualize the private, often fragmentary and skeletal, family stories of refuge and exile of Polish Jews inside the Soviet Union and thereby to locate them within a broader political and sociological narrative. In so doing, I also draw attention to a number of loosely connected but also clearly differentiated geographical and situational trajectories taken by different “subgroups” among Polish Jews who, by choice or circumstance, spent much of the war in the Soviet Union.⁸ I draw on two different but complementary sources of information and data.

Published Academic Articles and Books

The suggestion is not that the “story” has remained completely untold but rather that, for a variety of reasons I discuss more fully below, it has gradually receded further into the background and, therefore, much of the complexity and detail surrounding these experiences is no longer widely known or coherently understood. There has been a small but steady stream of academic essays, from the earliest overview in 1953 right

up to the present day; as chapters in edited books that deal more generally with aspects of the Second World War, the Holocaust, or Eastern Europe; and also in a wide range of academic journals.⁹ There is also one edited volume, published in 1991, that collects together fourteen academic essays by specialist authors on the general theme of Polish Jews under Soviet authority over the entire period of the Second World War.¹⁰

Published Memoirs

Autobiographical memoirs by Polish Jews who had spent the war years inside the Soviet Union were already appearing by the late 1940s, although most of the early ones were in Yiddish, and many still remain untranslated.¹¹ By the 1970s a few more, now in English as well as other languages, slowly started to trickle out, but there has been a noticeable increase in the publication of these personal memoirs over the past two decades, as the growing impetus for Holocaust survivors to “tell their stories,” together with their advancing age, has encouraged many Jews of this generation and background (including some who had spent the war inside the Soviet Union) to write autobiographical works.

Some are quite modest in scope, taking the form of a straightforward, chronological retelling of significant biographical events, often put down at the urging of children or grandchildren, and therefore including personal stories and details that are of most relevance and interest to family and friends. However, within the autobiographical narratives of this generation of Polish Jews, growing up in Poland in the first decades of the twentieth century followed by what happened to them in the years before and during the Second World War invariably carries a significantly heavy weight and emphasis. A few memoirs were written by “professional” writers and therefore often exhibit considerable literary skills, notably well-developed descriptive qualities and a fluid and engaging prose style.

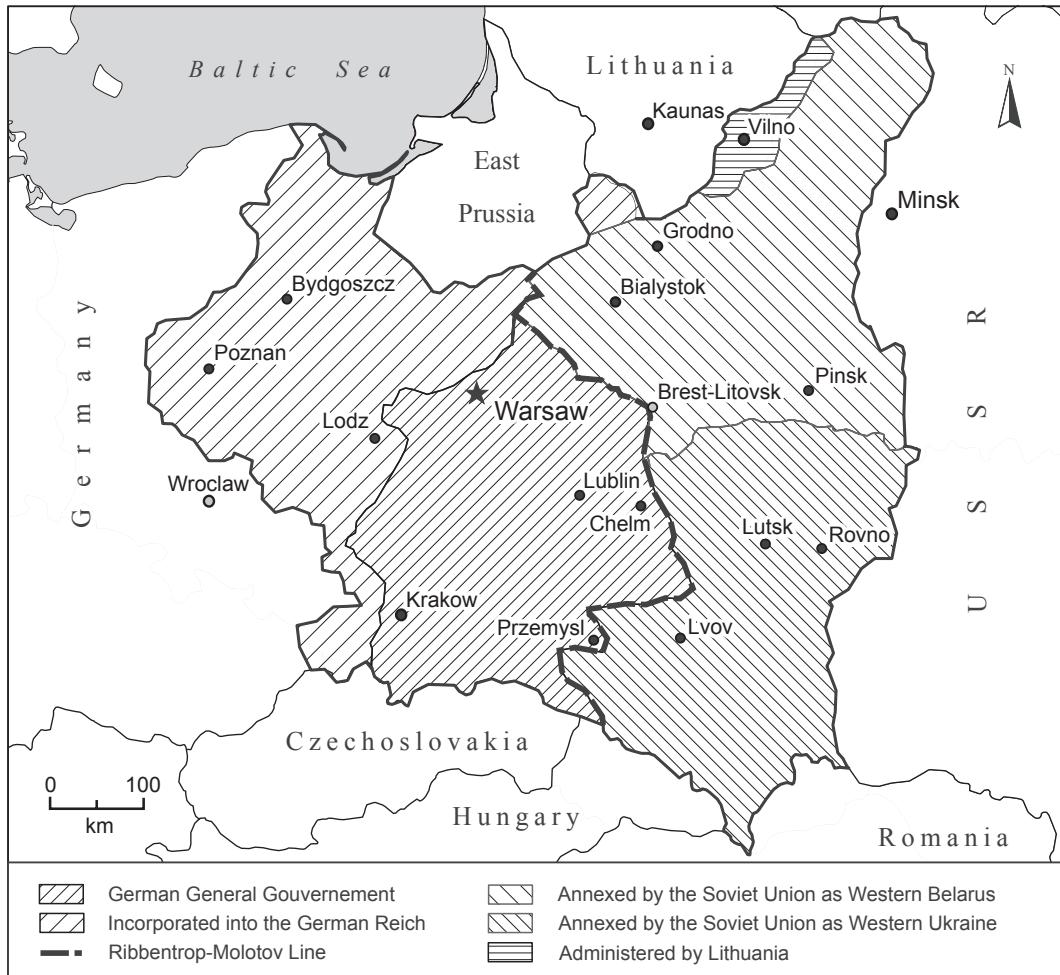
From my reading of fourteen of these published autobiographies, the majority by Polish Jews who later settled in Australia, each includes at least a few fascinating and often insightful anecdotes, observations, descriptions, and details.¹² These both complement and, I would argue, greatly enhance the broader historical narrative, adding the qualitative richness and ethnographic texture we tend to associate with unique lived experience.

THE DECISION TO MOVE EASTWARD, 1939–1940

The invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany on 1 September 1939 was preceded a few days earlier by the signing of a non-aggression treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union.¹³ This agreement included a secret protocol that specified the projected borders that would soon divide Poland. The German army overcame most of the Polish military resistance within the first few weeks, while Soviet forces moved into Poland from the east on 17 September 1939 to take up positions on the newly defined border (see map 1).

It is difficult, almost eight decades later, to recapture the widespread confusion, chaos, apprehension, and fear that would have confronted the more than 3 million Polish Jews in the weeks that followed the German army's crossing the Polish frontier in those first days of September 1939. The legal and physical persecution of Jews already instituted by the Nazi regime, first in Germany in 1933 and, by the late 1930s, across the expanding areas of Central Europe over which they had gained political control, was already widely known. But events were moving so quickly that it seemed impossible that the Jews in Poland could now find a way to evade any "special treatment" that might await them as a visible and vulnerable minority within a Polish nation whose military resistance had been overwhelmed in the space of only a few weeks.

However, the entry of the Soviets into the picture, and their very rapid movement into administrative control of eastern Poland, introduced one of the few available alternative scenarios—but it also posed some imponderable questions. Was it possible for Polish Jews to rationally determine whether it was preferable for them to stay where they were or, for those now under German authority, to seek a way somehow to move themselves into the Soviet sphere of control? Within the first few days after the Germans began their invasion, an increasing number of Jews from the western and central areas of Poland began to leave their homes and move in an easterly direction. As a result, some of these "refugees," as they came to be known, were already in eastern Poland by the time the Soviet troops took possession of these areas. In addition, for several periods during the first few months after the new border between the German- and Soviet-occupied territories of Poland was established—that



Map 1. Poland under German and Soviet occupation, 1939–1941

is, until late in December 1939—movement between the two zones was relatively open.¹⁴

Notwithstanding considerable apprehensions and doubts, some Jews, particularly young single males—less burdened by work and family obligations and sometimes encouraged by their families, many of whom had kin or close contacts inside the eastern regions—very quickly began to look for a safe route into Soviet-occupied Poland, making use of any available means, contacts, and resources. There were restrictions in place at various times, and there was some level of danger involved, but a considerable number who set out with the intention of relocating to the east managed to do so without too much difficulty. It is estimated that by early 1940, as many as 300,000 Jews from the German-occupied sections of Poland had moved into the Soviet-controlled zone, adding to the more than 1 million Jews already living there.¹⁵

Zyga Elton and Felix Rosenbloom, in their published memoirs, provide very similar accounts of the almost total confusion that reigned in Poland's two largest cities, Warsaw and Lodz, where well over half a million Jews were living in early September 1939. As young men when the Germans invaded, they both were quick to respond to desperate requests for assistance by the Polish military. As Elton writes, public announcements urged “all citizens capable of carrying arms to leave Warsaw and march eastward, toward the Russian border, where they might organize themselves into fighting units.”¹⁶ However, without any real direction or chain of command, many who started to respond very quickly decided to abandon this “leaderless” mob and return to their homes.¹⁷

Soon after, with the Germans now controlling Warsaw and Jews already being rounded up, Elton and his family begin to hear of Jews who had already moved into the Soviet-controlled zone and were now encouraging others to do the same. So Elton, aged nineteen, and his brother take a train to somewhere near the newly defined eastern border. There they negotiate with locals, paying them to take them by cart to the Bug River, which for most of its length has been designated as the de facto border between German and Soviet zones, and they are then able to cross by boat at night. From there they take the train to Bialystok, in the western Belarusian region now occupied by the Soviets.¹⁸

The larger cities, Bialystok in Belarus and Lvov in the western Ukraine region, become the most popular destinations for the Jewish

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“refugees” from German-occupied Poland. Both already have sizable Jewish populations, with the number further inflated by at least 30 percent in the last few months of 1939 when the refugees come streaming in.¹⁹

In late November 1939, Bialystok is also the destination for Rosenbloom, aged eighteen, who is urged by his father to leave Lodz, where violence against Jews is increasing and a law requiring the wearing of yellow Star of David armbands is about to be introduced. Rosenbloom and a cousin take a train to a small town close to the border, from where they are able to sneak across and proceed on to Bialystok without hindrance.²⁰

In another memoir, the decision to move into the Soviet area is presented as a simple choice with few moral complexities or dangers. When the Germans invade Poland, Toby Kłodawska Flam, in her late twenties and living in Lodz, happens to be visiting friends in Warsaw. She decides to remain there, and, by late September 1939, it is apparent to all that Poland’s war had been lost. She writes: “One evening a soldier came to the place where I lived and told us he’d heard on the radio that everybody who didn’t want to be under German occupation was welcome in the USSR: the borders were open for everybody.”²¹ As she has heard about the Nazi treatment of Jews in Germany, she says to herself: “Maybe there is a way. Maybe the USSR will save my life.” So together with some friends and her brother, she decides, as she puts it, to take up the “Russian offer.”²² They leave Warsaw on foot on 28 September. She writes: “The next day we were refugees in the care of the Russian Army in Bialystok. . . . We were well treated and got some food and shelter.”²³

In some instances the decision to leave was far from voluntary, but rather was expedited under the authority of the local German military unit controlling the area. In the first few months following their conquest of Poland, the German authorities often applied policies toward Jews that sought to “encourage” their “voluntary emigration” into the Soviet zone. They even helpfully provided a legal document called an *Ausweis*, which was intended to act as an exit visa. That, for example, was the experience of Fela Steinbock, who was living in the southern Polish town of Sosnowiec, near Krakow, which came under German control on the first day of the war. A few weeks later, in early October, she married her fiancé, and they quickly decided that they should try to leave if possible. The Germans did not seek to prevent them, however: “We had to sign a document

(an *Ausweis*) stating that we would never return to Sosnowiec again. We were the first to leave town.”²⁴

Leo Cooper, not yet eighteen years old, at the urging of his father leaves Warsaw on his own in late 1939, moving eastward toward the Soviet zone. In his memoir, he recalls that after arriving somewhere near the new border, he seeks and received an *Ausweis* from the local German authorities without any trouble and that this document also permitted him to cross into the Soviet zone unhindered. From there he quickly reached members of his extended family living in Bialystok, which he observes was now filled with refugees.²⁵

Felix Rosenbloom writes that he and his cousin were moving cautiously toward the border without any exit papers when they were stopped by a German patrol in an area of “no-man’s-land,” but they were allowed to continue: “It seemed that the German authorities were only too happy to be rid of as many Jews as possible.”²⁶

However, in other places, the Germans were neither quite so cordial nor particularly concerned with formalities. Zev Katz was in his mid-teens in 1939 and living with his family in Jaroslaw, a small town in southeastern Poland, halfway between Krakow and Lvov, which was occupied by German forces. Soon afterward, someone from the local Gestapo gave his family an abrupt ultimatum: either leave town within five hours or be shot. Katz records in his memoir: “In an instant we turned from a well-to-do family with a thriving grocery shop and export business into hapless refugees.”²⁷ Anna Bruell, then aged nineteen, was already on the move toward the southern section of the Soviet zone when she and her brother found themselves in a town occupied by the German army and with a presence there of the SS. She recalls that a few days after her arrival there, the Sonderkommandos ordered Jews to leave within twenty-four hours, telling them just to “go east.”²⁸

A few of the memoirs point to a relative ease, at least in the early months, with which it was possible to move in both directions across the border between the two zones. At the outbreak of the war, Arthur Spindler is twenty-three years old and living in Tarnow in Galicia, which is quickly occupied by the Germans. At his father’s recommendation, Spindler and four friends begin their journey toward Lvov in Soviet-occupied Ukraine, taking about a week to arrive at the border. They cross by night and manage to arrive in Lvov, but not long after, at the request of his

family, he recrosses the border in the other direction and returns to Tarnow, where, as a qualified electrician, he was regularly employed over the next few years by the German military.²⁹ Among Naomi Rosh White's eleven interviewees, four mentioned that, at least once, they had moved in both directions across the German-Soviet Polish border. One informant, "Wladek," even reported that, as an adolescent, he "used to cross the border between east and west Poland once a week," moving back and forth between his mother's home in the German-occupied zone and his girlfriend's in the Soviet-controlled area.³⁰

The movement into the Soviet-occupied zone slowed down dramatically in the first few months of 1940, when stricter border controls were put in place by both sides.³¹ However, refugees from German-occupied Poland, albeit in much smaller numbers, continued to find ways of slipping into eastern Poland right up to June 1941, when the German army invaded this area. There was no particular refugee profile, but the external circumstances tended to favor older adolescents, young married couples, and small groups of peers or similar-aged kin traveling into the Soviet zone together. In the early months, there was also a pattern of husbands first making the trip into eastern Poland and later calling for their wives to join them. There were small extended family groups as well, not usually larger than five or six persons, who made the journey together. However, almost all who became refugees had to make a wrenchingly difficult decision: to separate themselves from families left at home—from siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—many of whom, as it turned out, they were never to see again.

LIFE UNDER THE SOVIETS, 1939–1941

Jews actively moved into the Soviet zone, but for a much larger number already resident in these areas, it was the Soviets who came to them, as, for example, in Moshe Ajzenbud's autobiographical novel, where the young protagonist was living in a town in Belarus occupied by "the Russians" on 17 September 1939: "The young folk watching felt distinct relief: they had at last been freed from the anti-Semitic Poles and if the Russians were here, the Germans would not come. They greeted the Russian soldiers joyfully."³² Anna Bruell, who was able to cross the border into a town in southern Ukraine, writes in her memoir of a similar response

there to the entry of Soviet troops: “They were an unforgettable sight. This was a regiment of Cossacks all on beautiful horses, dressed in long fur-lined capes and tall fur hats. They rode slowly through the streets and were greeted with cheers and flowers, mostly by Jewish people.”³³ Bernard Weinryb, writing in the early 1950s, quotes from an oral testimony gathered very soon after the end of the war: “It is easy to imagine with what great delight the Jews of Lvov met the Red Army which saved them . . . from the Germans almost at the last moment.”³⁴

These brief passages highlight one widely cited reason for the heightened tension between the Jews and their “ethnic” Polish neighbors. The relationship between the two groups had already become increasingly volatile in the late 1930s, further sharpened by the growth in electoral support for antisemitic political parties in Poland. Another contributing factor was a significant Jewish presence within the Polish Communist Party.³⁵ And now, for many nationalistic Poles, the Soviet Union was the hated partner of Germany in their joint destruction of the Polish state. Therefore, observing Jews who, for a variety of perfectly understandable reasons, now appeared to welcome the “Russian” occupiers, confirmed what many Poles already believed, that Jews as a group had little identification with or loyalty to the Polish nation.³⁶

But political and social differentiation within the Jewish population was an important determinant in how the Soviets responded to the Polish Jews and vice versa. As the Soviet troops took control of eastern Poland, their political and administrative authorities were intent on quickly identifying and neutralizing perceived “class enemies” among the local population. High on their lists were persons active in local political parties, members of the intelligentsia, religious authorities, and the group they called the *kulaki*, which included major landowners and leading businessmen and merchants. Jews were to be found in all of these groups. David Kay was only a young boy in 1939 when the Soviets occupied his hometown of Slonim in Western Belarus. Because his father was a prominent local property owner and merchant, he was immediately identified as a *kulak* and arrested by the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), the Soviet security agency.³⁷ The rest of the family, consisting of David, his mother, and one of his two older brothers, was exiled soon after to a small town in Siberia.³⁸

This pattern was consistent with the general policy followed by the Soviets, whereby the head of a “class enemy” family was usually arrested and sent to a prison, often in one of the Soviet gulags, while the rest of the family was relocated to some isolated “place of exile” deep within the USSR.³⁹ In a historical time and place, where the particular intersection of external forces and individual circumstances often yielded the most unpredictable of outcomes, it is perhaps one of the blackest of ironies that of the more than 1 million Jews permanently resident in eastern Poland in 1939, most were to meet their deaths as victims of the ghoulish Nazi extermination policies soon after the German armies invaded these territories in June 1941; while, by comparison, of the Jews previously arrested by the Soviets as “class enemies,” who along with other members of their immediate families were incarcerated or deported inside the USSR, many were destined to survive.

In this regard, the latter were joined by many among the larger group of Jewish refugees from German-occupied Poland who, by 1940, were increasingly becoming a “political, administrative and economic problem” for the Soviets in eastern Poland.⁴⁰ Finding work was difficult, particularly in the larger cities to which the Jewish refugees gravitated. One attempt by the authorities to deal with this problem was to offer the refugees jobs inside the Soviet Union.⁴¹ Zev Katz reports that, among those who accepted, skilled workers such as tailors or shoemakers “who could produce goods in the ‘Western style’” often managed to settle quite well.⁴² Leo Cooper, who registered himself for work in his trade as a turner was provided with free transport to travel to his assigned location inside the USSR and later given a Soviet “passport” that listed his status as “resettled” person as distinct from “refugee.”⁴³ Zyga Elton accepted Soviet citizenship, moved to a small town in Soviet Ukraine, and later was able to take up a scholarship at a teachers college there. He completed one year of his course, but his studies were then interrupted by the German invasion of the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ Toby Kłodawska Flam initially took up a job offer in Soviet Belarus, later found other work there as a dressmaker, and in the summer of 1940 was accepted as a student in a technical training school in Minsk, in Ukraine.⁴⁵ All four write of this early period of their stay in the USSR in a tone that is generally appreciative of the opportunities for training that opened up for them and the positive stimulation

associated with the experience of learning a new language and adapting to the Russian people and Soviet culture.

Interestingly, in the main, the Polish refugees made few connections with the Russian-speaking Jews, of whom there were many living in the Soviet Union. As Cooper explains: “The Jews of Minsk, or for that matter of any other city in the Soviet Union, did not constitute a separate entity. The Jews were in the process of being assimilated and did not, therefore, make any attempt to identify themselves with the newcomers. It was probably fear of entertaining relations with foreigners . . . rather than lack of feeling towards a fellow Jew that kept them apart from us.”⁴⁶

However, a number of the memoirs tell of the author, or someone they knew, taking up the offer of a job inside the USSR and very quickly becoming disillusioned with the working and living conditions they encountered. According to Moshe Ajzenbud’s novelistic account, some who enlisted for work in coal mines, ironworks, and building projects soon returned, complaining that the conditions specified in the contract were “one big lie.”⁴⁷ Larry Wenig tells a similar story about laborers recruited for the Donbas coal mines. The young men who went “soon found that they had been duped,” and “they sent back letters telling of miserable working conditions.”⁴⁸

One quite spectacular exception emerges in the autobiographical memoir by Ruth Turkow Kaminska.⁴⁹ As a third-generation actress in one of the most illustrious Jewish theatrical families of Eastern Europe, still in her late teens and already an established “star” of stage and screen, Turkow Kaminska’s introduction to life and work under the Soviets is characterized more by ease and luxury than by misery and deprivation. Soon after the Germans invade, following the familiar path taken by the Polish refugees, Turkow Kaminska together with other members of her family—her mother, Ida Kaminska, one of the most celebrated stars of Yiddish theater; her stepfather; and her flamboyant, German Jewish, jazz trumpet-playing husband, Adi Rosner—hastily depart Warsaw and make their way to Bialystok in Soviet-occupied eastern Poland. Once there, both Turkow Kaminska and her husband are quick to take up the offer of Soviet citizenship, and within a few weeks, under the “auspices of the Belarusian People’s Commissar,” Rosner is offered the leadership of a local jazz orchestra, with Turkow Kaminska to be employed as one of the band’s vocalists. They sign a contract for a substantial sum of money that

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includes extra provision for costumes, sets, and other necessary expenses, with the understanding, at the request of local party functionaries, that they organize an extensive USSR-wide tour for the band, performing mostly Western-style jazz. They then embark on an extremely affluent lifestyle, staying in the best hotels and, with the money they earned, purchasing food, clothing, and other provisions available only to the Soviet elite. This extends to Rosner buying Turkow Kaminska fur coats, a luxurious mink and a second sable, as well as expensive jewelry. Their tour opens to great acclaim, first playing dates in Belarus and then, in late 1939 and early 1940, moving on to extended seasons in both Leningrad and Moscow, before traveling to some of the more remote areas of the USSR.⁵⁰

But the easy acceptance of Soviet citizenship, which presented little problem to Turkow Kaminska and her husband, was not a choice favored by the majority of the Jewish refugees now in eastern Poland. Also, an important condition attached to Soviet citizenship was the requirement for the refugees to then move from the cities to smaller urban centers, which most were loath to do.⁵¹ Very soon the “ambiguous” citizenship status of the Polish refugees became of major concern to Soviet authorities. In November 1939, with the Soviet Citizenship Law extended to the occupied areas of eastern Poland, all permanent residents were now declared Soviet citizens. In the early months of 1940, it was decided that the offer of a Soviet “passport” (the terminology used in the USSR for the required document of identity) could also be taken up by the refugees from “western” Poland. However, given the growing general dissatisfaction within the refugee community, highlighted by the widespread disdain shown by many who had taken work in the USSR only to choose to leave their jobs and return to the large cities, the Soviets were becoming increasingly wary and suspicious of exactly where the refugees’ ultimate “loyalties” might lie.

By March 1940, the authorities came up with what they thought would prove to be an effective (but in its level of deviousness and deception also an exceptionally cruel) strategy to test whether the refugees’ “true” commitment and “loyalties” were to Soviet or German interests.⁵² While this response may now appear extremely paranoid, given the Nazis’ well-known views toward Jews, not to mention their past policies and action, some of the memoir writers confirm the ambivalence ex-

pressed by many Jews about precisely this dilemma. When Toby Kłodawska Flam is about to flee from Warsaw to eastern Poland, a friend tries to dissuade her, telling her: “You will see, the Germans are not so bad.”⁵³ Chaim Künstlich’s mother, still living in German-occupied Krakow, wrote to him (by then he was already inside the USSR) suggesting that he return, as she thought it “better to live with the Germans than to stay in Russia.”⁵⁴ Late in 1939, in Minsk, Leo Cooper was just one of “a crowd of refugees who . . . were trying to return to Nazi-occupied Poland.”⁵⁵ In various parts of eastern Poland, some Jews even tried, unsuccessfully, to register with German commissions (set up there as diplomatic “consulates”) for “repatriation” back to their homes in German-controlled areas of Poland.⁵⁶ In fact, as Cooper writes: “Many managed to cross the demarcation line and re-enter Nazi-occupied Poland, even as many others were still fleeing the Nazi occupation into the Russian zone.” He retells the widely circulated story of two trains going in opposite directions meeting at the border. Jews from the one traveling into the Russian zone shout: “Where are you going? You must be mad.” But they are met by those in the other train shouting back at them: “You must be insane! Where are you going?”⁵⁷

In March 1940, the Soviets began to require Polish refugees to register themselves with the NKVD and to nominate one of two alternatives: “either to become Soviet citizens or to declare that they were ready to return to their former homes, now under Nazi occupation.” Faced with this choice, most were wary of opting for Soviet citizenship, fearing that such a step would mean they would never be able to return to their former homes and families.⁵⁸

As a consequence, the Soviet authorities chose to initiate a dramatic and somewhat draconian course of action: they already considered the refugees a security risk and likely candidates for espionage, since they showed a particular interest in developments in the German area, had family connections across the border, made repeated attempts to sneak through the frontier to visit relatives, and had often expressed the desire to emigrate overseas. The distrust was further increased by the refusal of most to accept Soviet citizenship, coupled with a preference to be returned to German-occupied Poland, and drove the Soviet authorities to a radical resolution of the problem—massive deportation of the refugees.⁵⁹

DEPORTATION AND “HARD LABOR,” 1940–1941

The operation to “clear” the Polish refugees from the former Polish territories of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, at first occupied and more recently annexed by the Soviets, began slowly in the spring of 1940. Not only Jews were targeted, as a considerably larger number of ethnic Poles had also moved from German- into Soviet-controlled areas after September 1939. The arrests and deportations reached their peak on the “night of June 29 when hundreds of thousands of people were arrested, most of whom were Jewish and the rest [ethnic] Poles.”⁶⁰ They were taken from their homes or sometimes straight off the street. Even some refugees who had taken up Soviet-sponsored jobs, and some who had accepted Soviet citizenship, were caught up in the swift and efficient roundup operations and summarily deported on the trains with the rest.

The suddenness of their arrest by Soviet authorities and the rapid events that followed—being herded into overcrowded railcars for a lengthy train journey eastward, often lasting weeks and into parts unknown—is described in detail and sometimes at considerable length in a number of the memoirs. Fela Steinbock tells of being arrested while pregnant and, together with her husband (who was not even one of the “refugees” but a permanent resident of Soviet-occupied Poland), being deported by train to a remote barracks camp in the general vicinity of Krasnoyarsk in central Siberia.⁶¹

All the firsthand reports are consistent in mentioning the severe discomforts experienced during the journey, in particular the extreme overcrowding in the locked “cattle cars,” the appalling sanitary conditions, and the minimal food and water available. All traveled for lengthy periods, but Anna Bruell’s journey of five weeks on the train before arriving at Tynda, located in the far east of the USSR, seems especially grueling.⁶²

Zev Katz and his family were arrested and deported in late June 1940. He writes that the guards on the train informed the deportees that they were being “resettled” in big cities inside the USSR, where they “would be able to live quite comfortably.”⁶³ He captures very evocatively how, on the long journey eastward, after some time on the train, the atmosphere between guards and deportees became more relaxed and the overall mood improved considerably:

By then we knew each of our guards quite well and on occasion engaged them in long talks. Some of them were very curious to hear about life in Poland and Europe before the war. Some of our “passengers” had travelled widely, even to America. As Soviet people, isolated from the outside world, the guards were fascinated to hear from people who had seen it with their own eyes. The weather was summery, not too hot, and as we travelled through the huge stretches of Russia, the Ural mountains with their breathtaking views and then through the vast lands of Siberia, we could not help being deeply impressed. It was like a holiday in the middle of a nightmare journey. . . . The train journey was to most of us something of an adventure, since we had not previously travelled beyond our immediate surrounding. Also, travelling on this train was like being in an eerie, suspended time-capsule: we could do nothing but live from day to day and wait to see what would happen.⁶⁴

Within the existing Soviet system of incarceration there were three types of custody to which detainees could be assigned.⁶⁵ The most severe and tightly controlled were the “regular” prisons, where all inmates—usually both the criminal and the political—were confined by walls, fences, and guards; were kept in cells or primitive huts; “rarely worked”; and “were often kept in strict isolation.”⁶⁶ At the next level were the “labor camps” and “labor colonies,” invariably in remote and desolate locations, where there was some form of control over the movement of inmates and they were assigned to labor duties, but where, due to the isolated locations, walls and fences were unnecessary since escape was virtually impossible. At the lowest level of external control were the “places of exile,” to which those who were “banished” were sent and expected to find work to sustain themselves; persons sent to such locations were deemed to be under some form of geographic confinement and subject to other forms of monitoring and restrictions but were free to live their own lives in these places for as long as determined by the authorities. This third category might also include specified remote urban settlements, *kolkhozy* (collective farms) and *sovkhozy* (state-owned agricultural settlements).⁶⁷ It was to the second-level “labor camps” and “labor colonies” that most of the Polish deportees were first assigned. Many were located in central

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and eastern Siberia and northern Kazakhstan, but there were also some in the far northern, subarctic regions of Russia.

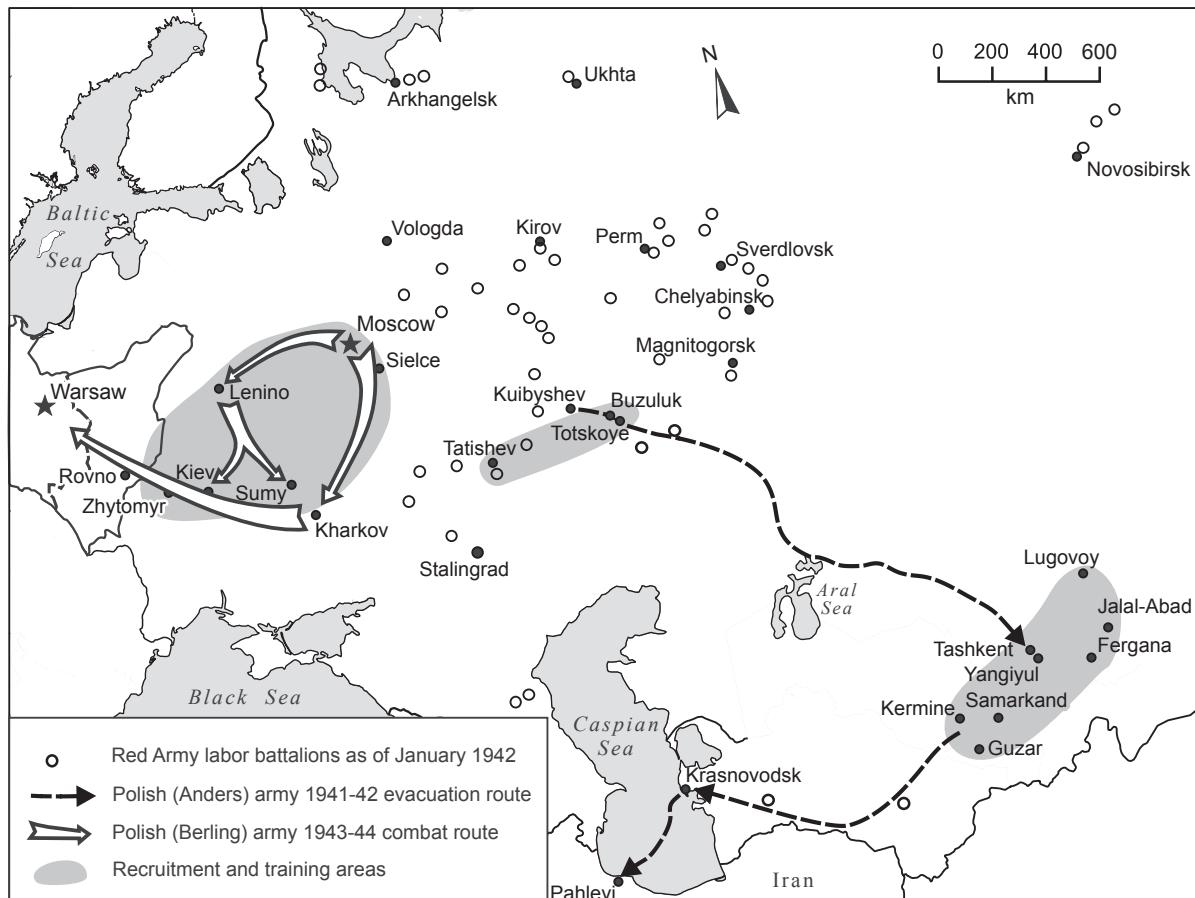
For example, Larry Wenig and his family were taken from their home at midnight and then transported for two weeks by train before arriving in “Gulag 149” near Morki (about 1,000 kilometers northeast of Moscow) in the Mari Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the homeland of the “Finno-Ugrian” people known as the Mari.⁶⁸ They were informed that they were now classified as “special settlers,” a category applied to “capitalists or members of political parties” who were “enemies of the Soviet State.” Wenig assumed that his family was marked for harsher treatment because when his father registered as a refugee in Lvov and the Soviet officer asked where he would prefer to go, he replied “to the USA.”⁶⁹

Map 3 shows the principal deportation routes for the Polish refugees transported out of eastern Poland in 1940.⁷⁰

Estimates of the overall number of Polish Jewish refugees who were deported in these operations vary considerably, some quoting a figure as high as 200,000, but more recent and probably more reliable sources suggest that it was considerably lower and closer to 70,000.⁷¹

The camps to which the deportees arrived were invariably in remote locations, with the number incarcerated in each ranging from a few hundred to several thousand. The inmates often included both Jews and ethnic Poles. Anna Bruell writes that she experienced little antisemitism in these circumstances, something she attributes to the fact that “we were all, so to speak, in the same boat.”⁷²

In writing about the remote camps, most authors list the numerous hardships they endured: the long hours of labor in forests, mines, and farms; the high work quotas expected and the minimal food rations earned even when these were achieved; the extremes of climate faced, most notably the brutal Russian winter; the serious epidemics, particularly typhoid and malaria, that swept through the camp population; and, as almost everyone mentions, the extreme infestations of bedbugs and lice. With reference to this last difficulty, the following brief anecdote from “Kuba,” the only interviewee in Naomi Rosh White’s study who spent time in a Soviet labor camp, manages to be both richly evocative of the experience and blackly humorous in tone: “One very important feature of our life was to reduce the lice population on our bodies and clothing. We had to



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do it every night. If we didn't, we were finished. The first indication of a person who had given up was that he no longer did it. . . . Lice in Russia have been a perennial problem. Lenin said once that either the revolution will kill the lice, or the lice will kill the revolution. From what I saw, the half-time score was one-one."⁷³

Significantly contributing to the anxiety and despair experienced by many of the deportees was the uncertainty about their future: How long would they remain in this place under these conditions?⁷⁴ This was not helped when they were repeatedly told by their guards or by Soviet officials that they must accept as reality that they would never be leaving the camp, much less the USSR.⁷⁵

The conditions were certainly harsh and some died of hunger and disease—one recent estimate suggests that 10 percent of the Jewish refugees did not survive the experience.⁷⁶ And while the age cohort of the refugees was biased toward young adults, the camp populations also included some adolescents and even young children. Bruell recalls: "Few babies survived in our camp in Siberia. I can only remember a few young children, undernourished and mostly kept indoors because of the freezing weather and lack of warm clothes."⁷⁷

Chaim Künstlich remembers children old enough to work in the camp he was in, with the youngest around twelve years of age. He recalls that one child died, but overall—unlike some—his memories of the camp experience are relatively benign, adding, "But nobody died from hard work." In the same vein, he continues: "No one froze to death in their bunks, like in some gulags. We had heaters in our rooms and there was the whole forest to burn for fuel."⁷⁸ Similarly, Bruell, in spite of her lengthy exposition on the numerous difficulties they faced in the camp, concludes: "Yet despite these hard conditions few people got sick in the winter—there was no flu or other contagious diseases. The worst we got was frostbite, sometimes very serious."⁷⁹ Some report that from the labor camps it was even possible to communicate by mail to family and friends back in Poland and also to receive assistance packages of goods and food sent to them.⁸⁰

The Soviets were not renowned for their tolerance toward expressions of religion, and there is certainly a divergence in the memoirs with regard to how the authorities in the labor camps responded to Jews who wished to observe religious rituals. For example, it was difficult for Jews

to keep the Sabbath, as they were not exempted from work on this day, and, according to some, they had to be extremely circumspect about observing religious festivals or holy days.⁸¹ Larry Wenig, whose family was “traditionally religious,” notes that the officials were “opposed to religious observances of any kind” and “prohibited religious displays and church attendance, and, in fact, tried vigorously to eradicate belief in God.”⁸² However, again, a very different picture is painted by Künstlich, who recalls no restriction on religious practice in his Siberian place of deportation. On the contrary, for the Jews “there was one Torah in the camp and some bar mitzvahs were held.” He writes that there was even a camp *shochet* to supply the necessary kosher meat.⁸³

A few deportees were school-age adolescents and, even while in labor camps, were given the opportunity to continue their education. Wenig, aged sixteen, began attending school at the commencement of the academic year in September; although he does also note that extensive “communist indoctrination” accompanied the lessons and that “dissent” was not well tolerated.⁸⁴

Zev Katz, of a similar age to Wenig, already had a taste of the Soviet education curriculum while attending school in Western Ukraine, having fled there with his family in 1939. Following their subsequent deportation to a Siberian labor camp, Katz is keen to continue his studies, but there is no school in the camp. Remembering a phrase he had learned earlier from the Soviet constitution, “All citizens of the USSR have the right to an education,” he comes up with the seemingly audacious idea to send a personal letter to Stalin, in which he writes, “I appeal to you to direct the local officials to make it possible for me to go to school for which I shall be very grateful to you.” Some months later, after sending off a second letter, he finally receives a reply from an official in the Kremlin directing those responsible to try to find a school for him. However, in true Soviet style, at the same time he receives another letter from a local official regretfully informing him that there is no suitable school close enough to the camp that he can attend.⁸⁵

Most of the Polish deportees spent more than a year as involuntary inmates under the strictly controlled regime of these remote labor camps, but their lives took another twist after 22 June 1941 when Germany turned on its former “ally” and mounted a massive military attack on the Soviet Union.

SURVIVING THE WAR UNDER THE SOVIETS, 1941–1945

The Jews originally from German-occupied Poland were deported, beginning in 1940, from Soviet-controlled Poland and assigned to carry out hard labor in remote camps scattered throughout the Soviet Union. But by the summer of 1941 there were now two other groups of Polish Jews whose circumstances and locations, over the previous two years, had diverged considerably from those of the deportees. These included Polish Jews who had taken the offer of work inside the USSR, some of whom had also accepted Soviet citizenship, and also some among the permanent residents of eastern Poland who, as “class enemies,” had been imprisoned and deported very soon after the Soviets took control of these areas in 1939.⁸⁶

But when Germany attacked the USSR, the survival options available to all of these groups inside Soviet-controlled territory began to merge together again.⁸⁷ The reasons for this had a lot to do with broader geopolitical developments that unfolded as a consequence of the Soviets joining the anti-German coalition and therefore seeking strategic and military assistance from, and coordination with, the Western governments that were now their new allies.

Of particular significance was the signing on 30 July 1941 of a Polish-Soviet agreement, with the Polish side represented by the London-based “government-in-exile” led by General Władysław Sikorski. At the preceding discussions, there was considerable disagreement on a number of issues and particularly on the precise location of a future—meaning postwar—Polish-Soviet frontier. However, with the British applying considerable pressure on both parties to come to some agreement on this and other points in dispute, including the freeing of Polish prisoners and deportees inside the USSR, finally a number of acceptable, if deliberately somewhat ambiguous, compromises were reached.⁸⁸

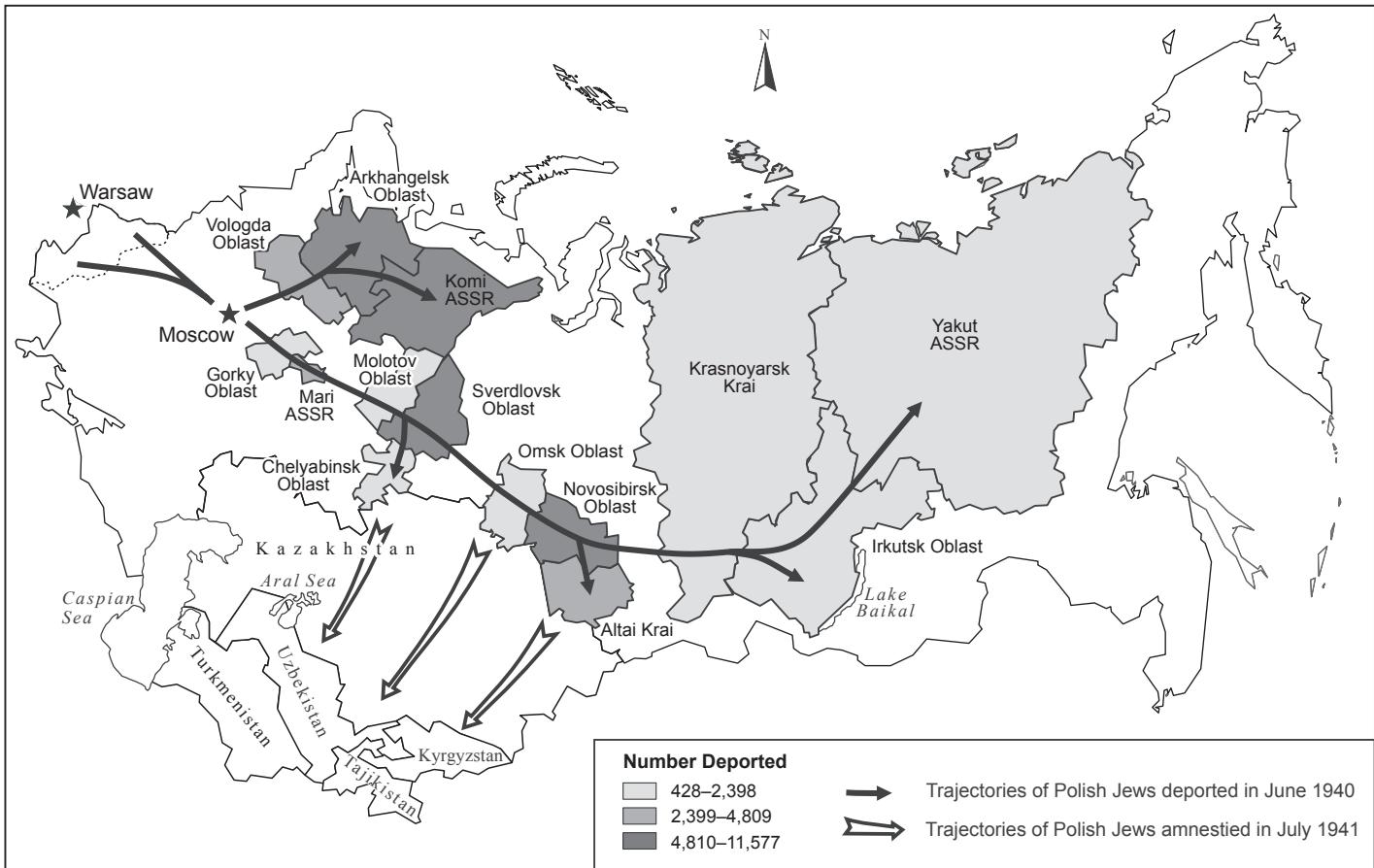
A short time later, on 12 August 1941, the Soviet government officially declared a general “amnesty” for Polish citizens in the USSR. Most of those detained in prisons and labor camps were to be freed and permitted to resettle in other parts of the Soviet Union, with the exception of the large cities in the west. As these were in the European portion of the USSR already under fierce attack from the German military, they were also

unlikely to be the most desirable locations for those seeking a safe haven from the hostilities. It is not surprising, then, that the path followed by almost all of the newly “amnestied” refugees was in the general direction of the Soviet republics of Central Asia (in particular, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan), where the climate was much more temperate.⁸⁹ It was also possible that work might be available there, as, following the German invasion, the Soviets put into place a defense strategy that included moving vital industries into these regions to provide greater protection from enemy attack. For the Polish Jews, another attraction lay in the geographic vicinity of these areas to the Soviet frontiers with India and Iran. Some were hopeful that it would be possible to escape from the USSR across what they assumed, somewhat naively, would be more permeable border areas.

But of considerable importance to most of the refugees was the reinstatement of their Polish citizenship (a status to which they had desperately sought to cling and a major reason behind the earlier Soviet decision to deport them to labor camps). Representatives of the Polish government-in-exile would now be permitted to set up “embassies” throughout the Soviet Union to assist with the process.

As Zev Katz describes, soon after German troops invade the USSR the inmates of his labor camp in the Altai mountains of Siberia are assembled and informed that they are now both “Polish citizens and allies.” Some weeks later they are finally provided with tangible recognition of their reclaimed Polish identity, “a precious piece of paper.” Representatives of the Polish government come to the camp and inform the inmates that soon a special train will be arriving at a nearby station to take them to “the warm lands in Central Asia.”⁹⁰ At the station they receive a certificate from the Ministry of Internal Affairs stating that they are “under the auspices of the Embassy of Poland” and “have the right to travel, reside, work, rations etc. much like any other citizen.” Katz and his family chose to settle in Kazakhstan, in the “first major city out of Siberia,” which, although still geographically located in “Asia,” was a “predominantly Russian city” and also had an attractive climate.⁹¹

When the amnesty is announced, Larry Wenig’s family is in a “gulag-style” camp in Russia’s far north. Camp officials inform them that they are soon to receive “special documents” that will allow them to leave the camp as free people. “We were to select a place where we wanted to settle.



Map 3. Polish Jews deported to the Soviet Union in June 1940

Source for statistics: Stanisław Ciesielski, Grzegorz Hryciuk, Aleksander Srebrakowski, *Masowe deportacje radzieckie w okresie II wojny światowej* (Wrocław: Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1994), 57.

They would make travel arrangements.” The family, still hoping to find a way to the United States, first chooses the far-eastern port of Vladivostok. When this destination is rejected, they settle on Uzbekistan, both for the warmer climate and for the possible chance of escaping across the border and eventually reaching Palestine or America.⁹²

Anna Bruell and most of the fellow “prisoners” in her Siberian camp, on receiving the news that they are free to leave, look to go somewhere in “Soviet South Asia,” even though, as she writes: “Most of us knew nothing about South Asia, just that it was sunny and warm, far from Europe, from the war and from the Germans.”⁹³ After a three-week-long train ride, Bruell settles in a small town in southern Kazakhstan populated by Kazakhs and Russians, where she remains for the next five years.⁹⁴ Similarly, both Fela Steinbock and Chaim Künstlich leave their Siberian labor camps and eventually find homes in different small towns in Kazakhstan for the duration of the war.⁹⁵

As already noted, moving eastward, away from the Soviet-occupied areas now imminently threatened by the rapid German advance and toward the relative safety of Soviet Central Asia, was also, for a brief period, an “escape route” available to some of the Polish Jews. A number, like Moshe Ajzenbud’s alter ego, “Michael,” are among the relatively few who escape the rapid and systematic roundup by the Gestapo and the SS of almost the entire Jewish population of eastern Poland, very soon after the German military quickly gains control of these areas. Michael manages to flee eastward across the old Poland–Soviet Union border into Russia, first on a bicycle and then continuing his journey by train until, finally, he reaches a small town near Samarkand in Uzbekistan.⁹⁶

Moshe Grossman initially fled into eastern Poland in 1939, but because of his reputation as a Yiddish writer and “intellectual,” he is soon arrested by the Soviets and imprisoned in Archangelsk in Russia’s far north. In June 1941, he also benefits from the “amnesty” and sets out by train toward Central Asia. After a journey lasting seventeen days, he arrived in Samarkand, “in the land of sun, grapes and frontiers.”⁹⁷ There was an official Polish office nearby “which issued Polish Passports to all former Polish citizens who had been in Soviet territory since 1939 and had not adopted Soviet citizenship. This meant all those who had been in prison, camps and exile.”⁹⁸ Grossman notes how important it was to the Polish Jews there to be in possession of their official documents (release certificates).

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When they were stolen (as often happened), “people became absolutely desperate.” However, forged papers could be bought at the Samarkand bazaar—in someone else’s name and often without a photograph.⁹⁹

With his literary eye, he also wryly observes that even among the mix of various groups of “foreign” refugees alongside Soviet evacuees who now found themselves in equally impoverished and desperate circumstances, an inevitable status hierarchy quickly emerged:

The Russian Jews grabbed the big courtyard. . . . They would not admit any Polish Jews there. First because we were dirty, second because according to them we were all thieves. And third, we were not evacuees after all but released prisoners! . . . The Lithuanian Jews also regarded themselves as a higher class in the lineup. They didn’t like the Poles either. Even the Bessarabian Jews did not hold with us, while among the Polish Jews themselves there was a struggle between the Galicians and the Congress Poles. What was more, there was quite a special dispute between those who talked Polish and those who talked Yiddish.¹⁰⁰

Another important initiative that came out of the 1941 agreement between the Soviets and the Polish government-in-exile was the formation of a separate “Polish army,” made up of Polish citizens now inside the USSR and placed under the leadership of General Władysław Anders (himself only recently released from a Soviet prison). One of the major recruiting centers was in Buzuluk, near the city then known as Kuibyshev (now Samara), deep inside Russian territory and close to the northern border of Kazakhstan. The imminent existence of such a military force quickly attracted the attention of the Polish Jewish refugees, particularly as it soon also became widely known that, once formed, this army was to be moved out of the USSR and then through Iran, to join up with the Allied forces in the Middle East under British command. As Yisrael Gutman writes: “From the very beginning of the recruiting, thousands of released Jewish prisoners and exiles flocked to the collection points,” most acting on their own initiative.¹⁰¹

Some Jews who volunteered were accepted. However, there is some evidence to suggest that an ingrained bias against taking Jewish recruits

was shared by some officials of the Polish government-in-exile but was particularly prominent within the Polish military hierarchy, from General Anders down; despite both internal and external maneuverings that sought to challenge this type of discrimination, Jewish recruitment into the army came to almost a complete halt after the first few months.¹⁰² And according to the personal experiences recounted in some of the autobiographical memoirs, there is considerable anecdotal support for this scenario.¹⁰³

Zyga Elton accepted Soviet citizenship in 1939 and later had his studies at a teachers college in Western Ukraine rudely interrupted by the German attack on the Soviet Union. Slightly wounded after volunteering, and being assigned to an auxiliary role supporting the Soviet military in its somewhat ineffective attempts to defend against the initial German advance, Elton then hears about recruitment for the “Anders army” taking place in Buzuluk. He makes his way there with the hope that, by successfully volunteering for this unit, he will also be able to regain his Polish citizenship. However, when he arrives after a long train journey, he is told he cannot join because he is carrying a Soviet passport. But he is sure, he explains, that the “real reason for the refusal was that we were Jews, and the acceptance of Jews into the Polish Army was limited to a very small number, mostly former officers.”¹⁰⁴ Larry Wenig tried on two occasions to join the Anders army without success.¹⁰⁵

Moshe Grossman writes: “Everybody wanted to go and volunteer for the Polish Army. . . . But Jews were not accepted.” Only a tiny number was able to enter, and it was widely believed that the only way in was either through bribery or a certificate of conversion.¹⁰⁶ Leo Cooper’s anecdote from his personal experience provides support for this view. As a Polish Jew who earlier accepted Soviet citizenship and found work in Soviet Belarus, when the German military begins to advance he moves further east and, by November 1941, is on a train to Uzbekistan. When the train stops at Buzuluk, he discovers, by chance, that this is to be the headquarters for the Polish army being formed by General Anders. While still at the railway station, he meets a fellow Polish Jew, also now a Soviet citizen, who suggests that they join up as a way out of the Soviet Union. However, Cooper soon finds out that recruiters are rejecting those who admit to being Jewish. His new friend has heard that one can easily get around this by trying again, only this time presenting oneself as a Catholic. He

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employs this strategy and is accepted, but Cooper is unwilling to employ this strategy.¹⁰⁷

Eventually, by the summer of 1942, more than 75,000 military personnel recruited into the Anders army, together with almost 40,000 family members, including children, were able to leave the Soviet Union. And despite the many who report that they were unable to join, this number included around 6,000 Jews—more than 4,000 soldiers and almost 2,000 civilians. In another strange twist, soon after leaving the USSR, these Jewish soldiers found themselves suddenly under British military control and, in the summer of 1943, also stationed in Palestine.¹⁰⁸ Once there, and with the encouragement and assistance of local Jewish settlers keen to recruit well-trained soldiers, many Polish Jews who left the USSR with the Anders army deserted and quickly disappeared into Jewish towns and *kibbutzim*. Therefore, for the relatively small number able to take advantage of the circumstances, the alliance between the Soviets and the Polish government-in-exile and the subsequent formation of the Anders army provided both an escape route from the USSR and an opportunity to bypass the British Mandate restrictions designed to severely limit further Jewish immigration into Palestine.¹⁰⁹

The movement of Polish Jews into Soviet Central Asia added only a tiny fraction to the huge numbers of people moving into these areas in the months following the German attack on the USSR. Almost immediately, the Soviet government put into effect a gigantic evacuation plan, so that by December 1941 at least 10 million Soviet citizens had been relocated from “European” into “Asian” areas of the USSR.¹¹⁰ This, together with the movement of troops and military support toward the front, meant that the major roads and railways across the USSR were filled with the constant flow of people heading in both directions.

In this context, it is not surprising that there were numerous opportunities for chance encounters between different groups of Polish Jews whose paths happened to cross. For example, Zyga Elton became a Soviet citizen and therefore was not deported to a labor camp in 1940, but in the summer of 1941, having just been rejected as a potential recruit into General Anders’s Polish army, he was on a train to Uzbekistan:

In Kyzl Orda on the way to Tashkent we met a large convoy of cattle wagons full of people, left on a railway siding. . . . Most

were poorly dressed and some were in tattered clothes, their bare feet covered in cloth. They were Polish citizens freed from concentration camps and settlements in accordance with the term of an agreement between the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Soviet Union. They were escaping the severe cold of the snow-covered Siberian expanse. Their only chance of survival was to reach the mild climate of Central Asia and last out till the end of the war. These people were hungry and had not eaten in days. Some were sick, and without medical help. They hoped to travel as far as Aschabad, and from there to the Persian border. These hopes were the product of delirious minds, as the borders were strongly guarded against any trespass. . . . We returned to our train, grateful to have escaped their fate.¹¹¹

But despite their currently impoverished state, as noted in the book by Moshe Ajzenbud, the former Jewish deportees had one reason to feel optimistic about the future: they were carrying their “release certificates” affirming that they were Polish citizens. “They assumed that the others, the [ones who chose to become] Soviet citizens, could expect very little to change—they would have to remain always in Russia. For us, they thought, it is different: we are Polish citizens, and we will have to be allowed to go home after the war.”¹¹²

Certainly, as many of the memoirs suggest, day-to-day survival for the refugees in the Central Asian republics was often quite stressful and difficult. Anna Bruell, writing about life in her small town in Kazakhstan, mentions serious illnesses such as typhoid and dysentery and the ever-present bedbugs and lice. And, while a wide range of work was available, the pay was often insufficient to support basic nutritional needs, more so if some members of the family or group brought in no income.¹¹³ Some who found employment in a local *kolkhoz* were required to take on unfamiliar, physically demanding agricultural work and were paid in accordance with the rules of the particular collective. Grossman describes working, together with hundreds of other refugees, in the cotton plantation of an Uzbek *kolkhoz* in “primitive” living conditions and receiving “meagre food.”¹¹⁴ Some were fortunate enough to later move on from these situations and take up less physically arduous work in offices and factories in the local towns.

A number mention that they resorted to illegal activities to supplement their impoverished diets. Bruell comments: “Everybody stole from each other. There was bribery and cheating on the small and grand scales.”¹¹⁵ Indeed, an often-repeated observation is that the “black market” trading of goods, usually acquired through stealing and reselling materials from one’s workplace, was endemic throughout the Soviet Union. As Elton writes: “A whole culture developed which rationalised the lifting from factories and government enterprise, as these were common property, and partly owned by the perpetrator. This would be distinguished, in people’s minds, from lifting privately owned property which was considered morally wrong. . . . Being in charge of goods for which there was a great consumer demand would further enhance one’s well-being.”¹¹⁶

David Kay was still a young boy when, in 1939, he was transported with his mother to a small Siberian town, where he became involved with a gang of youthful thieves and petty criminals. He asserts the view that theft was “endemic” to Soviet life. His mother also soon engaged in illegal activities and shrewdly established “business” relationships with powerful men in the town with whom she could make mutually beneficial “deals.” Kay writes: “She was imprisoned many times for her black marketeering, but her bribes and contacts saw her released fairly quickly.” He also contends that “thieves did not receive severe treatment from police and magistrates” because their offenses were not as bad as “capitalist” crimes such as speculation. In particular, from the Soviet ideological perspective, “distributors,” that is, merchants, were perceived as “nothing more than speculators.” The producer should sell directly to the consumer and thereby eliminate the “parasitical” middleman.¹¹⁷

Inevitably, the Polish Jews had some contacts with the distinctive “ethnic” communities that constituted significant components (usually the majority) of the local populations. In the memoirs, few devote much attention to these “indigenous” groups such as the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Tajiks, not to mention the “Bukhara” Jews. When such groups do appear in the narratives, it is often to emphasize their Muslim or, more frequently, their “Asiatic” exoticism.¹¹⁸ Toby Kłodawska Flam observed that the “local” (meaning “Bukhara”) Jews “seemed almost unaware that there were Jews in other parts of the world. They lived with the local people, spoke their language, dressed like them.”¹¹⁹ However, Moshe Ajzenbud observed

that, on the contrary, in the small town near Samarkand where his central character “Michael” lived, the “Buchara Jews” dressed in European clothes (unlike the local Uzbeks) and “had biblical names like Moses or Jacob.”¹²⁰

Chaim Künstlich found the Kazakhs “welcoming and very good to the Polish people.”¹²¹ According to Anna Bruell, the Kazakhs were a “very hospitable and generous people with whom we got on very well. They had nothing against Jews or Poles but hated Russians passionately.” However, she also notes their widespread poverty, “superstitions,” and “quaint” child-caring practices and felt less comfortable with their “low hygiene standards.” She pointedly mentions, with regard to this last factor, that when they were invited to eat with their Kazakh landlords, “No matter how hungry we were, we could never bring ourselves to share the meal.”¹²²

Zyga Elton’s memoir is one that does include a lengthy and somewhat more detailed “ethnographic” description of local living conditions, dress, and customs. In the Uzbekistan city of Bukhara, Elton observed, “most living quarters were built of clay, patched together with small windows, low ceilings and doors,” and “one had to bend to enter.” Not surprisingly, then, it was the local *chaikhanas*, or teahouses, that operated as hubs for most social and community interaction, although restricted to males. He also observed that the visually impressive and ancient tiled mosque was “now abandoned and the front a major market site.” As for the people: “The inhabitants of these parts, the Uzbeks, were dressed in long quilted kaftans, worn in winter on top of other kaftans and in summer, on bare bodies. The headgear, called ‘tyubiteika,’ had the shape of a squared dome and was richly embroidered with local motifs.”¹²³ The Uzbek language, “a Turkish derivate,” was incomprehensible to the newcomers, and, overall, Elton found the locals “not particularly welcoming to the Polish refugees, or for that matter, the Russian evacuees.”¹²⁴

Larry Wenig agrees about the social distance between the two groups, noting that “the Uzbeks on our street did not talk to or look at us.”¹²⁵ Moshe Grossman, in Samarkand, at first presents a similar view, noting considerable hostility between the local Uzbeks and the refugees, even down to the children, who were continually throwing stones at the Jewish children: “The little Uzbeks hated the Polish children because they were better dressed and received clothes and food from America.”¹²⁶

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However, he soon tempers this by observing that, over time, the relationship between the two groups began to warm: “It took a long time for the Uzbeks and the Jews to get to know one another better. Once we were accepted as guests at their festivities, both people saw that you must not judge in a hurry or superficially by the people you meet by chance in the street or the bazaar. Among them, as among ourselves, there were decent, modest, fine folk of high morality and culture.”¹²⁷

Overall, relations between the Jews and “ordinary” Soviet citizens, with the general exception of those in authority positions and NKVD officers, tended to be mostly cordial and friendly. Anna Bruell observed that most of the Russians in these areas were also often quite impoverished and, except for those “in charge,” not much better off than the local Kazakhs.¹²⁸ David Kay was a young boy when he and his mother were transported from their home in eastern Poland to their place of exile in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, where they remained for almost six years. During his time there Kay found it easy to make friends with boys his own age and experienced little overt discrimination against Jews. The locals were generally hospitable, even prepared to share what meager food supplies they might have, leaving him with the impression that “individually, Russians are remarkably good people.”¹²⁹

Zev Katz had already shown his determination to take advantage of what the nominally egalitarian Soviet system had to offer with his letters to Stalin requesting access to education while still an inmate of a Siberian labor camp. He pursued these ambitions further when he and his family were “amnestied” and moved on to Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan. By September 1942, Katz had gained entry as a student in a teachers training college linked to the University of Kazakhstan, from where he was able to graduate with his degree four years later. During this period, life for him and his family regained some sense of “normality.” There were cultural institutions operating—the National Theater of Kiev was resettled and performed in the town—and cinemas regularly showed movies, including even some from America. But he also remained conscious of the enormous contradictions inherent in Soviet society: the difficult working conditions and immense poverty and hunger of most workers and “peasants” that contrasted sharply with the material advantages open to members of the privileged classes (the *nomenklatura*), who were able to enter closed shops to purchase goods that were unavailable to the rest.¹³⁰

Despite their parallel experiences during their time in the USSR, the relationship between Polish Jews and ethnic Poles, according to a number of the autobiographical memoirs, continued to follow a mostly separate, mutually distrustful, and sometimes openly hostile pattern.¹³¹ But there are also some who present a different image. After the 1941 amnesty for Polish refugees, Felix Rosenbloom, unable to get to Central Asia, instead relocated to Bijsk in central Siberia, where he remained for several years. There were also other refugees in the town, including non-Jewish Poles, with some of whom he developed warm and lasting friendships: “I could not vouch how they felt about Jews in general, but I believed that their friendship to me was genuine. We remained good friends until I left Bijsk.”¹³²

In the main, both Jews and “ethnic” Poles came into the wartime situation with established, often strongly held views about, and personal experiences with, members of the other group that inevitably contributed to how comfortable and open they were likely to feel now. Indeed, from the widely shared Jewish perspective, Chaim Künstlich might be seen as somewhat atypical when he writes about his life in prewar Poland: “I never experienced any difficulties as a Jew attending Polish schools, because Krakow was a very nice city and the Polish people were very nice.”¹³³ Later, when he is settled in a small town in Kazakhstan, he is again careful to resist placing emphasis on any “ethnic” differences within the refugee population: “There was a Polish community, but the Jewish community was very small and we really didn’t know who was Jewish and who was not. . . . There was no anti-Semitism there.”¹³⁴

After April 1943, with the Germans now in retreat from the USSR, the already intense ambivalence felt by many of the Jewish refugees with regard to their past and present identity as Poles, not to mention their future relationship with an as yet unknown, postwar Poland, was put to a further test. For reasons that lie outside the scope of this chapter, but revolve around irreconcilable differences on the location of the future Poland-USSR border, the Soviet government’s already uneasy relationship with General Sikorski’s Polish government-in-exile fractured completely.

Even before this final break, the Soviets’ broader geopolitical strategy had already turned toward making effective use of the Polish refugees inside the USSR who might play a useful role in securing one of



Map 4. Polish Jews in the southern republics of the Soviet Union registered with the Polish embassy, Kuibyshev, as of April 1943

Data source: Report on the Relief Accorded to Polish Citizens by the Polish Embassy in the USSR, with Special Reference to Polish Citizens of Jewish Nationality, USHMM, RG-59.032, Polish embassy in Kuibyshev, A.7.307/40.

their postwar objectives: establishing a predominant Soviet influence over a compliant, and Communist, Poland. To these ends, the Soviets assisted in the setting up of two important new Polish institutions: the first was the “Polish army in the USSR,” again a military force to be drawn entirely from Polish refugees, but this time trained and assigned to fight alongside the Red Army in the liberation of Poland from the Germans; the second was a political organization, the Union of Polish Patriots (known also by its abbreviation in Polish as the ZPP), aimed at recruiting any Polish Communists who were still alive, and other Poles whose political credentials met Soviet requirements, to be trained to play leading roles in a future Polish government and administration.

On 8 May 1943, two weeks after they broke off all relations with the Polish government-in-exile, the Soviet government announced the formation of the first military unit of its “new” Polish army, which was to be under the command of General Zygmunt Berling, with the foundation unit strategically named, after the Polish national hero, the Tadeusz Kościuszko division.¹³⁵ The number of recruits continued to grow, and by the summer of 1944, when units of Berling’s army reentered Poland alongside Soviet forces, it consisted of more than 100,000 soldiers. According to some sources, in the recruiting process there was considerably less discrimination against Jews than had been the case with the earlier Polish army under General Anders. Klemens Nussbaum writes that around 12,000 Jewish soldiers served in the Berling army, with a high Jewish representation among the officers.¹³⁶

Toby Kłodawska Flam recalls that her brother was “drafted” into the Kościuszko unit in 1944.¹³⁷ But Zev Katz presents a less sanguine view of this Polish army, suggesting that antisemitic discrimination was still in evidence. When he and his brother tried to volunteer, they were rejected and told that the recruiters had been warned, as Katz notes drily, that the Polish army “had too many Abramoviches already, they do not need any more.”¹³⁸

Jews were, however, well represented in the ZPP, leading one academic author to suggest: “The best period for Polish Jewish refugees was from May 1943 until the end of July 1946 because Stalin had assigned them a role in the process of transforming Poland into a ‘peoples’ republic and a Soviet satellite.”¹³⁹

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Zyga Elton joined the ZPP soon after its formation and late in 1944 was recruited as an assistant to the local branch secretary in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. He writes: “My task was to organise cells at workplaces where there were at least five Polish citizens working. I had to call and attend meetings at which we were to enlighten the members of the merits of The Polish Committee of National Liberation, and the future of the new Polish Democratic Republic.”¹⁴⁰ He was assigned to visit collective farms outside Bukhara “with substantial Polish-Christian populations,” he writes, “who were generally little interested in what I had to say, except with regard to what was on their minds: repatriation to Poland.” Their hostility toward Elton as a representative of the Soviet-sponsored organization was so intense that he felt “hatred in their eyes.”¹⁴¹ After these experiences, he came to realize that the ZPP had no standing within the Polish-Christian community, for whom “as an organisation of former communists and Jews, ZPP was a complete anathema.”¹⁴²

Larry Wenig, in another town in Uzbekistan, observed that the ZPP opened its own schools in areas where there was a Polish refugee population and Polish-speaking students were encouraged to transfer into them. The schools took care that the educational curriculum followed was supportive of Soviet ambitions for the direction of the “new” Poland.¹⁴³

By 1944 some Polish Jews were also being “called up” to serve in the Soviet army, although most were assigned to a “labor battalion” rather than a fighting unit. Often this meant being recruited to work under conditions not dissimilar from those that prevailed in the Soviet “labor camp.” On being drafted, Leo Cooper was taken with many others by train from Uzbekistan to a camp not far from Leningrad, where most of the other conscripts labored in coal mines, while, because he was skilled, Cooper was assigned work in the maintenance shop.¹⁴⁴ A similar story is told by Elton, who also had a brief stint in a Red Army labor unit that involved a train journey of several weeks across the USSR followed by work in a coal mine, before he was released from duty on health grounds.¹⁴⁵

Although the end of the war was now in sight, and most of the Polish Jews were keen to assist the Allied cause and speed up what now appeared to be the inevitable military defeat of Germany, the total unpredictability of their situation was still sometimes forcefully brought home to them. Moshe Grossman was imprisoned as a “class enemy” early in the

war, then released under the Polish amnesty of 1941, and spent the next three years in Uzbekistan. But in February 1944 he was suddenly rearrested by the NKVD and charged with “counterrevolutionary agitation.” After several months of interrogation he was sent to a prison camp, and in his articulate reflection on the seemingly endless vicissitudes of his own experiences in the Soviet Union, he enumerates the bewilderingly diverse range of circumstances encountered and, by implication, the necessary adaptability he, and many fellow Polish refugees, needed to develop as an effective strategy for their survival:

During the years that I spent in Soviet Russia I had almost instinctively tried to pass through everything experienced by a considerable part of the citizens and above all by the Jewish refugees from Poland. I already had been in exile and in prisons, I had already been in hospitals and kolkhozes. Had worked at digging earth, at cotton plantations, I had carried clay and bricks, worked as a bookkeeper, served as a nightwatchman, sawn wood in the forests, worked as a sailor on a freighter, starved, slept in the streets, had been tortured and beaten during interrogation. The only thing missing to round matters off was a concentration camp.¹⁴⁶

Grossman was deported to a labor camp, but, again, fate intervened, in the form of Stalin’s grander political ambitions. Two months after Germany’s unconditional surrender in May 1945, the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union declared a new amnesty for all Polish citizens, including their right to be repatriated to Poland. This even applied to prisoners who were serving sentences of no longer than three years, and, therefore, on 4 August 1945 Grossman was once again a free man.¹⁴⁷

REPATRIATION AND DISPERSION, 1945–

For the Polish Jews who had remained under Soviet authority for the best part of six years, the belief that they would one day be free to leave the Soviet Union had seemingly ebbed and flowed with the political tides. By late 1939, if they were permanent residents of eastern Poland, they were Soviet citizens by decree, and in 1940, if they were “refugees” from

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German-occupied Poland, they either became “voluntary” Soviet citizens or were deported to labor camps for refusing this honor. By the summer of 1941, they were all theoretically Polish citizens again, and by 1943, when relations between the Soviets and the Polish government-in-exile fractured, they were again Soviet citizens. As they were by now dispersed throughout the USSR and subject to various civilian and military authorities, who often interpreted these sudden “policy” shifts in unpredictable and idiosyncratic ways, it is not surprising that in the last few years of the war many Jews were perpetually confused and anxious about their precise status and fearful about exactly what might happen to them after Germany was defeated.

By late 1944, with the territory of Poland retaken by the Red Army, supported by General Berling’s Soviet-sponsored “Polish army in the USSR,” the Polish Committee of National Liberation, previously sanctioned by Stalin, was installed in the temporary capital of Lublin as the new government of Poland. For strategic and political reasons, the Soviets considered it important to solicit the support of as many as possible of the several hundred thousand Poles who had survived the war inside the USSR.¹⁴⁸ Following the end of hostilities, this approach was reaffirmed in the form of the announcement on 6 July 1945 declaring “the right of persons, Polish or Jewish by nationality, living in the USSR, to change their Soviet citizenship and be evacuated to Poland.”¹⁴⁹ Albert Kagannovitch suggests a few of the strategic rationales that could have influenced Stalin in making this fateful decision: “In addition to relieving the USSR of a potentially unreliable group and increasing the population of its future satellite state, another consideration in permitting a large-scale emigration may have been Stalin’s desire to gain sympathy in the West during negotiations over Poland’s future borders, and thus to neutralize one basis for the hostility promoted by the London-based Polish government-in-exile.”¹⁵⁰

Not surprisingly, when the news of this latest “amnesty” spread through the Polish exile population, there was a rush to register for repatriation. While some of the Polish Jews were suspicious that it might be another ruse by the Soviets and that rather than be returned to Poland they would end up back in a labor camp, they very quickly overcame these initial apprehensions.¹⁵¹ Their path toward repatriation was smoothed further by the general looseness of the registration process, with virtually any

form of documentation accepted as sufficient proof of former Polish citizenship. Even where there was no documentation, as Leo Cooper observed, “two witnesses who would confirm that they knew the person as a former Polish citizen” was sufficient.¹⁵² The final decisions were left to local Soviet bureaucrats, often joined by members of the ZPP.¹⁵³ Zyga Elton, who as a representative of the ZPP in Bukhara was placed in charge of organizing the registration process there, notes that sometimes more “creative” assistance was necessary: “We had to invent ways for those who had no documents, but who were genuine Poles, to get through the bureaucratic maze. . . . Any document with a slight indication of Polish locality was made valid. We even accepted medical prescriptions in the Polish language as valid documents.”¹⁵⁴

The complex logistics for repatriation took considerable time to organize, as many of the Poles, including most of the Jews, required transportation from thousands of kilometers away. A small number who, when the war ended, were located in the western parts of the USSR (including prewar eastern Poland) managed to return in 1945, but most did not gain access to available transportation until the spring and summer of 1946.

Before they departed, many of the refugees were less than subtly encouraged by their Soviet hosts to consider and appreciate, upon their return to Poland, the benefits and assistance they had received during their stay in the USSR. Zev Katz was awarded his degree from the University of Kazakhstan before he was scheduled to depart in the summer of 1946. He recalls that after the graduation ceremony, he was invited to the dean’s office and told: “You have been one of our best students. We have given you education and made a major effort to see that you graduate. . . . You will shortly return to Poland. A Polish citizen who graduated from a Soviet university, who studied Marxism-Leninism, is very important to us. I am sure that you will be able to make a meaningful contribution for the good of both our countries.”¹⁵⁵

Cooper tells of a similar experience. Following the release of Poles working in a Soviet military labor battalion and now to be repatriated, local officials at a celebration ostensibly in honor of the Poles’ imminent departure “expressed the hope,” he writes, “that we would remember with gratitude our stay in the Soviet Union and would continue to work for the cause of socialism in liberated Poland.”¹⁵⁶

The Soviet authorities employed other strategies to gain the sympathy of repatriates, for example, by providing comfortable traveling conditions on the trains that took the refugees back to Poland, including ample provisions, available medical support, and even free clothing and footwear.¹⁵⁷ Anna Bruell, reflecting on her train journey in April 1946, recalls that they were repatriated without being required to pay a fare.¹⁵⁸

In the end, while few of the Polish Jews departed with a particularly favorable view of Soviet Communism as a political system, many did retain positive feelings about the people—Russians, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and others—who, in the main, had treated them decently and with compassion and also a heartfelt appreciation for the relatively safe and peaceful refuge they had been fortunate enough to find inside the USSR. Toby Kłodawska Flam, in her memoir, recalls her rather effusive parting words on the train leaving the Soviet Union in March 1946: “Goodbye, my friends! . . . Goodbye, friendly country! . . . I’ll never forget you, goodbye!”¹⁵⁹ Cooper is more measured, but also quite open, about feeling some ambivalence when it was time for him to take his leave of the Soviet Union. He writes: “At this moment I was overcome by a strange feeling. It was a feeling of uncertainty about what lay ahead mixed with sadness of leaving behind the people amongst whom I lived for over seven years of my prime youth, of leaving my Russian friends who treated me with so much kindness and understanding.”¹⁶⁰

But for two of the memoir writers, their last years in the USSR were anything but compassionate or benign. While, by the end of 1946, due to the unprecedented but politically calculated display of Soviet “generosity,” most Polish Jews had already been repatriated, Arthur Spindler and Ruth Turkow Kaminska had instead been subjected to a rather unpleasant taste of the impenetrable, “Kafkaesque” Soviet judicial process in action.

Spindler had moved into the Soviet-occupied part of Poland in 1939 but, soon after, returned to his family in German-occupied Poland. Working as an electrician in Tarnow, he was employed by the German military, but when Jews began being rounded up and a ghetto established, he obtained false “Aryan” papers and moved to Warsaw. Now presenting himself as an ethnic Pole, he found work with a German company dealing in wheat.¹⁶¹ Sometime later, he was contacted by Polish “partisans”

who persuaded him that, as a “Polish patriot,” he should assist their cause by diverting some of the company product for their benefit. Of the double irony here, he notes: “Me, a Jew being asked to join the Polish underground! It had been made all too clear that Jews were not welcome in the organisation.” Spindler was given a Polish code name and sworn in on the Holy Cross.¹⁶² Events took an even stranger turn when, in December 1944, the Soviets reoccupied the town and, as they considered the Polish partisan movement to be an ultranationalist and anti-Soviet organization, Spindler was arrested. Despite his protestations that he was really a Jew hiding under false papers, he was transported to a “gulag” inside the USSR and not released until late in 1947, when, as the beneficiary of another “friendly” Soviet gesture toward the new Communist Polish government, he was finally allowed to return to Poland.¹⁶³

In 1940, Ruth Turkow Kaminska was on a national tour with her husband, Adi Rosner, and his jazz band. While many of the other Polish Jews were being deported to labor camps, they seem to have stumbled into an alternative universe and were living the ostentatious and lavish lifestyle of the Soviet *nomenklatura*, associating mostly with high officials, favored artists, writers, and other “celebrities.” After successful, lengthy seasons playing Leningrad and Moscow, their tour continued into the “provinces,” covering the Soviet Central Asian republics and the “far east.” This included a concert in the so-called Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan, the Soviet-created “Jewish homeland” referred to at the beginning of this chapter, where they found little evidence of “Yiddish culture” and a noticeably impoverished living standard. At one point they were all flown to a Black Sea resort town and directed to perform a “special concert” played to a completely empty theater, except for one curtained box, which they later believed was probably occupied by Comrade Stalin himself. By 1944, they were being asked to provide entertainment relief for frontline troops of the Red Army during its advance into Poland, and, as a reward, they gained possession of a “war trophy”—a Ford automobile left behind by the retreating Germans.

Their musical careers and privileged lifestyle continued until the summer of 1946. They began to sense that with the emerging Cold War rhetoric their form of entertainment was now at odds with the current ideological climate, and, having completed their contractual obligations, they requested permission to return to Poland along with the other

repatriated refugees. They were scheduled to leave late in November on one of the last repatriation trains from Lvov, in Ukraine, when, on the evening before their departure, they were paid a visit by NKVD officers, who searched their apartment and arrested Rosner. Within a short time, Turkow Kaminska was also in custody. Both were sentenced to lengthy terms. Turkow Kaminska served five years, the first part in prison and then later in exile in Kazakhstan. She was finally “rehabilitated” after Stalin’s death and only managed to return to her home in Warsaw in 1956.¹⁶⁴

However, what awaited the Jews who returned to Poland from the USSR in the eighteen months following the end of the war was more horrific and shocking than anything they could have ever imagined. Some news of the Nazi campaign to exterminate European Jewry had filtered through while they were in the Soviet Union, but now they came face-to-face with the unimaginable extent of the devastation and loss. What they quickly learned was that most, and in some cases all, of the families and friends, and even entire communities, they had left behind a few years before had vanished, leaving barely a trace.

The sense of desolation was undoubtedly amplified by the widely noted hostility they faced from their fellow Poles upon their return. Zyga Elton experienced a taste of what was to come as soon as the train bringing him back crossed over the Polish border: “Wherever we stopped on the Polish side, we attracted the local population who stared at us, taunting and jeering, exhorting us to go back from whence we came. . . . We realised that our troubles were not yet over.”¹⁶⁵ Leo Cooper points to a certain ironic symmetry in being warned on the train by the Russian conductor against returning to Poland, where Jews were already being killed by their fellow Poles, echoing the sentiments expressed in his story from 1939: “Fools, where are you going?”¹⁶⁶

Almost every one of the memoir writers makes a point of reporting the coldness and rejection they encountered from “ethnic” Poles, often quoting almost identical phrases of hatred and contempt as the first words with which they were “greeted”: “You are alive? I thought all the Jews were killed?”¹⁶⁷ “So many of you still survived?”¹⁶⁸ “Where are all these Jews coming from? We thought Hitler finished all of them. Pity he didn’t.”¹⁶⁹ Larry Wenig, while having his hair cut following his return to Krakow in 1945, overheard a fellow Pole exclaiming: “We must forever

be grateful to Hitler. He got rid of the Jews.”¹⁷⁰ Elton was saddened by the total lack of empathy toward the Jews who had survived: “I could not understand the mentality of these people who had witnessed the destruction of their neighbours without showing any compassion. They could not find in their heart a word of consolation for those who survived.”¹⁷¹

Even with documentation now available, we are still unable to say exactly how many Jews returned to Poland from the Soviet Union. Some estimates suggest that as many as 200,000 had been repatriated by late 1946.¹⁷² However, Edele and Warlik propose a “high” figure of a little over 160,000.¹⁷³ Taking a longer time frame, as some Jews in the Soviet Union did not return to Poland until later—even well into the 1950s—Lucjan Dobroszycki calculates that a total of between 240,000 and 250,000 eventually returned, “arriving at different points in time.”¹⁷⁴ But what we can be certain of is that considerably fewer Polish Jews—the likely figure, according to Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, lies somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000—survived inside the territory of the prewar Polish state, liberated from the concentration camps, emerging from hiding, or with partisan groups.¹⁷⁵

As suggested in many of the comments from the memoirs quoted above, in general the homecoming was not a sweet one, and indeed a considerable number stayed in Poland only for a very short time. The official Polish government policy directed the returning Jews toward settling in the western areas of Poland, such as Lower Silesia and Pomerania, only recently “cleared” of their former high concentrations of ethnic Germans.¹⁷⁶ David Kay describes arriving in the virtually empty Upper Silesian city of Szczecin only a few weeks after it was taken by Soviet troops. He and his family, he writes, were “dropped at the end of the street, told to choose whatever flat we wanted and to register with the police the next morning with details of the property we had appropriated.”¹⁷⁷ On their return, Fela Steinbock, Chaim Künstlich, and Anna Bruell were also resettled in Silesia. Bruell describes a savage Polish reaction as more of the returning refugees from Russia began arriving in Szczecin: “After a few weeks the Poles started a real ‘pogrom,’ attacking the traders at the market, robbing them and beating some savagely to death.”¹⁷⁸

Zev Katz learned, with some consternation, that his family had been resettled in Lodz in a house that was previously part of the Jewish ghetto

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and from which, only a few months before when the ghetto had been “liquidated,” the former inhabitants had been expelled and transported to a Nazi death camp.¹⁷⁹

On coming “home” to physically devastated Warsaw, Zyga Elton poignantly captures the feelings of total helplessness and despair that many who returned must have experienced:

As I was taking my first hesitating steps in the city of my childhood, now almost completely destroyed, I could hardly recognise the outlay of the streets. . . . An immense sadness descended upon me as I realised the enormity of the destruction and the tragic fate of my family. I could hardly see anything in front of me as my eyes filled with tears of helplessness. . . . There were only ruins where the apartment house stood when we said goodbye to my parents and sister, leaving them in their hour of need. It was then that I felt guilty and remorseful for leaving them on their own, powerless as they were to defend themselves. I wandered around aimlessly, trying to imagine what and how it all happened. There was no one to whom I could turn for help.¹⁸⁰

It is not surprising, then, that most who came back also very quickly came to the conclusion that there was no place for Jews in the new Poland. The rejection and verbal insults they encountered were sometimes accompanied by serious outbreaks of violence; several hundred Jews were killed in such attacks between 1945 and 1947. The most infamous, a pogrom that took place in the city of Kielce on 4 July 1946, finally convinced many Jews, if they still had doubts, that it might be wise for them to leave Poland as soon as they could.¹⁸¹ The extent of the flight was dramatic: overall, while an estimated 275,000 surviving Jews resided in Poland for some period between 1944 and the spring of 1947, the postwar Jewish population reached its peak of around 240,000 in the summer of 1946 following the mass repatriation from the USSR.¹⁸² But soon after, in the nine-month period between mid-1946 and March 1947, 140,000 Jews left Poland for good.¹⁸³

A large number of those Polish Jews who were looking to leave quickly were assisted by a Zionist “underground railway” known as the Bricha, a network of more than 150 special emissaries sent from Palestine

who helped them make their way into displaced persons (DP) camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy.¹⁸⁴ From there they moved on either to Palestine or to other cities in Western Europe—a number spent some months, and sometimes several years, in Paris. The majority of the Jews who left postwar Poland eventually settled either in Palestine (after May 1948, the new state of Israel) or in the United States. A smaller number, by the late 1940s and early 1950s, were able to secure immigration documents for Australia, Canada, Argentina, or other countries in Central or South America.

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I now return to the observation in the chapter's introduction concerning the historical and cultural marginalization of the events, contexts, and stories recounted above.¹⁸⁵ Again, awareness of this process is not new and was already being publicly commented on very soon after the war ended. Already in 1947, in writing about the Jews in European DP camps, journalist Mordkhe Libhaber was of the view that the survivors gathered together in these camps "had not adequately addressed Soviet exile." He saw this as a paradox, since he was also aware that "Polish Jews who had survived in the Soviet Union constituted the majority of the displaced Jews in Germany."¹⁸⁶ And more than sixty years later, historian Atina Grossmann noted how little had changed. She pointedly observed that the contemporary image of the "Holocaust survivor," both through representations in popular cultural forms such as films, documentaries, novels, and museum exhibits and in the academic and scholarly literature, "does not in fact reflect the historical experience of most survivors." "This does seem to me," she remarked, "rather extraordinary."¹⁸⁷

What are the individual and collective processes that seem to have cumulatively ensured that the experiences of so many Polish Jews who survived in the Soviet Union continue to be relegated to, at best, a brief footnote in the history of the Holocaust? The difficulties faced by many Jewish survivors over many decades in articulating their experiences, both to their children and to "the world" in general, have some resonance in the much explored concept of Holocaust "silence"—the central theme in Ruth Wajnryb's book on intergenerational transmission of parental memories, emotions, and experiences with which this chapter

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began. But it seems to me that the events and stories I explored above are not widely known because they have often been buried beneath, not one, but three “layers” of silence.

The first layer of silence is the one they share with all survivors—those who were in the Nazi camps, in hiding, in the forests—to which the major contributors are feelings of grief, loss, and guilt around those close to them who did not survive.¹⁸⁸ Returning to Poland after their time in the Soviet Union to find their families and communities wiped out would have triggered for them a similar range of emotional and psychological responses to those experienced by all survivors.

Also contributing to this layer of “shared silence,” something common to all the survivors who left Europe soon after the war ended and almost immediately confronted issues associated with immigration and settlement in a new country—finding work, a place to live, learning a new language, bringing up young families—is that most “simply did not have time . . . to record—let alone publish—their experiences.”¹⁸⁹ And, that among them were some who preferred to follow the words of advice offered by Larry Wenig’s uncle to Larry’s father, when he came to meet the family upon their arrival in the United States in 1946: “You’re in America now. Forget the past.”¹⁹⁰

Another aspect of “shared silence” is related to language. Most of the Polish survivors who came to the West were not fluent in English (or other local languages), and many who settled in Israel, if they knew Hebrew at all, only spoke it as their second language. For almost all, their first language was either Yiddish or, in some cases, Polish, which increased the difficulty of effectively “communicating complex, nuanced ‘information’” even to their own children, much less to their new non-European friends and neighbors.¹⁹¹ As noted above, the few early published accounts that did emerge of Jewish experiences inside the Soviet Union were almost exclusively written in Yiddish.

The second layer is “politically motivated silence.” The Soviet Union, Stalin, and the international Communist movement all represented polarizing global political symbols, and Jews were just as divided about them as everyone else, perhaps even more so. For the period of the war, the Jewish refugees had been “guests” of the Soviet Union, so how were they to respond to the country and the political system that, for whatever reasons, saved them from likely extermination at the hands

of the Nazis? A certain level of ambivalence was inevitable, as Mordkhe Libhaber had also already observed in 1947: “A feeling of strong gratitude towards the Soviet government, mixed with accusations against it, is part of the problem.”¹⁹²

Many were fully aware that the intention behind the decision by the Soviet authorities to deport them to labor camps was not to “save” them and that the reason they were still alive was the fortuitous combination of historical accident and good fortune. Their own limited agency in responding to their situation is forcefully articulated in the memoir by Zyga Elton when he observes, in the end: “During the war years we were moved around under difficult circumstances, without exercising our own will. We lived from day to day, victims of war. We were not asked what we would like to do. We were always pushed by ensuing events.”¹⁹³

The ambivalence many felt was complicated further by the intensification of Cold War rhetoric in the West. While they remained in Soviet-dominated Poland, it was best not to criticize the USSR, and when many of them moved to the West it was generally wise not to praise it. It is then not surprising that, at least publicly, most preferred to say as little as possible. It was only with the collapse of Communism in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s that “the need for justification, political positioning, and settling scores with the Soviet Union became obsolete.” It is probably not coincidental that almost all the autobiographical memoirs cited above and written by Polish Jews who spent the war years in the Soviet Union were published after 1990. By this time, “the motivation to write these memoirs generally was not political; rather, the authors sought to leave personal testimonies for the second and third generations.”¹⁹⁴

The third layer of silence reflects the position of “relative silence”—both imposed on and accepted by the Jews who returned from the Soviet Union—in relation to other Holocaust survivors that derives from what some observers have called “the hierarchy of victimhood.” Many of the returnees were quickly made aware that, in the general context of what had happened to others, their “suffering” had been relatively minor.¹⁹⁵ These sentiments are echoed in a number of the memoirs. Anna Bruell writes: “Much later when we heard about the concentration camps and what happened to people there, we called ourselves lucky. Despite the hard conditions we still had a chance to survive—they had none.”¹⁹⁶

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One of the more explicit and direct expressions of this view appears in the introduction to Felix Rosenbloom's memoir, in which he notes that he "survived the war years in the comparative safety of the then Soviet Union" but had for decades resisted his family's request to write down his experiences, because he firmly believed that "only people who were incarcerated in ghettos or concentration camps or had been in hiding from the Nazis, should leave eye-witness accounts of those terrible years."¹⁹⁷

Among Holocaust survivors, socially sanctioned mechanisms were soon in place that enabled them to very quickly bring their personal experiences and grieving to the attention of the broader general public and particularly to others within the local and global Jewish community. Already by the early 1950s, in Australia and elsewhere, there were ritualized communal forms of public commemoration of the Nazi horrors inflicted in the death camps and the ghettos. Certainly, for almost all of the Polish Jews who survived in the Soviet Union, and later for their children, there was an equally strong impetus to be part of these, as many had lost most, and in some cases all, of their families; those who had remained behind, either in the already Nazi-controlled areas or the soon-to-be Nazi-overrun territories of eastern Poland. However, their own particular stories—the details surrounding their mode of "escape" and "survival"—tended to remain a private and family affair. There was little impetus or desire from them to form organizations, to be with others who had similar experiences, or, even though there were deaths of family and children while they were in the Soviet Union, to create any special public rituals of commemoration.

The diminished status assigned to the refugee experience in the USSR, over many decades, has permeated many of the debates among "surviving" Jews around Holocaust memory and appropriate commemoration. In most cases, those in both groups have either colluded with or accepted the de facto "hierarchy of suffering," already in place soon after the war, "with concentration camp survival at the top and the Soviet experience at the bottom."¹⁹⁸ Since then, we see in virtually every aspect of the memorialization process, either the total exclusion of the Polish refugee experience from the status of "survivorhood," as is often the case with museums and displays devoted to the Holocaust, or, at best and only recently, an allowance of some of the Poles who were in the Soviet Union

to “slip into” the “survivor” category. This is what has happened, for example, when the more contemporary “gatekeepers” presented no objection to incorporating their voluntary oral testimonies into recently accumulated collections, such as the worldwide USC Shoah Foundation project and the Phillip Maisel Testimonies Project based at Melbourne’s Jewish Holocaust Centre.¹⁹⁹

A similar pattern can be discerned with the emergence over the past twenty years of published autobiographical memoirs written by Polish Jews who had been in the USSR. I have drawn on fourteen of these for this chapter, and more have been and continue to be published, but, again, their number and distribution must be considered in a broader context. The distinguished historian of the Holocaust Yehuda Bauer pointedly observed in his foreword to Zev Katz’s autobiography that, compared with the many hundreds of memoirs that have been written by Holocaust survivors, “not many Jews who fled or were deported to the Soviet Union wrote memoirs.”²⁰⁰

My purpose in this chapter, then, has been to try to counter the pervasive influence of the combined weight of the three layers of silence I have identified, which have for a long time relegated the experience of this very large body of Jewish refugees to the periphery of historical awareness and, I would suggest, clouded our ability to fully grasp and comprehend their experiences. By also drawing from some of their now-available first-person memoirs, I am very belatedly responding to the plea from historian Meir Korzen, who more than half a century ago wrote:

The life of horror, the dramatic struggle for survival and the premature, bitter end the Jews eventually suffered under the Nazi regime, has overshadowed the fate of the Jewish refugees in the Soviet Union which has consequently been relegated to secondary importance. . . . And yet, this episode is definitely worthy of the historian’s attention, not only because it involves so many human beings, but also because its study reflects particular experiences that have an impact on the present generation and are likely to impress future generations, no less in their way, than do the experiences and consequences of the Nazi regime.²⁰¹

Notes

1. Wajnryb, *The Silence*, 40. This is the operational definition of *Holocaust survivor* Wajnryb used for the purposes of her research.
2. Ibid., 212–13.
3. In their particular instance, they traveled by train from Lithuania all the way across the USSR, from west to east, as far as Vladivostok, then on to Japan, and eventually to Shanghai. It is likely they were among the more than 2,000 Polish and Lithuanian Jews who, together with a much larger group of around 17,000 mostly Austrian and German Jews, were able, between 1938 and 1941, to take advantage of the extremely loose entry requirements into the international settlements of Shanghai and, for the duration of the Second World War, found a relatively safe wartime refuge in this cosmopolitan “Paris of the East.”
4. The Soviet-controlled territory includes both the sections of eastern Poland and the Baltic states annexed by the Soviet Union after September 1939 and the “greater” USSR itself. The recent revival of academic interest in the topic has yielded differing estimates of the total number who returned from the Soviet Union, as the proportion of all Polish Jews who survived the war. These range from around two-thirds to a high of more than 80 percent. See, respectively, Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 374; and Atina Grossmann, “Deported to Life: Reconstructing the Lost Story of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union during World War II” (paper presented at the annual conference of the Association of Jewish Studies, Boston, 20 December 2010), 2. For an extended discussion, and a comparative analysis of a range of available data sources, on the number of Polish Jews who survived the war and later returned from the Soviet Union to Poland, see chapter 2, by Mark Edele and Wanda Warlik, in this volume.
5. Around 17,000 European Jewish refugees settled in Australia between 1945 and 1954. See W. D. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1991), 2:67–69. The 1954 Australian census counted more than 9,000 Poland-born Jews, almost all of whom had arrived in Australia after 1945. See Charles Price, “Jewish Settlers in Australia,” *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 5, no. 8 (1964): app. 3a and 3b.

6. Naomi Rosh White, *From Darkness to Light* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1988). The 1954 Australian census recorded 6,603 Poland-born Jews resident in Victoria, compared with 2,030 in New South Wales. See Price, “Jewish Settlers in Australia,” app. 3a.
7. See the biographical notes on “Kuba” in Rosh White, *From Darkness*, 44–45.
8. On this subject, see also chapter 2 of this volume.
9. One of the earliest publications was Bernard Weinryb, “Polish Jews under Soviet Rule,” in *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, ed. Peter Meyer et al. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1953), 329–69. Weinryb presents an extremely detailed historical chronology and politically well-informed outline of events. Another early contribution was by historian Meir Korzen, “Problems Arising out of Research into the History of Jewish Refugees in the USSR during the Second World War,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 3 (1959): 119–40. It is telling, given when it was written, that Korzen begins by noting that the Nazi destruction of Jewish communities throughout Europe “has almost completely diverted the attention of contemporary Jewish historiography from another dramatic and interesting episode in the history of the Jewish refugees in the Soviet Union” (119).

Interest from historians, political scientists, and sociologists cooled over the next twenty years, but a revival occurred in the late 1970s and has continued up to the present. Some examples, in the decade following the late 1970s, include two articles that focus on the period 1939–41 in Soviet-occupied eastern Poland: Ben-Cion Pinchuk, “Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland, 1939–1941,” *Jewish Social Studies* 40, no. 2 (1978): 141–58; and Pinchuk, “The Sovietization of the Jewish Community of Eastern Poland, 1939–1941,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 56, no. 3 (1978): 387–410. Pinchuk’s first article is more general, while the second looks at the attempts by the Soviet authorities in eastern Poland to politically “reeducate” the Jewish refugees. The underlying political tensions between, and very different interests of, the Soviets and the Polish government-in-exile in relation to the situation of Polish Jewish refugees in eastern Poland are explored in David Engel, “An Early Account of Polish Jewry under Nazi and Soviet Occupation Presented to the Polish Government-in-Exile, February 1940,” *Jewish Social Studies* 45, no. 1 (1983): 1–16. The situation faced by Jews in the territories occupied and annexed by the Soviets during their two-year alliance with Nazi Germany is extensively

examined in the volume of essays edited by Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry under Soviet Rule, 1939–1941* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995); first published in Hebrew as *Tekufa Be'Sograim* in 1989.

Academic interest was spurred considerably by the fall of the Soviet Union and the other Eastern European Communist regimes in the early 1990s, which opened up a considerable volume of new data and archival material to researchers. More recent contributions include Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland: A Portrait Based on Jewish Community Records, 1944–1947* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994). Dobroszycki's book is primarily a presentation of detailed data on Jewish survivors, in particular children, but also includes a lengthy introductory overview essay. Another detailed exposition of both the broader context and chronology of events surrounding the Polish Jewish refugees' survival inside the USSR can be found in Yosef Litvak, "Jewish Refugees from Poland in the USSR, 1939–1946," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 123–50. The quite extensive article by Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, "Paradise Lost?," also seeks to identify and discuss reasons why, given the obviously expanding interest in Holocaust stories in both academic and broader public circles, this one has remained so "under-explored." A useful political analysis of the labyrinthine cross-cutting motives and interests of the major international players in the ultimate decision by the Soviets to allow the Polish Jews to leave the USSR after the end of the war is provided in Albert Kaganovitch, "Stalin's Great Power Politics, the Return of Jewish Refugees to Poland, and Continued Migration to Palestine, 1944–1946," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 59–94.

- io. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). An English-language collection, this volume includes papers presented at an academic conference held in Jerusalem in 1988, supplemented by contributions commissioned later by the editors. It also includes 150 pages of relevant primary documents.
- ii. One of the earliest of these memoirs was Moshe Grossman, *In the Enchanted Land: My Seven Years in Soviet Russia* (Tel Aviv: Rachel, 1960). Grossman, a well-known Yiddish writer of novels and short stories from Warsaw, was already in his mid-thirties when war broke

out and he fled into eastern Poland. His memoir of the years he spent under Soviet rule, titled with obvious irony, was originally published in Yiddish in 1949. Grossman later settled in Israel, and a Hebrew-language version of his book was published there in 1951. Another early work is by Melbourne Yiddish writer Moshe Ajzenbud, *The Commissar Took Care* (Brunswick, Victoria: Globe Press, 1986). Ajzenbud's account, first published in Yiddish in 1956, presents a fictional story of a protagonist named "Michael" and is a thinly veiled personal memoir of his years in the Soviet Union.

12. Of the fourteen autobiographical works I consulted for this chapter, the authors of nine are Polish Jews who settled in Australia after the war. With the exception of the early Yiddish-language book by Ajzenbud, *Commissar*, the other eight autobiographical memoirs have all appeared since the early 1990s: Leo Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others: The Story of a Worker in the Soviet Union* (Melbourne: Hudson, 1994); Fela Rosenbloom and Felix Rosenbloom, *Miracles Do Happen* (Melbourne: Scribe, 1994); Anna Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime: Memories of World War II* (Melbourne: privately printed, 1995); Zyga Elton (Elbaum), *Destination Buchara* (Ripponlea, Victoria: Dizal Nominees, 1996); Arthur Spindler, *Outwitting Hitler, Surviving Stalin* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1997); David Kay, *Tough Kid: Surviving Siberia in Style* (Caulfield South, Victoria: Makor Jewish Community Library, 2005); Fela Steinbock, *My Life: Surviving in Russia* (Caulfield South, Victoria: Makor Jewish Community Library, 2007); and Chaim Benjamin Künstlich, *L'Chaim: Surviving Soviet Labour Camps to Rebuild a Life in Postwar Poland* (Caulfield South, Victoria: Makor Jewish Community Library, 2009).

Of the five non-Australian publications, two of the authors immigrated to the United States: Ruth Turkow Kaminska, *Mink Coats and Barbed Wire* (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1979); and Larry Wenig, *From Nazi Inferno to Soviet Hell* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 2000). Two others settled in Israel in the late 1940s: Grossman, *In the Enchanted Land*; and Zev Katz, *From the Gestapo to the Gulags: One Jewish Life* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2004). One memoir writer settled in Canada after the war: Toby Kłodawska Flam, *Toby: Her Journey from Lodz to Samarkand (and Beyond)* (Toronto: Childe Thursday, 1989).

13. Poland's new borders and integrity as an independent nation-state were only reestablished at the end of the First World War. For more than a century before, all the territory of Poland had been divided,

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- with various sections subsumed under the authority of imperial Russia in the east, the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the south, and the Prussian, later German, state in the west.
14. Litvak, “Jewish Refugees from Poland,” 122–24.
 15. See table 1 in chapter 2 of this volume.
 16. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 104.
 17. While Elton was in Warsaw, Rosenbloom was in Lodz, to the west, and he reports an almost identical experience there, only some days earlier: on Tuesday, 5 September 1939, the radio announced a “strategic retreat” of military units from Lodz and “urged all able-bodied males, between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, to leave the city during the night and to head towards Warsaw, to help defend the capital of Poland.” Rosenbloom also heeded the call, but observing the general atmosphere of disorganization and panic with “tens of thousands” on the roads, he soon returned home. Rosenbloom and Rosenbloom, *Miracles Do Happen*, 61–62.
 18. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 104–17.
 19. Weinryb, “Polish Jews under Soviet Rule,” 330.
 20. Rosenbloom and Rosenbloom, *Miracles Do Happen*, 67–72.
 21. Kłodawska Flam, *Toby*, 39.
 22. Ibid., 40.
 23. Ibid., 42. Perhaps the ease with which Kłodawska Flam was able to cross the border had something to do with when this took place. Pinchuk notes in “Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland” that while the new borders between the USSR and Germany were drawn on 28 September 1939, “during the month of October, the Soviet authorities did not object to the German practice of forcing entire Jewish communities to cross into Soviet Poland” (143) and that “the Soviets were still ready to accept thousands of Jewish refugees, either those who had been expelled or were fleeing on their own” (144).
 24. Steinbock, *My Life*, 73–74.
 25. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 12–18.
 26. Rosenbloom and Rosenbloom, *Miracles Do Happen*, 71.
 27. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, xiv–xvi.
 28. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 19–27.
 29. Spindler, *Outwitting Hitler*, 23–30.
 30. Rosh White, *From Darkness*. See, in particular, the biographical information provided by her interviewees: “Frания” (18); “Wladek” (32); “Kuba” (44); and “Henryk” (50).

31. Pinchuk, "Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland," 145.
32. Ajzenbud, *Commissar*, 5.
33. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 27.
34. Weinryb, "Polish Jews under Soviet Rule," 333.
35. This presence was notwithstanding the fact that the Polish Communist Party had been virtually destroyed in the late 1930s, ostensibly because Stalin suspected that it was controlled by "Trotskyists."
36. This situation is discussed in considerable detail in Elazar Barkan, Elizabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve, introduction to *Shared History—Divided Memory: Jews and Others in Soviet-Occupied Poland, 1939–1941*, ed. Elazar Barkan, Elizabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve, Leipziger Beiträge zur Jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur, no. 5 (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007), 13–42.
37. Kay, *Tough Kid*, 3.
38. Ibid., 19–20.
39. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, 32.
40. Pinchuk, "Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland," 146.
41. Ibid., 149–50. Pinchuk notes that, in particular, "teachers, engineers, technicians, accountants and physicians were in great demand."
42. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, 45.
43. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 21–29.
44. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 162–63.
45. Kłodawska Flam, *Toby*, 43–46.
46. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 40. But as discussed in two subsequent contributions of this volume—Natalie Belsky's chapter 4, "Fraught Friendships," and chapter 6, by John Goldlust, "Identity Profusions"—the encounters between Soviet and Polish Jews were both more complicated and nuanced. However, Belsky does offer some support for Cooper's observation in noting that "Polish Jews expressed confusion about Soviet Jews' reticence to open up to them. As one refugee commented: 'It was impossible to learn anything from the Russian Jews. They appeared always frightened and refused to answer questions'" (chapter 4).
47. Ajzenbud, *Commissar*, 39.
48. Wenig, *Nazi Inferno*, 96. Both Ajzenbud's and Wenig's accounts are consistent with the broader observation reported in the academic overviews by Litvak, "Jewish Refugees from Poland," 127–28, and Pinchuk "Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland," 150. Pinchuk notes that of the Jewish refugees who registered for work in the USSR "quite a few among them came back": "What might have been considered

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- by the Soviet authorities to be a generous offer of conditions equal to their own citizens was believed by the refugees to be hard labor that they were not accustomed to performing.”
49. Turkow Kaminska, *Mink Coats and Barbed Wire*.
 50. Ibid., 9–39.
 51. Korzen, “Problems Arising,” 123.
 52. Litvak, “Jewish Refugees from Poland,” 128. The Soviets seriously suspected that some of the Jewish refugees who had fled into their territories could have been planted to undertake espionage on behalf of Nazi Germany or other Western countries (126).
 53. Kłodawska Flam, *Toby*, 40.
 54. Künstlich, *L’Chaim*, 60.
 55. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 30.
 56. Pinchuk, “Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland,” 152.
 57. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 31. Pinchuk also mentions this same incident in “Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland” (153) and reports that it is an “authentic story.”
 58. Pinchuk “Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland,” 150–51. Litvak writes in “Jewish Refugees from Poland” (129) that, in fact, “more than half the refugees from the German-occupied zone were registered to return to their homes on the German side” and that “most of those registered to return were lone individuals, hoping that in this way they might be united with their family members.”
 59. Pinchuk, “Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland,” 153.
 60. Litvak, “Jewish Refugees from Poland,” 129–30. Alongside refugees, some permanent residents of eastern Poland were also targeted. These included “leading members of Zionist organizations as well as other political parties, especially the [Jewish] ‘Bund,’ former representatives in the Polish Sejm and senate and local authorities, some wealthy people and rabbis, as well as people who were suspected informants and collaborators with the Polish police against the Communists.”
 61. Steinbock, *My Life*, 84–85.
 62. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 38–41.
 63. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, 45.
 64. Ibid., 47–48.
 65. Weinryb, “Polish Jews under Soviet Rule,” 349.
 66. Stephen A. Barnes, “All for the Front, All for Victory! The Mobilization of Forced Labor in the Soviet Union during World War Two,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 58 (2000): 241.
 67. Litvak, “Jewish Refugees from Poland,” 131.

68. Wenig, *Nazi Inferno*, 113–31.
69. Ibid., 105.
70. While most of the refugees in Eastern Poland had been deported by the end of June 1940, further deportations continued, but on a smaller scale, up until the outbreak of the German–Soviet war almost a year later. See Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky, introduction to Davies and Polonsky, *Jews in Eastern Poland*, 28–29.
71. The higher figure is from Edward D. Wynot Jr., “World of Delusions and Disillusions: The National Minorities of Poland during World War II,” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 7, no. 2 (1979): 188. Wynot also estimates that 80 percent of all Polish Jewish refugees were taken in these deportations, which seems far too high. Similar figures, drawn from documents compiled by the wartime Polish government-in-exile based in London, are cited in Maciej Siekierski, “The Jews in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland at the End of 1939: Numbers and Distribution,” in Davies and Polonsky, *Jews in Eastern Poland*, 113.

For the lower figure, see table 2 in chapter 2 of this volume.

Interestingly, while anecdotally deportation into the Soviet interior as a refugee is widely perceived as the “normative” pathway, that is, the one followed by most Polish Jews inside the Soviet Union during the war, only five of the fourteen memoir writers I read for this chapter had been taken in the deportations of 1940.

72. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 43.
73. Quoted in Rosh White, *From Darkness*, 44–45. About bedbugs, Wenig, in *Nazi Inferno* (134), similarly observes that “the war on the bug problem was continuous, with never a victory.”
74. This point is strongly argued by Eva Marks, originally from Austria, who was a young girl when the Nazis took control in 1938 and who then moved with her family to Riga, Latvia. In 1940, the Soviets briefly took control of Latvia, and at the time of the German attack in June 1941, she and her family were transported to Soviet labor camps, first in Siberia and later in Kazakhstan, where they spent the next seven years. In her autobiographical memoir, she argues that this situation can be psychologically more damaging than the one facing “normal” Soviet prisoners, who know precisely the length of their sentence: “The fact that we had no . . . definite sentence imposed on us, played continuously on our minds and caused incredible stress. In some ways, it was worse than physical deprivation.” Eva Marks, *A*

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- Patchwork Life* (Caulfield South, Victoria: Makor Jewish Community Library, 2003), 60.
75. Words to this effect are recalled both by Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime* (43), and by Katz, *From the Gestapo* (48).
76. See Albert Kaganovitch, “Jewish Refugees and Soviet Authorities during World War II,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 38, no. 2 (2010): 100. As Steinbock recalls in *My life* (87–88): “In Siberia there was a saying . . . ‘If you won’t get used to it, you’ll die’ and some who couldn’t cope did.”
77. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 48.
78. Künstlich, *L’Chaim*, 63.
79. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 59.
80. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, 66–67.
81. Ibid., 55–64.
82. Wenig, *Nazi Inferno*, 175.
83. Künstlich, *L’Chaim*, 64.
84. Wenig, *Nazi Inferno*, 175.
85. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, 71–76. Clearly, some of the Polish refugees were quick to pick up on this mode for expressing a “legitimate” grievance. As Sheila Fitzpatrick points out, in the Soviet Union it was not uncommon for “ordinary” people to write directly to someone in high authority requesting their assistance or intervention on a particular matter. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s,” *Slavic Review* 55, no. 1 (1996): 78–105.
86. Edele and Warlik estimate that at the time of the German attack on the Soviet Union the total number of Polish Jews already either voluntarily or forcefully removed from the Soviet-occupied areas of eastern Poland, and now located inside the Soviet “hinterland,” falls between 140,000 and 170,000. See table 2 in chapter 2 of this volume.
87. According to Weinryb in *Polish Jews under Soviet Rule* (353), to the groups already mentioned must also be added between 120,000 and 180,000 “local” Jews (meaning permanent residents of Soviet-occupied eastern Poland) who fled eastward into the USSR ahead of the advancing German army. Absence of reliable data leads Edele and Warlik (in the source note to table 3 in chapter 2 of this volume) to cautiously estimate 210,000 as an upper limit for the number of Polish Jews who evacuated in the summer of 1941.
88. Davies and Polonsky, introduction to *Jews in Eastern Poland*, 33.

89. Weinryb, "Polish Jews under Soviet Rule," 355.
90. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, 78–79.
91. Ibid., 81–83.
92. Wenig, *Nazi Inferno*, 187.
93. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 70.
94. Ibid., 71–83.
95. Steinbock, *My Life*, 91–94; Künstlich, *L'Chaim*, 70–71.
96. Ajzenbud, *Commissar*, 43–56.
97. Grossman, *In the Enchanted Land*, 125.
98. Ibid., 173.
99. Ibid., 126–27.
100. Ibid., 127–28.
101. Yisrael Gutman, "Jews in General Anders' Army in the Soviet Union," *Yad Vashem Studies* 12 (1977): 236.
102. For a comprehensive and detailed account, with extensive discussion of the internecine political maneuverings behind the severely restricted Jewish participation in General Anders's Polish army, see *ibid.* For a briefer overview, see Ryszard Terlecki, "The Jewish Issue in the Polish Army in the USSR and the Near East, 1941–1944," in Davies and Polonsky, *Jews in Eastern Poland*, 161–71.
103. More personal accounts expressing similar views may be found in a number of video testimonies from Polish Jews who were rejected when they tried to enlist. See chapter 6, by Goldlust, in this volume.
104. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 183.
105. Wenig, *Nazi Inferno*, 215, 258.
106. Grossman, *In the Enchanted Land*, 210.
107. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 84–88.
108. See Gutman, "Jews in General Anders' Army," 284–85; and also table 4 in chapter 2 of this volume.
109. Terlecki, "Jewish Issue," 166–68. One of the deserters, when the Anders army was stationed in Palestine, was future Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin. Some Jews chose not to desert and remained in Polish units that later fought with the Allies in Italy. After the war, as a reward for their service to the British cause, veterans of General Anders's Polish corps were granted permission to settle in the United Kingdom rather than be repatriated to the now Communist-oriented "new" Poland. Kuba (an interviewee in Naomi Rosh White's study) spent five postwar years in the United Kingdom, later migrating to Australia. Rosh White, *From Darkness*, 45–46.

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110. See Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 50.
111. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 188–89.
112. Ajzenbud, *Commissar*, 77.
113. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 89–101.
114. Grossman, *In the Enchanted Land*, 139–42.
115. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 85.
116. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 211. Also, according to David Kay, *Tough Kid* (35), because they were extremely “nationalistic” Russians avoided plundering any goods directed toward the military.
117. Kay, *Tough Kid*, 28–31.
118. For example, Ajzenbud introduces a lengthy, literary description of the town of “Zirbulack” in Uzbekistan, with his protagonist “Michael” observing:

He felt as though he had stepped back in time. . . . The streets were narrow and dusty between small scattered mud-houses. The air was filled with unfamiliar sounds of camels and mules, used for transporting all kinds of goods. The small, state-owned shops that surrounded the market-place were uninteresting and sold poor-quality rugs and household goods, but there were also shabby, privately-owned stalls that sold *catic*—a kind of yoghurt, tiny balls of butter and an abundance of delicious, exotic fruits which Michael had never seen before. There were honeydews and watermelon, cantaloupes, juicy grapes as long as your finger, figs, dates, pomegranates and many others. On the ground were bags of rice, nuts, and all kinds of vegetables which, having ripened in the hot sun of the region, tasted exceptionally sweet. In round, mud-ovens women baked *lepioshkas*, the Uzbek bread, and sold it on the spot. In another part of the market *shashlik* was cooked and Michael was surprised to see Uzbeks sitting on the ground around a big dish of plow—the traditional meal of rice, mutton and vegetables cooked in oil—and eating with their fingers.

And further: “In time he grew accustomed to the people and their ways, even to the women who walked through the streets with their faces hidden by *parangas*, black muslin veils. Young women wore long, colourful dresses and delicately embroidered *tubiteykas* on their thick

- black hair that was braided into one single, heavy plait or into many tiny ones." Ajzenbud, *Commissar*, 56–57.
119. Kłodawska Flam, *Toby*, 63.
 120. Ajzenbud, *Commissar*, 57.
 121. Künstlich, *L'Chaim*, 71.
 122. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 88–89.
 123. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 193.
 124. Ibid., 194.
 125. Wenig, *Nazi Inferno*, 246.
 126. Grossman, *In the Enchanted Land*, 187.
 127. Ibid., 202–3.
 128. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 90–91.
 129. Kay, *Tough Kid*, 35.
 130. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, 81–114.
 131. Historian Meir Korzen notes in "Problems Arising" (129) that many of the ethnic Poles now in the USSR were "former colonists, police constables, officials and well-to-do estate-holders" who had been forced off their property when the Soviet army took over eastern Poland in 1939. And, he suggests: "They had always been chauvinistic, and now their national pride had been hurt by the sudden and unexpected downfall of Poland, and embittered by personal misfortune they readily pointed to the Jewish scapegoat, claiming indignantly that 'the Jews had welcomed the Red Army' etc. Not even the bitter common fate that they shared with the Jewish refugees who, like them, had been made homeless and taken to remote forced labour camps and work villages, could abate their Jew-hatred."
 132. Rosenbloom and Rosenbloom, *Miracles Do Happen*, 95.
 133. Künstlich, *L'Chaim*, 10.
 134. Ibid., 70–71.
 135. For a detailed discussion of this new Polish army, see Klemens Nussbaum, "Jews in the Kościuszko Division and First Polish Army," in Davies and Polonsky, *Jews in Eastern Poland*, 183–213.
 136. Ibid., 194–208. Kaganovitch, in "Stalin's Great Power Politics" (62), contends that Stalin encouraged the enlistment of Polish Jews into the Soviet-controlled Polish army "in part to boost the Soviet position in the imminent diplomatic struggle for Eastern Poland." But Edele and Warlik, in chapter 2 (table 6) of this volume, note also that other sources point to a considerably lower Jewish participation in the Berling army.

A DIFFERENT SILENCE

137. Kłodawska Flam, *Toby*, 68.
138. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, 106.
139. Litvak, “Jewish Refugees from Poland,” 148.
140. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 238. This Polish committee, sanctioned by Stalin in July 1944, subsequently became the new government of Poland. See Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics,” 66.
141. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 238.
142. Ibid., 245.
143. Wenig, *Nazi Inferno*, 264–65.
144. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 108–20.
145. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 230.
146. Grossman, *In the Enchanted Land*, 320.
147. Ibid., 380–83.
148. See Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics,” 75–83. For the broader context of the vicissitudes in popular attitudes and party policies toward both Soviet Jews and refugee Jewish populations through the wartime and postwar years, see chapter 3, by Sheila Fitzpatrick, in this volume.
149. Dobroszycki, “Survivors of the Holocaust,” 27.
150. Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics,” 59.
151. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 122.
152. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 141–43.
153. Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics,” 67.
154. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 258. He also notes that there were “some Polish citizens who refused repatriation and preferred to stay behind” in the USSR, for either family or ideological reasons. Some who remained subsequently took advantage of a further opportunity provided by the Soviets to return to Poland in the late 1950s.
155. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, 114.
156. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 146.
157. Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics,” 72.
158. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 123.
159. Kłodawska Flam, *Toby*, 77.
160. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 149–150.
161. Spindler, *Outwitting Hitler*, 23–53.
162. Ibid., 73–75.
163. Ibid., 111–34.
164. Turkow Kaminska, *Mink Coats and Barbed Wire*, 39ff. The marriage did not survive the prison terms, and after Turkow Kaminska returned

to Poland, Rosner, who was released in 1954, remained in the Soviet Union as a musician, bandleader, and occasional film actor, finally returning to his native Germany in 1973. Turkow Kaminska and her mother, Ida Kaminska, eventually emigrated from Poland and settled in the United States.

- 165. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 259.
- 166. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 148.
- 167. Kłodawska Flam, *Toby*, 80.
- 168. Steinbock, *My Life*, 104.
- 169. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 127–28.
- 170. Wenig, *Nazi Inferno*, 304.
- 171. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 262–63.
- 172. Jockusch and Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost?,” 374. This figure is supported by Kaganovitch, who calculated that “during the first two stages of the repatriation in 1944–6 slightly more than 202,000 Jewish former citizens of Poland officially left the USSR, including those who cleared border control with false documents, children from orphanages (who had been registered separately), and Polish Jews who had served in the Red Army. Thousands remained in the USSR, even after several later repatriations.” Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics,” 75.
- 173. See table 6 in chapter 2 of this volume.
- 174. Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust*, 19.
- 175. Jockusch and Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost?,” 374.
- 176. Ibid., 376.
- 177. Kay, *Tough Kid*, 41.
- 178. Steinbock, *My Life*, 104; Künstlich, *L’Chaim*, 92; Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 131.
- 179. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, 116–17.
- 180. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 261.
- 181. Joanna Michlic, “The Holocaust and Its Aftermath as Perceived in Poland: Voices of Polish Intellectuals, 1945–1947,” in *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin after WWII*, ed. David Bankier (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), 211.
- 182. Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust*, 25, 10.
- 183. Ibid., 26–27. Around 90,000 Jews remained in Poland in 1947, but most of these also eventually departed during three subsequent emigration waves: one in 1949–51, the next in the mid-1950s, and the last in 1968–69.

184. On the organization and work of the Bricha, see Zeev Tzahor, “Holocaust Survivors as a Political Factor,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 4 (1988): 432–44.
185. On this theme, see also chapter 7, by Eliyana R. Adler, in this volume.
186. Quoted in Jockusch and Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost?,” 380. The authors note that Jews repatriated from the USSR made up two-thirds of the entire Jewish DP population and 85 percent of the Polish Jews among the DPs.
187. Grossmann, “Deported to Life,” 2.
188. As Naomi Rosh White observed in relation to the survivors she interviewed in her 1980s Melbourne study: “The deepest feelings of grief and anger are triggered by the interviewees’ recollections of abruptly severed family contacts, of partings which turned out to be final. The most painful recollections for the interviewees who had been separated from their families were not those dealing with the deprivations that they had experienced themselves, but those that had been experienced by their families.” Rosh White, *From Darkness*, 217.
189. Jockusch and Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost?,” 377.
190. Wenig, *Nazi Inferno*, 319.
191. Wajnryb, *Silence*, 134.
192. Quoted in Jockusch and Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost?,” 381.
193. Elton, *Destination Buchara*, 230.
194. Jockusch and Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost?,” 392.
195. Ibid., 377–86. The origins and early development of this “hierarchy,” which the authors suggest was already in place in the European DP camps, are explored in the article in considerable detail.
196. Bruell, *Autumn in Springtime*, 90.
197. Rosenbloom and Rosenbloom, *Miracles Do Happen*, viii. For more examples of similar views drawn from testimonies lodged in the USC Shoah Foundation video archives, see chapters 6 and 7 of this volume
198. Jockusch and Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost?,” 384.
199. However, despite this incorporation, it is significant that were those Polish Jews who had been in the Soviet Union to be attributed, or to feel themselves “deserving” of, “full” survivor status, statistically they should constitute the majority of testimonies. Yet, of the total collected in Australia, and now lodged in each of these two video

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archives, those who spent the wartime years in the Soviet Union still represent only around 15 percent of the Poland-born Jews who have volunteered “survivor” testimonies.

200. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, xii.

201. Korzen, “Problems Arising,” 119.

2

Saved by Stalin?

Trajectories and Numbers of Polish Jews in the Soviet Second World War

MARK EDELE AND WANDA WARLIK

“TO THE SOVIET PARADISE”

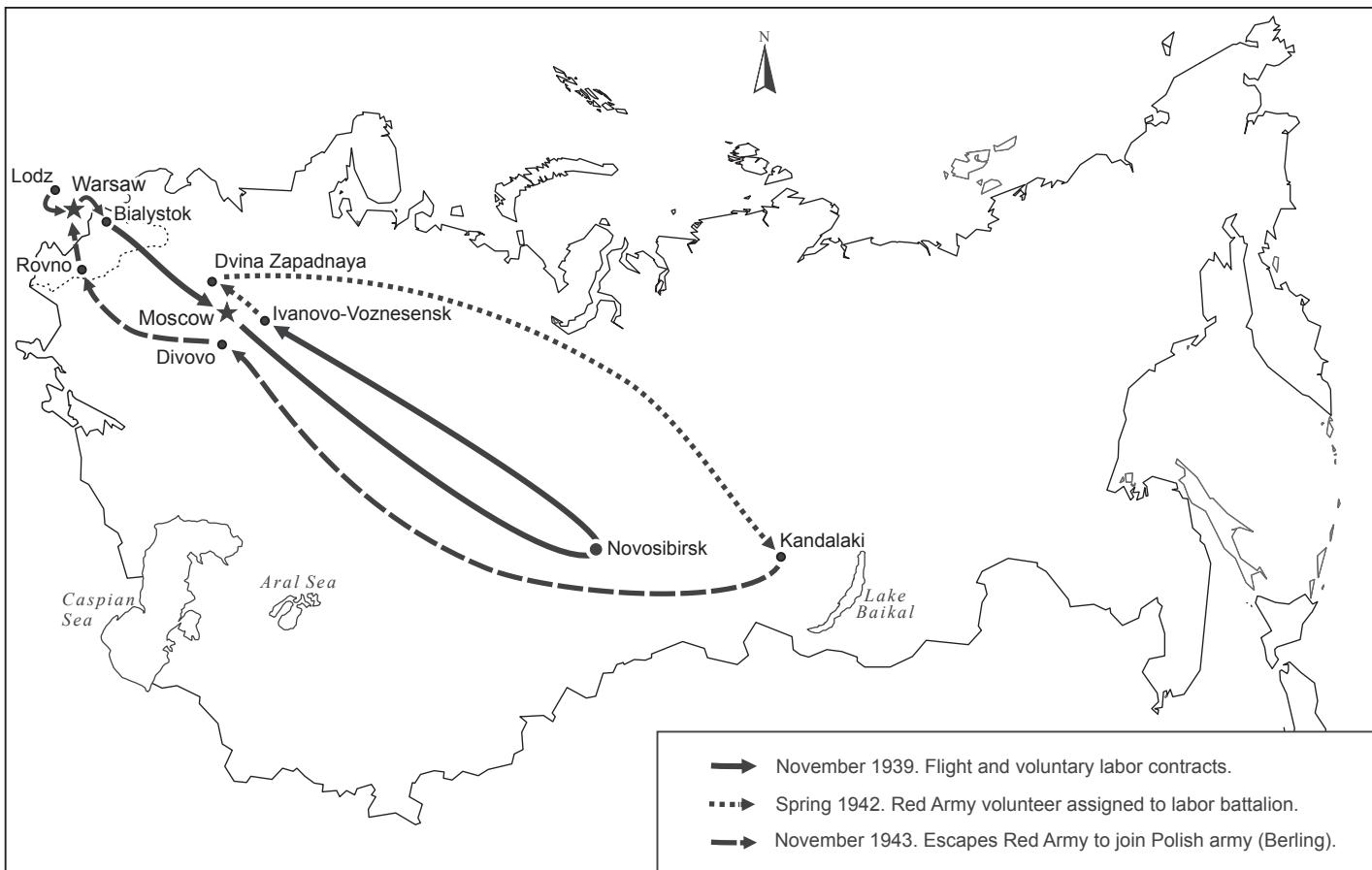
Adam Broner, resident of Lodz, was fourteen years old when the Germans attacked Poland on 1 September 1939.¹ Two and a half weeks later, on 17 September, the Red Army invaded Poland from the east, and Polish territory was subsequently divided between the two aggressors in accordance with a secret protocol of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 23 August 1939. Following elections held in October 1939, eastern Poland was incorporated into the Soviet Union as Western Ukraine and Western Belarus. This division of his country gave Broner a choice of occupier. As his hometown had fallen to the Germans, he decided,

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together with his older brother, to flee to the Soviets (see map 5). In November, like many others, they traveled by train to Warsaw, dodging SS beatings when changing trains on the way. From Warsaw, they crossed the Vistula River by horse and cart to board another train on the eastern side. At the last stop before the border, they were ordered off the train. Jews were separated from other Poles, and the Germans showed the former which road to take to the border. They also fleeced the refugees of their belongings at checkpoints along the way, and some particularly brutal representatives of the *Herrenvolk* picked out victims for their amusement, beating them bloody. Again the Broner brothers were lucky. They avoided physical assault: “The last German soldier I met at the 1939 Soviet-German border before entering the so-called neutral zone was very polite and even kind. He didn’t ask for our knapsacks; he didn’t beat us. He only asked the ironic question ‘So you are going to the Soviet paradise?’ and offered me a cigarette.”²

The Broner brothers were only two of between 150,000 and 300,000 Polish citizens of Jewish faith or heritage who fled German-occupied territory between September 1939 and June 1941 (table 1).³ While they could not have known the extent of the apocalypse about to descend on Polish Jews, they were aware that calamity awaited and hoped that the Soviet Union would offer a more livable alternative.⁴ As it turned out, they were right. While many would perish in the Soviet Union during the war, their survival chances were much higher than had they stayed. Including several other contingents of Polish Jews, at least 157,000 and no more than 375,000 were inadvertently saved from the Holocaust by Stalin’s Soviet Union, which provided a harsh but mostly livable alternative to genocide.⁵

Once on Soviet territory—the border crossing was its own epic, as the Soviets did not at first want to let them across, stranding them in no-man’s-land—the Broners joined the approximately 1.3 million Polish Jews who had become Stalin’s subjects after their home region had been occupied by the Red Army (table 1).⁶ Another group of Polish Jews had originally tried to escape the Nazis without having to submit to the Soviets: not everybody was as optimistic about life in Soviet paradise as the Broner boys. The Zionist activist Zorach Warhaftig and his family left Warsaw on the night of Thursday, 7 September 1939 (see map 6). They traveled on foot, by horse-drawn cart, and—after beast and wheels had



Map 5. Trajectory of Adam Broner, 1939–1944

TABLE I: Polish Jews who became Soviet subjects as a result of the division of Poland

Category		Lower estimate (thousands)	Higher estimate (thousands)
A	Polish Jews taken over by Soviet annexation	1,300.0	
B	Polish Jews fleeing to Soviet territory after German occupation	150.0	300.0
C	Of B returning to German-held territory	1.6	
D	Hence: total number of Polish Jews who became Soviet subjects on formerly Polish territories incorporated into Soviet Union (D=A+B-C)	1,448.4	1,598.4

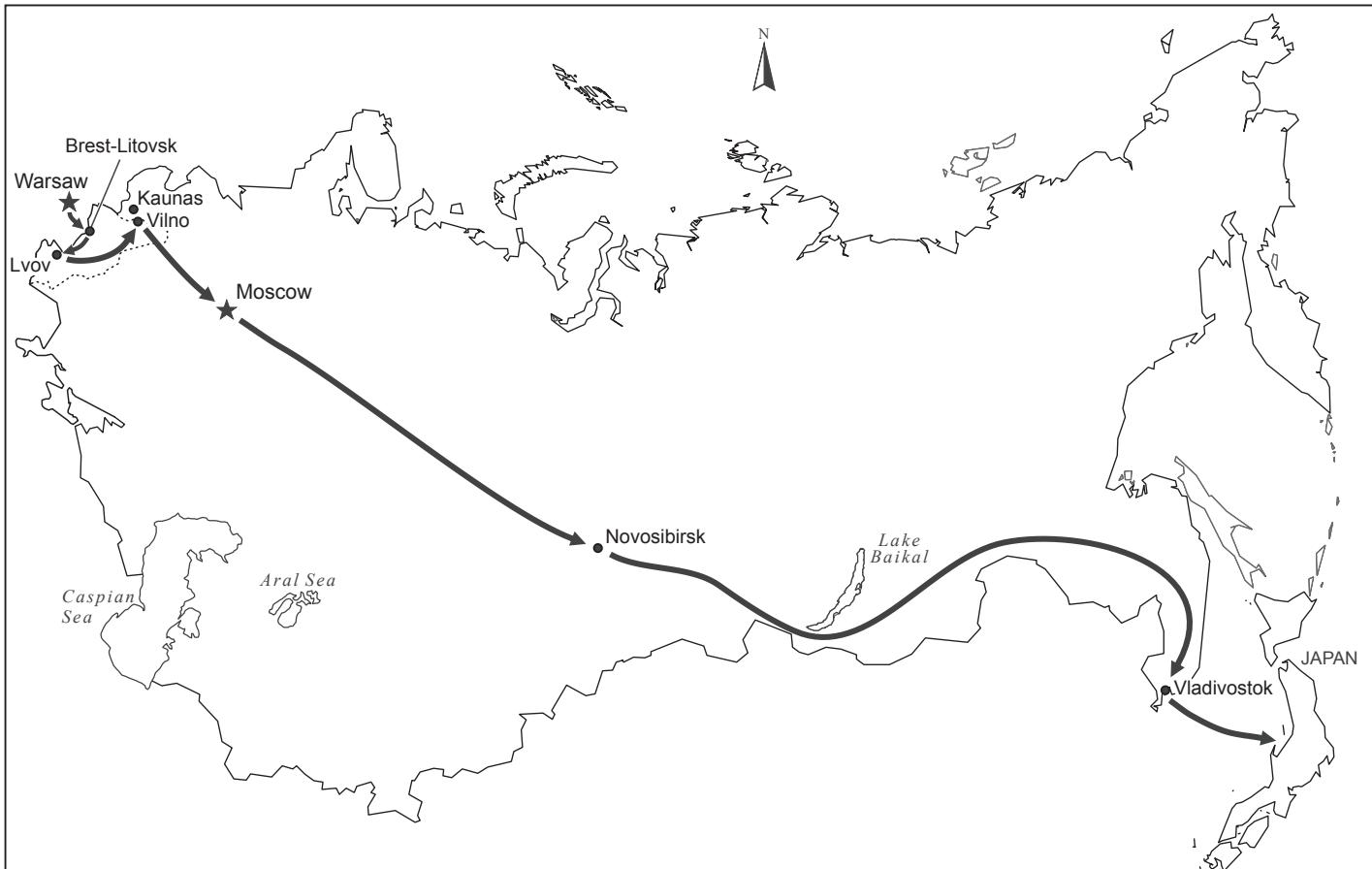
Sources: Row A: For the origins of the estimates of 1.3 million Polish Jews in Soviet-occupied eastern Poland, see Maciej Siekierski, "The Jews in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland at the End of 1939: Numbers and Distribution," in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (Hounds Mills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 110–15, 113. Row B: The lower number of 150,000–200,000 is based on the accounting of the Soviet authorities. See, for example, Gennadii V. Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2003), 187; or Nikolai L. Pobol' and Pavel M. Polian, eds., *Stalinskie deportatsii 1928–1953* (Moscow: Demokratia, 2005), 151n1. Natalia S. Lebedeva gives the more precise figure of 145,000 refugees: "The Deportation of the Polish Population to the USSR, 1939–41," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 16, nos. 1–2 (2000): 36. The higher number is "based on purely mechanical deduction from less than precise data" from the Polish exile government. It is accepted as "reasonable" by many authorities, including the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). See Siekierski, "Jews in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland," 110–15, esp. 113; Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry under Soviet Rule, 1939–1941* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 180; and USHMM, "Introduction to the Holocaust," in *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005470> (accessed 18 April 2015). Row C: Mieczysław Wieliczko, "Migracje przez 'linie demarkacyjne' w latach 1939–1940," in *Położenie ludności polskiej na terytorium ZSRR i wschodnich ziemiach II Rzeczypospolitej w czasie II wojny światowej*, ed. Adam Marszałek (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 1990), 137. This number is a lower limit: it refers to those who gained official permission to return. There was a lot of unsanctioned border crossing between the German and Soviet zones of occupation, and many individuals went back and forth repeatedly, as Eliyana R. Adler points out in her contribution to this volume (see chapter 7).

been commandeered by a Polish army unit—on foot again. At first their goal was Brest Litovsk, some 200 kilometers to the east, but they soon changed direction, traveling south instead, trying to reach the Romanian border some 700 kilometers away. They arrived at the outskirts of Lutsk after ten days, only to hear the news—“We could not believe our ears”—of the Red Army’s invasion from the east. They journeyed on to Lvov and there discovered that the Romanian border was sealed. Unstoppable, the Warhaftigs turned toward Vilna, some 750 kilometers to the north and about to be handed over by the Soviets to still independent Lithuania. This time they traveled for two days “on a packed train that meandered and stopped all over the place” before reaching their destination.⁷

Lithuania seemed like a peaceful island in a sea of dictatorship, and quite a few Polish Jews tried to reach this haven—about 15,000 succeeded, according to Warhaftig. Vilna alone registered 10,370 refugees in late 1939, in the vast majority (75 percent) men, while only 20 percent were women and slightly above 5 percent children. By February 1940, the number of Jewish refugees in the Vilna area had grown to 14,000.⁸

In what follows, we sketch the story of Adam Broner’s and Zorach Warhaftig’s wartime survival as part of a very complicated larger history: the trajectory of Polish Jews whose lives were saved by their removal from Hitler’s to Stalin’s sphere of influence. Our attempt at outlining their collective path builds on several important essays and utilizes a growing memoir literature, relatively recently published Soviet archival records, and newly available archival sources from Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and the United Kingdom.⁹ We combine individual life stories with estimating the relative size of the groups involved, a reconstruction summarized in a series of tables.¹⁰

Both parts of our methodology have their problems. As for the individual stories, we are dealing mostly with later reconstructions, subject to the well-known problems of memoir literature and oral history.¹¹ More importantly, our group of survivors is predominantly male and mostly of the generation old enough to fight in the war. This selection bias is partially a reflection of who has published memoirs to date, but it also reflects a historical reality: that those who survived in the Soviet Union were more often than not young men. The quantitative aspect of our chapter is similarly problematic. Not only is the group so complex and the trajectories in question so complicated that good quantification is



Map 6. Trajectory of Zorach Warhaftig, June 1939–October 1940

hard; the numbers are also subject to dispute and highly laden with political meaning for many observers. We deal with these problems in three ways. First, we privilege sources most likely to have recorded more or less correct numbers over those more subject to inflation: we take the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) statistics of deportees as more reliable than the estimates by the exile Polish government in far-away London; likewise, we trust the numbers of the Jewish-Polish repatriation commission, whose representatives counted people as they came off the repatriation trains after the war, more than the statistics of how many were registered in the localities, which were prone to double and triple counting, as the same person was registered first in one, then in a second, and finally a third locality.¹² Second, we provide both minimum and maximum numbers, in order to give a sense of the possible deviations between different estimates, which are often massive. Third, we subject these estimates to a diachronic analysis: in the end, even ballpark figures need to add up over time. It cannot be that more people repatriated after the war than had supposedly left at its outset, unless one of the two numbers is wrong.

The diachronic analysis of the numbers takes place in a series of six tables, each accompanied by explanatory notes and a discussion of sources. It is possible to read these tables as a separate text, if what interests is not so much the overall story we are trying to tell but the numbers that underwrite our narrative. For readers less interested in statistics, the tables can be skipped altogether, as our review of this history mentions in summary their conclusions.

The main text, meanwhile, proceeds chronologically. We begin with the fate of those Polish Jews who became Soviet subjects during the early phase of the war in Europe, when the Soviet Union made common cause with Hitler's Germany. This period, from September 1939 to June 1941, is covered in the second section below. The third section then covers the first half year of the German-Soviet war, from 22 June 1941 to the end of the year, when evacuation and flight were the order of the day for those Polish Jews who would manage to survive in the long run. The fourth section then covers the further paths these survivors took through the rest of the Soviet Second World War, while the fifth section deals with postwar repatriation to Poland and subsequent emigration elsewhere. Overall, we argue that the fate of these survivors of genocide, flight, deportation, and

war shows in a nutshell not only the far-reaching displacements that characterized the Soviet war experience but also the very moral and political ambiguity of the Soviet Second World War.¹³ On a more empirical level, we stress that both those who initially escaped east and those who returned after the war were, in their majority, men. Our diachronic analysis of the available statistics, finally, does not lead to undisputed facts, but demonstrates that a reasonable range can be established. While we will never have hard numbers, as other contributors to this volume rightly point out, some figures are more likely than others and some clearly wrong.

TRANSIT, ARREST, DEPORTATION, LABOR CONTRACTS, MOBILIZATION

Altogether, then, there were three groups of Polish Jews in the Soviet sphere of influence in the period between the Nazi attack on Poland and the subsequent assault on the Soviet Union: 1.3 million acquired with Polish territory in 1939, 150,000–300,000 refugees of 1939–41, plus an estimated 15,000 who had fled to Lithuania and who eventually became subject to Stalin's rule once the Soviets had taken over the Baltic states in 1940. Their number was reduced to about 9,000 through emigration by the time the Germans attacked on 22 June 1941. A significant minority would survive the Holocaust because they either fled or were removed from the territory later occupied by the Germans. There were six main paths of this escape to or through the Soviet Union: transit across Soviet territory to countries beyond the Soviet sphere of influence, arrest and incarceration in a prison or labor camp, exile or deportation to special settlements, voluntary travel to work in the hinterland, mobilization into the Red Army, and further flight or evacuation when the Germans attacked.

Transit was possible through and out of the Soviet Union only to those who were seen by the Soviet authorities as stateless refugees rather than as newly acquired citizens. Without too much consistency, the Soviets categorized those who had reached Lithuania as stateless, after the Soviets had annexed the country in the summer of 1940, while those in the territories taken over from Poland in September 1939 were not given that status. This categorization meant that both before and for the first half year after the Soviet annexation, Polish Jews in Lithuania could try to arrange

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TABLE 2: Polish Jews rescued from Holocaust by removal to Soviet Union, 1942

Category		Lower estimate (thousands)	Higher estimate (thousands)
A	Total removed by coercive means from Ukraine and Belarus	101.6	115.6
B	Volunteered to work in Soviet hinterland	40.0	53.0
C	Fled via Lithuania through Soviet Union to Japan, Turkey, or Iran	4.5	6.0
D	Evacuated from western borderlands	n.d.	210.0
E	Drafted into Red Army (including labor battalions) after German attack in 1941 and marched east	n.d.	n.d.
F	Hence saved from Holocaust by removal to Soviet Union (ca. early 1942) (F=A+B+C+D+E)	146.1	384.6

Sources: Rows A and B: See table 3. Row C: See the discussion of the available estimates in Mark Edele, "Second World War as a History of Displacement: The Soviet Case," *History Australia* 12, no. 2 (2015): 35n67; and Levin, *Lesser of Two Evils*, 207–8. Row D: Piotr Żaroń, *Ludność Polska w Związku Radzieckim w czasie II wojny światowej* (Warsaw: PAN, 1990), 131. Żaroń gives the number of Polish citizens who fled or were evacuated in the summer of 1941 as 250,000, among them 40,000 Polish children on holiday camp. Among the remainder, the Jewish share must have been fairly high, implying that we can take 210,000 as an upper limit for Polish Jews who evacuated in the summer of 1941.

Note: The lower estimate in row F is clearly too low: it does not account for any evacuations from the borderlands and removal by way of conscription into the Red Army. The higher estimate, meanwhile, is most likely much too high. First, there is double and triple counting: people could volunteer to work and then be evacuated once their new places of employment were overrun by the Wehrmacht. Second, not all who were arrested actually left the borderlands; only those who had already been sentenced to imprisonment were sent to the Gulag, and those who were evacuated successfully when the Germans arrived were actually saved. Those still in prisons in June 1941 were often either overrun by the Germans or shot instead of or while being evacuated. The table also does not account for increased mortality among all these groups. Third, not all Polish adult evacuees (higher estimate in row D) were Jewish.

leaving Eastern Europe. Some of the well-connected and well-off managed to emigrate to the United States, while Palestine was the default destination for the majority. They traveled by plane, boat, and train, circumnavigating the European continent to avoid setting foot on German-occupied territory. The journey to Palestine was made possible by Soviet exit documents and transit visas obtained from Scandinavia, the United

Kingdom, France, Turkey, and Syria. The largest share of those who succeeded in moving on before the Germans turned on their Soviet ally, however, were those who, equipped with Soviet exit documents and Japanese transit visas, traveled over 7,000 kilometers across the Soviet Union to Vladivostok to board ships to Japan. The Warhaftigs were among the 2,718 who arrived there by August 1941.¹⁴ Overall, about 4,500–6,000 escaped via the various routes from Lithuania (table 2). Thus the Soviet exit visas, which made the routes through Riga, Tallinn, Vladivostok, and Odessa possible, saved between 30 percent and 40 percent of the Jewish-Polish refugees who had reached Lithuania in the wake of the German attack on Poland.¹⁵

Others were rescued more or less by accident: while all of these escape routes were planned and sometimes put into practice, arrests and deportations began after the Soviet takeover of Lithuania. Zionists, Bundists, and other “politicals” were construed as “counterrevolutionaries.” “Invited” to have a friendly chat with the authorities, they found themselves in the clutches of Stalin’s police, as did Menachem Begin, the later prime minister of Israel.¹⁶ We do not have data for the Baltic states, but in Western Belarus and Western Ukraine, a total of 23,590 Jews were arrested in 1939 through 1941 (table 3).

While those arrested were eventually sentenced for more or less imaginary “counterrevolutionary crimes,” others were rounded up as a security measure and deported preventatively. They were seen as potential rather than actual enemies of Soviet power. Samuil Rozenberg was one of these victims of the arbitrary use of police powers.¹⁷ Born in 1923 in a small town near Pinsk in the Polesie region of eastern Poland, he was the son of an entrepreneur running a fish farm supplying the market of western Poland. With the arrival of the Red Army in 1939, his family lost the business to nationalization and Rozenberg’s father became a brigade leader in a newly formed fishing cooperative. The boy—who had just finished seventh grade—was drafted into a trade school attached to the railway system, becoming one of the victims of this particular Soviet form of youth indentured labor.¹⁸ Rather than learning a trade, he was forced into the heavy work of changing tracks from the European to the Soviet gauge. They worked seven days a week without pay. The food was tolerable, he told his interviewer many decades later, and they did get clothes (uniforms) and housing (barracks), but he still experienced this “school”

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TABLE 3: Polish Jews removed from western borderlands and number remaining (1941)

Year	Category	Lower estimate (thousands)	Higher estimate (thousands)
A	Total number of Polish Jews who became Soviet subjects on formerly Polish territories incorporated into Soviet Union (from table 1)	1,448.4	1,598.4
B 1939–41	Jews arrested in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus	23.6	
C 1940–41	Polish Jews deported to Soviet hinterland	68.0	71.0
D	Polish Jews conscripted into Red Army and removed east	10.0	21.0
E	Hence: total removed by coercive means from Western Ukraine and Western Belarus (E = B + C + D)	101.6	115.6
F	Polish Jews who volunteered to work in Soviet hinterland	40.0	53.0
G 1941	Hence: Polish Jews still in Western Ukraine/Belarus by time of German attack (F = A – E – F)	1,306.8	1,429.8

Sources: Row A: See table 1. Row B: O. A. Gorlanov and A. B. Roginskii, “Ob arrestakh v zapadnykh oblastiakh Belorussii i Ukrayiny v 1939–1941 gg.,” in *Istoricheskie sborniki “Memoriala”: Vypusk 1, Represii protiv poliakov i pol’skikh grazhdan* (Moscow: Zven’ia, 1997), 89. Row C: Data on the number of Jews are available only for the third deportation wave (65,000–68,000), see Stanisław Ciecielski, Grzegorz Hryciuk, and Aleksander Srebrakowski, *Masowe deportacje ludności w Związkach Radzieckim* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2003), 230–33; and for part of the second wave (data from Ukraine, April 1940: 1,311 Jews, making up 4 percent of the total), see “Tablitsa o vyselenykh kontingentov antisovetskogo elementa iz zapadnykh oblastei USSR, po natsional’nomu sostavu,” Main State Archive of the Security Services of Ukraine (GDA SBU), f. 16, op. 1, d. 395, l. 207. This latter number should be a subset of our estimate of 3,000 as family members of the 700–900 Jewish officers killed in the Katyn mass executions. See Frank Fox, “Jewish Victims of the Katyn Massacres,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 23, no. 1 (1993): 52. Row D: There are no data for the number of Jews in the conscription of former Polish citizens (between 100,000 and 210,000 in 1940–41, before the German attack). The numbers here assume that the share of Jews was about equal to their share in the population (10 percent). The source for the higher figure is the Documentation Bureau of the Second (Anders) Polish Army, which for political reasons was inclined to overestimate the suffering of the Polish population at the hands of the Soviets. See Hoover Institute, Anders Collection, box 68, no. 62C, Bohdan Podolski, *Polska wschodnia 1939–1942*, 29. The source for the lower figure is Roman Buczek, “Działalność opiekuńcza Ambasady R.P. w ZSRR w latach 1941–1943,”

(continued)

TABLE 3: (*continued*)

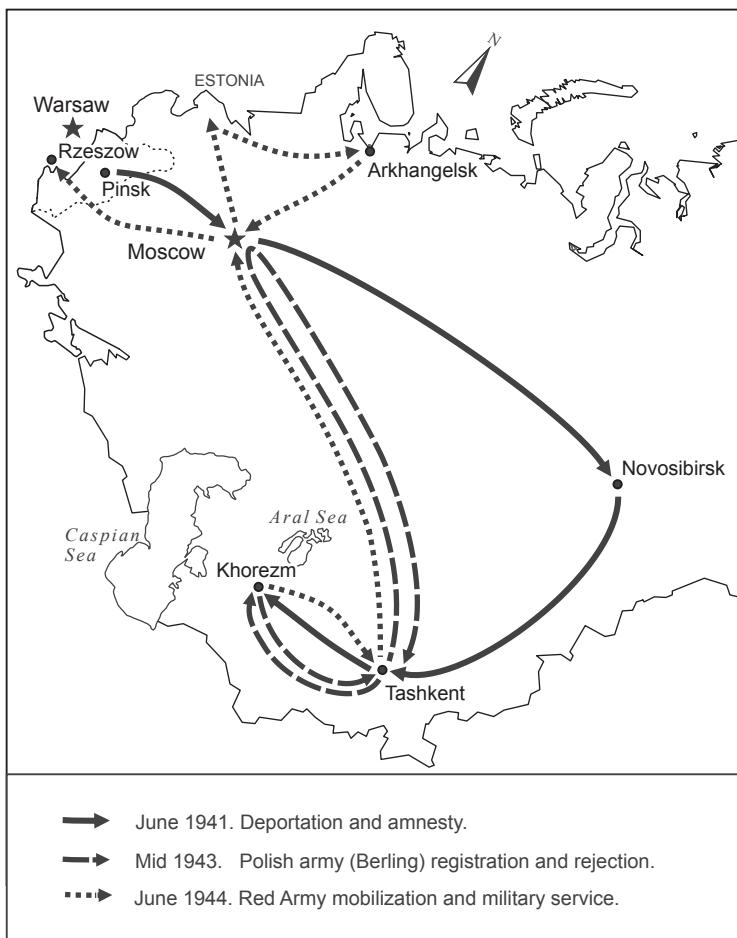
Zeszyty historyczne, no. 29 (1974): 88; it is based on relevant population statistics. Row F: The lower number is based on contemporary reporting in the local press; Levin, *Lesser of Two Evils*, 190. The higher number is based on Politburo figures for the mobilization of refugees to work in the hinterland. See Lebedeva, “Deportation of the Polish Population to the USSR 1939–41,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 16, nos. 1–2 (2000): 28–42, esp. 31–32.

Note: The numbers in row G can only provide a general orientation. They exclude children born since 1939 but also deaths since the Soviet invasion of Poland. They also exclude those from row F who had already returned after encountering poor living conditions in the Soviet hinterland, and they assume that all in row B had been either already sentenced and sent east or evacuated in 1941. Both are not reasonable assumptions.

as a form of forced labor and as a repressive measure by the new government. Nevertheless, this experience was only the beginning. In the night of 20 June 1941—two days before the Germans attacked—the entire family was deported to Siberia as part of the “alien and bourgeois element” (see map 7).

Deportations engulfed many more people than arrests, though statistics have undergone drastic and controversial revision in recent years.¹⁹ The mass deportations of February, April, and June 1940 and June 1941 forcibly removed a minimum of 355,000 Polish citizens, including Jews, from the annexed territory of eastern Poland, that is, Soviet Western Ukraine, Western Belarus, and part of Lithuania.²⁰ Each deportation targeted a particular group of Polish citizens regardless of ethnicity or religion: military and civilian colonists and foresters in the eastern borderlands, the families of arrestees and prisoners of war, refugees who had been rejected for repatriation by the Germans and refused to accept Soviet citizenship, and “alien elements” from the border areas of all territories incorporated into the Soviet Union.²¹

Jews were present in each of the four mass deportations, though their numbers are difficult to ascertain. We know that the second deportation to Kazakhstan included the families of at least 700 Jewish officers who had been prisoners at Starobelsk, Kozelsk, and Ostashkov and were victims of the so-called Katyn massacres (see table 2). Most striking, however, is the composition of the third deportation group, of whom 85 percent, that is, between 64,000 and 68,000, were Jewish refugees who had refused Soviet citizenship and/or registered to return to German-occupied Poland. Some were deceived into believing they were returning



Map 7. Trajectory of Samuil Rozenberg, 1941–1944

home, only to find themselves bundled into freight trains and transported east.²² Of the group, three-quarters were adults, more than half were male, and over 8,000 were highly qualified professionals and specialists, notably doctors. All were destined for a life of hard labor in remote forestry and mining “special settlements” scattered across northern European Russia and Siberia and controlled by the NKVD.²³ Paradoxically, refugees from western Poland increased their chances of surviving the Holocaust by making a decision to register to return to German-occupied territory. Fortunately for almost all Jewish refugees who applied, the Germans rejected their repatriation, and as a consequence the Soviets forcibly

moved them to remote areas of the USSR, where the further east they went, the more shielded they were from the “Final Solution.” The Jewish applicants who were successful numbered 1,600 and returned to their certain death under the Germans (table 1).

The Rozenberg family was caught up in the fourth deportation. NKVD trucks rolled up at night. Officials told the family to pack what they could carry and get on the vehicles. Under escort they were driven to the town square. Early in the morning, a crowd gathered around. “Many were happy that ‘they throw the bourgeois out.’ They yelled insults at us. This was when my grandfather got up and shouted at the crowd: ‘There will come a time when you will envy us.’ It was as if he could see the future.”²⁴ The Rozenbergs—twenty-three people in total—ended up in the same cattle car in the echelon that would carry them east. They were warned that any attempt to get out of the car would be seen as flight. The perpetrator would be shot without warning. Then the train started to roll out of the station. It was the morning of 22 June 1941. Military operations had already begun further west. Pinsk would be bombed heavily later that day and occupied by 4 July. In May of the following year, the Jewish population was forced into a sealed district, the Pinsk ghetto. Few survived its brutal liquidation in October 1942.²⁵ “This was a paradox,” mused Rozenberg. “It turned out that the exile to Siberia saved our lives. . . . Our echelon moved toward the east.”²⁶

Meanwhile, the Broner brothers had escaped deportation, because they had quickly thrown in their lot with the Soviets. Adam, the younger of the two, changed his age to sixteen in order to be eligible to work, and by the end of 1939 the two had signed up to work in Novosibirsk. They were among 40,000–53,000 refugees, many homeless and without any means of support, who, hoping to improve their lot, signed labor contracts (table 2). The travel from Bialystok took the volunteers twenty-one days in cattle cars, which, despite a stove in the middle, were covered with white frost on the inside. “The red-hot stove could not warm up the inside of the car, except in its closest proximity. There were no toilets in the cars, and no water.” But, in contrast to most deportation trains, there were no fatalities either, and they were fed along the way. Broner’s description of their reception in Novosibirsk—“lavish”—is also very positive. The authorities made a point in treating the “liberated Belorussians” particularly

well, giving them preferential access to scarce goods. Their work contracts expired in the spring of 1941, and because the brothers had by then accepted Soviet citizenship, they were able to follow rumors of better supplies in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, where they experienced the outbreak of the war with Germany.²⁷

The fate of young, unattached men responsible only for themselves and able to make quick decisions contrasts with the more negative experiences of couples with children. Sara Broder's family had also initially fled to Bialystok, and not unlike the Broner brothers, Broder's father decided to move the family east.²⁸ He had been promised a job in his trade of shoemaking, a good wage, and a place for his family to live. On arrival at the train station at Homel, workers were greeted with the standard fare of a band playing, welcoming speeches, and a meal. However, the family's accommodation was a small, unfurnished room, and there was no work of any kind for Broder's father. No work meant no food, and in desperation they moved to a *kolkhoz* (collective farm), where for a short time both parents and their four children worked long hours in the fields in exchange for meager food rations. As Broder recounted, "We worked hard, from dawn to dusk, and we were always hungry."²⁹ When they were told there was no more work on the *kolkhoz* and they were faced with the very real prospect of starvation, they risked incurring the wrath of the NKVD and returned to Bialystok.

Another trajectory that took Polish Jews eastward to relative safety was conscription. In the period before the German attack on the Soviet Union, conscription drives in autumn 1940 and spring 1941, enlisted between 10,000 and 21,000 Polish Jews (table 3), predominantly male (female nurses and doctors were also conscripted) and aged in their early twenties. Following rudimentary military training and obligatory political indoctrination, conscripts were transported in freight trains to numerous destinations throughout the Soviet Union. Some recruited in 1940 traveled as far north as Karelia and the White Sea, assigned to serve in war-torn Finland. The extreme cold, as well as the absence of daylight and the eerie effects of the aurora borealis, led to desperate attempts at reassignment and sometimes death by freezing. Others conscripted in 1941 found themselves in the Caucasus, where the main obstacle to survival was the raging typhus epidemic. With the German assault of June 1941, their situation changed dramatically. Now considered to be "suspect elements," they

were removed from active service and formed into NKVD-controlled work battalions, building military infrastructure and laboring in essential war industries. Though their living conditions deteriorated significantly, their chances of surviving increased with their removal from territories directly in the path of the German advance.³⁰

EVACUATION AND FLIGHT

On the eve of the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, then, several thousand Polish Jews had already left the Soviet Union (or were in the process of doing so) via Vladivostok to Japan, via Odessa to Turkey, or via the Baltic states to still free parts of Europe. But these were a tiny minority of Polish Jews who had initially escaped the Germans in 1939. The majority, who were under not German but Soviet power on 21 June 1941—1.4–1.6 million—found themselves still in the Soviet Union's western borderlands. Conscription, deportation, and arrests had removed only a relatively small fraction out of the path of the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppen, and had they not perished on the way, they now lived in extremely dire circumstances in labor battalions, special settlements, or labor camps, but out of reach of the German genocidal machine. Others had left as labor contractors, but clearly the majority must have remained in the western borderlands, to be overrun by the Germans the next day (see table 3).

Like other Soviet subjects, Polish Jews had to decide after 22 June 1941 whether they should stay or try to escape further east. In theory, evacuation was not a voluntary affair but an organized relocation of essential functionaries and labor power by the state. State and party employees and their families as well as workers in enterprises dismantled and sent east received notices to assemble at such and such a time in such and such a place, from where they would be taken away from the frontline by train, car, or whatever other means of transport was available. Collective farmers were often simply told to herd their cattle east. In practice, time was short, the situation confused, and transport missing. Those who preferred to stay behind and wait for the Germans could usually do so without too much effort, even if they had been ordered to evacuate. Others could not find transport, and still others managed to attach themselves or their families to the evacuation without having the necessary papers. Self-directed flight and organized evacuation shaded into each other.³¹

Decisions were painful and complex, taking into account family and individual need, access to transportation, assumptions about what the Germans were likely to do, information from propaganda sources, word of mouth, and historical memory of German behavior in the First World War.³² Many did try to leave, sometimes managing to get away. According to current estimates, between 1.2 and 1.6 million Soviet Jews did escape the grip of the Nazis through evacuation or flight.³³ This number is nearly certainly an underestimate, as it does not, for example, include Jewish men who volunteered for the Red Army and were evacuated from the frontline in forced marches, to fight another day.³⁴ It would also exclude those who managed to flee but never identified themselves to the authorities as refugees, integrating successfully into life in the hinterland or the army.³⁵ Moreover, we do not know how many of these successful refugees were Polish Jews (as opposed to pre-1939 Soviet citizens of Jewish nationality), but 210,000 is a reasonable upper limit for this group (table 2).

Who successfully evacuated might be gleaned from a list of 1,039 Jewish evacuees in Tashkent, whose registration cards claimed that they came from a city called “Poland” (Pol’sha).³⁶ This was an overwhelmingly young and male group: 58 percent were men, 38 percent in their twenties, and another 27 percent in their thirties. Not a single person in this sample had a registered age below six years. This might be because younger children were not registered. Equally likely, however, the gender and age imbalance reflected the brutality of the evacuation experience: young, unattached men were more likely to get away in the summer of 1941 than women with children. Consider the description of seventeen-year-old William Z. Good, who tried to escape from the Polish, then Lithuanian, and finally Soviet Vilna (Wilno, Vilnius):

I was going to run away from the Germans. I got together with another kid, we were good cyclists—we would run away. We had a family council. My mother and father decided that they would stay but they realized the gravity of the situation and if I was young, courageous and willing to run they gave me their blessings. . . . The night was terrible, there was lots of bombing. Monday we left heading east to Minsk into Belorussia. The Soviet troops were

retreating and the Lithuanians were shooting at their Soviet comrades. The Germans were bombing and machine-gunning the refugees—the casualties were incredible. As we were riding my friend was killed by the German machine-gun fire. The planes would go down low, the people would fall down and not move. . . . There were thousands and thousands of refugees—kids, cattle, women, all kinds of people—some of them got hit and killed, some not. I was one of those who survived and got to Minsk. But the German tactic . . . was not to go toward their objective directly but rather break through behind it. They were already east of Minsk. . . . There was nothing for me to do in Minsk—I couldn't go ahead so I started to go back to Wilno. On the way the peasants robbed me, took away my bike, took away my belongings—left me barefoot with just my pants. It took me more than a week to get back home to Wilno.³⁷

Women also often decided to stay behind to look after family, sometimes assuming, wrongly as it turned out, that the Germans were less likely to kill women and children than they were men of military age. For similar reasons, young men were often encouraged by their parents to make a run for it.³⁸

FURTHER PATHS AFTER 22 JUNE 1941

With the storm that broke on 22 June 1941, our reconstruction of the overall size and paths of Polish-Jewish Holocaust escapees becomes increasingly hazy. We have not been able to reconstruct the size of the group who successfully evacuated or fled in the summer and fall of that year, but we can assume that this must have been a minority, at most 210,000. Together with those who had been conscripted, deported, or arrested and those who had already reached Japan, Turkey, or Iran, then, up to 385,000 Polish Jews might have escaped to or through the Soviet Union by the end of 1941 (tables 3 and 4). As we pick up their path further east, the fog of war gets thicker, obscuring our sense of scale. We can, however, continue to follow individual life stories and get occasional glimpses at the size of the groups involved.

SAVED BY STALIN?

TABLE 4: Polish Jews on Soviet-controlled territory, late 1942

Category		Lower estimate (thousands)	Higher estimate (thousands)
A	Saved from Holocaust by removal to Soviet Union	146.1	384.6
B	Left via Vladivostok to Japan, Turkey, or Iran	-6.0	-4.5
C	Left with Anders army to Iran	-7.0	-6.0
D	Hence should still be in Soviet Union by late 1942 (including those who died on Soviet soil) (D = sum A:C)	133.1	374.1

Sources: Rows A and B: See table 3. Row C: The Polish Ministry of Defense lists the number of Jewish soldiers evacuated from the Soviet Union as 4,226 (Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, A.II.755/2) and the British Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration (MERRA) claimed to know, in September 1946, of 4,500 deserters in Palestine. It is clear that not all Jewish soldiers absconded and not all absconders were Jewish, so this number is an absolute lower limit for soldiers (British National Archives [BNA] AJ/43/16/314/56/2). The total of Jewish civilians is somewhat clearer. According to correspondence between the British Foreign Office (FO) and the Jewish Agency for Palestine's London Office of January 1943, 1,235 had sailed from Persia for Palestine (BNA, FO 371/36690/W1262). Correspondence from the FO of December 1943 advised that the remaining 608 had arrived at Suez on route to Palestine (BNA, FO 371/36692/W17542). In addition, an unknown number of Jews were transported overland through Iraq to Palestine in a clandestine operation that involved Polish military trucks and which the British were alarmed to discover and took vigorous action to stop (BNA, FO 371/36690/W1017). Further, a few hundred Jews chose not to go to Palestine and instead sailed for East Africa as part of a contingent of 18,000 Polish evacuees who were temporarily settled in British African territories. The refugee camp at Tengeru in Tanganyika (now Tanzania), for example, accommodated 155 Jews (Julius Carlebach, *The Jews of Nairobi, 1903–1962* [Nairobi: Nairobi Hebrew Congregation, 1962], 61). Thus the minimum figure is 4,226 soldiers + 1,235 civilians in first ship to Palestine + 608 civilians in second ship to Palestine = 6,069 total. The 7,000 is adding estimates for those who traveled overland clandestinely to Palestine, were shipped to Africa (more than 155), and died in Persia (56 in Tehran alone).

Note: The lower estimate is arrived at by taking the lower baseline in row A and subtracting the higher estimates for rows B and C. The higher estimate does the opposite, beginning with the higher number in row A and subtracting the lower estimates for rows B and C. Hence “lower” and “higher” estimates refer only to rows A and D.

The attack on the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany drastically altered the fate of the Polish Jews who had been forcibly removed to the Soviet Union—deported from the borderlands to special settlements in the far reaches of the Soviet Union, arrested and sent to prisons or labor camps, captured as prisoners of war, or conscripted into the Red Army and transferred to labor battalions. Virtually overnight, they found themselves to be not enemies but allies of the Soviet Union. With the signing of the Polish-Soviet agreement of 30 July 1941, diplomatic relations between the London-based Polish government and the Soviet Union had been restored, and the two parties agreed to provide each other with mutual assistance in the war against the now common enemy, Nazi Germany. In a codicil to the agreement, Stalin agreed to amnesty Polish citizens detained on Soviet territory either as prisoners of war or on “other sufficient grounds.”³⁹ Hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens were now “amnestied” and, at least in principle, released from prisons, labor camps, special settlements, and labor battalions.⁴⁰

“Suddenly, in the fall of 1941 they explained to us that we were free,” remembered Rozenberg.⁴¹ This announcement was an unexpected turn of events from a grim life since deportation. The Rozenbergs had survived the callous disregard of their guards during the transport east and arrived in a bedbug-infested camp in the Novosibirsk region, Siberia. All males sixteen years and older had to work as lumberjacks, fulfilling demanding norms to receive food rations. No longer guarded, they lived together with their families, and they were able to barter their “western clothes” for food from the local peasants—major differences between their position and those of labor camp inmates such as Begin. Now, both groups could leave and rent corners in the huts of locals, but they were forbidden to move to any of the major cities. At first, Rozenberg’s family was at a loss about what to do, but then his grandfather remembered a cousin in Tashkent—“We’ll go to him.”⁴² The authorities, eager to make space for evacuated Soviet citizens and refugees, put few obstacles in their path, and they traveled in a train full of refugees to the south. Indeed, large numbers of freed Poles streamed southward to reach warmer climes, to gain access to welfare assistance from the Polish embassy based in Kuibyshev (present-day Samara in Russia) over a thousand kilometers southeast of Moscow, or, like the Rozenbergs, to connect with family in established Jewish communities.

A further path was now open to people such as Begin and Rozenberg—to join the Polish army, which, under the terms of the Polish-Soviet agreement, was being formed in the Soviet Union. Recently released prisoner of war General Władysław Anders was appointed its commander, and recruitment centers were set up near Kuibyshev and later near Tashkent (Uzbekistan). People flooded to join, men as combatants, women as part of the Women's Auxiliary Service, and boys and girls aged fourteen years and older as cadets. Begin was, after his release from the Gulag, among a very small minority of Jews who managed to enlist and be evacuated via Iran to Palestine in 1942. Out of a total of about 113,000 evacuees, approximately 6,000–7,000 were Jewish soldiers and civilians (see table 4).⁴³

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF POLISH JEWS IN THE SOVIET UNION, 1942–1943

By the middle of the war, then, in late 1942 and early 1943, some of the Polish Jews who had been rescued from the Holocaust by removal to the Soviet Union had already left Stalin's inhospitable lands. Others had died—we do not know how many—but the majority survived. Our reconstruction thus far has estimated the number of survivors by late 1942 or early 1943 as between 133,000 and 374,000. This range is huge. Which numbers are the more likely?

Table 5 compares our reconstruction in tables 1–4 with estimates made at the time of the number of Polish Jews alive on Soviet-controlled territory by the middle of the war. It confirms what we already knew: that 133,000 is nearly certainly too low. Neither the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem nor the Polish government-in-exile thought such a low number likely. The former agency, far removed as it was, produced a tally generally within the ballpark of our lower estimate, but still 35 percent higher. The Polish exile government, meanwhile, came up with a number that very closely tracks our higher estimate. By contrast with the Jewish Agency, the Poles had boots on Soviet ground and had registered Poland's former citizens until relations with the Soviets deteriorated in the wake of the Katyn affair.⁴⁴ At the same time, however, Poland was for political reasons prone to overestimate the number of its former citizens alive on Soviet territory. Table 5, thus, only confirms that the higher and lower

TABLE 5: Comparison of reconstruction (tables 1–4) with independent sources

Category		Lower estimate (thousands)	Higher estimate (thousands)
A	Dead or alive on Soviet-controlled territory, ca. 1943, according to reconstruction in tables 1–4	133.1	374.1
B	Alive on Soviet-controlled territory according to other sources, 1943	179.0	375.0
C	Discrepancy ($C = A - B$)	-45.9	-0.9
D	C as share of A (%)	-34.5	-0.2

Sources: Row A: See table 4. Row B, lower estimate: A report by the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem of June 1943 ("Polish-Jewish Refugees in the USSR") estimated that "260,000 to 300,000 [Poles] are at liberty in Russia, 40% of these are Jews. 150,000 are in labor camps and prison camps, of which 50% are Jews" (Palestine Censorship, J/3261/43, National Archives, United Kingdom, FO 181/977/13 [consulted in USHMM, RG-59.064: Selected Records from the Foreign Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Embassy and Consulate in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (formerly Russian Empire), General Correspondence, 1942–1946]). According to this estimate, by the middle of the war there were between 179,000 and 195,000 Polish Jews alive in the Soviet Union. Soviet documents support the Jewish Agency numbers for Poles (former deportees and arrestees) at liberty, that is, 257,660 as of 1 December 1943. However, they also indicate that all but 344 of the 120,962 Poles in prisons and labor camps were released under the amnesty of August 1942. The Jewish Agency figure of 150,000 in prison and labor camps in June 1943 is therefore open to question. Based on Soviet figures, we can conclude that there were 103,064 former Jewish deportees and prisoners in the Soviet Union (N. F. Bugaj, "Specjalna teczka Stalina: Deportacja i reemigracja Polaków," in *Zeszyty historyczne*, no. 107 [1994]: 111). If we add to 103,064 at least 10,000 conscripts and 40,000 voluntary laborers (table 2), we reach a figure of 153,064 Polish Jews in the Soviet Union at the end of 1943. A report from April 1943 prepared in Tehran following the severing of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union and the evacuation of the Polish embassy from Kuibyshev shows that 106,602 Polish Jews had registered and received some form of assistance from the vast welfare network established throughout the Soviet Union by the embassy (*Report on the Relief Accorded to Polish Citizens by the Polish Embassy in the USSR, with Special Reference to Polish Citizens of Jewish Nationality*, USHMM, RG-59.032, Polish embassy in Kuibyshev, A.7.307/40).

Row B, higher estimate: According to one source, at the time the Berling army was formed in 1943, there were "690,000 to 750,000 Poles" in the Soviet Union, "of whom 40–50 per cent were Jews" (Klemens Nussbaum, "Jews in the Kościuszko Division and First Polish Army," in Davies and Polonsky, *Jews in Eastern Poland*, 187). Accordingly, there would have been between 276,000 and 375,000 Polish Jews at the time, significantly higher than our above estimate. The source is a 1974 Polish monograph, published at a time when access to Soviet archives was unavailable. Rather than NKVD records, it relies on the estimates of the Polish government-in-exile, which routinely overestimated the numbers for the deportations as being between 880,000 and 1.2 million (Krystyna Kersten, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej po II wojnie światowej* [Warsaw: PAN, 1974], 62).

estimates are both historically reasonable but also highly problematic signposts for a quantification.

A second test of our higher and lower numbers puts them in the context of postwar repatriation numbers to Poland (table 6). It again shows that the lower estimate is clearly too low—otherwise nobody would have died on Soviet territory or stayed there after the war. Indeed, as row G in table 6 shows, the lower estimate would imply that more Polish Jews returned after the war than had been on Soviet territory by early 1943—clearly an impossibility. Nevertheless, the higher estimate also has its problems. It would imply that over 200,000 Polish Jews remained in the Soviet Union after the end of repatriation, a hypothesis not supported by Soviet postwar census data.⁴⁵ Rather than an increase in the Jewish population of the Soviet Union, it shows a decline compared to the 1939 figure.⁴⁶ Thus both tables 5 and 6 imply that the higher and lower estimates can be seen as the limits to where the numbers might reasonably have been. Neither of them is likely to be correct, but we can assume that the true number was somewhere between these extremes.

RETURN WITH THE RED ARMY

Some of the Polish Jews who remained after the evacuation to Iran of Anders's troops and their families in 1942 would also eventually be mobilized into the Red Army. They were not treated much differently from the earlier conscripts or, indeed, the Broner brothers. As former citizens of Poland, they were subject to a rather unhealthy dose of suspicion and ended up in labor battalions rather than the regular army. Michael Goldberg, who had grown up in Pinsk and became a Soviet citizen by decree after the Soviet annexation, had a fairly chaotic start to the war. Recently mobilized into the armed forces, he managed, more or less of his own initiative, to get away from the advancing Germans. He ended up in a military camp in Orel, from where all those who had been born outside the Soviet Union (Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Germans) were shipped off to northeastern Russia, to join the labor army. After several weeks in cattle cars (without guards), his group arrived in early September in Izhevsk, where they were set to work in terrible conditions to rebuild the factories evacuated from the west. In April 1942, his labor battalion was disbanded, and its members were assigned to other workplaces. He remained in Izhevsk,

TABLE 6: Polish-Jewish survivors returning to Poland and beyond, 1944–47

Category		Lower estimate (thousands)	Higher estimate (thousands)
A	Alive on Soviet-controlled territory, ca. 1943	133.1	375.0
B	Returned with Berling army to Poland, 1944	2.0	20.0
C	Returned in organized echelons under postwar repatriation agreement	136.6	
D	Returned on their own steam	6.0	
E*	Thus total return to Poland 1944–46 (E=B+C+D)	144.6	162.6
F	E as share of A (%)	108.6	43.4
G	Hence remaining on Soviet territory (including those who died there)	-11.5	212.4
H	Polish Jews in DP camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy, 1947	180.0	

Sources: Row A=See table 5. Row B: In July 1944, of the 37,024 soldiers in the four main fighting divisions of the Berling army, 2,011 were Jews (Ignacy Blum, “O składzie socjalno-demograficznym Polskich sił zbrojnych w Związku Radzieckim, maj 1943–lipiec 1944 r.,” *Wojskowy przegląd historyczny*, no. 2 [1963]: 19). Other historians put the number of Jews much higher, claiming that Polish sources obscure their real tally. According to Klemens Nussbaum’s calculations, “about 12,000 Jews served in the Polish Army in the USSR and formed more than 12 per cent of the total number of soldiers” (“Jews in the Kościuszko Division,” 194), while Yosef Litvak gives the even higher estimate of “between 16,000 and 20,000” (“Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union to Poland at the End of the Second World War and Afterwards,” in Davies and Polonsky, *Jews in Eastern Poland*, 227–39). Row C: “Wykaz transportów repatriantów z ZSRR” (not before 31 July 1946), Centralny Komitet Żydów Polskich (Jewish Central Committee; CKŻP), Wydział Repatriacji z ZSRR, sygn. 303/v.6o: 61 (consulted in USHMM, RG-15.104M, reel 3). Row D: Albert Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics, the Return of Jewish Refugees to Poland, and Continued Migration to Palestine, 1944–1946,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 69. Row H: Litvak, “Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated,” 238.

Note: DP=displaced person.

*In 1946, the Soviet embassy in Poland reported that according to the CKŻP, more than 150,000 Polish Jews had returned from the Soviet Union—a number that would be well within our estimates. The same source also noted that these were 90 percent of all the Jews living in the Soviet Union and subject to the repatriation agreement. (“Spravka posol’stva SSSR v Pol’she o sostoianiii evreiskogo voprosa v strane,” 24 September 1946, reprinted in *Sovetskiifaktor v Vostochnoi Evrope 1944–1953: Dokumenty*, 2 vols., ed. V. T. Volokitina [Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999], 1:340–45, 341). Other estimates put this total somewhat higher, at 202,000, a number including 54,900 who returned under earlier repatriation agreements. With a few exceptions,

(continued)

TABLE 6: (*continued*)

the latter were Holocaust survivors who had either managed to hide under German occupation or served in partisan units. Strictly speaking, then, they do not count toward the number who had been “saved” by the Soviet Union. Therefore, we would need to subtract the 54,900, which would leave us with 147,100 (Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics,” 66–67, 75). Litvak gives an even higher number for Jewish repatriates, 157,420 for June 1946, and 230,700 by the end of the decade. Again, these would include some who are not part of our research here. Moreover, these numbers are based not on the arrival numbers in echelons but on registration in the localities. One would assume that these include people who had returned with the Berling army. Moreover, as he explains, there was a significant amount of double counting, and at least 10–15 percent would need to be deducted from this number (Litvak, “Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated,” 235).

working as a tailor. In early 1944, former Polish citizens were drafted into the Red Army again. Goldberg trained for two months in Siberia and then was sent to the front, fighting his way through Romania and Hungary into Austria.⁴⁷

Broner was initially also sent to the labor army. Having volunteered in the spring of 1942, he found himself building airfields rather than fighting the Nazis, as he had hoped. He remained in this labor battalion until the summer of 1943, when he used a hospital stay to doctor his papers. He was released to a regular Red Army unit and soon learned that all Poles were to join the Berling army, a second Polish army being formed on Soviet territory with Soviet backing and inspired by the Union of Polish Patriots, a Polish Communist organization. He put up his hand, but his Jewishness threatened to throw him back into the labor army. “You are Abram Broner, son of Israel,” he was told. “You are Jewish and we won’t send you to the Polish Army.” Instead, Broner was sent to a Siberian coal mine, a potentially lethal work assignment. Not willing to submit to the Soviets’ demands that he become a uniformed slave, he deserted and made his own way to the Berling army, which he joined in late November 1943. He returned to Poland in its ranks.⁴⁸

Broner was not the only Jew in the Berling army.⁴⁹ Estimates for their number vary between 2,000 and 20,000 (table 6). Even the higher figure, however, implies that the Berling army was a relatively minor conduit for leaving the Soviet Union: Jews in its ranks constituted, at best, 15 percent of Polish Jews who had been on Soviet territory by the middle of the war (table 5). These numbers were not due to a lack of desire to join up.

Rozenberg was one of many who experienced anti-Jewish barriers. He had ended up, together with his family, on a collective farm in Kazakhstan (the authorities had not let them into Tashkent), a hungry place filled by refugees and a life not much better from what they had experienced in Siberian exile. Never having received internal passports, they were stuck in this godforsaken place. Rozenberg and his grandfather learned how to make felt boots from a Polish refugee, a trade that allowed the family to survive. In the middle of 1943, all “non-Soviet Poles” were registered for the Berling army and sent to training close to Moscow—Rozenberg among them. However, the Jews were not enrolled but had to listen to the ravings of a Polish major: “We are a Polish army, not a Jewish army [*voisko zhidovskoe*]. . . I won’t take you.” Hence Rozenberg returned to his village in Kazakhstan. He was called up again in June 1944, this time mobilized in the regular Red Army. “It seems that the total prohibition to draft ‘westerners’ from Ukraine and Belarus was lifted,” he speculated, “although refugees from Bessarabia were not taken into the field army until the very end of the war.”⁵⁰

REPATRIATION

On 6 July 1945, the Soviet Union and the provisional government of Poland signed an agreement on repatriation, which stipulated that ethnic Poles and Jews who had been Polish citizens as of 17 September 1939 were allowed to exit both Soviet citizenship and the Soviet Union itself and settle with their families in Poland.⁵¹ Rozenberg took advantage of this opportunity. Upon being drafted into the Red Army in 1944 and after short but harsh training, he was sent first to Estonia, then to Archangelsk, and on to Poland, where he finally saw action. His division fought its way to the river Oder and finished the war in Czechoslovakia before being sent to Hungary. A candidate member of the Communist Party, Rozenberg was a reader of *Pravda*, where he learned about the repatriation agreement. He applied, and his parents did so as well, departing before him from Uzbekistan. Still waiting for a reply from the commission, Rozenberg was transferred to a unit near Moscow, which was preparing for departure to the Far East. After intervention by his commander, he was transferred to a Moscow holding unit for

former Polish citizens awaiting decisions about repatriation. He finally got the green light, received his papers, and, with a small group of others, traveled to Poland.⁵²

By mid-1946, 136,579 Jewish repatriates—between 9 percent and 10 percent of the 1.4–1.6 million who had initially become Soviet subjects in 1939–40—had arrived in Poland with organized echelons from all over the Soviet Union. About 6,000 made their way outside of the officially organized transports, whether with official recognition or without such authorization. Further adding those who returned with the Berling army would increase this number to between 145,000 and 163,000 Polish Jews who, having survived World War II in the Soviet Union, returned to Poland in 1945–46. Diachronically, these numbers make sense both in the context of the number who were later accounted for in displaced persons (DP) camps and in the context of our reconstruction of the range of possible numbers of those alive on Soviet territory in 1943 (table 6). Overall data on the composition of the Jewish repatriates are not available, but partial data show quite clearly that they were, like the original group that had left for the Soviet Union, overwhelmingly male: 57 percent of those Jews who returned to Lodz, 54 percent of Jewish arrivals in Wrocław, and 55 percent of all repatriates (Poles and Jews).⁵³

Many returnees quickly moved on elsewhere. Ninety-four percent of the well over a thousand repatriated who had arrived in Przemysl between 1 February and 1 August 1946 left the town during the same period.⁵⁴ Often such movement crossed borders again. Rozenberg's parents and his brothers were already in a German DP camp, ultimately attempting to reach Palestine. Rozenberg ditched his Red Army uniform and fled to Czechoslovakia, then on to Austria, where, in the winter of 1947, he crossed the border to Germany under adventurous circumstances. He reached the DP camp where his family was and with a group of illegal migrants crossed Italy en route to Palestine.⁵⁵

Many others also left an inhospitable Poland, as a September 1946 conversation between the UK representative in Poland and the chief rabbi of Poland, made clear.⁵⁶ Rabbi David Kahane claimed that “the Jews who had arrived from the Soviet Union had reached Poland without any possessions, found no prospect of gaining a livelihood in this country

and were therefore resolved to go west without any delay.⁵⁷ By September 1947, German, Austrian, and Italian DP camps counted 180,000 Jews who had left Poland. In their majority, they were repatriates from the Soviet Union, which explains why their number matches so closely the tally of those who had returned through repatriation.⁵⁸

Not everybody eligible to leave for Poland under the 6 July 1945 agreement actually did so. Goldberg, for one, while intimately involved in underground activities to find as many Polish Jews as possible and facilitate their transfer to Poland, stayed behind. He had fallen in love with a local, who refused to leave her family. They left the Soviet Union only in 1958.⁵⁹ Some showed class consciousness: "My father was poor all his life in Poland, our family was always hungry and lacked everything," claimed a twenty-three-year-old Polish Jew. "And I had no understanding of science. Only here, in the USSR, did I get work and an education. Now I will never return to Poland."⁶⁰ Others were denied exit permits because they could not produce documentation of their pre-1939 Polish citizenship, although Soviet bureaucrats showed remarkable flexibility in the kind of papers they would accept: the 1941 amnesty document was as admissible as a Polish passport, military booklet, Polish school reports, any kind of Polish ID card, or birth or marriage certificate.⁶¹ Nevertheless, there were cases where no official piece of paper of Polish providence could be produced.⁶² People who had been charged in the past with anti-Soviet activities were also denied return to Poland.⁶³ Others had missed the deadline for applications and faced suddenly stubborn bureaucrats.⁶⁴ By and large, however, those who decided to apply for repatriation were allowed to go home. Of 247,460 former Polish citizens (Jews and Poles) the Soviets had registered by 15 August 1946, 228,814 were cleared and had successfully left for Poland by 4 September. Only 3,471 were denied exit visas for various reasons.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

The diachronic analysis of the statistics presented in this chapter, then, supports lower estimates for the number of Polish Jews saved by Stalin's state than are sometimes advanced in the literature. The high estimate of 385,000 by early 1942 (table 3) and 375,000 by 1943 (table 5) would imply

that over 200,000 (or 52 percent) either died or remained in the Soviet Union at war's end. This is not a reasonable assumption, given that such a conclusion is not supported either by Soviet archival statistics on the repatriation of former Polish citizens or by the 1959 Soviet census. In order to defend this number, therefore, we would have to assume a death rate among our group several times higher than even among Gulag inmates, to say nothing of the population at large.⁶⁶ Such a hypothesis is hardly realistic. At the same time, the lowest estimates given in tables 1–6 also do not make any chronological sense: to defend this series, we would have to assume that nobody remained on Soviet soil, whether dead or alive, after repatriation was over (table 6). Hence the real number must have been above these low limits and below the maximum numbers listed in the tables.

The most conservative estimate, then, would be for, at the very least, 157,000 Jews from Poland who would not have survived the Nazi genocide had it not been for the existence of Stalin's state: 6,000 escaped via the transit route to Vladivostok or to Odessa; 6,000–7,000 left with the Anders army in 1942 via Iran; and between 145,000 and 163,000 repatriated after the war. Including those who remained in the Soviet Union and taking into account higher estimates, their maximum number might have been as high as 375,000, but was more likely somewhere in between these two signposts.⁶⁷ Defying critics of such "category creep," we could call these 157,000–375,000 "Holocaust survivors."⁶⁸ Alternatively, we could call them "flight and deportation survivors."⁶⁹ Whatever words we use, it is clear that their story changes several historiographies of the Second World War, as discussed in the introduction to this volume.

The experience of these Jewish survivors was shot through with ambiguities. For one, there was the question of how they fit into the larger story of the Holocaust.⁷⁰ But many of them also fit in poorly with the clear political lines of the Cold War. Few would become true believers in Stalin's socialism. For that, they knew it too well. Too many people had died in the Soviet Union, as a direct or indirect result of the policies of Stalin's regime. Nevertheless, few of the survivors would become Cold War warriors, either.⁷¹ "Regardless of the Soviet regime," wrote Broner, "I had a debt to that land."⁷²

Notes

1. Adam Broner, *My War against the Nazis: A Jewish Soldier with the Red Army* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007). The narrative is chronological. Page numbers for direct quotations are cited below.
2. *Ibid.*, 16.
3. Henceforth, we will use *Polish Jews* as a shorthand for “(former) Polish citizens of Jewish faith or heritage,” although an argument for the term *Jewish Poles* could also be made. On the complex social identity of the group, see chapter 6, by John Goldlust, in this volume.
4. On decision making about whether to leave or to stay, see Eliyana R. Adler, “Hrubieszów at the Crossroads: Polish Jews Navigate the German and Soviet Occupations,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 28, no. 1 (2014): 1–30. On the refugee problem, see Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry under Soviet Rule, 1939–1941* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 179–97; and Yosef Litvak, “The Plight of Refugees from the German-Occupied Territories,” in *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939–41*, ed. Keith Sword (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 57–70.
5. For the number, see the conclusion to this chapter. On the absence of a Soviet policy to save Jews, see chapter 3, by Sheila Fitzpatrick, in this volume.
6. For the wider context of the impact of the 1939–40 annexations on the Jewish population of the Soviet Union, see chapter 3 of this volume.
7. Zorach Warhaftig, *Refugee and Survivor: Rescue Efforts during the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988), 32–40; 37, 40 (quotations). See also the Oral History interview with Zorach Warhaftig, 30 August 1999, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), <http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508251>.
8. On Lithuania as a “gateway to the free world,” see also Levin, *Lesser of Two Evils*, 198–217. The numbers are cited from *ibid.*, 200.
9. The several essays we build on are Yosef Litvak, “Jewish Refugees from Poland in the USSR, 1939–1946,” in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 123–50; Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 373–99; John Goldlust, “A Different Silence: The Survival of More than 200,000 Polish Jews in the Soviet Union during World War II as a

Case Study in Cultural Amnesia,” *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 21, no. 1 (2012): 13–60 (reprinted in a revised version as chapter 1 of this volume); Atina Grossmann, “Remapping Relief and Rescue: Flight, Displacement, and International Aid for Jewish Refugees during World War II,” *New German Critique* 39, no. 3 (2012): 61–79; as well as Grossmann’s contribution to this volume (chapter 5). See further Adler, “Hrubieszów at the Crossroads”; and Markus Nesselrodt, “From Russian Winters to Munich Summers: DPs and the Story of Survival in the Soviet Union,” in *Freilegungen: Displaced Persons—Leben im Transit: Überlebende zwischen Repatriierung, Rehabilitation und Neuanfang*, ed. Rebecca Boehling, Susanne Urban, and René Bienert (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2014), 190–98.

10. For a different reconstruction of the numbers, see Albert Stankowski, “How Many Polish Jews Survived the Holocaust?,” in *Jewish Presence in Absence: The Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland, 1944–2010*, ed. Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2014), 205–16.
11. For more on the problems of memory and history with regard to this group, see chapter 7, by Eliyana R. Adler, in this volume.
12. See also table 6, note to row E, in this chapter.
13. On the centrality of displacement for the history of the Soviet Second World War, see Mark Edele, “The New Soviet Man as a ‘Gypsy’: Nomadism, War, and Marginality in Stalin’s Time,” *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 3, no. 2 (2014): 285–307; and Edele, “The Second World War as a History of Displacement: The Soviet Case,” *History Australia* 12, no. 2 (2015): 17–40. More generally, see Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad Is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia’s Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).
14. Warhaftig, *Refugee and Survivor*, 52–53, 75, 118, 99, 116, 156.
15. Much of the historiography has focused on Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese vice-consul in Kaunas, who under increasingly perilous circumstances issued at least 2,100 transit visas. Hillel Levine, *In Search of Sugihara: The Elusive Japanese Diplomat Who Risked His Life to Rescue 10,000 Jews from the Holocaust* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Pamela Rotner Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees: A World War II Dilemma* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); Seishiro Sugihara, *Chiune Sugihara and Japan’s Foreign Ministry*, pt. 2, *Between Incompetence and Culpability*, trans. Norman Hu (Lanham, MD:

- University Press of America, 2001); Gao Bei, *Shanghai Sanctuary: Chinese and Japanese Policy toward European Jewish Refugees during World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For a discussion of the numbers, see Edele, “History of Displacement,” 35.
16. Menachem Begin, *White Nights: The Story of a Prisoner in Russia* (London: Macdonald, 1957).
 17. Rozenberg’s wartime trajectory is retold here on the basis of his interview with G. Koifman (25 April 2014), available at I Remember, [http://iremember.ru/memoirs/pekhontsi/rozenberg-samuil-
isosifovich/](http://iremember.ru/memoirs/pekhontsi/rozenberg-samuil-isosifovich/) (accessed 16 December 2015). Translation into English by Mark Edele.
 18. On this system, see Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism: Labour and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 120–34.
 19. The wartime Polish government based in London estimated that the mass deportations of 1940 and 1941 engulfed around 1 million Poles. See Polish Government in London, *Polish-Soviet Relations, 1918–1943; Official Documents, Confidential* (Washington, DC, 1943), 17–21. Soviet archives accessible in the 1990s have produced new figures of around 315,000 deportees in total. See Aleksander Gurjanow, “Cztery deportacje 1940–1941,” *Karta*, no. 12 (1994): 114–36. For a discussion of the pre-archival and the archival numbers, see Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski, eds., *Katyn: A Crime without Punishment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 138–39. The authors are inclined to accept the revised, lower figures.
 20. Stanisław Ciesielski, Grzegorz Hryciuk, and Aleksander Srebrawski, *Masowe deportacje ludności w Związku Radzieckim* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2003), 246.
 21. For a detailed account of the deportation regime, see Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*, expanded ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939–1948* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994).
 22. For an elaborate NKVD plan for this deception, see Ivan Serov to Lavrenty P. Beria and Vsevolod Merkulov, Main State Archive of the Security Services of Ukraine (GDA SBU), fond (f.) 16, opis (op.) 1, delo (d.) 397, listy (ll.) 7–9.
 23. Ciesielski, Hryciuk, and Srebrawski, *Masowe deportacje*, 230–35.
 24. Rozenberg, interview.

25. On the Pinsk ghetto and its liquidation, see Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 267–69.
26. Rozenberg, interview.
27. Broner, *My War*, 21–38; 21, 24 (quotations).
28. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 191–92.
29. Quoted in *ibid.*, 192.
30. Leon Antoni Sułek, “Wojenne losy polaków zołnierzy armii czerwonej (1940–1945),” *Zeszyty historyczne* 99 (1992): 30–39; Krystyna Laskowicz, “Strojbataliony,” *Karta*, no. 2 (1991): 106–21.
31. Mordechai Altshuler, “Evacuation and Escape during the Course of the Soviet-German War,” *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 28, no. 2 (2014): 57–73; Edele, “History of Displacement,” 28–29.
32. On the process of decision making, see Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), chap. 4.
33. Vadim Dubson, “Toward a Central Database of Evacuated Soviet Jews’ Names, for the Study of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Territories,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 102–3.
34. Natan Gimel’farb, “Zapiski opal’nogo direktora: Chast’ pervaia, O detstve i iunosti” (Buffalo, 1999), <http://natan.gimelfarb.com/PART1.pdf> (accessed 19 May 2015).
35. Sergei Maksudov, “Evacuation Documentation and Testimonies as Sources for the Study of Soviet Jewish Population Losses during World War II,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 120–30.
36. Data extracted from database “RG-75.002, Registration cards of Jewish refugees in Tashkent, Uzbekistan during WWII, Transliterated data.” The database, held at the USHMM, indexes RG-75.002M, registration cards of Jewish refugees in Tashkent during World War II, part of the Claims Conference International Holocaust Documentation Archive at the USHMM. This archive consists of documentation whose reproduction and/or acquisition was made possible with funding from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. Thanks to Megan Lewis, reference librarian at the USHMM, for pointing us to the database and extracting the raw data.
37. William Z. Good, “From ‘Jerushaalayim d’Lita’ and Back,” USHMM, RG-02.046, pp. 15–16. Spelling edited for conformity with the rest of this chapter.

38. Adler, "Hrubieszów at the Crossroads," 13.
39. For the full text, see "Polish–Soviet Union Agreements, July 30, 1941," Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law Library, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/polsov.asp> (accessed 31 March 2014).
40. A report from Beria to Stalin of 1 May 1944 mentioned 389,382 "former Polish citizens" who were subject to the amnesty in September 1941. Nikolai L. Pobol' and Pavel M. Polian, eds., *Stalinskie deportatsii 1928–1953* (Moscow: Demokratia, 2005), 178.
41. Rozenberg, interview.
42. Ibid.
43. For a discussion of antisemitism and the Anders army, see Yisrael Gutman, "Jews in General Anders' Army in the Soviet Union," *Yad Vashem Studies* 12 (1977): 231–96; Ryszard Terlecki, "The Jewish Issue in the Polish Army in the USSR and the Near East, 1941–1944," in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (Hounds-mills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 161–71. See also chapters 1 and 6, by Goldlust, and chapter 5, by Grossmann, in this volume.
44. On the Polish infrastructure inside the Soviet Union, see chapter 5 of this volume.
45. A new repatriation wave of former Polish citizens returned above 249,000 in 1955–59, but they were overwhelmingly (90 percent) ethnic Poles, many of whom had been arrested at war's end or after. Robert Wyszyński, "Przesiedlenia ludności polskiej z ZSRR w latach 1920–1960," *Studia BAS*, no. 2 (2013): 107–30.
46. The 1959 census counted 2.3 million Jews in the Soviet Union, down from 3 million in the "old" Soviet Union before the 1939–40 expansion. The data are available at *Demoscope Weekly*, http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_39.php and http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_59.php (accessed 11 December 2015).
47. Michael Goldberg, "Memories of a Generation," USHMM, RG-10.120, pp. 35–76.
48. Broner, *My War*, 43–107; 54 (quotation).
49. Klemens Nussbaum, "Jews in the Kościuszko Division and First Polish Army," in Davies and Polonsky, *Jews in Eastern Poland*, 183–213.
50. Rozenberg, interview.
51. Text in both Polish and Russian available at *Rzeczpospolita Polska. Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych. Internetowa baza traktatowa*

<http://www.traktaty.msz.gov.pl/> (accessed 12 May 2015). We disregard the earlier 1944 agreement for population exchange, under which 23,651 Jews had registered for repatriation by 1 November 1945 (Central State Archive of Social Organizations of Ukraine [TsDAGO], f. 1, op. 23, d. 1466, l. 246). They were probably not from the group that interests us here, as the agreement covered Poles and Jews who had been Polish citizens before the Soviet invasion of 1939 and who were residents of Western Ukraine. For more on this repatriation wave, see GDA SBU, f. 16, op. 1, d. 548; and Sheila Fitzpatrick's contribution to this volume (chapter 3), which also explores the reasons why Stalin allowed Polish Jews to leave. It is possible that some of our group sneaked through with this resettlement wave. Some of them were certainly back in time to try. Between July and 20 November 1944, a total of 21,946 former Polish citizens arrived in Ukraine from the eastern territories of the Soviet Union. According to an archival report, these were deported *osadniki* (Polish military settlers; we can probably assume there were few Jews among them), "evacuated from the frontline regions of Ukraine and Belarus in 1941." The arrivals were by and large Poles and Jews, with a few Belarusians, Russians, and Ukrainians among them. It is unclear whether they were included in this first repatriation wave. See TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 1466, l. 1–6.

52. Rozenberg, interview.
53. USHMM, RG-15.104M, reel 1, file 17 (Lodz); reel 2, file 23 (Wroclaw); reel 3, file 60 (all repatriates [Poles and Jews]). The total was 158,000; 87 percent of them were Jewish.
54. Komitet żydowski w Przemyślu, "Ruch repatriantów za czas od 1/II do 1/VIII 1946 r.", Centralny Komitet Żydów Polskich (CKŻP), sygn. 303/v.18: 6 (USHMM, RG.15-104M, reel 2, file 21).
55. Rozenberg, interview.
56. On an inhospitable Poland, see Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 36–37, 179–80. For more on this issue, see also chapters 1 and 6 of this volume.
57. Telegram: H.M.A. Warsaw to Foreign Office (FO), 14 September 1946, FO 181/1022/5 (USHMM, RG-59.064).
58. Yosef Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union at the End of the Second World War and Afterwards," in Davies and Polonsky, *Jews in Eastern Poland*, 238; Holian, *Between National Socialism*, 267.

59. Goldberg, “Memories of a Generation,” 76–95. On what the Soviets called the “Zionist underground” and its work to allow as many Jews as possible to leave the Soviet Union, see Sergei Savchenko, minister of State Security of Ukrainian SSR, report on the liquidation of Zionist underground (16 April 1946), GDA SBU, f. 16, op. 1, d. 568, l. 266–76. On other cases of decisions to stay because of family reasons, see Sergei Savchenko, minister of State Security of Ukrainian SSR, report on the end of repatriation to Poland, 23 August 1946, GDA SBU, f. 16, op. 1, d. 577, l. 365–71, 367.
60. Savchenko to Khrushchev, 6 November 1945, TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 1466, l. 267.
61. For strongly Jewish lists of refused applicants from Kemerovo region, see Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. A-327, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 264–66; ll. 267–69 (consulted in USHMM, RG-22.027M).
62. For a list of the types of documents that were accepted, see GARF, f. A-327, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 103–7 (USHMM, RG-22.027M).
63. For a non-Jewish case, see A. Mozgolov, report on repatriation work in Ryazan region, 23 July 1946, GARF, f. A-327, op. 1, d. 12, l. 198 (USHMM, RG-22.027M).
64. Report on repatriation work in Chelyabinsk region, 1946, GARF, f. A-327, op. 1, d. 12, l. 195 (USHMM, RG-22.027M).
65. A. Aleksandrov and D. Bychenko to A. N. Kosygin, report on the realization of the 6 July 1945 agreement on repatriation, 4 September 1946, GARF, f. A-327, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 33, 34 (USHMM, RG-22.027M). The numbers for Ukraine also show only a minority of refusals. See Savchenko, report on the end of repatriation to Poland, 23 August 1946, GDA SBU, f. 16, op. 1, d. 577, l. 365–71.
66. Death rates in camps and colonies varied between 2 percent and 27 percent per annum, with a spike in 1942–43. See Edwin Bacon, *The Gulag at War: Stalin’s Forced Labour System in the Light of the Archives* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 149, table 8.2. The total population loss of the Soviet Union during the war with Germany, including both civilians and military deaths, was 14 percent. See Michael Ellman and Sergei Maksudov, “Soviet Deaths in the Great Patriotic War: A Note,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 4 (1994): 672, table 1. The death rate among the highly Jewish third deportation group (“refugees”) between their arrival and April 1941 was approximately 2.5 percent, about equal to the death rate in Gulag colonies (as opposed to camps) in 1941 (2.4 percent). It was nearly balanced by the

- number of births in that group during the same period. See V. N. Zemskov, “Spetsposelentsy (po dokumentatsii NKVD-MVD SSSR),” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, no. 11 (1990): 5, 8.
67. Our analysis thus implies somewhat lower numbers than those supported by Goldlust, in chapter 1 of this volume.
 68. Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (London: Vintage, 2010), 5.
 69. “Flight survivors” is Adler’s term. Adler, “Hrubieszów at the Crossroads,” 17. See also chapter 7 of this volume. On these terms, see also chapter 6 of this volume.
 70. See chapters 5 and 7 as well as the introduction to this volume.
 71. On the ways Jewishness structured the experience of the Soviet Union, see also chapter 6 of this volume.
 72. Broner, *My War*, 107.

3

Annexation, Evacuation, and Antisemitism in the Soviet Union, 1939–1946

SHEILA FITZPATRICK

At the end of the eighteenth century, by the terms of the second and third partitions of Poland, Russia acquired not only substantial new territory to the west but also several million new subjects, most of them Poles but including half a million Jews.¹ It was the first time Russia had had a significant Jewish population, and difficulties in assimilating the Jews led to their relegation to the newly established Pale of Settlement and the emergence of a “Jewish question” in imperial Russia in the nineteenth century. Poland recovered independent statehood after the First World War and took back much of this territory from Russia, but in 1939, by the terms of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, Poland was in effect partitioned again. Germany occupied the larger western part, while the Soviet Union not only occupied the eastern provinces but actually incorporated them into the Soviet Union as part of the Ukrainian and Belarusian republics. Like the last time around, this brought the Soviet Union a new influx of Jewish population, along with ethnic Poles, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. Other territories incorporated at the time, namely, the Baltic states and Bessarabia, also brought in substantial Jewish population. Altogether, the annexations added 2 million Jews into the Soviet population, as part of a net population gain of around 23 million.² Overnight, the Jewish proportion of Soviet population rose

from 3 percent to 5 percent.³ It is surely no coincidence that in the wake of this acquisition, the “Jewish question”—shelved for the two decades since the Russian Revolution—made a major comeback. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the spectacular rise of popular and then quasi-official antisemitism in the Soviet Union during and after the war in light of the 1939–40 territorial annexations and the population displacements that followed.

SOVIET POLICY TOWARD JEWS IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

It was a matter of pride that the Soviet Union was a multinational state in which ethnic discrimination (except in the positive form of affirmative action for the disadvantaged) had been abolished. Most Soviet nationalities acquired their own territories, from “autonomous districts” to republics, in the 1920s; use of the vernacular languages was strongly encouraged.⁴ Jews, having no specific territorial association, were an exception until the establishment of the Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan in the Far East in the 1930s. But the collapse of the imperial regime had greatly improved their situation in Russia, not least because of the large-scale Jewish migration from the former Pale into the major cities of Russia and Ukraine that started during the First World War. Moscow’s Jewish population rose from 8,000 in 1897 to 131,000 in 1926, while that of Saint Petersburg (Petrograd during the war, later Leningrad) multiplied by a factor of 5.⁵ Jewish representation in elite positions of all kinds (political, administrative, and professional) was strikingly above the norm: Jews were three times as likely as the average Soviet citizen to occupy managerial positions in the party and state bureaucracy in 1939, while in professional positions involving high qualifications their preponderance was even greater, with Jews five times as likely as the average citizen to hold such jobs.⁶ Like all the revolutionary parties, the Bolsheviks before 1917 attracted many Jews, along with members of other national minorities that were the object of discrimination in late imperial Russia. This continued into the 1920s and 1930s, with the party now in power. In 1923, three out of seven full members of the Politburo were Jewish.⁷ This number had dropped to one out of ten by 1930 (though four of the remaining nine members had Jewish wives), with Jewish representation

on the larger Central Committee at a similar level at the end of the decade—but this still meant that Jewish representation in these elite bodies was double that of Jews in the party as a whole and more than three times their share of total Soviet population.⁸

The Jewishness of the Bolshevik party and its leadership in the first forty years of the twentieth century has often been underestimated, partly because the Bolsheviks' main competitors within the Marxist socialist movement, the Mensheviks, were even more Jewish and partly because so much was made of it by the Nazis in their propaganda against Jewish Bolshevism.⁹ “Get rid of Jews and Bolsheviks” was a rallying cry against the Reds during the civil war, especially in Ukraine. Addressing Soviet Jews collectively in 1927, the Russian émigré nationalist V. V. Shulgin wrote: “We do not like the fact that you became *the backbone and core of the Communist Party*. . . . We do not like the fact that that this whole terrible thing [the revolution] was done *on the Russian back*, . . . that it has cost us Russians . . . unutterable losses [and] that you, Jews, a relatively small group within the Russian population, participated in this vile deed *out of all proportion to your numbers*.¹⁰ Such attitudes were not uncommon within the Soviet Union, too, but antisemitism was vigorously combated by the party and government. The “political literacy” taught both to the general population and to party members for two decades involved repudiating and resisting antisemitism and other forms of ethnic discrimination. One could be expelled from the party or imprisoned for antisemitic acts, or both, and such prosecutions were regularly publicized in the press.¹¹ Jews who came of age after the revolution often claimed that “they had not encountered anti-Semitism before the war [World War II],” writes Amir Weiner in his study of the postwar period.¹² To be sure, this may have been a slightly rosy remembrance: Russia had a long history of popular antisemitism, and there were numerous occasions when particular circumstances or state policies brought it briefly to the fore, provoking condemnatory and punitive Soviet reactions. The faction fights in the succession struggles after Lenin’s death in 1924 pitted a non-Jew (Stalin) against two successive Jewish claimants (Trotsky and Zinoviev), and Trotsky later claimed that the antisemitic card was used against him by Stalin supporters. No doubt it was, covertly, but Stalin’s public commitment to the position of anti-antisemitism remained firm.¹³ The drive against “Nepmen” (New Economic Policy entrepreneurs) and speculators sometimes acquired antisemitic

overtones in the late 1920s (since many of the new “NEP bourgeoisie” were in fact Jewish), but we know this because prosecution and condemnation followed.¹⁴ Affirmative action policies in higher education in favor of proletarians and “backward” nationalities also created tensions that sometimes acquired antisemitic overtones (since Jewish students, mainly non-proletarian, were disproportionately represented in Russian and Ukrainian secondary and higher schools).¹⁵

The trickiest situation with respect to possibly resurgent antisemitism developed in the later 1930s, through a combination of the Great Purges and a shift in language and nationalities policy. Jews’ high representation in managerial and professional elites meant that the anti-elite component of the Great Purges of 1936–37 had the potential to turn antisemitic, and it probably sometimes did so. Nevertheless, according to the available quantitative data, Jews appear to have been, if anything, underrepresented among the Great Purges’ victims, particularly with regard to executions.¹⁶ The change in language policy, privileging Russian to a greater extent than before in non-Russian regions, led to closure of many “national minority” schools and cultural institutions, especially in the western parts of the country. This included Yiddish schools, but according to Gennadii V. Kostyrchenko’s authoritative study of Stalinist antisemitism, those who suffered most from this policy were not the Jews but rather other national minorities such as Germans, Latvians, and Poles, many of whom, in addition, had been targeted in recent deportations of non-Russians from border regions.¹⁷ New stresses emerged with the annexation of eastern Poland, the Baltics, and part of Bessarabia, adding to the Soviet population 2 million new Jews, many of them religiously observant and Yiddish-speaking. Compounding the problem was an influx of some hundreds of thousands of refugees, mainly Jewish, fleeing the areas of Poland that had been taken over by Nazi Germany.¹⁸ The Soviets approached all of these new citizens with their habitual suspicion, arresting some and deporting large numbers of others whom they regarded as unreliable and potentially disloyal for social or political reasons, including the socialist Bund leaders Henryk Erlich and Viktor Alter.¹⁹ This happened in all the newly annexed regions, and Jews were among the victims, along with members of core nationalities of these regions (Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, and so on). The punitive actions were not specifically anti-Jewish, although if Jews were around a fifth of

all deportees from Poland, they were overrepresented according to population share.²⁰

Nevertheless, the absorption of the annexed territories in 1939–40 appears to have proceeded reasonably smoothly, given the inherent difficulties. The immediate origins of the resurgence of a “Jewish question” in the Soviet Union lie not in the annexations themselves but rather in what came next. The German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 was quickly followed by German occupation of the large swathes of Soviet territory, beginning with the Polish and Baltic lands so recently incorporated into the Soviet Union. That attack prompted a chaotic evacuation and flight eastward into the Soviet hinterland from the annexed territories, Jews naturally being particularly motivated to flee. It has been estimated that half a million Jews fled or were transported into the Soviet hinterland.²¹ Large numbers of Jews also joined the evacuation from the capitals threatened by the invading army, Moscow and Leningrad. Overall, the number of Jewish wartime evacuees/refugees to the Soviet hinterland was about 1.5 million.²² Their destinations were various—the Volga, the Urals, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Siberia—but what these regions had in common was a previously low or nonexistent Jewish population of any kind, still less of non-Russian speakers.

A SOVIET SANCTUARY?

With hindsight, we can say that the best chance Eastern European Jews had of surviving the war and the murderous policies of the Nazis was to spend this period in the Soviet Union. Should we then conclude that the Soviet Union was the one safe sanctuary for Jews at this time and give it credit for saving them? This claim was put forward by the Soviet sympathizers and contested by their opponents in the Cold War.²³ The truth, as so often, was complicated. Many Jews welcomed the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland, something that was later held against them by their Polish neighbors.²⁴ But the Soviet Union did not explicitly offer itself as a haven for Jews after the German occupation of western Poland, nor did Politburo discussions of the problem of refugees and later of evacuation distinguish Jews from those of other nationalities.

Refugees from the west were accepted across the border until the end of 1939, but then the Soviet Union signed a treaty with Germany that

closed the borders, making no specific reference to Jews. The refugees, along with all residents of the annexed territories, were offered Soviet citizenship, but many refused, and some of these were deported back to the German sector in the west. Others caught in the Soviet part of Poland actually queued up for return to the west, a sight that Ivan Serov, head of the Ukrainian People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), described in a letter to Khrushchev as "painful."²⁵ This and other evidence of the Polish Jews' lack of enthusiasm for the Soviet Union led the NKVD to conclude after a few months that the refugees were a potential security threat, and many were arrested and sent eastward to the Gulag.²⁶ In addition, as already noted, many residents of the annexed territories were deported, although within a few months of the German invasion, as a result of a Soviet agreement with the Polish government-in-exile, the deportees were released, being left more or less to fend for themselves in the territories of the Soviet hinterland where they had landed.²⁷ Ben-Cion Pinchuk's suggestions that "the largest group of Jews rescued from the annexed territories were those who were deported before the outbreak of war" may be only slightly exaggerated.²⁸

It is striking that the idea of Soviet sanctuary for Jews threatened by Nazi Germany appears to have been virtually absent from Soviet internal discussions. The only straightforward statement on it I have found—and that in the form of a reproach to the Soviet Union for *not* offering sanctuary—was published in the form of an open letter to Stalin, published in a Russian émigré journal in October 1939 by former diplomat Fedor Raskolnikov, whom the Soviets regarded as a renegade.²⁹ No reply came from Stalin, of course, but it may have irked him.

The fate of the former Polish Jews was, however, of intense concern to some people in the Soviet elite, notably prominent Soviet Jewish intellectuals such as Solomon Mikhoels, director of Moscow's Jewish theater, and Yiddish poet Perets Markish and former Bundist literary scholar Isaak Nusinov, who were to become leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC). Officially created as a Soviet "voluntary organization" in 1942 for purposes of fund-raising and publicity in the international Jewish community, the JAC had its origins as a domestic pressure group on the plight of former Polish Jews after the new partition of Poland.³⁰ These men, well connected in the Soviet political elite, had been concerned about

the withering of Yiddish culture in Belarus and Ukraine since the mid-1930s and saw the sudden acquisition of additional Soviet Yiddish speakers as further ammunition for their arguments in favor of reestablishment of Yiddish schools.³¹ Informed about the situation in the newly incorporated territories by petitions and appeals sent to the Jewish Section of the Soviet Union of Writers, the body that, before the creation of the JAC, was seen by Jews as their quasi-official representative, Nusinov, the section's chairman, went with Markish and others to Bialystok in Western Belarus early in 1940 to check out the situation on the ground.³² On their return, the delegation sought an urgent meeting with Molotov to discuss the plight of the now-Soviet Polish Jews, with particular reference to the lack of Yiddish schools, libraries, and newspapers in the region.³³ In addition, Nusinov boldly complained about Jewish arrests and deportations, as well as inadequate Yiddish facilities, in a letter to the party Central Committee.³⁴ But in none of these documents did the Jewish intellectual activists invoke the notion of a Soviet sanctuary. Their pitch focused on the importance of Yiddish as an instrument of Sovietization of these "new Soviet citizens" and the threat to Jewish culture if it were lost, and it was presented in a tone that combined the old grievance on the Yiddish issue with a sense of new opportunity.³⁵

After the German attack, Soviet evacuation of population from the western regions was chaotic, with no special provision or priority for evacuation of Jews. In fact, official Soviet instructions and reporting on evacuation virtually never distinguished evacuees by nationality. Some local officials encouraged them to leave and supported their efforts, while others were less sympathetic. Paradigmatic in the latter category was Pan-teleimon Ponomarenko, first secretary of the party in Belarus, who, in a context of praising the steadfastness of Belarusian peasants in the face of German attack in a report to Stalin in July 1941, contrasted them unfavorably with white-collar urbanities who "only think of saving their own skins": "This can be explained, in the main, by the large Jewish stratum of the population in the cities. They have been gripped by an animal fear of Hitler and, instead of fighting, they flee."³⁶

Overall, the fairest summary of Soviet performance vis-à-vis the issue of sanctuary was given by Israeli scholar Yosef Litvak. Acknowledging all the Soviet "acts of cruelty" and violence against the newly incorporated Polish Jews and the refugees from the west, he writes:

The Soviet Union was a poor country plagued by shortages because of its unsuccessful social and economic socialist experiment. Nevertheless, after they had “succeeded” in early 1940 in stopping the further influx of Jewish refugees from the Nazis, the Soviets reconciled themselves to the existence of hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees who had arrived legally before the doors were shut and even to the presence of those who came illegally. In this instance, they displayed greater generosity than any other country. They offered the refugees full citizenship, including the right to work and study. They provided refugees housing and food, within their limited means, to those who agreed to work in large enterprises. Of course, they could not give the refugees better conditions than those enjoyed by their veteran citizens.³⁷

WARTIME ANTISEMITISM AND JEWISH ACTIVISM

The outbreak of war brought a sudden and quite spectacular upsurge of popular antisemitism in the Soviet Union.³⁸ All at once, antisemitic comments that would previously have been inadmissible were heard almost openly made in public. In October 1941, the diary of a young Ukrainian Jew recorded the following:

In the streets and in the park, in the bread shop and in queues for kerosene—everywhere you hear the whisper—quiet, horrifying, merry but full of hate. They are talking about Jews. They are still saying it a bit timidly, looking round. Jews are thieves. One Jewish woman stole such and such. Jews have money. One Jewish woman had 50,000 [rubles], but she railed against fate and said that she was naked and barefoot. One Jewish man had still more money, but he considers himself unfortunate. Jews do not like working. Jews do not want to serve in the Red Army. Jews live in the cities without a permit. Jews have oppressed them. In a word, Jews are the source of all misfortunes.³⁹

This upsurge at first sight seems counterintuitive, given that antisemitism was such a prominent part of the *enemy's* ideology. In the opinion of

one Russian historian, the antisemitism surged immediately after the staggeringly successful German attack because many Soviet citizens expected a Soviet defeat and therefore turned against the Soviet regime, reverting to the old equation of Communists and Jews.⁴⁰ No doubt another contributing factor was Nazi antisemitic leaflets dropped from the skies in the western regions of the country from the earliest days of the war and aimed partly at Soviet soldiers. The leaflets emphasized that Germany was “waging war principally against the Jews and Communism,” that is, not against the Russian and Ukrainian population as a whole.⁴¹ Judging by the number of Soviet army defectors who came over to the German side, often leaflet in hand, their impact was considerable.⁴² The same young Ukrainian Jew, who was also a Soviet patriot with no sympathy for the Nazi cause, noted ruefully that antisemitism was the only part of the leaflets’ pitch that was likely to hit home with Soviet readers.⁴³

Yet, from the nature of the antisemitic comments of the early war months, particularly in the panic of October 1941 when Moscow nearly fell to the Germans, it is hard to avoid the sense that flight and evacuation of Jews from the western regions eastward into the Soviet hinterland after the German attack was a key issue. Evacuated from Dnepropetrovsk to Essentuki in the North Caucasus, the young Ukrainian Jew noted in his diary in September that “those who remained in the city were looking indignantly at those who left, and some people started to say that it is just the Jews who are running away, that they have hoarded thousands [of rubles] and therefore they are making a dash for it.”⁴⁴ Belarusian first secretary Ponomarenko’s comment to Stalin in July (quoted above) similarly implied that Jews who fled were cowards. In September, security chief Beria reported in a memo to Stalin on the upsurge of popular antisemitism, quoting comments picked up by police surveillance, such as this one (from a retired Russian professor): “There are no Jews at the front, they have all run away to any place where everything will be quiet.”⁴⁵ In the panicky October days when government and individual citizens were trying to decide whether to evacuate Moscow, there were reports of Jews being pulled with their suitcases out of cars on the highways out of town and beaten.⁴⁶ “The last remnants of the Jews are fleeing. A sort of ‘de-Judaization’ of Moscow is occurring,” another Russian diarist reported, not without satisfaction, on 19 October.⁴⁷ Perlustrated letters coming out of the city revealed that the public was “upset by the perceived massive

flight of Jews from Moscow.”⁴⁸ The evacuation was “a turning point in the openness with which [antisemitic] sentiments were expressed,” an American historian concludes.⁴⁹

Jews were a previously unknown quantity in many parts of the hinterland, including Central Asia, to which they were evacuated or congregated after release from deportation. But the arrival of millions of evacuees needing housing and provisions put enormous strain on local administrations and populations.⁵⁰ While Jews were overall a minority of evacuees, they were overrepresented in the evacuation from some regions.⁵¹ Well over half of Moscow’s Jewish population chose evacuation, and in some receiving centers in the hinterland they were a majority of evacuees. In Uzbekistan’s capital, Tashkent, 63 percent of evacuees as of late 1941 were Jewish, and the Jewish theaters of Moscow, Kiev, and Odessa were among the institutions evacuated to the city.⁵² The prejudice Jews encountered was to some degree prejudice against evacuees in general, but it was also often specifically antisemitic, sparked perhaps by non-Jewish evacuees from places such as Ukraine and fueled later in the war by demobilized wounded soldiers who contributed the view prevalent in the army (although apparently unfounded) that Jews were underrepresented at the front.⁵³

On 20 August 1942, Beria reported on antisemitic incidents and statements in Uzbekistan arising “in connection with the coming to the republic via evacuation of a significant number of citizens of the Soviet Union of Jewish nationality.” Pogrom rumors abounded among the Jewish refugees, although most were without foundation.⁵⁴ But in the Sverdlovsk region in the Urals there actually was some sort of pogrom, with rampagers shouting “Here’s your second front—kill the yids.” Similar reports of growing antisemitism came from all over Central Asia. Evacuated Jews had “squeezed out Uzbeks and Russians” from all the good jobs, they were saying in Tashkent. In Frunze (Kyrgyzstan), demobilized soldiers were “openly say[ing] that Jews have refused to participate in the war and that they sit in the rear in warm places.” In Alma-Ata, rumor had it that “Jews were evading army service and that they had stolen money during the Moscow panic and were living in the rear ‘like kings.’”⁵⁵

It has sometimes been claimed that rising wartime antisemitism was at least in part a reflection of greater official tolerance than before the war, since the regime was hamstrung by fear of appearing to confirm Nazi equations of Jews and Communism.⁵⁶ This may be. Certainly, party

leaders must have been put on guard when, after a (state-sanctioned) Jewish rally by the same activists who were later leaders of the JAC was broadcast in Moscow in August 1941, NKVD surveillance reported strong negative reactions by citizens who interpreted the speakers' affirmations of Jewish identity along with Soviet patriotism as evidence that Jews were running Russia.⁵⁷ On the other hand, a large part of the evidence we have about wartime antisemitism comes from official reports and, most important, prosecutions.⁵⁸ Official condemnation of antisemitism may have slackened somewhat during the war, but it clearly had not disappeared.

Like the NKVD, the JAC was also monitoring antisemitism, being kept informed of it by an endless flow of complaints and appeals from evacuated Jews. The JAC leaders were very concerned about it and tried to get action in response to specific individual complaints via their contacts in the party and government leadership.⁵⁹ But they were in a bind: their official mandate was to rally international Jewish support for the Soviet Union against Nazi ideological antisemitism, not to complicate the issue by complaining about its everyday Soviet counterpart. Some heated debates went on in the closed counsels of the JAC on the issue, with the Jewish writer Ilya Ehrenburg—one of the most popular Soviet journalists of the wartime period, known for his vitriolic anti-German as well as anti-Nazi propaganda—arguing vehemently that domestic antisemitism must become one of the JAC's central concerns, against a more prudent majority warning that any such revision of mission would get the committee closed down.⁶⁰

POSTWAR DILEMMAS

Months before the end of the war, as the Soviet army gradually pushed the German army back toward and over the western border, reestablishing Soviet power in formerly occupied regions as it did so, evacuees started to return from the east to their former places of residence. This created huge problems, particularly when the former evacuees tried to reclaim their old apartments and jobs, which were now in many cases occupied by other people.⁶¹ But the problems were greatest of all for returning Jewish evacuees, who encountered intense hostility and refusal to give up apartments. This became a major preoccupation of the JAC, to which the sufferers appealed for support in their battles with occupants, neighbors, and local authorities.⁶²

The situation was particularly bad in Ukraine and Belarus, regions that had been under German occupation for three years. Probably the local populations had absorbed some of the Nazis' antisemitism, even if not fully approving their extermination policies. Writing of the Vinnitsa region of Western Ukraine, Historian Amir Weiner concludes that "by the end of the war Soviet Ukrainian society . . . had come to accept the 'Jewish problem' as a legitimate one" and to see Jews as aliens "whom people wished to see removed from their midst."⁶³ After reestablishment of Soviet rule, a wave of antisemitism swept through these areas, with minor pogroms in Kiev and other cities. These were associated not only with resurgent Ukrainian nationalism but also with a newly aggressive response on the part of Jews: in the Kiev case, for example, the trigger was a fight between a Jewish officer of the People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB) and two uniformed servicemen who, in September 1945, called him a "Tashkent partisan," at which he shot them.⁶⁴

The postwar antisemitism in the western regions of the Soviet Union resembled the better-known situation in postwar Poland, except that it appears to have been more successfully kept under control by the authorities. Still, it put them under significant strain and was one of the multitude of acute problems that confronted the reestablished Soviet administrations of Belarus, headed by Ponomarenko and Khrushchev. Both were Communists of lower-class Ukrainian or Ukrainian-Russian origin promoted rapidly in the 1930s, and both seem to have felt, perhaps understandably, that their first duty was to their regions' titular nationalities (Belarusian and Ukrainian). Hersh Smoliar, a Jewish Communist and prewar Polish citizen, who became a partisan during the war and remained in Belarus during the first postwar years, was horrified to hear from Ponomarenko personally that aggressive Jewish nationalists were mainly responsible for the trouble in Minsk and that Jews were in general too likely to ask for special treatment.⁶⁵

Similar reactions were reported from Communist officials and institutions in Ukraine.⁶⁶ Jewish members of the Ukrainian Union of Writers returning from evacuation found that their apartments in the Writers' House had been given to Ukrainian writers and would not be returned, as "the reestablishment of Jewish cultural institutions in Kiev is not anticipated in the near future."⁶⁷ But it sometimes worked the other

way, with the authorities supporting the returning Jews, as in the Kiev Conservatory of Music, where according to an anonymous denouncer, returning Jewish faculty members had “seized the executive positions,” appointed their cronies, and thrown out Ukrainians.⁶⁸ Either way, it is clear that ethnic tensions were running high. A top Soviet security official, Pavel Sudoplatov, remembered that Khrushchev, then secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, had complained to the Uzbekistan party secretary, Usman Usopov: “Jews from Uzbekistan ‘are flying to the Ukraine like crows from Tashkent and Samarkand. I have no space to accommodate them because the city is destroyed. Stop the flow or pogroms will start.’”⁶⁹ In Ukraine in 1944, two successive secret police investigations looked into allegations of antisemitism by officials (including Khrushchev); the second investigation, whose conclusions Khrushchev endorsed, was even more inclined than the first to be skeptical of the allegations and attribute problems to Jewish “nationalism” and self-assertion.⁷⁰

Ukraine and Belarus were having difficulties enough coping with the return from evacuation of their “own” Jews, pre-1939 citizens. The “Polish” Jews, former Polish citizens of the territories incorporated in 1939 who were now for the most part Soviet citizens, posed problems of a different order. In theory, at least, those who had evacuated or been deported from the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus in 1941 could return to their former homes, now in Soviet territory, but this was not an option for those who had fled east into the Soviet Union as refugees from western German-occupied regions, whose homes were now in the newly reconstituted state of Poland.

It was in the context of these problems that, in February 1944, Mikhoels and other JAC leaders drafted a letter to Stalin proposing the creation of a Jewish autonomous region in the Crimea. They had evidently had high-level encouragement to do this and may also have been tipped off that a mass deportation of Crimean Tatars for wartime collaboration (which took place a few months later, freeing up territory and housing stock in the region) was in the works.⁷¹ In its final form, the letter focused on the devastating wartime losses of the Jewish people—JAC leaders had apparently heard rumors that Crimea was being considered as “compensation for [their] bereavement”—and the need for Soviet Jews as a whole to have a territory of their own.⁷² But an earlier draft had pitched the

argument differently (and perhaps in terms whose practicality would have been more likely to appeal to Stalin), noting that the fate of the former Polish Jews was going to be a major postwar problem, with the Soviet Union under pressure either to return them to Poland or to let them depart for Palestine. Crimea would solve this problem by giving them a new Soviet home in whose development they would be “among the basic cadres of pioneers.”⁷³

Stalin did not react to the proposal for some years, during which the JAC had other preoccupations and turned its attention elsewhere, including renewing its interest in Birobidzhan. But he, too, was thinking about the question of what to do with the refugees/deportees/evacuees from Poland after the war ended. Initially, he seems to have been comparatively uninterested in the Jewish aspect, which he saw as a subset of the larger Polish problem, a key foreign policy issue in 1944–46.⁷⁴ Then, with the creation of a Jewish state of Israel on the agenda but not yet realized, Stalin became more interested, in a positive sense, in the Jewish aspect—though the positive was to switch to negative toward the end of the 1940s when the Soviet Union realized that the now-existing state of Israel was becoming an American client in the burgeoning Cold War.

REPATRIATION

Estimates of the number of Polish citizens of all ethnicities who spent all or part of the war in the Soviet Union range extraordinarily widely—from 300,000–400,000 to between 1 and 2 million. The high-end estimates of Poles missing and presumed in the Soviet Union originate from the wartime Polish government-in-exile, while the low-end, from Soviet archives, represent the number of Polish citizens within the Soviet Union amnestied in August 1941, which would not include evacuees, labor volunteers, or conscripts into the Soviet army.⁷⁵ A recent estimate puts the Jewish share of the larger group at about 25 percent, which on the basis of Mark Edele and Wanda Warlik’s figures (see chapter 2) would put the total Polish number in the range of 600,000–1,500,000.⁷⁶

Repatriation of Polish citizens began in 1942, when, by agreement with the Polish government-in-exile, 120,000 (about 30 percent) of the amnestied Poles in the Soviet Union were allowed to join the Anders army and leave for Iran to join the Allied fight against the Germans.⁷⁷ Despite

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being intended as a fighting force, the Anders army took many Polish civilians in its train, and it also included some 6,000–7,000 Polish Jews.⁷⁸ More Poles crossed the Soviet western borders as soldiers in 1944 with the Berling army (First Polish Division), which had been recruited on Soviet soil, with Soviet support, and independently of the Polish government-in-exile, from the same contingent of Polish refugees on which the Anders army had drawn.⁷⁹ The Berling army fought its way through Eastern Europe to Berlin and was demobilized in Poland in August 1945, with its officers forming the core of the new Polish People's Republic Army. Up to 20,000 Jews made their way back to Poland in its ranks.⁸⁰

The Soviet incorporation of former eastern Poland and the Baltic states was not on the table after the war, but disposition of their ethnically Polish population was. Agreements on a non-mandatory population exchange—ethnic Poles and Jews from the annexed regions of the Soviet Union to go to Poland (mainly for settlement in the territories in the west newly “recovered” from Germany) and Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians to go to the Soviet Union—were signed in September 1944 between the Polish Committee of National Liberation (a Soviet-supported proto-government) and the Soviet republics of Belarus, Ukraine, and Lithuania. These agreements were basically about Poles who had remained *in situ* in the western regions through Soviet annexation, German occupation, and Soviet reoccupation, not evacuees to the hinterland. Among more than 1 million who moved under the population exchange, 55,000 were Jews.⁸¹ But they should be considered direct Holocaust survivors—that is, Jews who survived in hiding or otherwise under German occupation—rather than part of the group that survived through fleeing or being deported into the Soviet Union.

The inclusion of Jews in these population exchange agreements was something of an anomaly, given that no other non-Polish nationality had the option of moving to Poland under their provisions. They were apparently added at the request of Wanda Wasilewska's Soviet-based Union of Polish Patriots.⁸² Wasilewska was a Polish socialist writer, based in the Soviet Union during the war, who by virtue of her personal closeness to Stalin and Khrushchev, as well as her marriage to the Ukrainian dramatist and political figure Aleksandr Korneichuk, was a very influential figure in matters concerning Poles in the Soviet Union, particularly the creation of the union and the formation of the Berling army.⁸³ In her concern

about Polish refugees, she was as firm in her support for Polish Jews as for ethnic Poles, which is an important part of the backstory to a second population exchange agreement, this time concluded by the Soviet government with the newly established Polish National Unity government on 6 July 1945, of which Polish Jews were the main beneficiaries.⁸⁴

Unlike the first agreements, this second population exchange was intended to cover former Polish citizens who had spent the war in the Soviet hinterland, as well as those who had remained in the annexed territories. Registration for departure (which was not mandatory) was carried out in centers all over the Soviet hinterland by the Union of Polish Patriots. A high proportion of the Polish Jews in evacuation opted for departure: as of the end of June 1946, 157,420 had registered for departure, of whom 120,975 had already left.⁸⁵ The final number registered by the Soviets as departing in these echelons was 136,600.⁸⁶ While Poland was the ostensible repatriation destination, many of these Jews were no doubt hoping to go on to Palestine.⁸⁷

The repatriates found, to their surprise, that conditions of transit were well above par and they were carefully looked after.⁸⁸ This was a rare occasion in which refugees were demonstratively privileged above the local population. Clearly, some sort of point was being made, and the intended audience seems to have been international Jewry and the Allies. Stalin was still hoping for a socialist Jewish state that would be an ally of the Soviet Union. A great deal of behind-the-scenes negotiation was going on about the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine at this time, with the Soviet Union supporting the idea and even facilitating the emigration of Eastern European Jews as well as the provision of weapons for the Jewish struggle.⁸⁹ These considerations were surely uppermost in Stalin's mind in 1945–46, when the departure of the Polish Jews was in progress.

Other explanations have been offered for the Soviet decision to allow Polish Jewish repatriation. One version has it that Stalin thought the Polish Jews had been a menace in the Soviet Union during the war because of their black market activities and therefore wanted them out; another has it that he thought Polish Jews were needed in Poland to help the new Communist state get on its feet.⁹⁰ Oddly enough, both versions originate from the same source, the Polish Communist Hersh Smolar, whose interactions with the Soviet leadership in Belarus we have already en-

countered. Smolar had good contacts with the JAC and some second-tier Soviet leaders, but he had no direct access to Stalin and was not privy to Soviet Politburo discussions. Certainly, Jews were prominent in the Communist leadership sent back from Moscow to Poland, and Stalin dismissed the advice of Władysław Gomułka that this would lead to problems with Polish popular opinion.⁹¹ But, in fact, perhaps half of the Polish Jews “repatriated” to Poland in 1945–46 ended up in Israel by 1949.⁹² This was because, confronted by the destruction of former homes and families and frightened by resurgent Polish antisemitism, most of the repatriates quickly moved on to Europe, joining the hundreds of thousands of “displaced persons” in Allied camps awaiting resettlement.⁹³ It seems highly likely that Stalin and other Soviet leaders—who seemed to take some pleasure in embarrassing the British and American occupation authorities in Germany by helping Jews departing Eastern Europe in 1946–47 to cross the border—expected this outcome and saw Polish Jewish repatriation as much as a population gift to the future Israel as a source of support for the new Polish government.⁹⁴

CONCLUSION

This story began with Jewish evacuation and popular antisemitism and has ended with Jewish repatriation. But of course there is an after-story that has not been told: that of quasi-official Soviet antisemitism in the final years before Stalin’s death in 1953. This was not in evidence in the Soviet leadership’s handling of the repatriation issue in 1945–46, as we have seen, but in domestic affairs it was becoming increasingly visible from 1947 on. In 1952, JAC leaders (arrested in 1949, after the dissolution of the JAC the previous year) were put on trial for treason, and a few months later Stalin recalled the Crimean proposal as a treacherous attempt to create an American beachhead in the Crimea and blamed Molotov for encouraging it. Stalin never exactly proclaimed a new antisemitic policy, but the announcement in January 1953 of a plot on the part of Kremlin doctors, most of them Jewish, to kill Soviet leaders and conduct espionage on behalf of the United States, now the enemy in the Cold War, came close. Diplomatic relations with Israel were broken off. Organized public discussion of the “Doctors’ Plot” charges revealed a public opinion strongly in favor of deporting Jews as a privileged and parasitical group from the

big cities—an action that was not actually officially planned, as far as we can tell from the archives, but was certainly not implausible, given past actions against “traitor” nations (including the Crimean Tatars, whose land the Jews would have inherited if the Crimean proposal had been accepted).⁹⁵

What prompted Stalin’s shift into antisemitism as a domestic policy is a hotly disputed question too complicated to discuss fully here. I myself am skeptical about suggestions that Stalin was a lifelong antisemite but was restrained by the Bolshevik taboo on antisemitism until, in old age, he let these feelings rip. In my reading, Stalin was always instrumental, including in his display of prejudice, so the question is, what goal did he seek to achieve by these means, and my proposed answer is, getting rid of his old number two man, Molotov, and perhaps most of the rest of his old Politburo team as well.⁹⁶ Be that as it may, however, it seems clear that a key factor in changing Stalin’s Jewish policy was the creation in 1948 of the state of Israel, which, contrary to Stalin’s hopes, quickly became a client of the United States and thus a Cold War enemy. As Terry Martin has noted, Stalin’s nationality policy in the prewar period implicitly treated as suspect those “diaspora” nationalities (Martin’s term) such as Soviet Germans, Finns, and Poles whose members could conceivably feel greater loyalty to a nation-state outside than they felt towards the Soviet Union.⁹⁷ Jews were not a diaspora nationality before 1948, but with the creation of the state of Israel, they became one. The significance of that change was already evident in the autumn of 1948, when Golda Meir arrived in Moscow as the first Israeli ambassador, to be greeted with huge enthusiasm by Jewish crowds (and Molotov’s wife) and corresponding suspicion from the security police and Stalin. It is notable that Meir’s hopes were quickly dashed not only with respect to Soviet financial support but also with respect to Soviet tolerance of future Jewish emigration to Israel, a major preoccupation of the new state (“No money, no people,” as she summed up the Soviet position).⁹⁸

There was, of course, nothing particularly strange in Soviet hostility to Jewish emigration, because legal emigration of any kind had been virtually impossible since the early 1930s. But in 1945–46, Stalin had bent his own rules for the Polish Jews—and, contrary to Israeli

hopes, this turned out to be a temporary strategic exception and not a basic change of policy. The combination of hopes raised and then disappointed with the obnoxious domestic antisemitism of the late Stalin period created one of the most egregious, long-running disasters of Soviet foreign policy, the refusal to allow Jewish emigration despite insistent pressure from Israel, the United States, and world opinion to do so. No doubt from the Soviet perspective part of the real justification was fairness (if nobody else could emigrate, why should the Jews be allowed?), but of course this was hardly an argument to blazon abroad, given that freedom of emigration was one of the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights accepted by the United Nations (albeit without Soviet signature) after the war. This issue, plus indignation at the hypocrisy of the Soviets practicing domestic antisemitism in the 1950s while denying that they were doing it, removed any possibility that the Soviet Union would be remembered as the country that had taken in Jews during the war, however ungraciously, and allowed them to survive the Holocaust in Europe. Yet, strangely enough, that is what happened.

Notes

1. Hans Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 15.
2. Figures from *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke: Istoricheskie ocherki*, vol. 2, 1940–1959, ed. Iu. A. Poliakov and V. B. Zhiromskaia (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001), 10.
3. Viacheslav Konstantinov, *Evreiskoe naselenie byvshego SSSR v XX veke (sotsial'no-demograficheskii analiz)* (Jerusalem: Lira, 2007), 33, table 1.1.
4. See Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 67–90.
5. Konstantinov, *Evreiskoe naselenie*, 38, table 1.6.
6. Ibid., 216–17, tables 5.8 and 5.9.
7. Jerry Hough and Merle Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1979), 467.
8. Konstantinov, *Evreiskoe naselenie*, 241. For national breakdown of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, see T. H. Rigby, *Communist*

- Party Membership in the USSR, 1917–1967* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 366. For Politburo membership in 1930, see Robert V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 430. On Politburo wives, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 68. The Jewish Politburo member was Kaganovich; the members with Jewish wives were Kirov, Kuibyshev, Molotov, and Voroshilov.
9. Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). Slezkine offers an important corrective.
 10. Quoted in *ibid.*, 181.
 11. See Gennadii V. Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniiia, 2001), 110–11; and Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 274.
 12. Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 272. A similar comment is quoted in Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 232.
 13. See Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina* (102–5), for Trotsky's claim that "anti-Semitism raised its head at the same time as anti-Trotskyism," which Kostyrchenko finds exaggerated.
 14. Alan M. Ball, *Russia's Last Capitalists: The Nepmen, 1921–1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 100, 165, 206n17.
 15. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 109, 283n140; Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 352–53.
 16. Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 424–27.
 17. Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina*, 131–38.
 18. The numbers are in the 150,000–300,000 range. See chapter 2 (table 1), by Mark Edele and Wanda Warlik, in this volume.
 19. The number of deportations was in the 68,000–71,000 range, and there were 23,600 arrests. See table 2 in chapter 2 of this volume. On Erlich and Alter, see Shimon Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 9–19, 165–71.

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20. The number of ethnics deported was 310,000, according to Pavel M. Polian, *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004), 118. About a tenth of the prewar population was Jewish. Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 4. The overrepresentation may be a product of Jewish preponderance among refugees from western Poland and the propertied classes in eastern Poland.
21. Yosef Litvak, "Jewish Refugees from Poland in the USSR, 1939–1946," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 14. This is the figure for fleeing and deported Jews from all the annexed territories. For Polish Jews alone, see tables 2–3 in chapter 2 of this volume.
22. Vadim Dubson, "Toward a Central Database of Evacuated Soviet Jews' Names, for the Study of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Territories," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 103.
23. For claims, see Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941–1948* ([Boulder, CO]: East European Quarterly, 1982), 150. For scholarly contestation, see Ben-Cion Pinchuk, "Was There a Soviet Policy for Evacuating the Jews? The Case of the Annexed Territories," *Slavic Review* 39, no. 1 (1980): 44–55.
24. See Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, 29–35, 206.
25. Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), 141. Khrushchev, party head of Ukraine, focuses his account on the irony of the fact that these Jews were trying to get back from Soviet-controlled territory to German-controlled territory, and he makes no mention of the arrests and deportations. This English translation ("shocked" for "*bol'no*") slightly distorts the sense of the original Russian.
26. For detailed accounts of Soviet policy toward the refugees, see Ko-styrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina*, 184–93; and Litvak, "Jewish Refugees from Poland," 129–31.
27. Litvak, "Jewish Refugees from Poland," 147–48.
28. Pinchuk, "Was There a Soviet Policy?," 55.
29. Raskolnikov, who defected in 1938 to escape arrest in the Great Purges, wrote on the eve of the Hitler-Stalin pact (17 August 1939) criticizing the Soviet tilt toward Germany, which meant, he stated,

“indifferently abandon[ing] to ruin the Jewish workers, intellectuals, artisans fleeing from fascist barbarity, slamming before them the doors of our country, which in its enormous spaces could have sheltered many thousands of emigrants.” The letter, originally published in *Novaia Rossiia*, 1 October 1939, 6–11, is in *Otkryvaia novye stranitsy . . . Mezhdunarodnye voprosy: Sobytiia i liudi*, ed. A. A. Iskenderov, comp. N. V. Popov (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literature, 1989), 198–99. Thanks to June Farris, Slavic librarian at the University of Chicago, and Angelia Graf, assistant Slavic librarian, University of North Carolina, for locating this document.

30. For an account of the genesis of the JAC, which, though otherwise excellent, more or less ignores this genesis, see Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 21–35. The JAC was by far the most active and successful of a number of antifascist committees created at the same time for similar purposes with particular international constituencies (youth, scientists, Slavs, women).
31. Solomon Lozovsky, deputy foreign affairs minister under Molotov as well as deputy head of the Sovinformburo in the early 1940s, was their main “go-to” man. See Perets Markish, statement under interrogation, 8 August 1949, in *Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm v SSSR ot nachala do kul’minatsii, 1938–1953*, comp. Gennadii V. Kostyrchenko (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 23. But they also had some direct access to Politburo members Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Beria, and others. On these, see Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin’s Team*, 200.

On the argument for reestablishing Yiddish schools, see Perets Markish, statement under interrogation, 18 July 1949, in Kostyrchenko, *Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm*, 20–21. See also Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina*, 192–93.

32. On the Jewish Section, see Markish interrogation, 8 August 1949, in Kostyrchenko, *Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm*, 24.
33. Letter and memorandum from Perets Markish, S. Mikhoels, A. Kushnarov, B. Zuskin, L. Kvitsko, I. Dobrushin, I. Nusinov, and S. Godiner to comrade V. M. Molotov, chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, 4 April 1940, on plight of Jewish refugees from west in Eastern Belarus: *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (GARF), f. 5446, op. 82, d. 119, ll. 239–45. The appeal had some effect, at least in the short term, with some Yiddish schools in the western regions being reopened, a new Yiddish newspaper established in Kiev, and a Jewish section being added to the Institute of

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- Literature and Language in Minsk. Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina*, 191–93.
34. Letter from Isaak Nusinov to Central Committee secretary Andrei Zhdanov, 10 October 1940, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 77, op. 3, d. 120, ll. 76–82.
 35. Memorandum of 4 April 1940, GARF, f. 5446, op. 82, d. 119, ll. 244–45.
 36. Albert Kaganovitch, “Jewish Refugees and Soviet Authorities during World War II,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 38, no. 2 (2010): 89. Ponomarenko, a Ukrainian of peasant origins promoted rapidly in the wake of the Great Purges, the top Soviet official in the region, along with Khrushchev in Ukraine, gets generally bad press from memoirists and historians on Jewish issues. The only exception is Polish Jewish Communist Jakub Berman, who gives him higher marks than Khrushchev, at least in having a sense of the contingency of the German alliance in 1939–41. Teresa Toranska, *Oni: Stalin's Polish Puppets* (London: Collins Harvill, 1987), 210–12.
 37. Litvak, “Jewish Refugees from Poland,” 147–48.
 38. See Oleg V. Budnitskii, “The Great Patriotic War and Soviet Society: Defeatism, 1941–42,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, no. 4 (2014): 782–83; and Karel C. Berkhoff, “Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population? The Holocaust in the Soviet Media, 1941–45,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 1 (2009): 102–3.
 39. Diary entry for 23 October 1941, in Vladimir Gelfand, *Dnevnik 1941–1946*, ed. Oleg V. Budnitskii (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2015), 44.
 40. Budnitskii, “Great Patriotic War,” 782–83.
 41. Mordechai Altshuler, “Escape and Evacuation of Soviet Jews at the Time of the Nazi Invasion: Policies and Realities,” 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: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 89.
 42. See *Heil Beil! Flugblattpropaganda im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Dokumentation und Analyse*, ed. Ortwin Buchbender and Horst Schuh (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1974), 49–50. Thanks to Mark Edele for this reference. For more detail, see Mark Edele, *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers Became Hitler's Collaborators, 1941–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

43. Gelfand, *Dnevnik*, 70 (diary entry for 12 June 1942).
44. Ibid., 34–35 (diary entry for 18 September 1941).
45. *Moskva prifrontovaia 1941–1942. Arkhivnye dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: Mosgorarkhiv, 2001), 629n64.
46. Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 112; Mikhail M. Gorinov, “Muscovites’ Moods, 22 June 1941 to May 1942,” in *The People’s War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, ed. Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 123.
47. *Moskva prifrontovaia*, 291.
48. Gorinov, “Muscovites’ Moods,” 126.
49. Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 112.
50. See Natalie Belsky, “Encounters in the East: Evacuees in the Soviet Hinterland during the Second World War” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014), esp. 337–47 (unfamiliarity of Jews), 90–135 (housing), and 206–63 (provisioning).
51. Vadim Dubson, “Toward a Central Database” (102–3), calculates that Jews made up 22 percent of the 4 million persons evacuated from Moscow and Leningrad and over half of those fleeing the western regions of the country. His estimate of the total number of evacuees, 7.5 million (96), is at the low end of a continuum whose high end is about 20 million. See Mark Harrison, *Soviet Planning in Peace and War, 1938–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 72 (adding the 4 million Moscow and Leningrad evacuees not included in Harrison’s calculation of 16.5 million).
52. Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 230.
53. See Belsky, “Encounters in the East,” 342.
54. Kostyrchenko, *Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm*, 32–34.
55. Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 230–33.
56. Oleg V. Budnitskii, introduction to Gelfand, *Dnevnik*, 18–19. Berkhoff, in “Total Annihilation” (103–4), makes a similar point when he suggests that Soviet reticence about publishing news of Nazi antisemitic atrocities may reflect official fears that such publicity might encourage popular antisemitism.
57. On the rally, see Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism*, 41. For negative reaction, see Beria’s report to Stalin of September 1941, in *Moskva prifrontovaia*, 629n64. The report includes the following statement from a retired Russian professor: “I not only turned off the radio when they broadcast the Jewish meeting but didn’t read the paper today because of its publication in *Pravda*.”

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58. Prosecutions form the basic data source for the discussions of local antisemitism in Kaganovitch, “Jewish Refugees and Soviet Authorities,” 117–20, and Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 229–33.
59. For examples, see documents published in Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 225–63.
60. On Ehrenburg’s position, see GARF, f. 8114 [Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee], op. 1, d. 919, l. 36; and Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 29.
61. On re-evacuation and housing problems, see Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 254–64.
62. For example, on the situation in Minsk as of August 1944, see GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 1053, l. 239.
63. Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 277–82; 289–90 (quotation).
64. Ibid., 192–93. On the Jewish nationalist resurgence, see a participant account by a former Jewish partisan, Hersh Smoliar, “Why Do They Hate Us? Partisan Leader Sheds Light on the Soviet Jewish Question,” *Jewish Currents*, July–August 1975, 4–12.
65. Smoliar, “Why Do They Hate Us?,” 7–9. Note, however, that he stops short of calling Ponomarenko antisemitic and, indeed, suspects that part of the problem in their relations was that he had thwarted Ponomarenko’s wish to be a benevolent patron by giving him a decent apartment (8–9).
66. Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 213–14.
67. GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 792, ll. 153–54.
68. Cited by Mordechai Altshuler, “Antisemitism in Ukraine toward the End of World War II,” in Gitelman, *Bitter Legacy*, 80–81.
69. Pavel Sudoplatov and Anatoli Sudoplatov, with Jerrold L. Schecter and Leona P. Schecter, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness—a Soviet Spymaster* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), 294. Sudoplatov dates Khrushchev’s complaint to 1947, which is oddly late for this particular concern; it is possible that Usupov, who in 1947 was being asked to accommodate 3,000 Kurdish refugees from Iran, was recalling an earlier round of resettlement problems.
70. Altshuler, “Antisemitism,” 83–85; Kostyrchenko, *Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm*, 40–44. Bureaucratic infighting between Khrushchev and Soviet security chief Beria (whose associates produced this first report, was involved in this episode, but there may have been real policy differences as well: Beria was one of the Politburo’s most reliable supporters of Jewish causes and, as Altshuler remarks,

- "it is also possible that [he] considered anti-Semitism to be a more serious problem than Khrushchev did. Altschuler, "Antisemitism," 89n28.
71. Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 44–49.
 72. See text in *ibid.*, 264–67. Although Birobidzhan had been created in the Far East to serve this purpose, the letter argued that it had not worked, partly due to its "extreme distance from the primary locations of the Jewish working masses."
 73. GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 792, ll. 167–71. Like the final version, the draft letter was dated 15 February 1944, addressed to Stalin, and signed by Solomon Mikhoels, Shakne Epshteyn, and Itzik Fefer of the JAC.
 74. The Polish problem embraced the future Soviet sphere of interest in Europe, the political complexion of a reconstituted Polish state, the status of the Polish government-in-exile, and accusations of Soviet responsibility for the Katyn wartime murders of Polish officers, as well as the (comparatively minor) question of repatriation of Polish citizens who had spent the war in the Soviet Union.
 75. For Polish figures, see Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939–1948* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 25–27; for Soviet figures, see Polian, *Against Their Will*, 118–19. See also Natalia S. Lebedeva, "The Deportation of the Polish Population to the USSR, 1939–41," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 16, nos. 1–2 (2000): 28–45. Note that Soviet amnesty-based figures would not include Polish refugees from former eastern Poland who fled the region after the German invasion without being arrested or deported or persons who had been executed or died since entering (pre-1939) Soviet territory.
 76. See the recent estimate of Lebedeva, "Deportation of the Polish Population," 24–45.
 77. Polian, *Against Their Will*, 19.
 78. See chapter 2, by Edele and Warlik, table 4. Future Israeli leader Menachem Begin was among them. See Nora Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917: Paradox of Survival* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 1:371. On the Anders army evacuation, see Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 60–87.
 79. On the formation of the Berling army, see Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 122–27.
 80. See table 6 in chapter 2 of this volume.
 81. Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 181–83; Yosef Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union to Poland at the End of

the Second World War and Afterwards,” in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (Hounds-mills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 227–28; Albert Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics, the Return of Jewish Refugees to Poland, and Continued Migration to Palestine, 1944–1946,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 66. Kaganovitch gives the figure of 54,900 Jews in a total of 1,016,354 who had moved as of 1 May 1946. Sword, in *Deportation and Exile* (187), gives a total of 1,517,983 without specifying a cutoff date.

82. Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 179.
83. On Wasilewska, see Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 237–38, 245–47.
84. Nora Levin, in *Jews in the Soviet Union* (1:376), notes that the Union of Polish Patriots, which Wasilewska headed, was “positively disposed toward the Jewish refugees from Poland and included several Jews in its Presidium.”
85. Litvak, “Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated,” 231–25. Ethnic Poles who had been Polish citizens until 1939 were also covered by this agreement, but they seem to have been somewhat less responsive than Jews to the opportunity. Of the 258,990 persons who left under these auspices according to Sword’s figures, only 113,956 were Poles or other non-Jews. The Poles, who had originally expected many more ethnic Poles to register, revised their estimates of the numbers evacuated/deported into the Soviet hinterland sharply downward (from 750,000 to 248,000), but it is clear that, whatever the exact figures, “certain numbers of Poles did choose to remain behind on Soviet territory. Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, 187, 196.
86. See table 6 in chapter 2 of this volume.
87. See the comment in a memo of 28 December 1945 by American Jewish Committee expert on Jewish demography Max Gottschalk that “out of the 150,000 Polish Jews residing in the USSR, who have been authorized to return to Poland, one may expect a hundred thousand to come back for the sole purpose, however, of re-emigration to the Western countries and Palestine.” United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) archive, New York, S-0400-0003-07.
88. Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics,” 72–73.

89. This is the persuasive argument put by Kaganovitch in *ibid.*, 79–81. See also Arieh J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945–1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 167–74, 227–31.
90. Litvak, “Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated,” 229; Yaakov Ro’i, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewish Emigration, 1948–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 347. Both accounts are evidently based on oral interviews with Smolar (whose surname Litvak gives as Smolar).
91. Norman Naimark, “Gomulka and Stalin: The Antisemitic Factor in Postwar Polish Politics,” in *Varieties of Antisemitism: History, Ideology, Discourse*, ed. Murray Baumgarten, Peter Kenez, and Bruce Thompson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 242–45.
92. Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics,” 83.
93. Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 376–80.
94. On Soviet leaders helping Jews cross the border, see Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 227–28.
95. Note that there were some among the JAC leaders who had opposed the Crimea proposal for this reason, for example, Shimon Markish, who preferred the Volga option—settling Jews on the territory of the former German Volga Republic from which Germans had been deported during the war—and thought that Tatars should have the Crimea. Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 48; Levin, *Jews in the Soviet Union*, 1:217.
96. On the issue of Stalin and antisemitism, see Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin’s Team*, 217.
97. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 26–27.
98. Quoted in Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina*, 447.

4

Fraught Friendships

Soviet Jews and Polish Jews on the Soviet Home Front

NATALIE BELSKY

At the age of twenty-one, Jack Pomerantz fled from his hometown of Radzyn in eastern Poland to escape the advancing Nazi armies. Over the next five years, Pomerantz's travels took him across the wide expanse of Soviet territory—from Western Belarus to Tashkent (Uzbekistan) to a labor camp in Siberia and then to Alma-Ata (Kazakhstan), and finally to Moscow and back to Poland, where he returned as a soldier with the Red Army.¹ Pomerantz's journey may seem extraordinary, but it is, indeed, in some ways typical of the experiences of many Polish Jewish refugees who fled or were deported to the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1941 and managed to survive the Second World War and the Holocaust on the Soviet home front.

In a memoir written in the 1990s, Pomerantz tells of his encounter with a Soviet Jewish Red Army officer upon escaping from the Siberian camp; the officer helped Pomerantz gain passage to Alma-Ata and shared

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his food supplies with him. In the short time they spent together on the train, Pomerantz and the officer conversed in Yiddish, and while his new acquaintance was reticent to reveal much about himself, he was eager to hear about Pomerantz's background and his experiences: "He wanted to know about me, where I was from, what I had done, my stories of running away. He asked questions, and I talked, grateful at last to have a sympathetic ear, someone who was concerned. We spent hours in the private luxury of the compartment. It felt like freedom."² The officer even invited Pomerantz to his home and offered him the option of staying with his family while Pomerantz awaited the chance to return home to Poland.³ Pomerantz declined the offer and continued on to Alma-Ata, but the meeting stayed with him and constituted an important episode in his wartime sojourn.

In some ways, this incident provides a glimpse into the nature of relations between Polish Jews and Soviet Jews on the Soviet home front during the Second World War. It illustrates how, in some cases, a shared Jewish identity brought Polish and Soviet Jews together and fostered a sense of trust between them. At the same time, it is clear that significant differences in status, background, and political allegiance meant that these friendships were more complex and fraught than one might imagine. The trust between Pomerantz and his unnamed interlocutor was by no means absolute—it is indicative here that the officer refused to divulge any information about himself to Pomerantz. Indeed, he was curious to hear about Pomerantz's life but was tight-lipped about his own, probably for fear of being associated with someone of questionable background who had spent time in a labor camp.

Moreover, it is evident that both Soviet Jews and Polish Jews benefited from these interactions, but in distinct ways. In this particular case, Pomerantz's encounter proved fortuitous in that he gained a powerful ally who helped him get to his destination. Yet Pomerantz's description suggests that the officer, too, welcomed the interaction, though the benefits he may have received were intangible. The Soviet Jew seemed to relish the opportunity to speak Yiddish and to learn about Pomerantz and his life. Thus, as I argue in this chapter, interactions between Polish and Soviet Jews often proved to be mutually beneficial for both groups involved. At the same time, these interactions demonstrate the ways distinct interwar experiences, specifically the processes of Sovietization

among Jews in the USSR, created significant impediments to mutual understanding.

It is a truism that in the Soviet Union one's well-being depended on having access and connections. More often than not, associations and friendships with those in privileged positions were more important than money.⁴ The period of the Second World War was no exception to this rule. In fact, on the Soviet home front, the importance of establishing and maintaining useful connections in order to gain access to scarce goods was heightened by the inadequacy of official distribution networks, which were focused on supplying the Red Army.⁵ Moreover, Polish Jews, who had lived in the territories annexed to the Soviet Union in 1939 or fled from the German-occupied zone to the Soviet zone between 1939 and 1941, were relatively unfamiliar with how the Soviet system functioned. A significant proportion of them had been deported by Soviet authorities between 1939 and 1941 and had been doubly impoverished through displacement and deportation.⁶ Once amnestied following the reestablishment of relations between the Soviet Union and the Polish government-in-exile in the summer of 1941, they found themselves in a precarious position. Most traveled southward to Soviet Central Asia in search of more hospitable living conditions, and there they encountered millions of Soviet citizens, a significant proportion of them of Jewish background, who had been evacuated or had fled in the wake of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.⁷ Given this situation, it is not surprising that Polish Jews turned for help to Soviet Jews, who tended to be better-off.

As Pomerantz's example indicates, upon liberation, Polish Jews were often at a loss in deciding where they should go and how they could get there.⁸ Born in Krakow, Rita Blattberg Blumstein and her family fled to Lwow in 1939; from there, they were deported to a special settlement in the Mari Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). Released in 1941, they decided to make their way south. On the way down the Volga River, they met a Russian Jewish couple who warned them that Blumstein's mother, who had already endured a bout of malaria, would fare poorly in Central Asia and persuaded them to change course. Instead, their new friends suggested that they go to Kambarka, a small town in Udmurtia (in the Volga region between Perm and Kazan), and helped put them in touch with relatives who lived there.⁹ Though how the families met is

not clear, the Poles likely had an easier time reaching out to and trusting Soviet Jews with whom they had more in common.¹⁰ Thus this initial encounter illustrates the ways Soviet Jews could prove to be useful sources of information and practical advice.

Unlike Blumstein and her family, Yitzkhak Erlichson had a clear sense of where he was headed. Liberated from Kolyma and having experienced the difficulties of life in Soviet Central Asia, he was eager to make his way to Kuibyshev (present-day Samara) to seek aid from the representatives of the Polish government-in-exile in the Soviet Union.¹¹ Working with very limited resources, he often had to sneak his way onto crowded trains. In Novosibirsk, he recounted seeing a Jew on the train platform, weighed down with multiple suitcases he could not possibly carry on his own. Erlichson offered to lend a hand and thus secured passage onto the train and an additional 400 rubles from the Soviet Jewish evacuee, who was relieved and grateful that Erlichson had not taken the opportunity to steal his bags.¹² Erlichson had clearly taken the chance to approach the man because he identified him as a Jew. The Soviet Jew, however, was hesitant to take him up on his offer, but with no other option took the risk. Such chance encounters suggest the ways initial trust and confidence in one another began to develop between Polish Jewish refugees and Soviet Jews.

Once evacuees and refugees reached what would become their temporary homes on the Soviet home front, they struggled to secure housing, employment, and the necessities of daily life. Yet again, Soviet Jews were often in a position to help the Poles set up their households. According to the recollections of Genia Kniazeva, her parents, evacuees from Dnepropetrovsk, rescued a Polish Jewish boy whom her father had spotted roaming the local market in Chimkent (southern Kazakhstan), attempting to steal food in order to survive. When they found out that he was all alone, they took him in, and Kniazeva's father employed him in the tailoring workshop he had set up at a local factory to sew uniforms for the armed forces.¹³

As this story suggests, some Soviet Jews felt that it was incumbent upon them to help out Polish Jewish refugees who were in dire straits. Samuel Honig and his father, refugees from Krakow who had been deported to the Mari ASSR, owed their survival in the USSR in large part to the aid they received from Soviet Jews. After their release, they traveled down

the Volga River to Astrakhan. Waiting in a bread line, Honig spotted a woman who reminded him of his mother, who had stayed behind in Poland, and was simply transfixed by the resemblance. Noticing the stranger's gaze, the woman beckoned to him to come with her and asked him why he had been staring.¹⁴ Honig shared his biography with her; as he wrote, "I was sure she was Jewish and I mentioned that I was Jewish, too."¹⁵ The kind woman, Alina Axelrod, invited him home and fed him. It turned out that she and her husband were Jewish evacuees from Ukraine and her husband's parents were from Lwow and had come to the Soviet Union after the First World War. The husband arranged employment for Honig and his father, uncle, and aunt at a fish processing plant where the director was an acquaintance of his.¹⁶ In this case, an imagined sense of kinship between Honig and the woman he spotted on the street was later reaffirmed by their shared background and by her willingness to help him and his relatives.

Later on, Honig and his father were directed by representatives of the Polish embassy to a town outside Kuibyshev. The Kuibyshev region was an important evacuation hub, and while there the Honigs were approached by a Soviet Jewish evacuee named Gluskin. Gluskin offered them work chopping wood for him; in exchange, not only did Gluskin pay them well for their labor, but his wife also invited them into their home and offered them "milk, eggs, cheese and a big loaf of white bread," food the likes of which they had not seen in some time.¹⁷ Gluskin, like Kniazeva's father, was aware that Honig and his father were Jews from Poland and was likely sympathetic to their plight and wished to lend a hand. As the friendship between the Gluskinds and Honig developed, Gluskin, who had a good job in the flour mill, encouraged others in the community to also hire the Honigs for odd jobs. As Honig recalls, these side jobs were often particularly lucrative because they received compensation in food, which was more valuable than money.¹⁸

Honig's relationship with the Gluskinds was not purely economic—Mrs. Gluskin was eager to hear about the Honigs' background and confided in them her worries about the fate of her sons at the front. Yet there was clearly a barrier between them. As Honig writes, "Though I was very friendly with them, we never talked about politics or the war. We talked about the weather and [sic] our families."¹⁹ Thus, it seems, there was an implicit understanding of certain limits to the intimacy between the

families, some topics that they could not discuss because of the political realities and their distinct circumstances.

Most, though not all, accounts that I have looked at indicate the creation of economic relationships between Polish Jews and Soviet Jews in which Soviet Jews use their positions to help their Polish coreligionists secure both official and unofficial employment. In the accounts described above, Soviet Jews seem to have acted out of largely charitable motivations. Yet it is critical to note that these accounts derive from memoirs and recollections written and recorded decades after the war. Thus it is quite likely that the narratives were affected by the passage of time and by both the personal and political changes that took place in the ensuing years.

However, a series of interviews conducted by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in 1948 in displaced persons camps with Jewish refugees who had spent the war in the Soviet Union suggest a more nuanced interpretation.²⁰ Several of these testimonies indicate that Soviet Jews hired Polish Jews to work in the enterprises they managed but, in doing so, also engaged them in the common Soviet practice of siphoning off state goods onto the black market to supplement employees' salaries. A refugee from Warsaw, identified in the interviews as E.G., found himself in Leninabad (modern-day Khudzhand, Tajikistan), where he found employment at an ice cream plant. According to E.G., the Soviet Jewish evacuees in Leninabad were well-off and well-connected. His superior, the deputy director of the plant, whom E.G. identified as "a Jew from Leningrad," co-opted him into using less than the allotted quantity of sugar for the ice cream in order to sell off the remaining sugar at the market and make some extra money on the side.²¹ However, E.G. soon felt that he was being taken advantage of because he was the one responsible for running the operation, while his boss was simply reaping the profits. As the interview summarizes: "The vice director took no active part in the business but E.G. had to bribe the bookkeeper, give free ice cream to members of the N.K.V.D. [People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs], high officials and the police. The risk was all his and his profits dwindled to very little."²²

In this way, Polish Jews became engaged in both official and unofficial Soviet economic practices. While the evidence is anecdotal, it does suggest that the motivations of Soviet Jews were not always purely altruistic.

Since Polish Jewish refugees had few resources and little social capital, Soviet Jewish employers would have seen them as trustworthy workers who were unlikely to double-cross them because they were dependent on their help. Another refugee, identified as S.L., found work in a food cooperative in Uzbekistan run by “a Jew from Odessa who had been exiled to this place for criminal offenses during the Czarist regime.”²³ He reported that his boss sold off state goods at the local market. According to S.L., he knew all about his boss’s operations “because he [S.L.] was considered a ‘reliable’ person, one who would do as he was told.”²⁴ Thus economic relationships between Soviet and Polish Jews on the home front served important purposes for both groups involved—helping Polish Jews make ends meet and providing Soviet Jews with dependable employees who were unlikely to report these shady dealings to the authorities.

However, beyond these material benefits, friendships between Polish and Soviet Jews enriched spiritual and cultural Jewish life at sites of resettlement. Both Soviet and Polish Jewish accounts attest that the arrival of the more observant Polish Jewish refugees on the Soviet home front reinvigorated Jewish religious practice. While Polish Jews (or, in some cases, local, non-Ashkenazi Jewish communities) largely initiated efforts to celebrate Jewish holidays and carry out traditional rites, evacuated Soviet Jews often took part.²⁵ One interviewee, identified as Mr. Traitman, traveled to Dagestan with his family after the amnesty and recalled attending services at a synagogue set up by the local community of Mountain Jews. Traitman served as a ritual slaughterer (*shochet*) for the community during his stay there, but he noted that he observed Jews from Kiev and Kharkov attending services at the synagogue.²⁶ Once Nazi forces approached the region, Traitman and his family moved further east to Central Asia, where they had similar experiences. He recalled Polish Jews organizing prayer groups, collecting funds for a ritual bath (*mikvah*), and establishing a yeshiva.²⁷ While noting that only Polish Jews attended the yeshiva, the “Russian Jews,” as he identified them, contributed funds for the construction of the *mikvah*.²⁸

Although few Soviet Jews would openly participate in religious ceremonies, some expressed a degree of interest in these events, particularly the elderly, who likely were more familiar with these practices and were less concerned about the potential ramifications for their careers if their

behavior was discovered by the authorities. According to one interview, observant Jews from Russia, Bessarabia, and Poland collaborated in opening two synagogues in Ush-Tobe (Kazakhstan); the community also had a *shochet*, and a Jew from Kiev performed ritual circumcisions (*mohel*).²⁹

In a recent interview, one evacuee from Kiev, M.D., reflected on religious practice in the Jewish community in wartime Orsk, a city in the Urals located close to Russia's border with Kazakhstan. He himself had been raised in a relatively observant family from Berdichev, had attended a Yiddish school, and had had an illicit bar mitzvah.³⁰ In evacuation in Orsk, he recalled that his parents attended holiday services at someone's home, where they encountered Polish Jews. However, it was impossible for young people like himself to do so since they had to be at work.³¹ In Kuibyshev, Samuel Honig attended Rosh Hashanah services at a synagogue located in a rather run-down part of the city. Honig noted that the service was brief and somewhat hurried: "Everybody seemed to want to leave in a hurry. The younger people just minutes before the services ended. It was not a popular place to be found in the Soviet Union."³² Despite the informal, abbreviated, and clandestine nature of these occasions, they presented an opportunity to bring people together and resume or revive Jewish religious practice.³³

Some interviews suggest that Soviet Jews were inspired and impressed by refugees' willingness to practice their faith and their traditions openly. After befriending a Polish Jewish young man in Kazakhstan, R.K., an evacuee from Moscow, was invited by him to attend a Polish Jewish wedding, where she observed the traditional wedding ritual under a chuppah; the scene made a big impression on her.³⁴ Similarly, in Erlichson's memoir, he notes that Soviet Jews in Dzhambul were pleased to witness a Jewish wedding celebration. For the occasion, a friend of his made a speech in Hebrew, which, according to Erlichson, the Soviet Jews found truly poignant: "The Russian Jews were really beaming when they heard a speech in the holy language. They swallowed every word as if it were pure honey. Moreover, most of them had not attended a Jewish wedding in a long time. They were moved and congratulated us warmly."³⁵ According to multiple sources, members of the Soviet Jewish evacuee community relished the opportunity to witness and take part in Jewish rituals and customs and to learn about Jewish communities abroad.

Like weddings, burials were key moments for the community to come together. Herman Carmel, a Jew from Czechoslovakia who had escaped to Latvia in 1939 and fled east from there, recalled his wartime experience in Tamak (Bashkiria) and described the creation of a Jewish community thanks to the efforts of one Mendel Menikhes. Menikhes was evacuated with his daughter's family to Tamak from Belarus, where he had been a leader of the religious community in Mozyr prior to the revolution. Their shared Jewish identity and religious literacy brought Carmel and Menikhes together. During their first meeting, Carmel endeared himself to Menikhes when he recited a Hebrew verse containing Menikhes's name, and the two became close friends.³⁶ Menikhes, or Reb Mendel as he came to be known, served as the main organizer of the Jewish community in Tamak, and Carmel dubbed him "the one-man Jewish charitable institution in Tamak."³⁷ Menikhes consulted on religious matters, collected money for the more needy members of the community, performed burial rites, and even organized a Passover Seder.³⁸ Polish Jews and Soviet Jews who died during the difficult war years in Tamak were buried at the site of the old Jewish cemetery, which had been established by the small prerevolutionary Jewish community of "cantonists," Jews who had been conscripted into the czarist army.³⁹ It was a woeful sign of the revival of Jewish life in the region.

However, even on these matters, there was sometimes a lack of consensus. One refugee from Lwow recalled how his proposal to establish a Jewish burial ground in Tashkent encountered opposition from a Jewish official who sat on the Tashkent municipal soviet.⁴⁰ It is quite possible that the bureaucrat, most likely a Soviet Jew, was concerned about appearing partial to Jewish communal concerns in his official capacity, especially at a time when antisemitism was on the rise in cities such as Tashkent and Alma-Ata.

At the same time, the description of a similar incident in Samarkand suggests a more nuanced interpretation. According to a Yiddish memoir cited by historian Yosef Litvak, when two Polish Jews approached a Soviet Jewish cooperative director to ask for a donation to the Jewish burial society, he initially threw them out of his office. However, he then immediately called in one of his employees (a Polish Jew, and the source for the account) and "gave him 300 rubles for them, and asked him to pass

the money on to them and to tell them to return every month for his donation.”⁴¹ The director was evidently concerned about appearances; he did not want to associate himself with the Polish Jewish visitors, but felt comfortable using his employee, a man he clearly trusted, as a conduit to support their efforts. These episodes suggest that many Soviet Jews felt pressured to feign an outward indifference to Jewish religion and culture and to keep their true commitment and support of these initiatives under wraps.⁴²

Interactions between Polish and Soviet Jews reveal both a sense of familiarity based on a shared identity and a certain bemusement and apprehension that had to do with their distinct experiences in the interwar period. Children raised in an ostensibly atheist Soviet society were struck by the odd appearance and language of some of the Polish Jews they met. For these youngsters, the Polish Jewish refugees represented as much a novelty as the native Central Asian populations they encountered. Semen Ar’ev recalled that in the course of his family’s journey to the east from Kamenets-Podolskii (Ukraine), he saw a Hasidic Jewish family for the first time and was struck by the father’s clothes, beard and side-locks, and Ar’ev’s grandmother explained to him that these were refugees from Poland.⁴³

Evacuated from Kiev to the Volga German region, Viktor Radutskii recalled an almost mythical encounter with a Polish Jewish man who came to ask for hot tea from Radutskii’s grandmother, evidently because he guessed that Radutskii’s family was Jewish. Radutskii and his siblings were struck by the man’s appearance because he wore traditional Jewish Orthodox garb, and they had never seen anyone dressed like that before. Moreover, his manner of speaking also denoted his foreignness. The visitor mispronounced the words for *hot tea*, asking for “gaise tai” instead of “goriachii chai,” but the children were so impressed by him that they adopted the new word “gaisetai” into their lexicon.⁴⁴ While Radutskii’s and Ar’ev’s accounts emphasize the exotic appearance and mannerisms of the religious Polish Jews they met, these encounters also impressed upon the youngsters the existence of diverse Jewish communities. Their recollections may also be shaped in part by their postwar lives—both immigrated to Israel later in life—and these particular episodes may stand out in their memories because they would later come across Hasidic and Orthodox Jews in Israel.

Of course, in some cases, interactions between more observant Polish Jews and assimilated Soviet Jews became quite contentious. In Osh (Kyrgyzstan), Maks Koifman, who had been evacuated from the town of Shostka in central Ukraine with his family, recalled an encounter with the Polish Jewish family that lived next door. One day, when Koifman and his sister were looking after their baby brother while their mother was at work, one of the Polish Jewish neighbors poked his head into their room and explained that “a real [*nastoiaschchii*] Jew should be circumcised.”⁴⁵ Koifman described the guest as an older man “who had something or other to do with medicine,” suggesting that the man may very well have been a *mohel* by profession.⁴⁶ The neighbor further explained that it was particularly important for Koifman’s brother, who was blond unlike his siblings, to be circumcised so that he would look like a Jew. The neighbor proceeded to perform the circumcision, recruiting Koifman and his sister to assist him.

Not surprisingly, Koifman’s mother was horrified when she arrived home to discover what had transpired and was particularly irate with the neighbor. As she yelled at him for what he had done, he tried to explain that he was only trying to do the best for her son, who would now be protected by the Almighty.⁴⁷ In this instance, the neighbor’s assumption of a shared faith and common practice between the two families proved to be erroneous. The episode demonstrates just one of the potential sources of tension between these families and reveals their distinct understandings of the meanings of Jewishness.

While religious practice and observance of traditions could understandably prove to be points of contention, Soviet Jews and Polish Jews also shared a linguistic and cultural background. On many occasions, a common interest in Yiddish literature and press brought them together. During the war, the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee received permission to publish a Yiddish newspaper, titled *Eynikayt* (*Unity*), which in essence served as a propaganda tool aimed at both domestic and international Jewish audiences.⁴⁸ Yet, given people’s hunger for news from the front and the absence of other reading material, the appearance of a new edition of *Eynikayt* was often an occasion that brought together the Yiddish-speaking community, Soviet and Polish alike.

M.D., in his account of his life in Orsk, recalled that he would meet with Polish Jews at the local library to read *Eynikayt*, adding that since

not all of them were literate in Yiddish, he would read the newspaper to them.⁴⁹ In most cases, the problem was not literacy as much as it was the difficulty of getting one's hands on a copy of the newspaper. M.D. himself confesses that he was not even sure how to subscribe to the newspaper, nor did he have the resources to do so, but he was fortunate to be able to access it at the local library.⁵⁰ A Polish Jewish refugee in Ush-Tobe recounted that subscriptions to *Eynikayt* were hard to come by and, more often than not, subscribers would discover that the delivered newspapers had been appropriated by the local population to be used as cigarette paper.⁵¹ For M.D., attending religious services was too risky (see above), but gathering to read *Eynikayt* was a socially acceptable activity that he, as a young Soviet professional, could engage in and that provided him with an opportunity to meet fellow Jews.

Although many assimilated Soviet Jews continued to shy away from any outward expression of their Jewish identity, the popularity of *Eynikayt* reflected a newfound excitement about the possibility of the revival of Jewish life in the Soviet Union, especially in the wake of the assault on Jewish schools and cultural institutions in the later 1930s.⁵² In Tamak, as Carmel recalls: "Getting the *Einikeit* [alternate spelling] used to be an event. Sasha [a lawyer from Moscow whom Carmel had befriended] would lend the newspaper to many evacuees, and it became worn and stained and got to be illegible."⁵³ Notwithstanding its content (or even its legibility), the newspaper seems to serve both as a symbol of a shared identity and a pretext to bring people together.

Given the difficulty of finding Yiddish publications for sale, Polish refugees were pleased to discover that some Soviet Jews had brought Yiddish literature with them and were willing to lend the material out.⁵⁴ That some Soviet Jews had chosen to bring Yiddish books with them into evacuation, despite the difficulties of their journeys and the limited number of items they could take with them, suggests their commitment to Jewish culture.⁵⁵ According to one Polish refugee, he found volumes of the writings of I. L. Peretz in the home of a Kievan Jew; they were then "used as reading matter, as text books for the study of Yiddish as well as for dramatic purposes."⁵⁶ These texts were utilized for Jewish cultural initiatives spearheaded by Polish Jewish refugees under the auspices of the Union of Polish Patriots.⁵⁷ While the interviewee does not indicate the intended audience for these efforts, it seems that Soviet Jews

made important contributions to these programs, even if largely behind the scenes.

In some ways, secular Yiddish literature and culture was an important conduit that brought the Jewish community together at sites of resettlement because it was relatively devoid of political and religious connotations that would have been worrisome for Soviet Jews. Yet, as always, there were limits to how far Soviet Jews were willing to go. In Tashkent, when one Polish Jewish refugee inquired of a Soviet Jew, an NKVD official no less, why Yiddish fiction books were available but Jewish history books were not, he was told that there was no need for these since “Jewish history is the history of the Soviet Communist Party.”⁵⁸ This response echoes Soviet policy about national minorities, which described Soviet national culture as “nationalist in form, socialist in content.” Thus Soviet Jews, especially those who had experienced significant upward mobility during the Soviet period and were invested in the Soviet project, were careful to ensure that expressions of Jewish culture could not be construed as anti-Soviet.

On numerous occasions, distinct social status and differing views and opinions about the Soviet system drove a wedge between Polish Jewish refugees and Soviet Jewish evacuees, thwarting trust and intimacy between the two groups. After all, most Polish Jewish refugees had had firsthand experience of the coercive practices of the Soviet regime and had no intention of remaining in the Soviet Union after the conclusion of the war. Most Soviet Jewish evacuees, by contrast, were employed by Soviet enterprises and organizations and expected to return to their homes, within the borders of the Soviet Union, after the war. Naturally, they had a much deeper understanding of how the Soviet system operated and the importance of being vigilant and exercising self-censorship, lest an erstwhile friend be accused of expressing “anti-Soviet” sentiments.

However, Polish Jews expressed confusion about Soviet Jews’ reticence to open up to them. As one refugee commented: “It was impossible to learn anything from the Russian Jews. They appeared to be always frightened and refused to answer questions.”⁵⁹ When conversations did take place, Polish Jews had a hard time understanding the “doublespeak” that Soviet citizens employed. Erlichson comments in his memoir that his interactions in Frunze with a Jewish neighbor from Moscow were somewhat superficial. As Erlichson describes: “He really had a wonderful

ability to talk on many subjects, but no one could figure out exactly what his opinions were. He often talked about Stalin, the government, the Soviet system, the collectivization, the Five-Year Plans, the Jewish question. But after discussing these things for a few hours, we would ask ourselves just what, exactly, he had said. What did he believe about all that? He had not taken a stand with a single word. Everything that he had said could be interpreted in different ways. He was like a cat who always lands on his feet.”⁶⁰ While Erlichson’s description denotes a certain admiration for his neighbor’s ability to remain noncommittal, this kind of guardedness would certainly stymie real friendship between the two.

Polish Jewish memoirs and testimonies thus reveal a clear tension between the authors’ desire to befriend Soviet Jews alongside a very real sense of the differences in political beliefs and commitments between them and their Soviet Jewish interlocutors. On the one hand, as noted above, they appreciated the practical benefits and advantages these friendships could reap. On the other hand, they had a difficult time understanding the views and attitudes Soviet Jews espoused. Carmel, in recalling his wartime experience in Tamak, noted that he befriended many Soviet Jews, but “there was an invisible line of frankness beyond which they were unwilling to go.”⁶¹

Originally from Suwalki, Poland, Regina Kesler and her family had been deported from Vilna to Siberia. After their release they settled in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, where Kesler befriended a classmate of hers, Luba Lurie, a Jewish evacuee from Odessa. Kesler became close with Lurie and her family, and Lurie’s father came to her aid on a number of occasions. Lurie’s father, the head of the hospital in Osh, helped Kesler secure a summer job as a nurse’s assistant, which led her to discover her passion for medicine.⁶² Kesler wrote that she “adopted him” as her “Russian father,” while her own father languished in a Soviet prison.⁶³ Yet, from the outset, she had an acute sense of the differences between them. Lurie’s family and especially her father, a prominent physician, were true Soviet patriots and were dedicated to Soviet values, with Dr. Lurie often quoting Marx, Lenin, or Stalin. After having personally experienced the Soviet penal system, Kesler could not share these views.

Moreover, a clear difference in social status between Polish and Soviet Jews also created a barrier, often unstated, between the two. Having set-

tled in Kambarka, Rita Blattberg Blumstein's family relied on their friendships with Polish and Soviet Jews. The Fishkins, two physicians from Minsk, were on hand to help with medical problems. The Ginzburgs from Vilna, whose intimacy with Blumstein and her family is evidenced by the fact that as a child she called them "Mamasha" and "Papasha," were dentists and were also willing to lend their professional services. There is no doubt that such connections were instrumental, but the ties between the families went beyond a simple exchange of services.⁶⁴

"Papasha" Ginzburg taught Blumstein a few words in Yiddish and also shared with her his love of the works of Russian poets such as Pushkin and Lermontov.⁶⁵ Yiddish, a signifier of their common Jewish background, reinforced the tie between Blumstein and Ginzburg, but it was the "hauntingly melodious Russian poems" he recited that stuck with her.⁶⁶ Still, despite these close friendships, she could perceive the difference in social rank between the Soviet Jews and her own family: "One memorable evening I demanded to be told why our Soviet friends, like the Fishkins and the Ginzburgs, were called 'evacuees,' whereas we, the Poles, were called '*biezhency*,' a word which in Russian means literally 'those who have run away.' 'If we have run away,' I said indignantly, 'then so have they. We all ran away from the fascist invaders.' More than an issue of semantics, what bothered me was an uneasy feeling that somehow we were at the very bottom of the totem-pole, less worthy and less secure than the others."⁶⁷ Thus the difference in status between the two groups was evident even to a young child. The Fishkins and the Ginzburgs belonged within the orbit of white-collar, professional Soviet society, while Blumstein's family, former deportees and Polish citizens who struggled to master the Russian language, could not claim membership within it.⁶⁸

One of the indicators of the distinct social spheres in which refugees and evacuees circulated is the fact that Soviet Jewish memoirs and interviews rarely mention encounters with Polish Jews. Most of the examples cited here, with some notable exceptions, derive from accounts by or interviews with Polish Jews. One possible explanation for this would be that Jewish identity played a much more significant role in shaping social relations for Polish Jewish refugees than it did for Soviet Jewish evacuees. At the same time, Polish Jews were more likely to depend on help from Soviet Jews than the other way around. For Soviet evacuees, both Jewish and non-Jewish, their professional and educational background

as well as their socioeconomic status was just as significant, if not more so, as their ethnicity in determining their social milieu.

During the Second World War, cities and towns in Soviet Central Asia served as temporary homes for diverse communities that included refugees, evacuees, and deportees, both Jewish and non-Jewish. For Jews, their wartime sojourn took on even greater significance after the war once they discovered the fate that befell those who remained at home. Yet life on the Soviet home front presented its own set of challenges, including separation of families, hunger, disease, and material deprivation as millions of people competed over scarce resources. As a result, individuals and families had to rely on diverse networks of support in order to survive. Jewish identity was one important bond that brought evacuees and refugees together and facilitated the creation of Jewish communal life on the Soviet home front. At the same time, relations between Soviet Jews and Polish Jews revealed the consequences of their distinct inter-war experiences. On the one hand, many Soviet Jews, particularly among the younger generation, no longer practiced or identified with Jewish tradition and found the behavior and mannerisms of Polish Jews odd. On the other hand, Polish Jews were confused by Soviet Jews' espousal of Soviet values and principles. Moreover, relations between Soviet and Polish Jews revealed distinct notions of Jewish identity among people who had lived on different sides of the Soviet/Polish border since 1917.

Notes

1. Jack Pomerantz and Lyric Wallwork Winik, *Run East: Flight from the Holocaust* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).
2. Ibid., 79–80 (quotation on p. 80).
3. Ibid., 80.
4. See Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Blat in Stalin's Time," in *Bribery and Blat in Russia: Negotiating Reciprocity from the Middle Ages to the 1990s*, ed. Stephen Lovell, Alena Ledeneva, and Andrei Rogachevskii (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 166–82.
5. For more on this topic, see William Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction: The Food Supply in the USSR during World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Wendy Z. Goldman and

Donald A. Filtzer, eds., *Hunger and War: Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

6. Significant numbers of Polish Jews were deported to Siberia for refusing to accept Soviet citizenship and/or expressing a desire to return to the German-occupied Polish territories. However, many Jews, like Poles, were arrested because of their political and/or class-based affiliations. Ironically, these deportations had the unintended consequence of removing thousands of Polish Jews beyond the grasp of the Nazi forces. Regarding the deportation of (former) Polish citizens from the annexed territories, see Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939–1948* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*, expanded ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), chap. 6; and Yosef Litvak, "Jewish Refugees from Poland in the USSR, 1939–1946," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 123–50. For more information, see also the introduction to this volume as well as chapter 2, by Mark Edele and Wanda Warlik.
7. Among a Soviet evacuee population of roughly 16.5 million, Jews constituted a sizable minority of roughly 1–1.5 million people. There is a lack of consensus about the total number of Soviet evacuees, with estimates ranging from 6 to 25 million. Due to the lack of accurate records, it is very difficult to provide reliable estimates. I use the figure of 16.5 million cited by historian Rebecca Manley and others. Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 1. Regarding the numeric size of the Soviet Jewish evacuee population, there is less variation in the estimates provided in the secondary literature. It is clear that while Jews were certainly a minority among the evacuated population, they were overrepresented among evacuees in comparison to their proportion within the total Soviet population. For the most recent scholarship, see Vadim Dubson, "Toward a Central Database of Evacuated Soviet Jews' Names, for the Study of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Territories," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 95–119. For further discussion of the number of Jews among the evacuee population, see Mordechai Altshuler, "Escape and Evacuation of Soviet Jews at the Time of the Nazi Invasion: Policies and Realities,"

- 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: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 77–104; Vadim Dubson, “On the Problem of the Evacuation of Soviet Jews in 1941 (New Archival Sources),” *Jews in Eastern Europe* 3, no. 40 (1999): 37–56; and S. Shveibish, “Evakuatsiya i sovetskie evrei v gody Katastrofy,” *Vestnik evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve* 2, no. 9 (1995): 36–55.
8. Jerzy Gliksman, *Tell the West: An Account of His Experiences as a Slave Laborer in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (New York: Gresham Press, 1948), 343–46. According to Gliksman’s memoir (Gliksman was the half-brother of Bundist leader Viktor Alter, who had been arrested and executed by Soviet authorities in 1941 alongside Henryk Erlich), Polish citizens released as a consequence of the amnesty were officially given permission to choose where they wanted to go, with the exception of large cities, which remained off-limits. As Gliksman notes: “According to the provisions of the agreement with the Polish Government, the camp authorities were bound to facilitate our transportation and to provide us with sufficient funds for our railway tickets. We were also to receive food and a specified daily allowance covering the time of our traveling” (343). Most chose to go to Central Asia where they hoped the climate would be more hospitable and where they planned to join newly forming divisions of the Polish army. However, Gliksman asserts that, in spite of their desired choices, many of the released prisoners (himself included) were given certificates indicating that they would continue to reside in the Komi region, where the camp was located. This constituted a blatant attempt on the part of the Soviet security forces to save resources by trying to get the former prisoners to remain in the area and continue to work there (343–46).
 9. Rita Blattberg Blumstein, *Like Leaves in the Wind* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), 38.
 10. For more examples of how Soviet Jews assisted Polish Jews, see chapter 6, by John Goldlust, in this volume.
 11. Following the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the Soviet government and the Polish government-in-exile, the Polish embassy established a network of local offices in areas where there were significant populations of Polish citizens. These offices were largely responsible for the distribution of aid and relief to the Polish populations. See Keith Sword, “The Welfare of Polish-Jewish Refugees

- in the USSR, 1941–43: Relief Supplies and Their Distribution,” in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (Hounds Mills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 145–60.
12. Yitzkhak Erlichson, *My Four Years in Soviet Russia*, trans. and with introduction by Maurice Wolfthal (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 107–8. Erlichson’s memoir was originally published in Yiddish in Paris in 1953, under the title *Mayne fir yor in Sovyet-Rusland*.
 13. Genia Kniazeva, “Eto byl moi fundament,” recorded by Svetlana Shkclarov, in *Voices of Resilience / Golosa Stoikosti*, ed. Svetlana Shkclarov (Calgary: Jewish Family Service Calgary, 2010), 315–16.
 14. Samuel Honig, *From Poland to Russia and Back, 1939–1946: Surviving the Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Windsor, Ontario: Black Moss Press, 1996), 140–41.
 15. Ibid., 140.
 16. Ibid., 141–43.
 17. Ibid., 188–89.
 18. Ibid., 189.
 19. Ibid.
 20. In the pages that follow, I cite multiple examples from the AJC interviews. This is a very valuable source of information on relations between Soviet and Polish Jews, but unfortunately we lack data about the manner and language in which these interviews were conducted. It is also not clear how the subjects were selected. Rachel Erlich, the author of the report on the interviews and the organizer of the initiative, noted that of a total of eighteen interviewees, fourteen were Polish Jews and four were Soviet citizens, who had lived in the Soviet Union before the war. As Erlich herself cautions, the hardship and suffering the interviewees endured in the Soviet Union clearly left them with an anti-Soviet bias. Moreover, she notes that the Soviet Jewish subjects were relatively tight-lipped because they were afraid to reveal any information that could negatively affect relatives who remained in the USSR. Given the political climate, it is not surprising that many of the subjects emphasized the negative aspects of their experience in the Soviet Union (the hardships of everyday life, hunger, widespread corruption, antisemitism, the limitations placed by the regime on religious and cultural life, etc.). A recent article by Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky discusses how Cold War politics influenced the ways Polish Jews recounted their years in the USSR. See Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost? Postwar

Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 373–99. Yet, despite the limitations and biases, these interviews are quite valuable precisely because they were undertaken shortly after the subjects left the Soviet Union, and thus they provide a useful corrective for the later accounts. Source: American Jewish Committee Archive (henceforward AJCA), Rachel Erlich, "Summary Report of Eighteen Intensive Interviews with Jewish DP's from Poland and the Soviet Union" (New York, 1949).

21. AJCA, Rachel Erlich, "Interviews with Polish and Russian Jewish DP's in DP Camps on Their Observations of Jewish Life in Soviet Russia," (New York, 1948), interview no. 10, 8. It is not clear whether E.G.'s boss is an evacuee or if he came to Tajikistan before the war.
22. Ibid. While this account may reflect the subject's anti-Soviet attitude, the description is certainly in line with what we know about endemic corruption in the Soviet economy.
23. AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 17, 5.
24. Ibid.
25. Local, non-Ashkenazi communities included Bukharan Jews in Uzbekistan and Mountain Jews in the Caucasus.
26. AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 4, 2.
27. Yosef Litvak's essay on the topic also discusses the establishment of Jewish religious schools in Dzhambul and Samarkand and the construction of a ritual bath in Dzhambul. Based on a Yiddish memoir from the 1960s, he notes that Polish Jews were assisted in these efforts by the local Bukharan community and by observant Soviet Jewish evacuees. Litvak, "Jewish Refugees from Poland," 144. Litvak's source here is: G. Lustgarten, *In vander un gerangel, 1939–1968* (Tel Aviv, 1968).
28. AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 4, 3.
29. AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 6, 4.
30. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (USHMM), RG-31.027, "Transcripts of Oral Histories of Ukrainian Jews from the Project 'Jewish Fates—Ukraine—20th Century,' 1930–1950; 1995–2004," box 7, folder 5, 16–39 . Original Source: Judaica Institute, Kiev, Ukraine. This collection includes oral history transcripts of Jews living in Ukraine who were born between 1894 and 1949. The interviews were conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In order to protect the identity of the subjects, I identify them only by their initials.

31. USHMM, RG-31.027, box 7, folder 5, 32.
32. Honig, *From Poland to Russia*, 198.
33. In fact, these wartime religious gatherings may constitute the precursors to the numerous unofficial congregations and prayer groups that emerged in the years after the war, as described by Mordechai Altshuler in his recent study. Mordechai Altshuler, *Religion and Jewish Identity in the Soviet Union, 1941–1964* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2012).
34. USHMM, RG-31.027, box 12, folder 50, 32.
35. Erlichson, *My Four Years*, 133.
36. Herman Carmel, *Black Days, White Nights* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1984), 109–10.
37. Ibid., 118.
38. Ibid., 110, 119–20, 137–38.
39. Ibid., 118–20.
40. AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 1, 5.
41. Litvak, “Jewish Refugees from Poland,” 146. Here Litvak is citing the memoir by Moshe Grossman (P. Grim), *In farkisheftn land fun legendarn Dzhugashvili* (Paris: Emes un freiheit, 1949).
42. The notion that Soviet citizens would adopt a certain “persona” to avoid raising suspicions is by no means surprising. This phenomenon is discussed at length in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). However, it is important to mention that Polish Jews, embittered by their own experiences in Soviet labor camps, were likely to stress the oppressive and corrupting aspects of Soviet rule.
43. Semen Ar'ev, “Doroga,” in *Evakuatsiia: Vospominaniia o detstve, opalennom ognem Katastrofy*, <http://www.lost-childhood.com/index.php/evrejskie-bezhentsy/62-semen-arev> (accessed 14 February 2016).
44. Viktor Radutskii, “Stranitsy odnoi evakuatsii,” in *Evakuatsiia: Vospominaniia o detstve, opalennom ognem Katastrofy*, <http://www.lost-childhood.com/index.php/shkola-vyzhivaniya/141-viktor-radutskij> (accessed 24 May 2017).
45. Maks Koifman, “My bezhali togda ot voiny,” in *Evakuatsiia: Vospominaniia o detstve, opalennom ognem Katastrofy*, <http://www.lost-childhood.com/index.php/evrejskie-bezhentsy/87-maks-koifman> (accessed 17 February 2016).
46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.
48. The Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was created in 1942 as one of four antifascist committees (the others were the Slavic, women's, and scientists' antifascist committees) to mobilize support for the Soviet war effort and, especially, raise funds abroad. The committee fell victim to Stalin's antisemitic campaign in the postwar period. During the war years, the committee sent multiple missives to Soviet authorities soliciting approval for the creation of the newspaper and, once it was granted, for permission to increase the size and frequency of the publication. In doing so, the committee noted the important political and educational role the newspaper would play in Jewish communities both in the Soviet Union and abroad. See Shimon Redlich and Gennadii V. Kostyrchenko, eds., *Evreiskii antifashistskii komitet v SSSR, 1941–1948: Dokumentirovannaya istoriya* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1996). While the content of the newspaper was largely propagandistic, a recent essay on the topic by Arkadi Zeltser discusses the ways the articles highlighted examples and images of Jewish heroism and drew on Jewish mythology and history to place the heroes of the Second World War within a Jewish narrative of heroism. Arkadi Zeltser, "How the Jewish Intelligentsia Created the Jewishness of the Jewish Hero: The Soviet Yiddish Press," in *Soviet Jews in World War II: Fighting, Witnessing, Remembering*, ed. Harriet Murav and Gennady Estraikh (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 104–28.
49. USHMM, RG-31.027, box 7, folder 5, 32. M.D.'s reference to the Poles' illiteracy in Yiddish is somewhat surprising; however, one possible explanation is that they were not familiar with Soviet Yiddish orthography.
50. Ibid.
51. AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 6, 4–5.
52. See Gennadii V. Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2001), 123–38.
53. Carmel, *Black Days, White Nights*, 229.
54. I found two cases of this book lending in the AJC interviews. AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 6, 4; interview no. 15, 4–5.
55. This commitment to Yiddish culture supports Anna Shternshis's findings about the continued interest among Soviet Jews in the interwar period in texts, films, songs, and theater productions that expressed Jewish themes, despite the pro-Soviet, antireligious propa-

- gandistic content and the overwhelming evidence of mass assimilation among the Soviet Jewish community, especially in the cities. See Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).
56. I. L. Peretz (1852–1915) was a prominent Yiddish writer and playwright. AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 6, 4.
 57. Ibid. The Union of Polish Patriots was an organization created to represent Poles in the Soviet Union after the breakdown of relations between the Soviet Union and the Polish government-in-exile in the spring of 1943. It was led by Polish Communists and was closely allied with the Soviet government. It also took on the responsibility of distributing aid to Polish refugees, a function that had initially been carried out by the Polish embassy. See Sword, *Deportation and Exile*, chap. 5.
 58. AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 1, 6.
 59. AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 3, 2.
 60. Erlichson, *My Four Years*, 126–127.
 61. Carmel, *Black Days, White Nights*, 110.
 62. Regina Kesler, *Grit: A Pediatrician's Odyssey from a Soviet Camp to Harvard*, ed. Michael G. Kesler (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009), 47–49.
 63. Ibid., 48.
 64. Blumstein, *Like Leaves in the Wind*, 49–77.
 65. Ibid., 66–67.
 66. Ibid., 67.
 67. Ibid., 64.
 68. It is important to mention that while most accounts follow the pattern of ascribing higher status and privilege to Soviet Jews and describing Polish Jews as seeking assistance from the Soviet Jews, this was not always the case. In some notable cases, Polish Jews, particularly those who managed to hang on to their clothes and valuables over the course of their journeys, thrived as traders in the marketplaces in Soviet Central Asia. For example, one of the AJC interviewees describes Soviet Jewish women in Stalinabad who struggled to make ends meet, sending their children to work with Polish Jewish traders. It is difficult to make generalizations on the basis of this evidence, but it can be surmised that Stalinabad, in the remote and resource-poor Tajik SSR, was a much less coveted destination than Tashkent, Alma-Ata, or Frunze. Thus those who ended up in Tajikistan most probably lacked

connections and affiliations with institutions and were more vulnerable. A memoir by a Soviet Jew, Abram Tseitlin, who was evacuated with his family to Kermine (Uzbekistan), relates a similar perception of Polish Jews—as wealthy and entitled outsiders who came to dominate trade at the local market and prompted antisemitism among the local population. Tseitlin, a child during the war, describes a Polish Jewish neighbor who made her living sewing blankets and recalled that he and other local boys would bring her scraps of clothing and cotton in exchange for candies that she would make for them. However, her attitude toward them was one of condescension, and Tseitlin himself seems to resent the activities of the Polish Jews in Kermine. The financial success of some Polish Jewish refugees also help explain the cases of Soviet Jews marrying Polish Jews in order to secure permission to leave the Soviet Union after the war, per the repatriation agreement between the Soviet Union and the Polish authorities. See AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 15, 3. USHMM, RG-31.053, Memoir of Abram Tseitlin, 1990, chap. 6; original source: Judaica Institute, Kiev, Ukraine. Cases of intermarriage between Soviet Jews and Polish Jews: AJCA, Erlich, interview no. 15, 4; interview no. 13, 4–5.

5

Jewish Refugees in Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India

Lost Memories of Displacement, Trauma, and Rescue

ATINA GROSSMANN

Earlier chapters in this book have sketched the convoluted overall trajectories of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union, their encounters with Soviet Jews, on the one hand, and with antisemites, on the other.¹ Later chapters explore the complex identities they would assume during and after this journey, and the complex ways in which their experiences were included and excluded from Holocaust testimony and memory.² This chapter focuses our attention on the role of colonial and semicolonial regions in these processes of displacement and identity formation: Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India. It “remaps” the history of Jewish wartime experience, away from the Polish epicenter controlled by the Nazis and thereby moves the “periphery” of Holocaust history toward the center.³

This story begins in the summer of 1941, with Molotov’s stunning radio announcement that the German-Soviet pact had collapsed and hostilities begun. Shortly after the German invasion, with the Soviets in

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dire need of Allied support, Stalin and the Polish government-in-exile, subject to British and American pressure from its seat in London, negotiated an “amnesty” for all imprisoned Polish citizens. The 30 July 1941 Sikorski-Maiskii Agreement provided for two key developments: the formation of a Polish army under General Władysław Anders (just released from prison in Moscow) intended to eventually fight for the fatherland in the European theater and the release of Poles, Jewish and not, from the camps and special settlements to which they had been deported from the territories occupied by the Soviets in the fall of 1939.

There followed another confusing chaotic migration, with freed deportees intently studying unfamiliar maps for potential destinations within certain permitted zones. Following “rumors of warm climates and abundance of fruits and other food products” or sometimes simply an attractive-sounding place-name and the associations provided by a well-known novel with the enticing, if dangerously misleading, title *Tashkent, City of Bread*, the “amnestied” embarked on a rush south to what they imagined were better and safer conditions in the Central Asian republics.⁴ Huddled in and around train stations, forced to keep moving when denied entry to the overwhelmed Uzbek capital, refugees were greeted instead by widespread hunger, severe overcrowding and poverty, typhus, dysentery, cholera, crime, and despair. The general confusion and hardship were exacerbated by the upheaval of mass evacuations of Soviet citizens, particularly the cultural, technocratic, and educational elite, as well as entire industrial plants, away from the advancing front into Uzbekistan, a gargantuan undertaking later stigmatized in antisemitic terms as the “Tashkent Front” where “Avram speculated while Ivan fought.” After “liberation” from the horrors of the camps and special settlements came another catastrophic situation in Central Asia; in some ways conditions became even worse, because now the former deportees were refugees without even the promise of bread for work. As a Viennese internee insisted, perhaps atypically, about her camp in Karaganda (Kazakhstan), “Come snow-storm or summer drought, the Soviet authorities never failed to feed us.”⁵

Memoirs (and photographs) offer starkly diverse representations of the Central Asian experience. Refugees found and recorded not only horrific misery but also an amazing variety of wartime improvisations, from evacuated universities, factories, and theater troupes to Red Army

recruiters, People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) agents, and local ethnic groups. Central Asians, mostly Muslims undergoing their own difficult and ambivalent process of Sovietization, were bewildered by, and often resentful and suspicious of, this sudden influx of Christian and Jewish "western" Soviet evacuees and Polish refugees and sometimes, however, also astonishingly generous given their own poverty and deprivation. These close everyday encounters with strangers who were perceived as both "primitive" and "exotic" by "Westerners" (later themselves called "Asiatics"), and in whose mud huts the refugees rented rooms, were mediated, it is important to add, in gendered ways that require much more research. Men were more likely to work the black market or in Soviet enterprises (or be drafted into the Red Army), while women engaged in negotiations over food, medical care, social mores, and housing.⁶

From 1941 to 1942 (and according to some records, into mid-1943), all Polish refugees, Jewish and Christian, were at least minimally supported by the London-based Polish government-in-exile, which in turn was dependent on its British host government and private donations, including from North America, for its funding. The government-in-exile maintained an official embassy in the temporary wartime Soviet capital Kuibyshev on the Russia-Kazakhstan border (now Samara) and some 300 welfare offices throughout Central Asia.⁷ Thousands of Jews, often half-starved survivors of labor camps, still Polish citizens, flocked to the Anders army recruiting stations in the Volga region and in Kuibyshev. Initially, they were a virtual majority of potential recruits, between 40 and 60 percent. Polish officers, however, rejected most of them. Targets of antisemitic suspicion and branded as a potential "fifth column" for a later Stalinist takeover of Poland, they were subjected to humiliating inspections and tests and endured insinuations that they were poor fighting material and unreliable Polish patriots. Polish Jews were thereby largely excluded from the evacuation of some 115,000 soldiers and their families to Iran—the only escape route out of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the British, powerfully influential in the Polish exile seat in London, were also not eager to see large numbers of Jewish refugees cross the border into Iran and move into Iraq and then Palestine for further training. They feared exactly what did in fact transpire, that many of the Polish Jewish recruits, once arrived at their goal in Palestine, would desert. Indeed, 3,000 of 4,000

did exactly that, including the most prominent among them, Menachem Begin (although he apparently managed to secure official permission). This development worried the British, struggling to keep order in their Mandate, but did not seem to overly concern the Poles, who were just as happy to move on toward the battlefield in Italy without their Jewish comrades.⁸

Perhaps more than any other wartime experience, the recruitment process for the Anders army—the only realistic lifeline out of the Soviet Union and potentially toward Palestine—inflamed tensions between Jewish Poles and the government-in-exile. In the event, the Poles and Soviets managed to blame each other for limiting the number of Jews in the Anders army, and it was the continually wavering Soviet commitment to provide support and materiel for the exile army that ultimately forced its rather quick exit to Iran.⁹ Jewish representatives also accused the Polish authorities of allowing (or coercing) Jews to be granted Soviet citizenship at a dangerously fast rate, thus undermining their professions of loyalty and assuring that fewer Jews would ever be able to return to a liberated Poland. In a poignant indication of how the situation in Nazi-occupied Europe was (mis)understood by those isolated in the Soviet Union, Jewish Poles complained in 1942 that this policy represented “an easy way to get rid of a great number of Jews” and that it “may create extremely great difficulties for these people when hundreds of thousands will want to return to their families after the war.”¹⁰

Between mid-1942 and early 1943, the situation of Polish refugees, who already had to contend with hunger, epidemics, and housing shortages, as well as the death and separation of family members in an entirely alien environment, became even more precarious. The final breakdown of steadily worsening relations between the Soviet Union and the London-based anti-Communist Polish government-in-exile—ostensible anti-Nazi allies—came in April 1943, after Stalin rejected an investigation of the Katyn massacre graves which had been, in a major propaganda coup, discovered by the Germans. Jews, who had been aided, albeit in an often discriminatory fashion, along with all other Polish refugees, by their national representatives, were now mostly on their own in an exotic, unfamiliar, and volatile exile.

In response to this new emergency, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the major Jewish transnational relief

organization, established in the United States at the beginning of World War I, set up an operation headquartered in Tehran. Together with the Jewish Agency and various *landsmannschaftn* (hometown associations) of Polish Jews in Palestine, it sent donated food and supplies to suffering relatives in Central Asia. The JDC first inaugurated a modest parcel service through the so-called Persian Corridor from Tehran into the Soviet Union beginning in August 1942. The JDC operation began, not coincidentally, after the Anders army arrived in Iran with over 100,000 Polish soldiers and civilians, perhaps 115,000 in all, starting with a first wave in March–April 1942, followed by another group at the end of August. Despite bitter protests from Jewish volunteers and organizations, only a very limited number of Jews, probably around 6,000 altogether (4,000 soldiers plus women and children), were able to join this exodus from Central Asia. They included somewhere between 700 and 1,000 children, who endured a nightmarish journey through Uzbekistan to the port city of Krasnovodsk in Turkmenistan, on the shore of the Caspian Sea, about 1,800 kilometers west of Tashkent, and then by ship to the Persian port of Bandar-e Pahlavi (now Bandar-e Anzali) or in some cases overland from Ashkhabad to Mashhad.¹¹ In transit camps run by the Polish army, children, many of whom had been transferred from an orphanage in Samarkand, experienced their first showers with soap, medical inspections, and immunizations. Some happily remembered a sense of having finally arrived in civilization; “It was an entirely different world from the one we had just left,” with “tanned, well-dressed, smiling people,” and “each day was an adventure where we began to learn to play again.”¹² Others recorded much harsher experiences, with starving, ill, and terrified children left to sleep under tents in the blazing sun after a horrific sea voyage. Even the sudden bounty of chicken and pita bread, fed to children who were “not used to eat[ing],” left them initially ill and depleted. At the same time, Jewish Agency representatives or young delegates from Zionist youth movements tracked down Jewish children who had smuggled themselves into Polish transports and tried to convince these wary youngsters that it was now safe to disclose their Jewish identity, perhaps to remove a crucifix that had facilitated the escape from Central Asia with Polish orphans. They moved on to transit camps outside of Tehran, in the shadow of Mount Damavand, passing through, as one refugee child later described, “a modern city . . . a bustling modern metropolis [that]

appeared before our eyes, with brightly lit shops, noisy traffic, and crowded streets.”¹³

Remarkably, U.S. State Department files reveal that the arrival of large numbers of Polish children in the camps near Tehran generated intense shock among American officials, for whom the condition of children entering from the Soviet Union apparently provided their first encounter with the extreme ravages of war and displacement. On 5 April 1942, in a letter that began by expressing condolences to the head of the American Red Cross, whose wife had just died, the organization’s representative in Tehran wrote to his headquarters in Washington about a humanitarian crisis that he termed “this awful holocaust.” By this time one would have expected Red Cross officials to be aware of, for example, the siege of Leningrad, if not the precise conditions in Nazi ghettos and camps, not to mention the general harshness of life during wartime in the colonial Middle East. Yet, Maurice Barber could not contain his panic about what he had already termed, in a report to the Red Cross director for the Middle East stationed in Cairo, “perhaps the greatest civilian emergency of the war.” “The sick children,” he wrote, “are haunting shadows—literally skin and bones” and warned that the situation among the Poles in southern Russia was even more tragic. “They are dying by the thousands,” he informed Washington, stating that “fifty percent of all Polish children in Russia have already perished from starvation, exposure and disease.” He concluded, “I did not mean to make this letter so long and please forgive me—but I have never in my life been more moved than I have been by the tragedy of these Polish refugees in Russia and now in Persia.”¹⁴

A young Zionist activist, who had himself just escaped from Central Asia and been recruited as the director of the Jewish children’s camp, set up on the grounds of a former Iranian military base outside Tehran, remembered his charges as “pale, gaunt and famished.” As he recounted: “They had a haunted expression in their eyes. . . . They were like little battle-weary soldiers, exhausted by gunfire, expulsion, imprisonment, and wandering across Siberia’s endless, forgotten wastelands to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and other places whose names they had never heard until they were dragged through them like beasts in cattle trucks . . . boils, ringworm, scabies—I saw them defecating in public, unable to control their bowels because of intestinal and stomach diseases.”¹⁵ These depictions of

trauma, composed at the time and decades later, both foreshadowed and rehearsed the early sketches of liberated Holocaust survivors. The children, whether Jewish or not, stole and hoarded food and clothing and clung to each other, tormented by desperate promises made to their parents—which they had often not been able to keep—that they would take care of younger siblings. Visually as well, the photographs of the Polish and Polish Jewish refugee children taken before or shortly after their arrival in Iran are strikingly similar to the images we associate with Holocaust survivors.¹⁶ Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, in his foreword to the 1981 collection of testimonies *War through Children's Eyes*, described the catastrophic conditions bluntly: "Children see their parents disappear; they do not know where they went, whether they are still alive, or already dead. They watch their mothers and fathers, their brothers and sisters, die of overwork, starvation, and mistreatment, helpless to prevent it."¹⁷

As similar as these depictions are and as terrible as the conditions of the Polish refugees seemed to American officials, Jewish activists complained that the Jewish refugees suffered particular hardship, left on their own or actively discriminated against by the representatives of the Polish Red Cross and the Polish government-in-exile. The children, who were housed in a separate tent camp adjacent to the Polish one, reported anti-semitic taunts and much tension between the groups. At the same time, however, in one of the paradoxes more familiar to us from the postwar displaced persons (DP) camps, the Zionist promise provided a sense of futurity that the Polish children in Soviet exile did not have. As David Laor, the young camp director saw it: "[The] Polish children were actually envious of the Zhids they tormented as the onion stinkers. . . . They knew that the Jewish children would soon be on their way to Palestine, their homeland. Whereas they had left a defeated homeland and would soon be sent to another exile, never knowing when they would return home. This was a different, new encouraging feeling—Poles envying Jews."¹⁸

Hoping to alleviate the critical situation of the Jewish children, Harry Viteles, a JDC emissary, traveled to Tehran from Jerusalem via Baghdad, in November and December 1942. His goal was to gather information about the situation in the Soviet Union from Jews in, or traveling with, the Anders army, to organize a local JDC relief committee in Tehran,

and to investigate increasing “general relief” for the much larger number of refugees in Central Asia. Viteles’s maintained a hectic schedule; he spoke with diplomatic, military, and civil authorities of the American and British governments and the Polish government-in-exile; officials of the American Red Cross, the Polish Red Cross, and the Polish Delegation for Refugees; residents of the American and British and Iranian Jewish communities; representatives of the Jewish Agency; emissaries of pre-state Palestine (Yishuv); and numerous refugees from both Central and Eastern Europe. Some sources have estimated that there were as many as 450,000 refugees altogether in Iran during the war, most of them from the Soviet Union, but Viteles reported that fewer than 1,800 of some 26,000 Polish civilians, most of them housed in refugee camps, were officially registered as Jews.¹⁹

Viteles did note some resistance by Iranians to this rather large group of refugees on their terrain, already basically occupied by the British and Soviets, observing that “the more religious and conservative section of the Iranian population was reported to be much concerned about the effect of the purported ‘idleness and gay life’ of the Polish refugees.” Moreover, the substantial local Jewish community itself seemed particularly anxious about “the increase of immorality among the young women” included in the small number of Jewish refugees, some 150–200, who had settled outside the camps in the Iranian capital itself. “About 20 Jewish ‘Bar Maids’ and ‘Waitresses,’ most of them from very good families,” apparently supported themselves in a quite disreputable manner. The JDC representative was careful to stress, however, that, “thus far, there has been no direct criticism against Jewish refugees; the Iranians and others always refer to Polish refugees.”²⁰

At least some of the small numbers of Western and Central European Jewish refugees already in Iran, most of them in Tehran, were drawn into working with the evacuees from the Soviet Union and the JDC. The experience and activity of those refugee Jews who worked and lived in Tehran over a longer period certainly bears considerably more investigation. They, too, had lost their homes, livelihoods, professions, and contact with families left behind, with no sense of what future they might face. But they were also Europeans, oddly privileged, adventurers, in exotic colonial or semicolonial non-Western societies. As described in a marvelous unpublished memoir by a female refugee physician from Munich,

"We are all uprooted and put down in this utterly alien culture" replete with "adventurers, spies, foreign agents" and the "wildest rumors." At the same time, these German and Central European Jews, who generally arrived in the 1930s, were often able to find first refuge and then work in the forcibly modernizing Iran of Reza Shah Pahlavi (and then in occupied Iran) as engineers, architects, construction managers, teachers, legal advisers, secretaries, and physicians. "Things [were] so much more colorful than they had been under 'normal' circumstances at home," Marianne Leppmann mused even as she also wrote about suicides, breakdowns, and the risks faced by "young European girls," who "were rare" and much coveted.²¹ Wartime conditions for refugees in Iran were, it should be said, relatively luxurious, with only some rationing. Their fortunate circumstances were highlighted by the dramatic arrival of the Polish orphans in hideous condition, whom refugee physicians helped to care for under the supervision of the chief medical officer assigned to the American Military Mission in Iran. Major Abraham Neuwirth was credited by American officials with having organized the medical relief that saved the lives of countless severely ill women and children refugees from the Soviet Union. But, in an indication perhaps of how much these refugees had to learn before they could become, as Leppmann eventually did, "new Americans," this American Jewish officer was described by his nonplussed colleague as a "a life form which I had not known till then, a typical New York Jew," who was "quick, enthusiastic, energetic, goodhearted, but terribly tactless and pushing."²²

Viteles, for his part, was particularly concerned with the Jewish children's camp, where between 700 and 900 youngsters (officially "orphans" but often children placed in orphanages by a desperate parent hoping to secure them a route out of the Soviet Union and eventually to Palestine) who had escaped with the Polish army were awaiting transit to Palestine. After multiple delays and diplomatic wrangles, largely due to Iraq's refusal to sanction a quicker overland journey, the children finally left Tehran on 3 January 1943, traveling by truck on terrifyingly serpentine roads to the Persian Gulf port of Bandar Shahpur. They then endured a miserable two-week sea journey, ducking mines and German submarines, to Karachi, where they spent two weeks in a camp, supported by Indian Jews and a mysterious (British) Indian army officer, who turned out to be a German Jew working as an undercover Haganah operative.

Outfitted with British colonial tropical helmets, the “Teheran Children” then boarded another ship, sailing through the Red Sea, past the port of Aden, where they were not allowed to disembark due to British fears of Arab unrest, and on to Suez. Having crossed the Red Sea, they were, in a resonant partial (but as far as I can tell so far, not articulated) reenactment of the Exodus story, transferred to Egyptian trains that finally, after years of exile in the Soviet Union and months of transit in the Middle East and South Asia, carried them into Palestine. Some 1,230 children, adolescents, and accompanying adults arrived at yet another camp in Atlit, near Haifa, on 18 February 1943—just as the ghettos in their homeland were being liquidated—to a warm but shocked welcome from Yishuv officials and Jewish soldiers. “The soldiers stood watching with tears in their eyes, looks of pity on their faces,” probably wondering, as the men of the Jewish Brigade did a couple of years later when they first encountered the camp survivors in the DP camps, whether these desperate wounded children could ever become the pioneers or the soldiers, the “human material,” that the Yishuv needed. As so often happens in this wartime story, the moment of relief also produced new anguish: “The children were suffering from the trauma of leaving the place they had lived for six months [Tehran] in comparative security. . . . Another step further away from the families in Russia. Another journey into the unknown.”²³

Approximately 21,000 non-Jewish Polish civilian refugees with no particular destination except the desire to escape the Soviet Union and eventually return home were distributed by the British among their colonial territories in Africa (Uganda, Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland) and India. The children were first taken to nearby British India and settled in two orphanages. The Maharajah of Nawanagar offered his princely estate in Jamnagar by the sea in northwestern India as a home for some 1,000 children, leaving the administration to a strict Polish priest, who tried to run the camp with military-style regimentation. A larger camp, set up in Valivade, eventually expanded to three kindergartens, four elementary schools, a middle and secondary school, a trade school for boys, a domestic training school for girls, and a teacher training academy, serving a total of some 2,500 students.²⁴

Viteles, in the meantime, had grasped the central point that “the presence of eighteen hundred Jews in Teheran, 75 percent of whom [were]

certificated for Palestine, [was] in itself not a serious problem." The more critical issue was, as the JDC envoy urgently noted, "the hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees still in Russia—whether they remain there or eventually are evacuated." Tehran was already a center of wartime intrigue and operations by the time JDC activity moved into full gear; indeed, between 1942 and 1945, Iran was arguably one of the most important—albeit noncombat—theaters of the Second World War. Alarmed by German influence in officially neutral Iran, the invasion of the Soviet Union and Axis victories in North Africa, and determined to protect precious oil supplies, British and Soviet forces moved into Iran in August 1941. The Allied action divided the country into southern and northern occupation zones and caused, as reported by one refugee memoirist, three days of "rather perfunctory fighting" in Tehran. But it preempted any further flirtation with the Nazis by deposing Reza Shah Pahlavi (whose policies had benefited a small number of emigrating German Jews who were more likely to be admitted as technical experts or academic advisers) and installing his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as titular leader.²⁵ By the end of September 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had ordered the formation of a U.S. military mission in Iran, launching what would become the Persian Gulf Command. This crucial Allied supply operation brought some 30,000 U.S. uniformed personnel and thousands of civilian workers into Iran from 1942 to 1944 and shipped millions of tons of materiel, including some 5,000 planes and 200,000 trucks, to the Soviets. It is worth noting that Viteles's JDC-sponsored mission not only followed the influx of Polish military forces and refugees in the spring and summer of 1942 but also preceded by only a few days the arrival of the first American troops at the port of Khorramshahr on 11 December 1942.²⁶ Reflecting Iran's key role in the war effort, in late 1943, Roosevelt, Stalin, and Winston Churchill confirmed mutual war aims at the Tehran summit conference.

The Iranian capital became, therefore, the center of a major Jewish relief effort focused on shipping vital goods for consumption and trading to the much larger number of Jews (Viteles estimated 200,000–300,000, but the figures vary in virtually every report) trying to endure the war in the Soviet Union. Interestingly, the JDC recognized, as expressed in Viteles's confidential report, that the success of the planned extensive relief effort emanating from Middle Eastern countries would depend on

the JDC's "not be[ing] suspected of Zionist or any political activities." This position of public neutrality in regard to Zionism necessarily led to ongoing (but contained) conflicts with the Jewish Agency and would ultimately shift only in the aftermath of the Holocaust.²⁷

"Thin indeed was the ice on which we were skating on in wartime Iran," wrote Marianne Leppmann, remarking on both the German threat and the more immediately threatening Russians, whose presence as occupiers was "felt to be something sinister and dangerous," and added that "several people we knew failed to come home after an errand in the city and were never heard from again." Yet, on the rare occasions when David Laor, the director of the Jewish orphanage, found time to go into the city, usually to collect precious medications from a Persian Jewish pharmacist, he incredulously wandered the crowded streets, "gazing into the showcases of the many jewelry shops, where the jewelry glittered as though there were no war anywhere in the world."²⁸

Tehran did appear to the refugees, whether they came from Poland or Central Europe, as fantastic and exotic, simultaneously modern and "primitive," but always firmly in the "Orient" and far from Europe. The Iranian capital might have been the only place in the world where refugee Jews actually begged German diplomats to stamp a *J* in their passports in order to evade the rumored British roundup of German nationals as enemy aliens. Previously, even as the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) had already established a local branch in 1933, followed by a Hitler Youth group and a "working group of German women abroad," German mission officials had maintained extensive contacts with Jewish refugees in Tehran at least through the late 1930s. They routinely queried the Gestapo in the refugees' hometowns as to whether there were objections to renewing any passports, including those of persons identified as *Jude*. Almost always, a letter, its bright red borders on thick paper still well preserved in stark contrast to the other disintegrating records in the mission's foreign ministry files, arrived, assuring that there were no qualms (*Bedenken*) about another one-year renewal. Only in 1940 did the Gestapo add the proviso that Jewish Germans must make no effort to ever reenter Germany, on the danger of imprisonment.²⁹ The British closed the German mission and ordered all German nationals detained in summer 1941; the men were transported to internment camps (called concentration camps by their inmates) in Palestine, India, or even

Australia, and the women and children sent back to Germany. German Jews, however, were given shelter for an entire week in the courtyard of the British embassy's summer residence, ensuring that they would avoid being picked up by local police, who, it was said, were unlikely to be able to distinguish among Jewish and "Aryan" Germans. Those German passports renewed with a *J* were, as Leppmann remembered, "worth their weight in gold."³⁰

Refugees from Axis countries under direct British control were not so lucky; in India, where the British feared both anticolonial agitation and Nazi infiltration, German, Austrian, and Italian Jews were interned, sometimes for the duration of the war, as "enemy aliens" and even as suspected "enemy agents." In February 1941, as England was waging a lonely battle against the Nazis, Gerda Phillipsborn, a German Jewish refugee held in the Purandhar parole center, had already eloquently expressed to a British refugee aid committee her frustration about the curious position of being a prisoner of the very nation with which she wished to ally to fight the mutual National Socialist enemy:

I know perfectly well that our personal fate is absolutely unimportant at present, that we have no reason to grumble, we who are here safe, well fed, looked after remarkably well all the time. With all strength of my imagination I probably cannot imagine the ordeal you all have to undergo since many months—days, nights—and the future may be more difficult still. I need not tell you how deeply I admire you all for standing it so bravely—but I also envy that you are allowed to face it. It is so terribly bitter to be not only excluded from helping but also being suspected. I never imagined that something could be so hurting.³¹

By 1942, Iran emerged as the center of a dramatic Allied confrontation with the ravages of war as the Polish refugees—several tens of thousands, including women and children—poured in from the Soviet Union. They confronted American diplomats and Red Cross officials not only with a humanitarian disaster—which was eventually controlled—but with an even more complex geopolitical dilemma. The Americans, in a rehearsal of Cold War conflicts, had to navigate the competing demands of virulent Polish anti-Communism, the United States' commitment to lend-lease

and support of the Soviet war effort, and British ambitions for semicolonial control of southern Iran. For all their sympathy with the plight of the refugees from Central Asia, American officials were exasperated with Polish insistence on diverting all aid intended for the Soviets to their compatriots as well as their aggressive purchasing of scarce food and medicine, which threatened to cause a political and humanitarian crisis in Iran. Given the dire wartime circumstances, the Americans were not inclined to let “these Poles, a stubborn as well as gallant race,” disturb their relations with either the Soviet ally or Iran. As the State Department clearly recognized, Iran was “vulnerable to Axis propaganda directed at all the Near Eastern countries,” especially “since the Axis has already been making capital of what it calls ‘soviet brutality’” in connection with the Polish refugees.³² “I need hardly say,” an officer in the Department of State, Division of Near Eastern Affairs, added in his 27 May 1942 warning to the American Red Cross in Tehran not to make Iran a “dumping ground” for wartime refugees, “that Iran occupies a most important place in the current Near Eastern picture, and this Department is anxious to do everything possible to maintain our relations with that country on a cordial basis.”³³

Not coincidentally, given its multinational cosmopolitan military and civilian population and its central position for lend-lease and refugee relief efforts, Tehran also became the key site for arguably the most extensive and challenging Jewish relief and rescue mission during the Holocaust. Between July and November 1943, the JDC, cooperating somewhat uneasily with the Jewish Agency, both operating out of Tehran, worked out the details of what would become a lifeline to the several hundred thousand Polish Jews scattered throughout Central Asia. The JDC agreed to acquire supplies, some purchased and some donated from lend-lease stocks; do major fund-raising in the United States; and run the parcel program, for which it set up a central warehouse and virtually independent post office to avoid Iranian customs dues and inspections. The Jewish Agency undertook to raise smaller amounts of money from friends and relatives of the “Asiatics” in Palestine; the goal was to ship at least 5,000 parcels a month. Since the Soviets banned all aid shipments to “sectarian” groups, each approximately ten-pound parcel, filled with everything from blankets to sugar and tea and soap and matzoh—both for immediate use and for black market barter—had to be addressed to

individual recipients, whose names and locations were laboriously gathered by refugees and Anders army members now working out of Tehran and sometimes Jerusalem. It is not clear how many of these painstakingly constructed parcels actually reached those who most needed them, but by 1944 some 10,000 packages a month were making their way on Red Army trucks from Tehran to the Iran–Soviet Union border and then onward via various routes for delivery throughout Central Asia. Remarkably, JDC records indicate that between 80 and 90 percent of 230,000 parcels shipped from Tehran “reached their destinations”; by January 1947, “130,000 official acknowledgements of receipt,” with thousands more waiting to be mailed, had been forwarded from Iran to the JDC’s Office for the Middle East and Balkans.³⁴

This extraordinary JDC operation, multifaceted, exhausting, and sometimes dangerous, was spread across the Middle East. It had outposts in Cairo, Beirut, and Jerusalem, as well as in British India, where other European Jews survived, many of them as internees in camps for “enemy aliens.” Others, especially non-Axis nationality Polish Jews as well as the local Jewish community (in particular wealthy Baghdadi Jews), worked out of the Jewish Relief Association in Bombay. In 1944, the relief association counted 409 members and was cooperating with the JDC on the same relief “scheme” for Jewish refugees in Russia as well as on a special fund for Polish Jewish refugees in transit.³⁵

Rescue efforts were headquartered in Tehran, with its small collection of German and Austrian Jewish refugees, thousands of Poles, and relatively easy access to Soviet Central Asia. Palestine was one node in this circuit—it was certainly not uninvolved—but it was only one, and not the main site. The process involved delicate negotiations with multiple parties: the Soviet Union, Iran, Great Britain, the United States, the Polish government-in-exile, the Polish Red Cross, and various international Jewish aid groups including the JDC, the Jewish Agency, the Jewish socialist Bund, and numerous smaller relief groups from Australia to South Africa, India, and London. These groups all had differing politics, about Zionism, about relations to Poles, as well as about the advisability of general aid to the USSR through the Soviet war relief effort rather than a specifically Jewish operation. But they all shared the increasingly desperate goal of rescuing those European Jews who might still be saved—and most of those were struggling to survive in Soviet Central Asia.

Indeed, it is from the testimonies of the Teheran Children collected after they arrived in Palestine that we have some of the most harrowing descriptions of the desperate conditions Jewish refugees faced in Central Asia, conditions that the Americans had described, referring to the Polish refugees in general, as this “awful holocaust” and which, in fact, are little different from the equally devastating Polish testimonies compiled by Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Jan T. Gross in *War through Children’s Eyes*. The Jewish Teheran Children remembered:

My father and mother got sick with typhus. . . . They died on the same day. We cried all night and the next day buried them ourselves. . . .

There were no doctors because they had all been mobilized for the front. . . . In Kazakhstan we all got sick with typhus, and after eleven days Mama died. My eldest brother, who was nineteen, also died. . . .

My father got sick with dysentery and after days died in the hospital. Only my brother and I remained out of the entire family. . . .

Seven of us left Poland. Three died of hunger and diseases. There were seven of us, and only my twelve-year old brother Abram and I remained. . . .

Of the fifteen people in our family exiled to Russia, six remained. It was the same in other families.³⁶

Unquestionably, many who had fled to the Soviet side of what had recently been Poland, and been initially reassured by Soviet promises that “we Jews are just as equal as everybody else,” came eventually to see their wartime situation more darkly, as a passage from “Nazi inferno to Soviet hell.”³⁷ But as most realized: “Better to have been deported . . . as a capitalist and enemy of the people than to fall into the hands of the Nazis as a Jew . . . in the end we were alive. Our exile had saved our lives. Now we felt ourselves supremely lucky to have been deported to Siberia.”³⁸ When confronted with the enormity of the German “Final Solution,” their difficult refuge in the Soviet Union appeared to some, as Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky note in an excellent early article on the subject of immediate postwar memory, as a kind of *gan eydn* (paradise).³⁹

Memoirs recall utterly contradictory experiences: a parent dying of dysentery or typhus in an Uzbek mud hut or working the risky but necessary black market trade on the Lenin Streets of Central Asian cities, while children read Pushkin and Lenin in school. Young people, looking quite dapper and well fed in group photographs, pursued violin lessons and language courses or even medical training with some of Moscow's and Leningrad's most gifted artists and leading academics in makeshift evacuated high schools and universities even as, in a frequently repeated phrase, others were "dying like flies." Refugees cheered the progress of the Red Army while simultaneously condemning the NKVD and the pervasive corruption of the Soviet system. They recalled Uzbek suspicion of both Christian and Jewish "Westerners"—but also the sharing of pilaf meals and wedding celebrations, the Jacobs who became Yacoub and the Helas now Hala in order to fit into their new environment, comfortable afternoons spent in the local teahouses (*chaikhanas*) or even sightseeing at the grand mosques and mausoleums in Samarkand and Bukhara.⁴⁰

Connections with local Bukhara Jews, while intermittent, also offered opportunities for Jewish wedding and circumcision rituals. Moreover, despite the fear engendered by the NKVD, the limits of Stalinist power in Central Asia and the sheer concentration of so many Jews in one area enabled the survival of significant Jewish cultural and political life including informal networks of Zionist youth movement activists. With their expertise in forging papers and maintaining clandestine cohesion, "Asiatic" left-wing Hashomer Hatzair and Dror activists would take on early leading roles in the Bricha (flight) networks that moved Jewish survivors out of postwar Poland toward U.S.-occupied Europe. In that sense, the Soviet Union played a key role not only as a preserver of Yiddish culture but as an incubator of the Zionism that later flourished in—and is so clearly associated with—the DP camps.⁴¹ "But we survived" is the refrain of the survivors who endured in the Soviet Union. It is a statement with a very different valence than the "we survived" of those who experienced Nazi occupation.

In July 1945, after the end of the war in May, an agreement between the Soviet Union and the new Polish regime organized the repatriation of Polish citizens to what had become, for Jews, a "vast graveyard." Refugees, probably somewhere between approximately 200,000 and 230,000, returned to Poland; earlier estimates speak of a total of 230,700 repatriates

until 1949.⁴² Some of the first to arrive were soldiers in the pro-Communist Berling army. Attached to the Red Army after the breakdown of relations between the Polish government-in-exile and the Soviet Union and the departure of the Anders army, it fought with and followed the Soviets all the way to Berlin. Most Jews returned after long, circuitous, and arduous journeys between February and July 1946—just as, not coincidentally, postwar antisemitic violence reached a climax with the pogrom in Kielce on 4 July. Others trickled back even later after their release from Soviet camps and prisons. When the trainloads of Jewish repatriates arrived in Lodz, Radom, Krakow, and Warsaw, the few survivors of ghettos, camps, hiding, and partisan units “turned out to welcome the repatriates and gape,” but “they came not to stare at rags and pinched faces—any Jew who survived the Nazis inside Poland was familiar enough with these things.” In a world where, among the 3.3 million Polish Jews “alive when Hitler invaded that land” there were “hardly more than a hundred Jewish families [that still] stood intact,” they “came instead to gaze on walking miracles—*whole Jewish families*, complete with fathers, mothers and children!”⁴³ Or as other repatriates recalled: “When the women saw our children they could not believe their eyes. They all said, ‘You still have children! Ours have all been killed by the Nazis.’” Often, despite their awareness of German atrocities on the Eastern Front, it was at these border crossings that the “Asiatics” first came face-to-face with incontrovertible evidence of the Final Solution, confirming rumors that had been hopefully discounted as Soviet propaganda.⁴⁴

Just as the liberation came at different times in different places, knowledge about the extent of the catastrophe seems to have been very unevenly received. On 30 September 1943, in a Rosh Hashanah “sermon” for Jewish internees in Purandhar, British India, a former lawyer from Berlin, who had clearly been listening to the BBC, already invoked “our brothers and sisters who unlike ourselves, had not the opportunity to escape the disaster and whom we shall never see again,” memorializing “all the hundred thousands and millions of our Jewish brethren who died as suffering heroes.” And on 13 May 1945, he turned a Victory in Europe Day speech into a Kaddish, noting, “We who, against our expressed will, were not permitted to participate actively in this battle for the freedom of all peoples can feel no true joy. . . . Above all we must think about those five million Jews, almost a third of our people, who found a hor-

rific death in the ghettos and extermination camps, on the road or in their homes and synagogues.”⁴⁵ In Iran, the refugee physician Marianne Leppmann did not begin to comprehend what had happened until she glimpsed first photographs of liberated concentration camps in *Life* magazine while attending a party at a British army base in Hamadan.⁴⁶

In Poland, the relatively large groups of Jews returning from the Soviet Union formed the core of a brief efflorescence of post-Shoah Yiddish culture in Lodz, or Stettin/Szczecin, and in Breslau/Wroclaw in the western “recovered territories” from which Germans had been expelled and where repatriates were often settled. Indeed, it is important to note that, for some young Jews, liberated Poland in the early postwar years was not only a “graveyard” but a place for temporary euphoria, with “enthusiasm and support for an optimistic and future-oriented vision of the country,” including active Zionist youth movements, Hebrew and Yiddish schools, theater, music, film, and even a baby boom (with 500 newborns delivered in 1947 in the Jewish hospital in Lodz). The liminal Jewish revival both reflected what had been preserved in the Soviet Union and anticipated and helped to shape the vibrant Zionist-dominated social and cultural life in the DP camps. The presence of unexpectedly numerous repatriates—and, it must be noted, not primarily the tragically smaller numbers emerging from the camps, partisan encampments, and hiding—served, however, not only as a catalyst for cultural and Zionist political life but also as a provocation for the postwar antisemitic violence that triggered the flight of Jewish survivors from Poland. By 1948, the Jewish experiment in postwar Poland was essentially over—a short-lived “life in transit”—having migrated to another transitional space, the DP camps of American-occupied Germany. Historians of the Holocaust and postwar Germany picked up the story of the “survivors” there, without, however, examining the experiences they brought with them.⁴⁷

Political and ideological as well as psychological factors, most importantly the pressures of the Cold War, the dominance of a unified narrative that subsumed all Jewish DPs under the rubric of the She’erit Hapletah, and the enduring sense among the “Asiatics” that their painful story was not worth telling in the face of the catastrophe that befell those who had been left behind, have shaped and distorted history and memory. The repatriates who arrived “home” in Poland starting in late 1945 became part of the undifferentiated collective of survivors that was in many ways

only invented after the war, first in Poland and then in the DP camps. Shocked by the devastation they confronted, a recognition made perhaps even more difficult to bear by the new knowledge that they had been the “lucky ones,” they accepted that role, especially as they found themselves forced to flee again. They joined the semi-organized but also panicked flight of Jewish survivors into occupied Germany and Austria Stateless refugees, without papers or with false papers, they carried their children born in Uzbekistan, on the journey back, or in Poland, their backpacks containing the last of precious black market goods from the bazaars of Central Asia often tossed or stolen along the way. They crossed more borders from Poland through Czechoslovakia into Austria or through the Soviet zone into the American sector of Berlin. Seeking safety among the American victors, they moved now from east to west rather than west to east, hoping to emigrate further out of “cursed” Europe, to Palestine, the United States, Canada, or Australia.

Members of the historical commissions set up in Poland or the DP centers to document and commemorate the *Khurbn* (as the DPs referred in Yiddish to the catastrophe that we generally name as the Holocaust or, even more recently, the Shoah), who had themselves survived in the Soviet Union, mostly silenced their own experiences and recorded only the stories of the camps, the ghettos, and the partisans. Journalists and poets, who published in the lively DP press, focused on memoirs of persecution and resistance, Zionist politics, and everyday life of the displaced, but hardly ever on the struggle for survival in Siberia or Central Asia. Actors and actresses on DP camp stages donned striped pajamas and played victims in German camps even if they themselves had arrived as “infiltrates” from Poland after having survived in the Soviet Union. They suppressed their own traumatic stories in order to find a desperately needed home among a community of survivors. But the memories of camps, partisans, ghettos, and hiding they performed, or claimed, were not their own, a circumstance that may partly explain the reluctant response of many survivors to the call to “collect and record” events that most of them had not experienced.⁴⁸ And when Jews finally left the DP camps and communities, would-be immigrants, especially to a reluctant United States, and mindful of escalating Cold War tensions, they supported a thriving industry of false documents, backdating their entry into Germany or inventing new (later) birthdates for children to disguise their Soviet

birthplace.⁴⁹ At the same time, the early silence may very well have been not only the result of deliberate repression and privileging of the “direct survivor” story but also simply a reflection of the fact that, unlike the exceptional stories of survival under the Nazis, the Soviet wartime story was so common that it did not warrant much mention; it was the “default” taken-for-granted backstory.⁵⁰ Moreover, the desperate seeking of “normality” where “what happened during the war seemed so unbelievable, so psychotic, that we had to suppress the events in order to maintain our sanity and start a normal life again” may also have blocked much emphasis on divergent experiences.⁵¹

An overarching and often undifferentiated story of *the Holocaust*, its victims and survivors, has therefore effaced the highly ambiguous role of the Soviet Union as the site where—with critical, if limited, support from American Jewish aid organizations—the great majority of Jewish DPs had survived the war.⁵² Given such a “remapped” history, arguments about definitions of “survivors,” generally considered in terms of differences among prewar refugees and survivors of Nazi occupation, become even more vexed. In fact, if we exclude the “Asiatics,” the number of actual survivors (and their descendants) becomes dramatically smaller, with hard-to-imagine consequences for our by-now well-established rituals of commemoration, which, if anything, are expanding rather than narrowing the range of those included. Today “survivors” are counted and identified collectively, but we often do not actually know the story of individual wartime experiences. Flight survivors have been only belatedly or partially recognized, including in the struggle for even limited reparations. Indeed, anxiety about explicitly disaggregating that collective persists today, certainly, but not only, in Germany. As the generation with any living memory of the Holocaust inexorably disappears, those committed to preserving memory fear that postwar German (and Allied) accusations positioning most Jewish DPs as refugees from Communism or economic migrants from devastated postwar Poland and not “genuine” victims of Nazism might be reactivated. If the majority of survivors had in fact experienced the more “normal” horrors of wartime rather than the particular catastrophe of genocide, then, this scenario suggests, German guilt is relativized and the unique nature of Jewish persecution during World War II obscured. At the same time, however, a precisely opposite conclusion might emerge: that understanding how very few

“direct” survivors there really were and that much of the “saved remnant” (*She’erit Hapletah*) had survived only because it had escaped Nazi control only underscores the deadly sweep of the Final Solution. Polish and Polish Jewish testimonies about the Soviet experience reveal hauntingly similar traumas in strikingly similar language but also point to crucial differences. Jews carried the additional burden of antisemitism expressed by both Soviets and fellow Poles and in the aftermath of their Soviet exile, they, unlike non-Jewish Polish repatriates, confronted genocide, the virtually total annihilation of their prewar lives, homes, and families.

What, then, is at stake, in terms of memory politics and history, if the complex and confusing story of the Polish Jews in the Soviet Union and its connections to Iran and even India was inscribed into the Holocaust studies narrative (rather than, for example, being sequestered in Polish Jewish history or even Soviet Jewish history)? Polish and Polish Jewish experiences have been narrated separately; we need to know much more about their encounters in the Soviet camps and in Central Asia and what their differing memories signaled after the war. In Poland, certainly, the surprise repatriation of some 200,000 Jews from the Soviet Union further inflamed Polish resentment about putative Jewish collaboration with the unpopular Soviet occupation and Communist regime.⁵³ In Germany, Jewish DPs rarely, if ever, shared the implacable anti-Communism of Polish and Baltic DP “nations in exile.” We would confront more clearly the fraught slippage—in both contemporary and retrospective accounts—between descriptions of National Socialist and Soviet terror. We would have to consider the ways that the language of a “concentration camp universe” is insistently present in accounts of Soviet internment and how reactions to encounters with the traumatized, emaciated Teheran Children both anticipate and mirror depictions of Nazi camp survivors.

Furthermore, the many pragmatic rather than vengeful “close encounters” among surviving Jews and defeated Germans appear in a different light when we acknowledge that for many Jewish DPs their most recent, visceral experiences of persecution (as well as assistance) had been at the hands of Poles and Soviets rather than Nazis. The black market activities of DPs in postwar Germany, on the (in)famous Möhlstrasse in Munich or the Hermannplatz in Berlin, perceived as exotic “bazaars” by Germans and Allies, read differently when understood, not in the context of the extreme conditions of exchange in Nazi ghettos and camps or the tradi-

tions of the *shtetl*, but in relation to the barter and rationing systems that supported survival in Siberian labor camps and on Lenin Streets in Fergana, Frunze, or Bukhara. Restrictive postwar U.S. immigration politics might look different when analyzed in the context not only of antisemitism and xenophobia but of security-obsessed Cold War suspicions that immigrant Jewish DPs might harbor Communist sympathies. Jews knew, at the very latest at the moment they crossed the border into postwar Poland, that their survival was the result, if inadvertent, of Stalin's policies. And despite their profoundly ambivalent memories of the Soviet Union, many survivors, Zionists, and international Jewish organizations such as the JDC or the World Jewish Congress, as well as early Israeli political discourse, did not share the intense anti-Communism of the Western powers or Eastern Europe's "nations in exile." That ambivalent awareness, and not only bitterness about antisemitism and collaboration with the Nazis, may well have contributed to Jewish DPs' political distance from other staunchly anti-Communist Baltic and Polish DP groups with whom they shared space in occupied Germany.⁵⁴

Their confounding tales of survival, of forced labor in Soviet camps and collective farms, hardship and exoticism in Central Asia, were—and are—difficult to integrate into a coherent narrative, into personal as well as public memory and mourning rituals. It is not an accident that numerous memoirs include maps, as if they might explain to their authors as well as others these unlikely journeys, tracing routes traversing Poland, the Soviet Union, Iran, India, Palestine, and Poland again, generally followed by renewed flight and displacement to American-occupied Germany (and Austria and Italy) and continued migration to the United States, Israel, France, parts of the British Commonwealth in Australia, Canada, and South Africa, as well as to almost all other corners of the globe. Yet, if one actually takes into account the Nazi death machine and the near total devastation of Eastern European Jewry, it stands to reason that the approximately 250,000 survivors who consolidated themselves into the staunchly Zionist (in spirit, if not in destination) She'erit Haplelah could not possibly have all emerged from hiding, passing on the "Aryan side," or partisan groups or, as it were, walked out of Treblinka, where so many of the victims of liquidated ghettos were murdered. Nonetheless, ongoing anxieties still govern a certain reluctance to expose this history, to explain that the "survivors," certainly the Polish Jews, had for the most part

survived a more perhaps “normal” wartime experience of incarceration, flight, and desperate privation—with many deaths but no Final Solution and a chance at survival.

In the face of the emerging Cold War, and in a survivor culture more and more dominated by Zionism, the majority of Jewish DPs, some in camps populated almost entirely by “infiltrators” from postwar Poland who had returned from the Soviet Union, needed to negotiate their own excruciatingly complicated encounters with Nazism, Stalinism, and the “Orient.” Their trajectories remap and reconfigure the history of the Holocaust, rendering it transnational and multidirectional in new ways. They challenge us to understand the Holocaust, its victims and survivors, more deeply, comprehensively, and in comparative context.⁵⁵

Notes

1. For trajectories, see chapter 2, by Edele and Warlik; for encounters with Soviet Jews, see chapter 4, by Belsky; and for encounters with anti-Semites, see chapter 3, by Fitzpatrick (all in this volume).
2. For identities, see chapter 6, by Goldlust; for exclusion of testimony and memory, see chapter 7, by Adler (both in this volume).
3. See initial attempt in Grossmann, “Remapping Relief and Rescue: Flight, Displacement, and International Aid for Jewish Refugees During World War II,” *New German Critique* 39, no. 3 (2012): 61–79; a different later version of this article appears in “Remapping Survival: Jewish Refugees and Lost Memories of Displacement, Trauma, and Rescue in Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India,” *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 15 (2017): 71–97.
4. Quotation from Susan T. Pettiss with Lynne Taylor, *After the Shooting Stopped: The Story of an UNRRA Welfare Worker in Germany, 1945–1947* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Press, 2004), 146, diary entries for 11 and 13 December 1945. The entries record intake interviews with Jewish “infiltrators” arriving in Munich after they fled antisemitism in postwar Poland, to which they had been repatriated. On the general topic of Soviet wartime evacuation to Central Asia, see Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009). Alexander Nevetrov’s 1923 novel *Tashkent, City of Bread*, referring to the famine of 1921, had been adapted into a popular children’s book and translated into Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew and was especially well known

- among Jews. The archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) contain 156,000 registration cards of Jewish refugees who arrived in Tashkent by February 1942. See USHMM, RG-75.002.
5. Edith Sekules, *Surviving the Nazis, Exile, and Siberia* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2000), 95.
 6. Both czarist and Soviet planners had envisioned Tashkent as a kind of model colonial and then postcolonial city. On wartime conditions in Tashkent, see Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), esp. 72–144. Stronski discusses the impact of evacuation and Sovietization but barely mentions Jews, much less the Polish Jews. The prizewinning 1962 Soviet-Uzbek film *You Are Not an Orphan*, directed by Shukhrat Abbasov during a “thaw” period, depicts, in a tribute to cross-ethnic solidarity during the Great Patriotic War, the semidocumentary story of an Uzbek peasant couple who take in a multinational group of fourteen orphans, notably including a Jewish boy who is presented as especially traumatized, while their own son is doing his duty at their front. One *kolkhoz*, Phat Abad in Bukhara, managed by Uzbeks, is remembered as a particularly warm environment for Jewish children.
 7. JDC Archives, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1933–1944, Folder #422, “Memorandum: The Position of the Polish Refugees in Russia” issued by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, page 2 of 3, 31 July 1942. See also Keith Sword, “The Welfare of Polish-Jewish Refugees in the USSR, 1941–43: Relief Supplies and Their Distribution,” in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 145–60.
 8. See Menachem Begin, *White Nights: The Story of a Prisoner in Russia* (New York: Tolmitch E-Books, 2014); first published 1957, republished hardcover 2007.
 9. For detailed discussion, see David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 124–209. The government-in-exile had not been entirely opposed to a German action in 1941 that might lead to a weakened, albeit ultimately victorious, Soviet Union.
 10. Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Memorandum: Position of the Polish Refugees in Russia,” 31 July 1942. See also Georgette Bennett and Leonard Polonsky Digitized JDC Text Archive, New York Collection,

- 1933–1944, folder 422 (digital item 448812). Memo cites Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 17 June 1942; Polish Telegraphic Agency, 23 June 1942, and Jewish Labor Committee statement. See also Engel, *Shadow of Auschwitz*, esp. 114–56 (on Russia); and Yosef Litvak, “Jewish Refugees from Poland in the USSR, 1939–1946,” in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 123–50.
11. Reports vary on the numbers, composition, and timing of the Anders army as it evacuated the Soviet Union into Iran. According to the archival sources cited by Edele and Warlik in table 4 of chapter 2 of this volume, between 6,000 and 7,000 Jews left with the Anders army. The gender division among the Anders civilian evacuees is unclear; there were Polish nurses, including some Jewish women, serving directly with the army. Despite efforts—confirmed in the U.S. diplomatic files that I have so far examined—to evacuate at least 50,000 more children, Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzińska Gross report that only 15,000–20,000 were transported to Iran. Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Jan T. Gross, eds., *War through Children’s Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939–1941*, with a foreword by Bruno Bettelheim and an introduction by Jan T. Gross, trans. Ronald Strom and Dan Rivers (Stanford, CA: Hoover University Press, 1981). Even this figure highlights the very small number of Jewish children, who have nonetheless been given the name “Teheran Children.” See, among multiple sources, also the documentary *The Children of Teheran*, directed by Yehuda Cave, David Tour, and Dalia Guttmann (Israel, 2007). Note that this chapter uses the most common current English spelling “Tehran,” except when referring to, or quoting, sources where the name of the city is often written as “Teheran.”
 12. Devora Omer, *The Teheran Operation: The Rescue of Jewish Children from the Nazis; Based on the Biographical Sketches of David and Rachel Laor*, trans. Riva Rubin, from the Hebrew *Hatahana Teheran* (Washington, DC: B’nai B’rith Books, 1991), 146. Interestingly, the title refers to “rescue . . . from the Nazis” when, in fact, the direct rescue is from terrible conditions in Soviet Central Asia. The second quotation is from Bob Golan, *A Long Way Home: The Story of a Jewish Youth, 1939–1949*, ed. Jacob Howland, with a preface by Bette Howland (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 90.

13. Golan, *Long Way Home*, 92. See also the testimony of Joseph Kresch describing his arrival in Iran. USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (accessed, USC, Los Angeles, 11 April 2016). There are numerous oral histories about the Soviet Union (some including the Teheran Children) in the Visual History Archive that I have not yet accessed, although it must also be said that the number is in no remote way proportionate to the very high percentage of Polish Jews for whom this was their survival story.
14. Maurice Barber to Hon. Norman Davis, chairman, American Red Cross Headquarters, Washington, DC, Tehran, 5 April 1942, transmitted with Dispatch No. 247, 12 April 1942, from the American Legation at Tehran. Earlier—and frequently repeated—reference to “greatest civilian emergency” from telegram sent to American Legation, Cairo, from Maurice Barber, American Red Cross representative in Tehran, to Ralph Bain, director, American Red Cross, Middle East, Cairo, transmitted with Dispatch No. 239, 2 April 1942, American Legation, Tehran to Bain, Cairo. Both items are located in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), State Department Refugee Files 840.48, microfilm box 1284, roll 31.
15. David Laor quoted in Omer, *Teheran Operation*, 144. Barely older than his charges, he had managed to use both Hashomer Hatzair Zionist youth movement and Polish government-in-exile connections to smuggle himself out of the Soviet Union.
16. See the photographs in ibid. and also in Grudzińska-Gross and Gross, *War through Children’s Eyes*.
17. Bettelheim, foreword to Grudzińska-Gross and Gross, *War through Children’s Eyes*, xv–xvi.
18. Laor memoirs as quoted in Omer, *Teheran Operation*, 146ff.
19. See ongoing research by Lior Sternfeld, University of Texas at Austin; especially Sternfeld, “Reclaiming Their Past: Writing Jewish History in Iran during the Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Early Revolutionary Periods (1941–1989)” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2014). For a brief mention of the refugee crisis in wartime Iran, see Lior Sternfeld, “Jewish-Iranian Identities in the Pahlavi Era,” *International Jewish Middle East Studies* 46, no. 3 (2014): 602–5. A recent highly suggestive report estimates between 114,000 and 300,000 Polish refugees in wartime Iran, part of a larger landscape of refugee camps throughout the Middle East, including Egypt, Syria, and Palestine as

- well as Iran and India. See Ishaan Tharoor, “The Forgotten Story of the European Refugee Camps in the Middle East,” *Washington Post*, 2 June 2106.
20. Bennett and Polonsky Digitized JDC Archive, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1933–1944, folder 713, Harry Viteles, Confidential Report on Visit to Baghdad (2–9 November 1942) and to Teheran (11 November–2 December 1942) (digital item 486793); quotations from pp. 3, 7. Also in Bennett and Polonsky, Digitized JDC Text Archives, Item #866652, JDC Archives, Records of the Istanbul Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1937–1949, Folder #IS.50, This detailed report is forty-seven pages long. Interestingly I have (so far) found no mention of Viteles’s visit in the U.S. diplomatic files, which deal extensively with the crisis of the Polish refugees in Iran.
 21. Marianne Leppmann (Hempel), unpublished memoirs, with permission of the family. Acquiring visas for Persia/Iran was particularly difficult for young single women precisely because of fears that they would constitute a sexual threat as prostitutes or at least women of loose morals. This gender-specific aspect of immigration possibilities, particularly perhaps to “non-Western” destinations, requires further research. I am currently researching this group of German and Austrian refugees, who included my parents. My remarks here are entirely tentative.
 22. Leppmann, memoir.
 23. Laor memoirs as quoted in Omer, *Teheran Operation*, 247, 222. A second, smaller group of 110 arrived on 28 August 1943.
 24. NARA, State Department Refugee Files 840.48, microfilm box 1284, roll 32, British embassy memorandum, 29 January 1943, to State Department. See also Lynne Taylor, *Polish Orphans of Tengeru: The Dramatic Story of Their Long Journey to Canada, 1941–1949* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2009). Taylor (55) counts twenty-two camps for Polish refugees across British colonial Africa, in Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika, South Africa, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Nyasaland is now Malawi.
 25. Leppmann, memoir. On the Germans’ covert activity in Iran after their expulsion in 1941, see Adrian O’Sullivan, *Nazi Secret Warfare in Occupied Persia (Iran): The Failure of the German Intelligence Services, 1939–45* (Hounds mills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

26. The history of the United States' wartime military presence in Iran and the massive efforts, undertaken under difficult conditions, by the Persian Gulf Command, to aid the Soviet Union, and of the U.S. role within an Allied mission encompassing about half a million Soviet, British, and American troops seems to be remarkably understudied. See, for example, the collection of Joel Sayre's *New Yorker* reportage in Sayre, *Persian Gulf Command: Some Marvels on the Road to Kazvin*, foreword by James Thurber (New York: Random House, 1945). See also United States Army, *Instructions for American Servicemen in Iran during World War II*, facsimile ed., with a new introduction by Steven R. Ward (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2012); originally *Pocket Guide to Iran*, 1943.
27. Viteles, Confidential Report. All quotations and references from Viteles are from his report, here 24–25. It should be noted that the JDC did fund Jewish Agency activities and that “on the ground” the two groups worked together closely.
28. Leppmann, memoir; Laor quoted in Omer, *Teheran Operation*, 205.
29. Requests (mostly approved) for extensions of German passports for Jews resident in Tehran through April 1939 are contained in Deutsche Gesandtschaft Teheran, Passport Division, Aussenamt (Foreign Ministry) files, parcel 21, III.4, vols. 7–9.
30. Leppmann, memoir. This story is based on memoir and family history accounts.
31. Gerda Phillipsborn to Lady Reading, Purandhar Parel Camp, 27 February 1941, British Library, India Office, L/PJ/8/68 Enemy Aliens in India, Enquires on Personal Cases, p. 138.
32. NARA, State Department Refugee Files 840.48, microfilm box 1284, roll 32, Maurice Barber to Ralph Bain, 13 July 1942 (comment on Poles); draft for letter to American Red Cross in Tehran, 27 May 1942, State Department, Division of Near Eastern Affairs, signed by Paul Alling.
33. Draft for letter to American Red Cross in Tehran, 27 May 1942. On 18 July 1942, Undersecretary of State Breckinridge Long noted that the State Department “believes that it would be particularly unfortunate if the Iranians were given cause to feel that they were being imposed upon and were receiving unfair treatment.” NARA, State Department Refugee Files 840.48, microfilm 1284, roll 32.
34. Bennett and Polonsky Digitized JDC Archive, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee,

- 1933–1944, folder 1056, “Statement on Relief Activities of the JDC for Refugees in the USSR,” 31 May 1944 (digital item 531334). For postwar inventory, see *ibid.*, folder 427, letter from Charles Passman to J. L. Magnes, 15 January 1947 (digital item 44901). See, for example, a postcard, from April 1944 addressed to Joint Distribution Committee, Teheran, thanking (in pencil-scrawled Yiddish) the JDC for a shipment of matzoh (and surely more). Found in USHMM archives.
35. Pamphlet, Jewish Relief Association of Bombay, Annual Report, 1944, personal collection. On Jewish refugees in British India, see, among other sources, Margit Franz, *Gateway India: Deutschsprachiges Exil in Indien zwischen britischer Kolonialherrschaft, Maharadschas und Gandhi* (Graz: CLIO, 2015).
 36. Henryk Grynberg, *Children of Zion*, trans. Jacqueline Mitchell (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 142–43; first published in Polish in 1994. Grynberg’s book contains “fragments of interview record compiled in Palestine in 1943 by the Polish Centrum Informacji na Wschod (Eastern Center for Information) on the basis of the testimony of Jewish children evacuated from the Soviet Union to Palestine” (ix). In a striking conflation, these reports are dedicated in equal fashion “to the memory of the fathers, mothers, and children whose bones marked the ways and stations of torture in the inhuman expanses of Eastern Europe, Siberia, and Central Asia” (v). They should be compared to the autobiographical statements by mostly (but not entirely) non-Jewish Polish children as collected by the Anders army, published in Grudzińska-Gross and Gross, *War through Children’s Eyes*.
 37. See Larry Wenig, *From Nazi Inferno to Soviet Hell* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2000), 72.
 38. Esther Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe: Growing Up in Siberia* (New York: HarperCollins, 1968), 226.
 39. Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 373–99.
 40. See Regina Kesler, *Grit: A Pediatrician’s Odyssey from a Soviet Camp to Harvard*, ed. Michael G. Kesler (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009); as well as the memoir of Michael G. Kesler, the man Kesler would marry in Boston, *Shards of War: Fleeing to and from Uzbekistan* (Durham, CT: Strategic Book Group, 2010). On these very varied

experiences, see also the memoir by Miriam Finder Tasini, *Where Are We Going?* (Los Angeles: Richard Altschuler and Associates, 2012).

The photo collection of the USHMM contains remarkable (posed) photographs of well-dressed and fit-looking refugees.

41. On Hashomer Hatzair contacts in Uzbekistan, see Omer, *Teheran Operation*. On the reorganization of Zionist movements, see Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York: Random House, 1970). On the indispensable contribution of repatriates to DP cultural life, see Tamar Lewinsky, *Displaced Poets: Jüdische Schriftsteller im Nachkriegsdeutschland, 1945–1951* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2008). David Engel, in *Shadow of Auschwitz* (121), even suggests that Polish Jewish refugees transferred Zionist ideas and movements back into the Soviet Union after 1939, a process that might well have borne fruit decades later in the Free Soviet Jewry movement.
42. Yosef Litvak, “Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union to Poland at the End of the Second World War and Afterwards,” in Davis and Polonsky, *Jews in Eastern Poland*, 227–39. Litvak estimates 230,700 repatriates until 1949, approximately 54.5 percent male and 20.2 percent children up to age fourteen. He also asserts that “between 85 and 90 per cent of all the Polish refugees in the Soviet Union were repatriated” (234). For a different view, see Albert Kaganovitch, “Jewish Refugees and Soviet Authorities during World War II,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 38, no. 2 (2010): 85–121; and Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics, the Return of Jewish Refugees to Poland, and Continued Migration to Palestine, 1944–1946,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 59–94. Researchers in Russia and Israel, in cooperation with the USHMM, are trying to set up a database of Soviet and non-Soviet Jewish refugees in the unoccupied Soviet Union. See Vadim Dubson, “Toward a Central Database of Evacuated Soviet Jews’ Names, for the Study of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Territories,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 95–119.
43. *JDC Digest*, 5, no. 5 (1946): 1.
44. Sekules, *Surviving the Nazis*, 120. Yitzkhak Erlichson remembered his return: “We began to grasp the whole horror. In Russia there had been people who said that the bad news coming out of Poland was a little exaggerated. In part we had been glad that the Russian radio was encouraging a hatred of the Nazis. And in part we had tried to calm ourselves, hoping that these were indeed exaggerations. . . . But now

- the bloody spectacle lay before us.” Yitzkhak Erlichson, *My Four Years in Soviet Russia*, trans. and with an introduction by Maurice Wolfthal (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 177; first published in Yiddish in Paris, 1953.
45. Hans S. Grossmann, personal papers, in author’s possession.
 46. Leppmann, memoir.
 47. See Shimon Redlich, *Life in Transit: Jews in Postwar Łódź, 1945–1950* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), esp. 30, 31, 38, 42, 44, 65, 75. On postwar pogroms and antisemitism, see especially Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2006); and Gross with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). For detailed (and mostly anguished) reflections on immediate postwar conditions, see the quickly published reportage by Yiddish journalists who traveled to Poland from the United States; for example, S. L. Schnayderman (Schneiderman), *Between Fear and Hope* (New York: Arco Publishing Company, 1947); and Jacob Pat, *Ashes and Fire*, trans. Leo Steinberg (New York: International Universities Press, 1947). For memories of optimism, see Redlich, *Life in Transit*, 30; Kesler, *Grit*, 103–111.
 48. Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lewinsky, *Displaced Poets*; Margarete Myers Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945–1957* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. 237. On the contested place of the Soviet experience in immediate postwar memory of the *Khurbn*, see Markus Nesselrodt, “I Bled like You, Brother, Although I Was a Thousand Miles Away: Postwar Yiddish Sources on the Experience of Polish Jews in Soviet Exile during World War II,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 46, no. 1 (2016): 47–67. Given the “belated” nature of this research, it should incorporate—but has not yet—many of the insights of existing feminist scholarship about the intersecting significance of gender, age, and family, as well as the specificities of women’s experience, including sexual violence, the uses of instrumental sexuality as a currency of survival, family tensions and solidarity, and the centrality of mothers in survivor memory.
 49. This strategic “lying” on DP intake cards or immigration applications may have also distorted our sense of how many Jews actually survived in the Soviet Union. For an example of a falsified birthdate, see Joseph Berger, *Displaced Persons: Growing Up American after the Holocaust*

(New York: Scribner, 2004). Recently available International Tracing Service (ITS) records will facilitate necessary research. See also the stunning last (and long-lost) Yiddish-language feature film about the Holocaust made in Poland, *Undzere kinder* (1948, directed by Natan Gross and Shaul Goskind), in which two Yiddish comedians come to Lodz and stage a play with a song and dance routine set in a ghetto that bears no resemblance to the actual conditions some in the audience endured. The unmarked, but completely obvious at the time, subtext is that the two actors, Shimon Dzigan and Yisroel Schumacher, famous and beloved performers in prewar Poland, had not experienced the Nazi occupation but returned from the Soviet Union in 1947 after years in Stalinist prison and labor camps. See Gabriel Finder, "Child Survivors in Polish Jewish Collective Memory after the Holocaust: The Case of *Undzere kinder*," in *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915–1953: Ideologies, Identities, Experiences*, ed. Nick Baron (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 218–247.

50. This interpretation has been quite insistently suggested to me by several friends and colleagues who grew up in DP communities, as children of both camp and flight survivors.
51. Kesler, *Grit*, 107. See John Goldlust, "A Different Silence: The Survival of More than 200,000 Polish Jews in the Soviet Union during World War II as a Case Study in Cultural Amnesia," *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 21, no. 1 (2012): 13–60; now in a revised version as chapter 1 of this volume.
52. On the JDC's determined efforts, see the Bennett and Polonsky Digitized JDC Archive, New York Collection, which contains relevant documents from 1941 to 1947 and also includes extensive material from what had previously been cataloged as the Istanbul Collection. The 1943 appropriation for aid to refugees in Soviet Russia totaled \$1,275,000; in January 1947, the JDC estimated that the total cost of the Teheran operations was about \$5,150,000. Bennett and Polonsky Digitized JDC Archive, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1933–1944, folder 427, letter from Charles Passman to J. L. Magnes, 15 January 1947 (digital item 44901). See also Mikhail Mitsel, "American Jewish Joint Distribution Programs in the USSR, 1941–1948: A Complicated Partnership" and Atina Grossmann, "JOINTFUND Teheran: The Jewish Lifeline to Central Asia," in *The Joint Distribution Committee: 100 Years of Jewish History*, ed. Avinoam Patt, Atina Grossmann,

- Linda Levi, and Maud Mandel (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018 [forthcoming]).
53. This is the consensus number most historians use. Note that Edele and Warlik cite lower archival numbers. See table 6 in chapter 2, and the introduction to this volume.
54. On general DP politics in postwar Germany, see Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011). For a general overview of varied Jewish experience, see also Françoise S. Ouzan and Manfred Gerstenfeld, eds., *Postwar Jewish Displacement and Rebirth 1945–1967* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).
55. On the concept of multidirectionality, see Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). On the ambivalence of memory and differing understandings about definitions of “survivor” among those who had survived in the Soviet Union, see chapter 7, by Eliyana R. Adler, in this volume.

6

Identity Profusions

Bio-Historical Journeys from “Polish Jew” / “Jewish Pole” through “Soviet Citizen” to “Holocaust Survivor”

JOHN GOLDLUST

On the lengthy wartime sojourn inside the USSR by several hundred thousand “foreign” Jews,¹ while available statistical data and diplomatic documents served as the primary sources for earlier historical overviews, the complexity, nuance, and detail that surrounded these experiences under the Soviets is still not widely known, shared, or coherently understood.²

My interest in the topic was sharpened with the emergence in recent decades of a growing stream of richly detailed and widely accessible material, in the form of published autobiographical memoirs along with the burgeoning archive collections of personal oral testimonies.³ As I discovered, both memoir and testimony materials now include accounts of experiences from a number of Polish Jews who spent their wartime years under the Soviets. These represent for the researcher a valuable body of what Christopher R. Browning calls “collected memories.”⁴ And significantly, I would suggest, a careful exploration of these reflective biohistories, invariably enriched as they are by nuance and detail, add an important layer to the available academic and documentary accounts of the diverse, often dangerous, and territorially extensive odysseys undertaken by the considerable number of Polish Jews who survived the war inside the Soviet Union.⁵

In this chapter, my research draws from the written texts of fourteen published memoirs, supplemented by fifty video testimonies collected for, and now lodged in, the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive.⁶ All recollections and observations cited below come from Polish Jews who spent the war under the Soviets. And, except for five of the memoir writers, all the remaining informants subsequently settled in Australia.⁷ With these as the principal data sources, and in the spirit of interdisciplinary inquiry, I sketch out an approach that revolves around the concept of “social identity.”

This is not the place for a detailed exposition on the extensive literature in the disciplines of social psychology and sociology on social group identity.⁸ However, in what follows, I outline, briefly, how this concept might serve as a useful prism through which to engage with the wealth of material that emerges in the personal recollections, reminiscences, and memoirs I have been exploring, and I draw on a few examples to illustrate.

As used here, I do not consider “social group identity” to be based on “primordial” shared attributes that are embedded in the individual from an early age—what is often called the “essentialist” perspective—rather, I view it as a particular set of relationships that emerge through a dynamic historical process, and one that is continuously being reconstructed, shaped, and sustained by a combination of externally applied and subjectively affirmed symbolic and behavioral practices.⁹ Therefore, at its most basic, personal identification with, for example, an ethnic, national, or religious community requires an assumed, but not always mutually affirmed, agreement between, on the one hand, how others see or define the individual’s social group identity and, on the other, the individual’s ongoing self-identification with that group.

In the context of the modernizing frameworks and associated social and political transformations that began to spread across the nineteenth- and twentieth-century world, this “constructionist” view of how social group identities are both formed and sustained has gradually come to be seen in the social sciences as a pivotal explanatory principle.¹⁰ It seems particularly pertinent to the study of intergroup social relations in the decades immediately following the First World War, especially given the dramatic political collapse of imperial conglomerations and the subsequent creation, reorganization, and, in some cases, reemergence of a

number of “national entities” as independent states (processes often accompanied by volatile, ethno-political tensions and conflicts across much of Europe). In many instances, the constituent characteristics of the particular “social identity” being promoted—usually some combination of religion, language, history, culture—around which “a sense of belonging” to such nation-state societies was conceived, sustained, and symbolized were forcefully imposed on recalcitrant minorities, in some instances sought to exclude them, and at times were vigorously challenged by them.¹¹

Of particular relevance here is the post-1918 reconstitution of Poland as an independent nation-state—a historical political entity whose territory had been absorbed and its authority apportioned, among three powerful imperial neighbors for the previous 120 years. The social and political tensions that duly emerged in post–World War I Poland revolved around the aggressive assertion, by some among the population, of an “ethnically purer” (and unambiguously “Roman Catholic”) Polish group identity, in contrast to—and often seeking to exclude from political “membership”—other ethnic/national/religious minorities within its new borders, inevitably amplifying existing intergroup antipathies. The three largest minorities—Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Jews—together made up around 30 percent of Poland’s population between the two world wars.¹²

Of these three groups, “Jewish social identity,” unlike the others, was not necessarily derived from or tied to a particular geographical territory or language. On the contrary, as Jews were supposedly the descendants of an ancient and non-Christian religious heritage, the post-Napoleonic period of European nation building presented a major challenge to them in relation to how they and others conceived Jewish social and political status within the nation-states in which they now lived. Some, encouraged by the promise of access to rights associated with citizenship, often limited or in some instances completely denied to Jews, were quite prepared to “divest themselves” of their “Jewish baggage” (to the extent of voluntary religious conversion to Christianity); others sought to be acknowledged as members of a religious (or, for the more secularist-oriented, an “ethnic”) minority and, at the same time, recognized as “equal citizens” of the nation-state; a small minority of Jews were drawn to “radical” universalist-oriented political ideologies, such as socialism and communism, that promised possibilities for the future “transcendence” of existing particularistic religious, ethnic, and even national social identities.

However, regardless of the kind of political formation or legal acknowledgment of “minority rights” Jews might prefer or struggle to attain, non-Jewish advocates and supporters of more “exclusivist” nationalist ideologies, including those in post–World War I Poland, often championed views and policies that reaffirmed “essentialist” assumptions around questions of “Jewish” social identity. From this perspective “the Jew” would always remain an “inassimilable other,” a “universalist,” a “rootless transnational,” and potentially a “subversive enemy of the nation.”¹³

SOCIAL GROUP IDENTITY IN POLAND BEFORE 1939

It is not surprising, then, that in their autobiographical accounts, my Jewish informants, many of whom were born in the first decades of the twentieth century, frequently express strong views about whether there existed a hierarchy, duality, or total incompatibility between “Jewish” and “Polish” social identities—in the years before, during, and immediately following the Second World War. As “Polish Jews,” would they always be “outsiders” in relation to “ethnic” Poles, destined to remain part of an “inassimilable” ethno-religious minority, or could they attain a level of social acceptance appropriate to their nominal legal status as equal citizens of Poland?

By the late 1930s, even among the minority who thought of themselves in this latter category—as “Jewish Poles” rather than “Polish Jews”—many began to observe in their surroundings, and on occasion also personally experience, an increase in antisemitic attitudes and behaviors from their “ethnic Polish” neighbors, including from some they had previously considered close friends. Their reflections often support the view that the immediate prewar period accentuated feelings of social separation, with a growing emphasis on the inherent incompatibility between “Polish Jews” and “ethnic Poles.”¹⁴ And, they suggest, these changes delivered a severe blow to those Jews (and Poles) who still held the view that the “blending” of the two social identities was desirable or even possible.

Sara Bergman recalls that growing up in Poland she had a “tremendous lot of non-Jewish friends” but that a “different atmosphere” emerged around 1933–34, after which she became very disappointed in the way many Poles now responded toward Jews. By 1939, “even the Polish socialists

started wearing black ties” and she “saw in their eyes so much hate.”¹⁵ *Paula Blum*, in her video testimony, remembers that she had a couple of close non-Jewish friends, but in the late 1930s one friendship came to an end because her friend’s father had a “government job” and children of government officials were “not supposed to have Jewish friends.” Also, around 1936–37, she recalls, her brother was “constantly” being beaten up by his non-Jewish peers. At school Blum had some Polish teachers who were increasingly more abusive toward Jewish students, and, as she came to realize, “we were at home, but we were not.”¹⁶ Similarly, *Eugenia Biggs* remembers being told by ethnic Poles, “We don’t belong here.”¹⁷ And in the blunt words of *Moishe Blum*: “They were Poles, we were Jews.”¹⁸

This increasing social polarization had more direct, and often quite unpleasant, consequences for Jews soon after the German occupation of Poland in 1939. As reported in a number of the personal testimonies, it was often ethnic Poles who would voluntarily assist German soldiers in identifying and ejecting Jews trying to “pass” as Poles in food queues or seeking to avoid the German roundups of young Jewish males and females for daily forced labor duties. Indeed, a pungent comment drawn from one of the testimonies reflects a more widely held Jewish view that the most significant difference between Germans and Poles in their behavior toward Jews was that “Poles didn’t kill, they just pointed.”¹⁹

SOCIAL GROUP IDENTITY UNDER THE SOVIETS

For many, the growing gulf between “Polish Jew” and “ethnic Pole” widened even further through the wartime experiences of the Poles who either fled to or were already residents of the territories of eastern Poland occupied and later annexed by the Soviets between September and November 1939. Among the hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens who chose to move from German-occupied into Soviet-occupied areas of Poland between 1939 and 1941, there were at least twice as many ethnic Poles as Jews. And, while “officially,” Soviet authorities were directed to treat all Polish citizens similarly, a number of Jewish accounts affirm that a mutual suspicion and hostility continued between the two groups.²⁰

Under the Soviets, existing antagonisms were sharpened further by the view, shared by many ethnic Poles, that “all” Polish Jews were, at best, sympathetic to and, at worst, closely aligned with the “Russian

Bolsheviks,” who once again were set on destroying—alongside their German allies—the recently renewed and still fragile “Catholic” Polish nation.²¹

On the Jewish side, according to the recollections of a number of the Polish Jews who found themselves under the Soviets, the manner in which they were received and treated, and the opportunities for personal “improvement” or “advancement” available to them in the USSR, represented an almost total “status inversion” to the situation they had experienced in prewar Poland. This view emerges quite strongly in some of the memoirs and testimonies, both from Jewish residents of eastern Poland who became Soviet citizens through a decree imposed by the Soviet authorities in late 1939 and among Jewish refugees from central and western Poland who, soon after their arrival in eastern Poland, were being encouraged by the occupying authorities to voluntarily take up Soviet citizenship. For those prepared to relocate away from eastern Poland and inside the prewar USSR borders, along with their newly acquired “Soviet citizenship” came opportunities for employment, training, and education.²²

Leo Cooper writes in his autobiographical memoir that after arriving alone as a young refugee in eastern Poland in late 1939, he enlisted himself for work at a Soviet labor recruitment office. Having trained as a turner, he found his trade skills “appreciated in Russia because of a shortage of skilled labour.” Cooper also felt very quickly “integrated” into “the community of the Russian people at the factory,” who, he notes, were mostly ethnic Belarusians: “They accepted me as if I were one of their own and not a foreigner. I could converse fluently in Russian and I made many friends.” He reflects on “the irony of the situation. Here I was amongst strangers, people I hardly knew, speaking a language I only recently learned, living in a country whose regime I abhorred, yet feeling relatively free as a Jew.”²³

And even among Polish Jews subjected to much harsher treatment by the Soviets because they had been identified by the state security organization (the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, or NKVD), as “class enemies,” “dangerous elements,” or “spies,” the observations that emerge from the testimonies and memoirs repeatedly emphasize that, as Jews, they felt that they were not treated any differently from non-Jews in a similar situation.²⁴ So despite periods during which they were con-

fined, and under extremely difficult conditions in places of imprisonment or deportation, a considerable number still reflect quite positively on one important aspect—in sharp contrast to how they felt in 1930s Poland, they express genuine appreciation that, not only “officially” but also in practice, the Soviets treated them as “social equals.”

As a Polish refugee in Belarus, *Joseph Eckstein* had refused Soviet citizenship and was afterward arrested as a “German spy” and sent to a prison camp near Novosibirsk.²⁵ Yet in his testimony, he comments on the kindness of the local Russians who did not discriminate against the prisoners as Jews and who helped whichever way they could with cigarettes or scraps of bread.²⁶

Dora Huze, a refugee deported to a labor camp in Siberia notes that while some Russians were antisemitic, discrimination or using racist language was forbidden, and Jews were treated just like all the Russian prisoners. In the camp, they were even permitted to have a “spokesperson,” elected by refugees, to pass on any complaints or suggestions to the authorities.²⁷

When the interviewer asks *Anna Kalfus* whether there was different treatment for Jews in her Arctic Soviet labor camp, she replies with a firm “no”—and then adds that the authorities made it clear to inmates that not even the derogatory word “*zhid*” was permitted to be used.²⁸

Soviet-occupied Poland included, of course, adolescents and young adults in both the refugee and the resident Jewish populations. A number recall being encouraged either to continue their high school education or to enroll in trade schools, universities, or other tertiary-level courses. In retrospect, they often comment disdainfully on the preponderance of “propaganda” and ideological dogma that they encountered as part of their Soviet-inflected educational curriculum. But this doctrinaire form of pedagogy also acquainted them with their newly acquired citizenship “rights” under the Soviet constitution. Later some were quite prepared to petition higher authorities to have such “rights” duly recognized and acted on.²⁹

As Jewish refugees in eastern Poland, *Irena Feiler* and her family were deported to a labor camp near Mongolia in 1940. Aged sixteen at the time, Irena is chastised by an NKVD officer for not doing her kitchen work competently enough. In response, she points out to him that the Soviet

constitution stipulates that persons under the age of eighteen are supposed to be engaged in education—not labor—and that obviously he is ignorant of “Stalin’s constitution.” According to her testimony, not only does Feiler “win” the argument—from then on she is allowed to choose when and how long she works—but her “intervention” also improved working conditions for others in the camp.³⁰

In 1940, as a former Polish refugee—but now a Soviet citizen—*Kopel Frank* is working eight-hour shifts in a quarry in the Urals. Looking to find less physically demanding employment, he points out to his foreman that “Stalin’s constitution gives every citizen in Russia the right to learn a trade.” The foreman is a little stunned but agrees to his request. A few days later he is sent for training as a plasterer—a twelve-month course that he completes just before the war with Germany starts.³¹

While working in a coal mine in Kizel in the Urals in 1940, *Henryk Hornowicz* completes a Russian-language course, from which he “graduates at the highest level.” On hearing there is an institute in nearby Perm offering foreign-language courses, he takes the entrance exam and is accepted. However, the authorities at the coal mine refuse his request to continue his language education. So Hornowicz writes a petition to Stalin, distributing copies to the appropriate authorities. After twenty days, he receives a telegram giving him permission to leave. In his video testimony, he makes a point of saying that he cannot recall any instance of discrimination or different treatment as a Jew in all the wartime years he spent in the USSR.³²

It seems pertinent to draw attention to these recollections by Polish Jews in which they place particular emphasis on occasions when they felt that they were being treated as “equal Soviet citizens,” and more so in the context of the uneasy, suspicious, and frequently unsatisfactory encounters many Jews report with “ethnic” Poles throughout the wartime period when both groups were in the USSR. From the Jewish perspective, such feelings of discrimination and prejudice often come to the fore in the testimonies and memoirs of male informants when they recount their unsuccessful attempts to join the “Polish army” that was being formed in the Soviet Union by General Władysław Anders in late 1941 and 1942.

As now part of the anti-German alliance, the Soviet government had agreed that soldiers recruited to this army would be permitted to leave

the USSR to assist the Western Allies' war effort in Europe. Sometimes (though not always) supported with "evidence" drawn from their own experience, the reason most often given by the Jewish informants for why they were rejected when they tried to enlist is that they had acknowledged themselves (or were identified by the Polish recruiters) as Jews.

A few examples:

Joseph Eckstein is in Buzuluk (in southeastern Russia near the border with Kazakhstan) on his way to Tashkent, when he hears about the "Anders army." He wants to join but is not even allowed to enter the barracks. "We have enough Jews," he is informed. Eckstein, together with a friend, tries again some time later. Eckstein gives the recruiter his own and his father's name, declares himself "Jewish," and is not accepted. His friend has a "Polish-sounding name" and is accepted. Eckstein wryly observes that they were both in the same physical condition, but his friend "had a better name." But only a year or so afterward, Eckstein is accepted as a volunteer in the later—and this time Soviet-sponsored—Polish army recruited in the USSR under General Zygmunt Berling.³³

Similarly, *Mojsze Ganc* is rejected on the two separate occasions when he tried to join General Anders's Polish army, yet in January 1943 he is "called up" by the Red Army and remains an active Soviet soldier through the rest of the war.³⁴

As several thousand Polish Jews did manage to leave the Soviet Union for Iran with General Anders's Polish army in 1942, clearly not every Jew who applied was rejected, but the number who claim that they were suggests that many more were denied the opportunity to serve.³⁵ And given that Jews constituted around a third of all Poles inside the wartime USSR, they were certainly statistically underrepresented. Jewish troops made up only about 7 percent of the 70,000 Polish soldiers who left with General Anders's army.³⁶

So for the Jews from Poland, being treated as "equals" under the Soviets would have encouraged many thousands to embrace, or at least nominally accept, their newly available social identity as "Soviet citizens." In the fight against Germany, some Polish Jews (who, like Mojsze Ganc, were now "officially" Soviet citizens) were "called up" to assist in the Soviet war effort, although most served as "reserve labor" rather than in a military role; others remained in employment (especially if their jobs, skills, or

professions were strategically important); and some (usually the younger ones) were able to continue in training and education courses. Thus for these Polish Jews, their experiences as “new” Soviet citizens—particularly the opportunity to learn and develop technical and organizational skills, acquire credentials or professional qualifications, or contribute in the war against Germany—proved, both in the short and longer term, personally advantageous and psychologically rewarding.³⁷ But as the Anders army episode illustrates, that was not always the outcome when they tried to assert their identity as “Polish nationals.” On the contrary, as Leo Cooper notes in his memoir, many Jews perceived what was a strong determination by “ethnic Poles” to keep the percentage of Jews who enlisted low, otherwise “the Polish Army might be deprived of its purely Polish character,” as “Jews had not been considered as being Polish.”³⁸

But while they were in the USSR, Jews from Poland did sometimes encounter situations when a mutual acknowledgment of their *Jewish* social identity led them to form a stronger personal connection with a Soviet citizen than might otherwise have been possible.³⁹ As recalled in a few of the memoirs and testimonies, this also sometimes resulted in the Soviet Jew providing the Polish Jew with some useful advice or assistance. In some instances, the Soviet Jew was even in a position to ensure that the Polish Jew was a beneficiary of “special treatment,” even though it was clear to both parties that, had such an action come to the notice of the authorities, the Soviet Jew would most likely have ended up in serious trouble.⁴⁰

As a refugee in eastern Poland, *Abraham Amaterstein* quickly accepts Soviet citizenship and applies for coal-mining work in the Urals. However, he has already been rejected a number of times by Soviet doctors who consider him physically unsuitable for the job. On this occasion, he is attended by a matronly Jewish doctor, who seems more empathic to his situation and who speaks to him in Yiddish. But she also assesses him as unfit for work in a coal mine. Amaterstein becomes very distressed at this news and tells the doctor that, as he is unable to find other work, he will be forced to return to his home in German-occupied Poland. On hearing this, she becomes quite agitated, tells him to wait in her office, and returns later with an envelope. She hands him the envelope and informs him that he is being assigned to Kizel in the Ural district. She also tells him that there he will be under the authority of a Yiddish-speaking

Russian colonel, to whom he should personally give the envelope. After the group of around 500 Polish refugees arrives at their destination, Amaterstein delivers the doctor's letter as instructed and finds that he is the only one not assigned to a coal-mining job. The Jewish colonel tells him that "the doctor had made a mistake," but there is no point in sending him back, so he is assigned to a job as a "surveyor's assistant" in one of the mines.⁴¹

Also a refugee in occupied eastern Poland, *Sam Goldman* signs up for work in December 1939 and is sent inside the USSR, to Kiev. There he encounters local (Ukrainian) Jews and is befriended by a relatively well-off Jewish family, who regularly invite him to their home and feed him very well. After a while, he discovers that his "host" is a Yiddish-speaking NKVD officer, who offers Goldman helpful advice on how to avoid being arrested. He particularly warns Goldman not to publicly express hostility to the Germans—at the time, they are still allies of the Soviets—which he is prone to do. He also suggests that Goldman use "Mischa" rather than his Hebrew first name "Shalom," which Russians identified as a "Zionist greeting."⁴²

Mojsze Ganc finds work in a factory in Vitebsk (eastern Belarus) and marries his Polish Jewish girlfriend there. But his new wife is not happy with the civil registry union and wants a religious wedding. To accommodate this wish, he thinks, would be very difficult under the Soviets, since any kind of religious ceremony is strongly discouraged. Fortunately, Ganc meets a local who, he discerns, is a religiously observant Jew. After the man, who is at first suspicious, is assured that Ganc and his wife are "legitimate" Jewish refugees, he agrees to help them arrange a religious wedding ceremony. He introduces them to a (possibly clandestine) "congregation," whose members are able to prepare everything required for a religious wedding ceremony. About sixty to seventy local guests show up, although none, of course, know the "bridal couple." Ganc is impressed by their hospitality and generosity—he is not asked to pay anything.⁴³

However, the often treacherous and murky complexity of the political maneuverings and inexplicable shifts in international alliances that began in 1939 and continued throughout the war meant that, for the Jews from Poland now inside the USSR, there were two critical periods during which they were presented with the opportunity to "reclaim" their

Polish identity and, more importantly, once again have their status as Polish citizens “officially” recognized by the Soviet authorities.

The first period was in the later months of 1941, following the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Now fighting against, rather than allied with, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union became for a time politically and militarily aligned with the London-based Polish government-in-exile. A subsequent diplomatic agreement resulted in the Soviets declaring an “amnesty” for Poles inside the USSR, including those in labor camps—and this was extended even to many (but not all) serving prison sentences—who were both freed from incarceration and entitled to have their status as citizens of Poland restored.⁴⁴

The second period was from late in 1943 until 1946, when Soviet policy was directed toward securing support among the Poles inside the Soviet Union, particularly those who might later prove “reliable.” They were to be “groomed” to help ensure that a restored Polish state would be more accommodating to the future interests of a Soviet Union keen to assert its postwar authority over Eastern Europe. Aside from establishing a number of ideologically acceptable Polish political organizations in the USSR, to which the Soviets assigned important roles in future administrative responsibilities, a parallel initiative lay in the creation of a second, and more directly Soviet-compliant, Polish army under General Berling.

In this new recruitment process, Polish Jews felt more accepted and, according to some sources, found it easier to join than had been the case with the earlier Polish army under General Anders.⁴⁵ Most importantly, being a part of this army provided some Polish Jews the opportunity to participate directly in the military campaign to reclaim Poland and later to enter Germany in pursuit of the retreating German forces. From the testimonies and memoirs of individuals who were involved in these campaigns, there emerges considerable satisfaction and pride at the small part the Soviets allowed them to play in the eventual defeat of the Nazi threat.⁴⁶

Of course, many thousands of Polish Jews died in the Soviet Union—from disease, from succumbing to the difficult physical conditions, from military action, and at the hands of the Soviets via imprisonment or execution. But most of the Polish Jews from eastern Poland who were imprisoned as “class enemies” survived; most of the refugee Polish Jews who were deported to labor camps as “dangerous elements” survived; most of

the Polish Jews who accepted Soviet citizenship and moved into the USSR proper in 1939 and 1940 survived; but of the 3 million Jews who either remained in German-occupied Poland or, as residents of Soviet-occupied Poland, found themselves unable to flee eastward after the Germans attacked the USSR in 1941, only a tiny fraction were still alive when Germany surrendered in May 1945.⁴⁷

POSTWAR IDENTITY ISSUES

A large majority of Polish Jews who lived under Soviet authority for the best part of six years had no desire to remain there permanently. And, given the major global transformations that had taken place in the political and military landscapes since 1939–41, when most had come under Soviet control, along with the continuous changes in their locations and in their official status throughout their stay, by the last few years of the war many Polish Jews remained perpetually confused and anxious about exactly what might happen to them following an Allied military victory over Nazi Germany.

However, a couple of months after the German surrender in 1945, Soviet leaders, as one element of their plans for the “new” Poland (and to the surprise of many of the Poles now in the USSR), announced that they would grant the right of return to virtually any persons who could prove their Polish origins. So once again a pathway, more meaningful than it had been after the first Polish “amnesty” in 1941, opened that provided an opportunity for Jews from Poland to reclaim their “Polish identity.” And furthermore, this time the offer included an exit ticket from the Soviet Union—an outcome, they had been informed many times over the course of their lengthy stay there, they should forget about (“Don’t think you’re here for a day or two—you’re here for always”; “You will never see Poland again”).

Under this postwar “amnesty,” those Poles who wished to return were first required to register for “repatriation,” and, not surprisingly, most of the Polish Jews still in the USSR elected to do so—and they included some who had remained Soviet citizens, either voluntarily or by decree, since the very early period of the war.⁴⁸ It also quickly became apparent that sufficient transportation would only become available some time later.

As a result, most did not arrive back in Poland until late 1945 or even well into 1946.⁴⁹

By the middle of 1946, sources suggest, more than 250,000 Polish Jews had made their way back to Poland.⁵⁰ Some were survivors liberated by the Allies from Nazi camps, others had been in hiding under false identities or in the forests with partisan groups in German-occupied territories, but making up by far the largest component were the Jews returning from the Soviet Union.

However, for most, the return to Poland proved both intensely traumatic (discovering the extent of personal loss of family and community and the physical devastation of their homes and towns) and extremely unsettling in light of the almost total absence of welcome that their re-appearance elicited from resident Poles.

On the contrary, and reinforcing the sentiments prevalent among the published autobiographical memoirs I drew from in my earlier work on this cohort of Polish Jews (see chapter 1), many who came back from the Soviet Union are also quick to recall in their USC Shoah Foundation video testimonies the immediate and often intense hostility they encountered.⁵¹

Faced with such generalized hostility from ethnic Poles, which at various times and places escalated into brutal attacks (at least several hundred Jews were killed, and many more were injured), it is perhaps not surprising that for the majority of the surviving Jews, the social identity of “Pole” ceased to hold much positive psychological valence.⁵² While family links often stretched back over many generations, whatever residues remained of cultural and political identifications with Poland were relatively quickly and easily discarded by two-thirds of the surviving Polish Jews, who, within the first few years after the war, chose to settle elsewhere.⁵³

Yet, the above notwithstanding, tens of thousands of Jews, including some who had spent the war years inside the Soviet Union, did opt to remain in postwar Poland. But it is also perhaps some indication of the ongoing, and some suggest even exacerbated, tension between the social identities of “Jew” and “Pole” in postwar Communist Poland that, among those who stayed, a considerable number felt it prudent to discard “Jewish-sounding” for more recognizably “Polish” surnames—and this sometimes extended to giving their children identifiably “Catholic” first names. Some went beyond changing their names in seeking to take

up a “wholly” Polish social identity. Thus in the postwar years, according to one source, as many as 20,000 Polish Jews continued to use the false names and identities they had lived under during the war.⁵⁴

However, over the following decades, the periodic eruption of government-led antisemitic campaigns eventually persuaded almost all who had remained, and who continued to self-identify (or to be identified) as Jewish, to leave Poland; the late 1960s saw the last significant wave of post–Second World War Jewish emigration.⁵⁵

While most Jewish refugees who spent the war in the Soviet Union did elect to return to Poland, there is another, not insubstantial, group about whose postwar lives we know almost nothing. I am referring here to the Polish Jews who chose to remain inside the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ Certainly, up until early 1944 the eventual outcome of the war was not at all clear. So, throughout the years of their Soviet sojourn, for the Jews from Poland one option always available was to accept the situation and embrace their new life and future as Soviet citizens. Some undoubtedly chose to stay because they found spouses or partners there; perhaps there were opportunities to study and become professionals, receive specialist training, or gain trade qualifications; or maybe they found interesting and rewarding work there or possibly a career in the military. Without any systematic research, we are left to speculate. It would be reasonable to assume that those who did stay found one or more convincing reasons to exchange their former “Polish identity” for that of “Soviet citizen.” But once settled into Soviet life, how they then related to their social identity as Jews is an intriguing topic that still awaits further research.

And what of the more than 150,000 Jews who, following their departure from postwar Poland, were, by the early 1950s, living in Israel, North America, Argentina, and Australia or elsewhere? In these “countries of immigration,” they were encouraged to take up the citizenship of their new “homeland,” and most chose to do so as soon as they were eligible, with little concern that this also meant renouncing any remaining formal ties to Poland.

While undoubtedly there were some Polish Jews who, in the process of their resettlement in the West, took the opportunity to leave both Europe and their Jewish identity behind, the majority appear to have reaffirmed and maintained at least an “ethnic” (if not necessarily a

religiously observant) identity as Jews. In settling in their new countries, they often asserted such a commitment by choosing to live in residential areas with already established Jewish communities. In subsequent decades, many became active participants and often played important leadership roles in a range of Jewish community organizations and institutions. Here, in the context of both local-born and other immigrant Jews, they generally carried their “social identity” as “Polish Jews” and sometimes, in the early years after resettlement, as “displaced persons” or “postwar refugees.” However, for the next thirty or more years, what many Jews from Poland who spent the war years under the Soviets had in common was a shared reticence to identify themselves as “Holocaust survivors.”⁵⁷

Their widespread reluctance to take on the role of “survivor” is consistent with the “constructionist” view of how social identities are formed and sustained. That they did not “belong” in this category appears to have been simultaneously accepted by the Jews who returned from the Soviet Union and affirmed by those who saw themselves as the “real” Holocaust survivors.⁵⁸

Again, video testimonies often support earlier findings, drawn from autobiographical memoirs, that those who spent the war years in the Soviet Union were neither encouraged nor especially keen to draw attention to their particular experiences.⁵⁹ For example, *Pola Bilander* observes that, compared to people who went through the camps, “I had a good time” and remarks that, when other people talk about Auschwitz or concentration camps, “I have nothing to say.”⁶⁰ In a similar vein, *Cyla Fersht* says that she and her friends discuss their wartime experiences “all the time,” but that the emphasis is invariably on the stories of those who had been in concentration camps. “My experiences were not so tragic against theirs, so I never opened my mouth . . . because I see that their life was hanging on a very thin string.”⁶¹

However, in recent decades, along with the emergence of autobiographical memoirs that not only tell of the desperate struggle to evade death at the hands of the Nazis but also include authors who write of their wartime experiences under the Soviets, in addition to the ongoing, worldwide collection of tens of thousands of video testimonies, the previously more restricted “criteria” for admission to the “status of Holocaust survivor” seem to have become considerably more relaxed.⁶²

In this chapter, I have drawn from written and oral accounts illustrative of the various pathways taken by Jews born in Poland who spent the war years under Soviet authority. Over the course of the war and through the following postwar decade, most were subject to a series of often less than voluntary geographical relocations.⁶³ As well as having to readjust to new places, people, and surroundings, they were also continuously required to negotiate a shifting, often bewildering, and frequently contradictory mélange of structural and political forces impinging not only on their family loyalties, communal connections, and personal liberties but in some instances also challenging the very core of their personal understandings, beliefs, and values. When taken together, such potentially destabilizing encounters required of this disparate group of serially displaced Jews continuous readjustments to, and reevaluations of, their subjective attachments to both previous and more recently acquired social, religious, political, and ethno-national identity(ies).

Notes

1. The number is possibly as many as 300,000, but for an extended discussion of the continuing difficulties in securing reliable data establishing, with any precision, both the “real” number of Polish Jews who found a refuge and the number who also survived the war under the Soviets, see chapter 2, by Mark Edele and Wanda Warlik, in this volume.
2. For earlier overviews, see, for example, the works I list in notes 9 and 10 in chapter 1 of this volume.
3. With regard to oral testimonies, the largest—the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive—has accumulated together a worldwide collection of more than 50,000 video interviews. The Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, housed at Yale University, holds 4,400 video testimonies. There are also scores of more locally focused archives around the world, including a valuable Australian resource—the Phillip Maisel Testimonies Project, housed in the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne, which began collecting in the early 1980s and currently holds 1,300 video (as well as over 200 audio) testimonies.
4. In a methodological discussion on the issue of the reliability of memoir/testimony material in Holocaust research, Browning argues for the usefulness of “collected memories,” by which he means a body

of written or oral memoirs that together allow the researcher faced with a “variety of different, often conflicting and contradictory, [sometimes even] clearly mistaken, memories and testimonies of individual survivors . . . to construct a history that otherwise, for lack of evidence, would not exist.” Christopher R. Browning, *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 39.

5. As Diane L. Wolf notes, “Although many survivors recount that they felt no one wanted to hear their stories after the war, there is now a great demand for them.” And yet, she observes, “Holocaust testimonials remain, however, surprisingly overlooked and underanalyzed by sociologists and other social scientists.” Diane L. Wolf, “Holocaust Testimony: Producing Post-memories, Producing Identities,” in *Sociology Confronts the Holocaust: Memories and Identities in Jewish Diasporas*, ed. Judith M. Gerson and Diane L. Wolf (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 154, 155.
6. I first encountered the memoir materials while researching an earlier paper. For full bibliographic details, see notes 11 and 12 in chapter 1 of this volume.
7. A considerable proportion of the 17,000 European Jews who migrated to Australia soon after World War II were originally from Poland. According to the Australian census of 1954, more than 9,000 Jews born in Poland were resident in Australia; almost all had arrived after 1945, and most were living in Melbourne. See Charles Price, “Jewish Settlers in Australia,” *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 5, no. 8 (1964): app. 3a and 3b. In the mid- to late 1990s, there were 2,500 videoed Jewish survivor testimonies collected in Australia by the Shoah Foundation, and these are now lodged in its USC Visual History Archive; from these Australia-based interviews, I have been able to clearly identify 155 Poland-born Jews who spent most of the war years under Soviet authority. As noted, for this chapter, I have drawn on a subsample of fifty of these video testimonies.
8. See Karen A. Cerulo, “Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 385–409. Useful, book-length overviews are provided by Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 2014); and Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2003).
9. On the essentialist perspective, see Fenton, *Ethnicity*, 12. The social constructionist approach to identity, most importantly, “rejects any

category that sets forward essential or core features as the unique property of a collective's members." Cerulo, "Identity Construction," 387.

10. For a recent example, see Hazel Easthope, "Fixed Identities in a Mobile World? The Relationship Between Mobility, Place, and Identity," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16 (2009): 61–82.
11. As emphasized in the titles and central arguments of Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); and in the collection of articles by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
12. For a demographic overview of the multiethnic composition of the interwar population of Poland, see Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry under Soviet Rule, 1939–1941* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 18–21; first published in Hebrew as *Tekufa Be'Sograim* in 1989.
13. For a discussion of the emergence of modern Polish nationalism and its historical difficulties with the inclusion of Poland's Jews as a legitimate component of the body politic, see Joanna Michlic, "The Jews and the Formation of Modern National Identity in Poland," in *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism: History, Culture, and Ethnicity in the Formation of Nations*, ed. Athena S. Leoussi and Steven Grosby (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2007), 129–42.
14. See Edward D. Wynot Jr., "'A Necessary Cruelty': The Emergence of Official Anti-Semitism in Poland, 1936–39," *American Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (1971): 1035–58.
15. Sara Bergman, USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (VHA) interview 30068, Melbourne, 6 April 1997.
16. Paula Blum, VHA interview 38469, Melbourne, 8 December 1997.
17. Eugenia Biggs, VHA interview 11104, Sydney, 4 March 1996.
18. Moishe Blum, Visual History Archive, VHA 15796, Melbourne, 27 June 1996.
19. Lucy Goldfeld, VHA interview 41758, Melbourne, 22 March 1998. The denunciation of Jews to the Nazis was not limited to pointing but also extended to writing. See Barbara Engelking-Boni, "'Dear Mr. Gestapo': Denunciatory Letters to the German Authorities in Warsaw, 1940–1942," in *Inferno of Choices: Poles and the Holocaust*, ed. Sebastian Rejak and Elżbieta Frister (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, 2011), 166–81. It also led to other behaviors "condoning of the policy of

- oppression of the Jewish people” enacted by the German occupiers. See Andrzej Źbikowski, “Antisemitism, Extortion against Jews, Collaboration with Germans, and Polish-Jewish Relations under German Occupation,” in Rejak and Frister, *Inferno of Choices*, 182–235.
20. Moshe Grossman, a Yiddish writer who fled into eastern Poland in 1939, was arrested and imprisoned by the Soviet authorities but released during the “amnesty” declared in mid-1941. Soon after, he set out by train toward Central Asia, and in his autobiographical memoir he comments: “In the train there were also Poles who had been released from the camps. They had just been liberated from prisons and camps together with the Polish Jews, but they had not been able to get rid of the habit of flinging ‘cursed Jew’ in the faces of their comrades in fate.” Moshe Grossman, *In the Enchanted Land: My Seven Years in Soviet Russia* (Tel Aviv: Rachel, 1960), 123.
 21. See Joanna Michlic, “The Soviet Occupation of Poland, 1939–41, and the Stereotype of the Anti-Polish and Pro-Soviet Jew,” *Jewish Social Studies*, n.s., 13, no. 3 (2007): 135–76. Michlic writes: “The image of the secularized and radically left-wing Jew who aims to take over Poland and undermine the foundations of the Christian world has a long history in Poland, going back to the first half of the nineteenth century” (139). And, as others have noted, this stereotype was further amplified following the occupation of eastern Poland by the Soviets: “The prevalent view among Poles was that the Jews had joyously welcomed the Soviet invasion in September 1939; in addition, Jews supposedly had played an important role in the local Soviet power apparatus in the subsequent period, and in this role had contributed significantly to the persecution of the Poles, profited from their suffering and thus had committed ‘treason.’ This narrative was already widespread among the Polish population during World War II.” Elazar Barkan, Elizabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve, eds., *Shared History—Divided Memory: Jews and Others in Soviet-Occupied Poland, 1939–1941*, Leipziger Beiträge zur Jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur, no. 5 (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007), 26–27.
 22. And, as it turned out, when German troops began their attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, many of the Polish Jews who had previously signed up for work and relocated were now living inside the prewar USSR borders. They therefore had a greater chance of either being evacuated or escaping further east to a “safe haven” in Soviet Central Asia.

23. Leo Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others: The Story of a Worker in the Soviet Union* (Melbourne: Hudson, 1994), 21, 41, 46–47.
24. The category of “class enemy” included wealthy individuals, large employers, landlords, persons holding religious or high local office, those with military backgrounds, and leading figures in social, political, and community organizations—for Jews this meant prominent Zionists, Bundists, and also active Communists, most of whom were invariably identified with currently unacceptable “anti-Soviet” factions or views. Many were sentenced to varying periods in isolated prison camps or forced labor settlements. It was usual for the families of “class enemies” to be also subjected to deportation, although, in the main, family members were banished to labor camps or “places of exile” rather than incarcerated in prisons.

Polish Jews considered a “dangerous element” included, most prominently, around 70,000 Polish refugees now in the Soviet-annexed territories who, by early 1940, were still stubbornly refusing to sign up for Soviet citizenship. Indeed, the majority of these refugees had indicated to Soviet authorities that they would prefer to be returned to German-occupied Poland. Instead, in the first half of 1940, they were rounded up and deported to various labor camps or isolated settlements in Siberia, Kazakhstan, and the Arctic regions of northern Russia.

Those accused of being “spies” were sometimes arrested because they were suspected of communicating with families or contacts outside the USSR or had sought to escape over the border, and this category also included some who resisted a later Soviet drive, in 1943 and 1944, to impose citizenship on the considerable number of stubbornly recalcitrant Polish Jews.

25. Moshe Grossman writes in his memoir of being arrested by the NKVD in 1944 and charged with “counterrevolutionary agitation.” During his interrogations, and even at this late stage in the war, it was suggested that he and the other Polish Jews were sympathetic to the Germans and hated the Soviets and that the Germans had sent them as spies, assuming that, as they were Jews, they would not come under suspicion. Grossman, *In the Enchanted Land*, 248–49.
26. Joseph Eckstein, VHA interview 23321, Melbourne, 27 November 1996.
27. Dora Huze, VHA interview 32477, Melbourne, 13 June 1997.
28. Anna Kalfus, VHA interview 1915, Sydney, 4 April 1995.

29. See, for example, Zev Katz, *From the Gestapo to the Gulags: One Jewish Life* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2004). Katz wrote letters to Stalin from a remote Soviet labor camp requesting that his “right” to continue his education be honored, as I recount in chapter 1 of this volume.
30. Irena Feiler, VHA interview 1356, Sydney, 16 March 1997.
31. Kopel Frank, VHA interview 35237, Perth, 13 August 1997.
32. Henryk Horowicz, VHA interview 34353, Melbourne, 23 October 1997.
33. Eckstein, interview.
34. Mojsze Ganc, VHA interview 26790, Melbourne, 27 January 1997.
35. Most of those who left were soldiers, but some family members were also permitted to leave. On estimates of the number of Polish Jews who left the USSR with the Anders army, see the discussion in chapter 2 of this volume, in particular table 4.
36. See Yisrael Gutman, “Jews in General Anders’ Army in the Soviet Union,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 12 (1977): 231–333; Shimon Redlich, “Jews in General Anders’ Army in the Soviet Union 1941–42,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 1, no. 2 (1971): 90–98; and Ryszard Terlecki, “The Jewish Issue in the Polish Army in the USSR and the Near East, 1941–1944,” in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 161–71.
37. For example, Zev Katz writes in his memoir that he was able to enroll in a university degree in Kazakhstan in 1942 and remain a student until after the end of the war and, in summer 1946, was even given “special consideration” that enabled him to graduate prior to the date on which he was to be repatriated back to Poland. Katz, *From the Gestapo*, 113.
38. Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others*, 88–89.
39. For an extended discussion of such encounters between Polish and Soviet Jews in wartime USSR, see chapter 4, by Natalie Belsky, in this volume.
40. As Belsky notes in chapter 4 of this volume: “In some cases, a shared Jewish identity brought Polish and Soviet Jews together and fostered a sense of trust between them. At the same time, it is clear that significant differences in status, background, and political allegiance meant that these friendships were more complex and fraught than one might imagine.”

41. Abraham Amaterstein, VHA interview 17463, Melbourne, 31 July 1996.
42. Sam Goldman, VHA interview 43502, Melbourne, 22 June 1998.
43. Ganc, interview. As Belsky observes in chapter 4 of this volume: “Although few Soviet Jews would openly participate in religious ceremonies, some expressed a degree of interest in these events.” These included some of the older Soviet Jews, who “likely practiced Judaism earlier in their lives and were less concerned about the potential ramifications for their careers if their behavior was discovered by the authorities.”
44. The agreement included plans for the formation of a “Polish army” under General Anders, from which, as discussed above, many Jews who sought to join felt unfairly excluded. However, tens of thousands of recently “amnestied” Polish Jews were now free to settle elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Most chose places far away from the war zones, seeking to find work in one of the Central Asian republics, in cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Dzhambul or sometimes in smaller towns and villages or on collective farms. Many remained in these areas until the end of the war.
45. See Klemens Nussbaum, “Jews in the Kościuszko Division and First Polish Army,” in Davies and Polonsky, *Jews in Eastern Poland, 183–213*. Nussbaum describes the “atmosphere” in this army as very different: “Unlike Anders’ Army, their commanders and superiors were not Polish prewar officers known for their anti-semitic attitudes” (204). Also, according to Nussbaum, at the time the Berling army entered Poland as part of the Soviet-led forces, about half of the 2,500 Polish officers at all levels were Jewish (195). For more on the Berling army, and also on the inconsistent information with regard to both the number of Polish Jews who enlisted and the extent to which Jewish recruits experienced antisemitism within its ranks, see also chapter 1 and chapter 2 (especially table 6) of this volume.
46. As reflected, for example, in the testimony of Joseph Eckstein: Accepted as a volunteer in General Berling’s Polish army in 1943, following noncommissioned officer training, he was assigned the rank of corporal. Eckstein fought in a number of battles as the Soviets advanced into Poland and was with his battalion when they entered Warsaw in January 1945. When Germany surrendered in May 1945, his unit was stationed one hundred kilometers west of Berlin. He was

- released from the army at the end of 1946 and left with six medals, including ones for “long service” and “bravery.” Eckstein, interview.
47. According to data cited by Laura Jockusch: “Of a surviving remnant estimated at 350,000 Polish Jews, some 30,000–50,000 found themselves in Polish territory upon liberation.” Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 85. In addition, around 70,000–80,000 Polish Jews were liberated from camps in Germany and Austria. Therefore, a considerable majority of the surviving Polish Jews spent the war years under the Soviets. Edele and Warlik (table 6 in chapter 2 of this volume) estimate that somewhere around 150,000 returned under the postwar repatriation agreements, while Jockusch’s sources suggest that perhaps as many as 50,000 Polish Jews opted to remain in the USSR after the war.
48. That most Polish Jews chose to depart the Soviet Union is understandable for a number of reasons, and certainly one of the strongest was that many had left their parents and, in many instances, large, extended families in German-occupied Poland, about whom, since 1941, they had heard little or nothing—and by the war’s end they had good reason to fear the worst. However, some of the Jews who returned to Poland after the war had been, for a number of years, Soviet citizens, and despite the vicissitudes of their time inside the Soviet Union, most tend to recall mainly positive encounters with “ordinary Russians” (not to mention Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and other Soviet minority groups). Yet there was also a widely shared distaste for the “Soviet system.” The latter assessment was strongly influenced by their inevitable periodic encounters with a shifting and seemingly impenetrable party ideology, the often puzzling administrative and judicial decisions applied by local cadres and higher officials, and the abrasive style and menacing power of police and disciplinary authorities—especially officers of the NKVD. Indeed, numerous comments in the memoir and testimony material echo the observations made as early as 1947 by Jewish journalist Mordkhe Libhaber, who wrote: “Hundreds and thousands of Jews returned from the Soviet Union, saved from certain death under Hitler. . . . Many experienced a historical irony. They were led to destruction through hard labor in the camps where they were saved from death. Many found a hospitable asylum in the Soviet Union when they escaped hell. We understand the feelings of both gratitude and accusation.” Quoted in Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, “Para-

- dise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 381.
49. For a careful consideration and evaluation of the data sources on the overall number of Jews who came back to Poland from the Soviet Union (this includes those repatriated, returning "under their own steam," or returning with the "Polish army" under General Berling or with the Red Army), see, table 6 in chapter 2 of this volume.
 50. This figure represents the total number of Jews who spent some time in Poland between 1944 and 1947, although many did not stay long. See David Engel, "Poland since 1939," in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, ed. Gershon D. Hundert (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 2:1407. Lucjan Dobroszycki gives the slightly higher figure of 275,000 Jews in Poland over the period from summer 1944 to spring 1947. See Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland: A Portrait Based on Jewish Community Records, 1944–1947* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 25.
 51. For some, it began as they were returning on the trains or at railway stations, with comments by ethnic Poles, such as "You think they killed a lot—look how many are coming off." Fred Gold, VHA interview 17112, Sydney, 1 July 1996. A considerable number reflect bitterly on how stunned and disappointed they felt by the indifference and rejection they confronted all around them. For more examples, see the discussion in chapter 1 of this volume.
 52. For analyses and extended discussions of postwar antisemitism and outbreaks of violence against Jews in Poland, see, for example, David Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944–1946," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 43–85; Jan T. Gross, "After Auschwitz: The Reality and Meaning of Postwar Antisemitism in Poland," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 20 (2004): 199–226; Joanna Michlic, "The Holocaust and Its Aftermath as Perceived in Poland: Voices of Polish Intellectuals, 1945–1947," in *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin after WWII*, ed. David Bankier (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), 206–30; and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Cries of the Mob in the Pogroms in Rzeszów (June 1945), Cracow (August 1945), and Kielce (July 1946) as a Source for the State of Mind of the Participants," *East European Politics and Societies* 25, no. 3 (2011): 553–73.
 53. Ruth Wajnryb, drawing on her Australian study of twenty-seven "second-generation" children of "survivors," notes that this also

applied to many of the children of Polish Jews, so that the widespread ambivalence, if not total antipathy, expressed by their parents regarding the notion of Poland as their “home” and to “Polish” as their identity was effectively transmitted to the next generation. Ruth Wajnryb, *The Silence: How Tragedy Shapes Talk* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2001), 130.

54. See Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*, 84. And the desire not to draw attention to themselves as Jews also extended to some who returned from the Soviet Union. A pertinent example is provided in the video testimony of Diana Ackerman, referred to by Eliyana R. Adler in chapter 7 of this volume. Ackerman was a teenager when repatriated with her family from the Soviet Union to Poland. She recalls that “after consulting with other Jews they met, her parents insisted that the entire family should pretend to be Polish.” Some months later they departed Poland, and only “when they reached Vienna, did they return to outward Judaism.”
55. See Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust*, 27.
56. Perhaps as many as 50,000, according to sources cited by Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*, 247n1 (chap. 3).
57. Adler, in her extended exploration of this question in chapter 7 of this volume, examines a number of video testimonies from this subgroup of Jews who left German-occupied Poland and became refugees under the Soviets; she divides their responses as follows: “Most of the flight survivors interviewed clearly differentiate their own experiences from those of Holocaust survivors, sometimes even correcting or redirecting the interviewers in order to do so. A smaller number do consider themselves Holocaust survivors and claim that mantle proudly. The smallest group of witnesses do not seem to know to which group they belong.”
58. This view, as a number of observers have noted, reflected the early postwar emergence of a widely accepted “hierarchy of suffering” or “victimhood,” with “concentration camp survival at the top and the Soviet experience at the bottom.” See Jockusch and Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost?,” 377–86. The origins and early development of this “hierarchy,” which was already in place in the European displaced persons camps, is explored here in some detail. See also the discussion by Adler in chapter 7 of this volume.
59. See my discussion of “relative silence” in chapter 1 of this volume.

60. Pola Bilander, VHA interview 42995, Melbourne, 21 April 1998.
61. Cyla Fersht, VHA interview 35908, Melbourne, 21 September 1997.
62. See also my discussion in the concluding section of chapter 1 of this volume. Further indications that the accepted public definition of “Holocaust survivor” has now been significantly “expanded” may be found on the websites of the world’s two leading memorialization institutions, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, DC.

Yad Vashem, on its website, responds to the question, “How do you define a Shoah survivor?”:

At Yad Vashem, we define Shoah survivors as Jews who lived for any amount of time under Nazi domination, direct or indirect, and survived. This includes French, Bulgarian and Romanian Jews who spent the entire war under anti-Jewish terror regimes but were not all deported, as well as Jews who forcefully left Germany in the late 1930s. From a larger perspective, other destitute Jewish refugees who escaped their countries fleeing the invading German army, including those who spent years and in many cases died deep in the Soviet Union, may also be considered Holocaust survivors. No historical definition can be completely satisfactory.

Yad Vashem, “FAQs: Historical Questions,” <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/resources/names/faq.asp> (accessed 12 January 2016).

On the USHMM website, the definition is even broader and does not even restrict itself to Jews. “How is a Holocaust survivor defined?”: “The Museum honors as survivors any persons, Jewish or non-Jewish, who were displaced, persecuted, or discriminated against due to the racial, religious, ethnic, social, and political policies of the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945. In addition to former inmates of concentration camps, ghettos, and prisons, this definition includes, among others, people who were refugees or were in hiding.” USHMM, “Frequently Asked Questions,” <http://www.ushmm.org/remember/the-holocaust-survivors-and-victims-resource-center/benjamin-and-vladka-meed-registry-of-holocaust-survivors/registry-faq#11> (accessed 12 January 2016).

63. The first-person accounts I explore are certainly supportive of Diane L. Wolf’s summary of the central “threads” that inevitably reappear whenever we examine any group of “survivor” testimonies.

JOHN GOLDLUST

As she notes, “The Jewish experience during and after the Holocaust was one of expulsions, involuntary transnational movements, statelessness, and postwar immigration. Like other refugees, Jewish survivors did not move simply from one point to another but had to endure multiple movements and few choices in the end.” Wolf, “Holocaust Testimony,” 173.

7

Crossing Over

Exploring the Borders of Holocaust Testimony

ELIYANA R. ADLER

In September 1939, as the German forces neared their home in Tarnow, Poland, Harry Berkelhammer and his brother jumped on a bicycle and began pedaling eastward. Harry's brother was concerned that as young men they would be forced to serve in the German army. They took neither clothing nor food with them, hoping to hide out only until the danger passed. As the Germans continued to advance, the boys rode further and further eastward, finding food in fields and drinking out of streams along the way. At some point they met Russian forces and finally felt safe. They ended up settling in Lvov (Lwow), now under Soviet control, where they found their eldest brother, who had been serving in the Polish army.¹

None of the three brothers had planned to go to Lvov, much less to live under Soviet control. One had been mobilized into his country's army, which later collapsed and left him stranded in what had become foreign territory. The other two mounted a bicycle in order to escape an immediate threat, but were under the impression that they soon would be returning home. However, in the course of those early, chaotic weeks of the war, all three managed to cross what would become an international

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border; albeit inadvertently, they crossed an imaginary line with very real consequences.

Among the several hundred thousand Polish Jews who fled eastward in the autumn of 1939, some had short-term plans. Some had relatives with whom they planned to stay until the war ended; a few had longer-term plans. They hoped to escape to the as-yet-unoccupied countries of Lithuania, Romania, or Hungary and then pursue exit visas. Most, however, had no real plans. Like the brothers mentioned above, they sought to escape the bombing, or the initial indignities of occupation, and they hoped to return to their homes as soon as possible. But notwithstanding their desires and expectations, the split-second decision to flee, often made under pressure and always taken with no access to accurate information, would have singular consequences for their chances of survival during the war, as well as their postwar status and identity.

This chapter deals with an exploration of borders—natural and constructed, geographic and political, popular and academic—and how they affect conceptions about the Holocaust and survival. When the Nazis and the Soviets met in August 1939, to discuss dismembering Poland, they chose natural geographic features of the land to serve as dividing lines. The secret protocols attached to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact designate the Narew and Vistula (Wisla) Rivers in the north and the San River in the south as boundaries for the two powers’ “spheres of interest.”² However, once the invasion began in September, the movement of troops was not easily controlled. It took several weeks and further meetings before the two sides retreated to their newly established borders. In return for greater control over the Baltic states, the Soviets ceded the Germans more Polish territory, making the northern border at the Bug River.³ In the next months both occupation regimes would establish order and annex parts of their newly conquered territories. The Bug and San Rivers became an international border—although it was not recognized by either the Poles or the Western nations.

Yet even without wide recognition, the border was of great significance both during the war and afterward. Polish citizens who happened to live west of the Bug, or who were studying, working, or vacationing there in August 1939, were destined to spend World War II under Nazi occupation. Those on the eastern side spent nearly two years adjusting to

the Soviet system, before the Nazi invasion of June 1941 brought renewed fighting and a new order. The distinction between the two occupation regimes was particularly significant for Jews, who made up approximately 10 percent of the prewar Polish population.

Holocaust scholarship has amply demonstrated the differences between the unfolding of the genocide in western Poland and in those areas incorporated into the USSR. Whereas the Jews held under Nazi occupation from 1939 faced a long period of ghettoization and labor before deportation to the death camps, Jews in the Soviet territories encountered mobile killing squads immediately following the invasion in the summer of 1941. The arbitrary border imposed on the region had very real life-and-death consequences for Poland's 3 million Jews.

Less known is the fate of another group of Polish Jews: those who, like the brothers mentioned above, crossed the newly established border. In those chaotic and traumatic final months of 1939, all Polish Jews considered their options, and tens of thousands moved from Nazi to Soviet control, as we have seen in the contributions by Mark Edele and Wanda Warlik and by John Goldlust in this volume. Some would end up returning to their homes once the fighting stopped, but most remained in the Soviet-held areas. Exact numbers are impossible to determine, as are the reasons that some individuals and families fled eastward, while most stayed put in their homes.⁴

Although in retrospect flight appears to have been a wise decision, the Polish Jews at that time could not have known what we now know. They could not have imagined the death and destruction Hitler would cause. They could not have foreseen that within a year Stalin would deport the Polish refugees to labor installations deep within Soviet territory. Through the combination of choices they made and forces beyond their control, the majority of the Jews who crossed over the Bug and San Rivers would live out the remainder of the war in the Arctic, Siberia, the Urals, and Soviet Central Asia. By crossing a recently imposed political border, they effectively crossed out of direct danger from the Holocaust—but also outside the borders of Holocaust scholarship and popular memory.

The border crossers would eventually rejoin the few survivors who remained in Poland after the war, forming over 70 percent of the Polish Jews in displaced persons (DP) camps.⁵ Yet their story has remained

largely unknown outside of their immediate families.⁶ This chapter is part of a larger project intended to document the survival experiences of Polish Jews in the far reaches of the USSR. A number of scholars have recently turned to examining aspects of this topic, to which this volume makes an important contribution.⁷ Here, however, the focus is not on history but on memory. The oral testimonies of border crossers will illuminate the constructed nature of scholarly, chronological, and geographical borders.

SETTING THE SCENE

There is no end to the “flight” of the Jews to the Führer’s “friends.” One must admit that our sages’ words were justified: “The Almighty prepares the remedy before the sickness.” Were it not for Soviet Russia we would be strangled to death.

Tens of thousands of young Jews are without means of sustenance. Jewish youth has no present and no future, and it is fleeing for its very life. The escape is accomplished in various ways: on foot, by automobile, by train, in carts, and in all sorts of other vehicles. There is no obstacle from the Soviet side, and the Nazi conqueror has no established policy. One never knows what is prohibited and what is permitted.⁸

As observed by Chaim Kaplan, a diarist and keen observer of Jewish life in Warsaw, in November 1939, many Jews from the areas under Nazi occupation, especially the youth, continued to move into the Soviet-held territories. Yosef Litvak estimated that 400,000 Polish Jewish refugees crossed the new border between the two occupying powers.⁹ Recent scholars have sought to downgrade this figure.¹⁰ Their logic is based partly on the realization that the Polish government-in-exile, on whose documents Litvak relied heavily, had reason to inflate its numbers and also on new access to Soviet archives. While it is certainly true that the Poles had limited access to exact figures and every reason to exaggerate their cause, it is also true that Soviets kept far better track of the refugees they eventually deported than they did of the shifting group as a whole. My own research, while not quantitative in nature, has shown that many Jewish

individuals and families entered Soviet territory only to return soon afterward to their homes under Nazi occupation. Some even crossed the border several times, unsure as to where they would fare better.¹¹ As no statistics can accurately chart these multiple and bidirectional flight patterns, I find the larger estimates more convincing. In any case, there can be no question that at least 150,000 Jews from western Poland crossed into the former eastern territories in the late summer and autumn of 1939.¹²

There they joined the millions of other Poles who were trying to adjust to rapid Sovietization. Many of the refugees relied on friends and relatives to take them in. Others had to find space in public buildings or rent rooms in cities overflowing with other refugees and newly arrived Soviet officials. Yet while the refugees lived among other Polish citizens, the Soviet authorities treated them differently. Only those Polish citizens with official residency in the newly conquered areas were forced to accept Soviet citizenship and take part in the plebiscite to approve Soviet annexation and then elect representatives.¹³ The border crossers remained in a separate category.

Nevertheless, once the Soviets began deporting those elements of the Polish population they deemed to be potentially dangerous, they included Jewish refugees. Indeed, refugees from western Poland were not only swept up in the first waves of deportation focused on political, military, religious, and other leaders, but the third major deportation in June 1940, as well as a smaller one in the Baltic states in June 1941, specifically targeted the refugees and succeeded in capturing most of them.¹⁴ The major exception was the relatively small number of Polish Jewish refugees who had accepted voluntary Soviet citizenship. A great deal has been written about the Soviet deportation of former Polish citizens in the USSR, mostly from the perspective of the Poles, for whom this action was a major crime. From the perspective of the Polish Jews, however, by the time the war was over it became clear that the Soviet deportation had inadvertently saved them from the Nazis.¹⁵

The deportees were sent to collective farms and work camps in the Urals, in northern Kazakhstan, and as far as Siberia. There they labored under harsh conditions and without access to sufficient food, clothing, or tools, until the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union. At that point the

Polish government-in-exile, working out of London, was able to negotiate the release of incarcerated Polish citizens. While some chose to stay in or near their former camps, many used this opportunity to move south into Soviet Central Asia. With the exception of the Poles able to evacuate from the Soviet Union with the Anders army in 1942 and 1943, most stayed in the country until the war ended, when they were able to return to Poland.

Throughout this period the Polish Jewish refugees were largely indistinguishable from the other Polish deportees and exiles. Jews made up between 22 and 30 percent of the Polish deportee population.¹⁶ Most of these were refugees, but some had been arrested and deported for other reasons. These groups were later joined by other Polish Jews fortunate enough to escape the Nazi onslaught and self-evacuate to the Soviet interior. During the period of enforced labor, many of the Jewish deportees were sent to installations on their own or with other deported Soviet populations. Some, however, lived and worked alongside ethnic Polish deportees. Catholics and Jews alike struggled to survive the harsh conditions and faced punishment for practicing their religions or discussing their political views.

After the “amnesty,” as Poles of all backgrounds relocated to southern climes, certain areas attracted larger concentrations of Jews, but there was also a good deal of mixing. All of the former deportees, along with the millions of Soviet citizens evacuated to the area, found resources to be limited due to overcrowding and the tremendous needs of the military. Homelessness, starvation, and disease hit the Polish exiles hard. Tensions arose between Catholic and Jewish Poles over the allocation of the scant resources the Polish government-in-exile was allowed to bring in, as well as recruitment into the Polish army it was forming. Many Jews felt that Polish antisemitism caused them to receive less and to be turned away from the Anders army. While it is difficult to quantify the aid, it is clear that Jews were recruited into the army and evacuated along with it in lower numbers than their percentage of the Polish deportee population.¹⁷

However, it is also worth noting that the Soviet authorities often changed their agenda with regard to the Polish Jews. Not only were there periodic drives to induce the Polish Jewish refugees to accept Soviet

passports, which included highly coercive measures, but at times the Soviets blocked Polish Jews from entering the Anders army.¹⁸ In both of these instances the refugee Jews were treated differently than those Polish Jews who had been resident in eastern Poland before the 1939 invasion. They should have enjoyed a different status with regard to the Red Army as well, but in reality there were many complaints about Polish Jews who were not Soviet citizens being forcibly mobilized into Soviet military units.¹⁹

Yet there are important overlaps in the experiences of all these groups. On the one hand, the ethnic Poles, as well as the ethnic Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Jews deported from eastern Poland into the interior of the Soviet Union, faced similar challenges during the war years. On the other hand, they were also treated differently, and they have understood and interpreted their experiences in divergent ways in the intervening years. While recognizing how much the Jews deported by Stalin and saved from Hitler have in common, this chapter focuses in particular on the testimonies of Polish Jews who were in western Poland in September 1939 and took the decision to flee to the Soviet Union.

As we shall see, the reality of having lived for some period of time under the German occupation, before crossing over to the area under Soviet occupation, placed these refugees in a particular category. Although they could not have known about the coming Holocaust, let alone that they would be forcibly deported beyond its reach, they made an active decision to cross a border that ultimately changed their fate. Over 90 percent of Polish Jewry was murdered during the war. The majority of those who survived did so in the Soviet Union. As their testimonies demonstrate, however, many of them are not sure if they qualify as Holocaust survivors.

READING HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

In recent years, the use of Holocaust testimonies has become part of a broad and sophisticated scholarly conversation. Previously, the use of testimonies and subsequent discussion about these sources was limited to a small group, and their publications often appeared only in Hebrew. Today all Holocaust scholars are aware of the importance of these firsthand

accounts while taking into consideration the biased nature of all our sources. Rather than reconstitute this conversation, I will point to a few crucial insights of relevance to this inquiry.

Annette Wieviorka's important work *The Era of the Witness* demonstrates how the testimony collection efforts originated during and immediately after the war and developed and expanded afterward. She also shows the growth of communal interest in these efforts and in the witnesses themselves.²⁰ This increased attention, however, has had some mixed results. Among others, Tony Kushner has pointed to concerns about the ways testimonies are used. "It would be a tragic irony if Holocaust testimony, with all its potential nuances, became integral to the telling of a story so polished that we actually lost sight of the individual in any meaningful sense."²¹

In addition to heeding the individual, it is crucial to be aware of the nature of the source. Zoë Vania Waxman, in her innovative work *Writing the Holocaust*, has articulated that Holocaust testimony itself not only has a history but that "it is also contingent upon and mediated by this history."²² One result of this in the contemporary period is that a set of expectations exists for what a testimony should contain and how it should affect the listener: "The accepted concept of the Holocaust and the role of collective memory place two demands on the survivor. First, they seek to homogenize survivors' experiences, and secondly, they assume that in adopting the role of the witness, survivors will adopt a universal identity. But in negotiating the hegemony of accepted Holocaust narratives, some survivors' experiences are either pushed toward the margins or neglected altogether."²³ As we will see, this has particular resonance for survivors whose personal stories do not fit into the accepted narrative of the Holocaust.

As Peter Novick discusses in his well-known book *The Holocaust in American Life*, survivors are far from monolithic, and yet they are expected to represent themselves in certain proscribed ways: "It was the symbol of the survivor—the survivor as emblematic of Jewish suffering, Jewish memory, and Jewish endurance—rather than the highly diverse reality of survivors, that made the greatest contribution to Holocaust commemoration."²⁴ The larger oral testimony projects of recent decades, especially those conducted in the United States, arise from a society in which the survivor has an elevated status and fills a particular role.²⁵

An awareness of the mediated nature of the sources also requires looking at the norms and cultures of particular testimony collection institutions. Due to the goals of their founders, their histories, funding, and other factors, each of the major as well as the myriad smaller archives, museums, and communal organizations has approached its task in different ways. The testimonies used in this research are from the Visual History Archives (VHA) of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, an organization that has generated not only the greatest number of oral testimonies but also a fair bit of attention.

Scholars, and most recently the institution itself, have chronicled the seemingly implausible rise of this organization from a tiny staff of film producers in a trailer to one of the largest repositories of Holocaust testimonies in the world, now housed at a major university.²⁶ Due to the sheer size of the collection, as well as its intricate indexing, most scholars of the Holocaust now rely heavily upon it, yet a variety of concerns have also been raised.²⁷ Although the Shoah Foundation regularly employed academic advisers, it also made use of its original expertise in film to innovate in its interview process. The interviews are structured so that roughly 20 percent are devoted to the prewar period, 20 percent to the postwar period, and 60 percent to the war itself. Noah Shenker has pointed out that this can lead to tension between empowering the witness and the institutional imperative to produce a legible text.²⁸

Other concerns have included the “mass production” and the “happy endings.” As Michael Rothberg and Jared Stark ask rhetorically, “Will certain types of narratives—say, those familiarly American ones of ‘healing’ and happy endings—win out over such disturbing truths, despite the crucial work of scholars such as Lawrence Langer, who has thrown into question all affirmative accounts of survival and remembrance and sought instead to develop a typology of anguished, unheroic memory?”²⁹ To avoid such pitfalls, some scholars have cautioned others to avoid the most “cinematic” moments in the VHA interviews. In contrast, this chapter will focus precisely on one of these moments. While the majority of the VHA interviews are devoted to victims telling their stories, at the end the mood and content change dramatically. The interviewer moves from asking specific questions about the witness’s experiences during the war to broad questions about his or her takeaway message for the world. This closing discussion, often punctuated with the introduction

of other family members and followed by family photographs, is easy to view as a supplement to the body of the interview. To my knowledge, no one has published anything about this particular juncture in the interviews.³⁰

The witnesses are generally unprepared for the new line of questioning. They have spent the previous couple of hours narrating their stories in a straightforward and chronological manner. Many are subsumed in their memories. Suddenly they are asked for messages to the world at large. Some of those interviewed, after some initial stumbling, clearly enjoy the opportunity to speak as experts on the world stage. Others, who had not been anticipating this sort of questioning, shy away from these broader queries. They repeat what they have said previously, deny expertise, or offer halfhearted answers. Some of the most difficult testimonies to watch are by those for whom this line of questioning causes a rupture. Suddenly, seemingly, they do not know whether they belong in the august company of Holocaust survivors. The wording of the questions seems to exclude their experiences, and they do not know how to answer. The examples below offer a tentative typology of answers given by Polish refugees who survived in the USSR.

FLIGHT SURVIVORS CONFRONT THE HOLOCAUST

How often do you think about your Holocaust experiences?

Do you have dreams/nightmares? How often? Describe in detail.

How did your experiences affect your faith / religious identity?

Explain. Do you believe in God?

Do your experiences affect you in other ways? How?

What is your attitude toward non-Jews?

What would you like to tell future generations?³¹

In this selection of questions taken from the “Reflections on the Holocaust” section of the list of questions provided to Shoah Foundation interviewers, we can see that there are a variety of closing questions and that not all of them explicitly refer to the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the context is clearly the Holocaust and, with or without the exact term, interviewees usually understand that. Their responses vary, but many fall into one of three categories. Most of the flight survivors interviewed

clearly differentiate their own experiences from those of Holocaust survivors, sometimes even correcting or redirecting the interviewers in order to do so. A smaller number do consider themselves Holocaust survivors and claim that mantle proudly. The smallest group of witnesses do not seem to know to which group they belong, and so they fumble over the questions. Suddenly the coherence of the interview as a whole, as well as of the identity of the witness, is compromised and disintegrates. In a few cases it is not so much the final questions as the overall attitudes and interests of the interviewers that precipitate this confusion and discomfort. Examples of each group follow.³²

Flight Survivors Who Do Not Identify as Holocaust Survivors

Brothers Mendel and Yankl Saler were interviewed separately by the Shoah Foundation. In late 1939, their family fled across the Bug River. After volunteering to work in Ukraine, they found themselves in the Ural Mountains. In March 1940, they managed to leave and reach their relatives in Berdichev. They were still there when the Nazis invaded, but managed to self-evacuate to Uzbekistan. There they suffered hunger, sickness, and deprivation on a *kolkhoz*. Yankl Saler was drafted into the Red Army, but eventually the family reunited and repatriated to Poland after the war.

Toward the end of the testimony, the interviewer, who is also not a native English speaker, asks Mendel Saler, “How often do you think about, you know, the experiences which were caused by Holocaust?” Saler’s immediate response is, “Always.” Soon afterward, as he describes his excellent relations with Australians of all ethnicities, the interviewer asks him pointedly about his attitude toward Gentiles. Saler responds with examples of close relationships and then concludes:

I don’t hate anybody. I don’t hate. . . . You see I have been in Russia. It was very hard. We were starving, and cold, and everything. But I don’t hate the Russians. I hate more the Poles, because in Poland I felt on my own back the sticks from the boys when they used to go with me in the same school, in the same grade! And I used to get hurt because I was a Jew. But I don’t hate anybody. I would like everybody to live in peace because it’s possible. If only the people would like to, it’s possible.³³

It is noteworthy that Saler makes no mention of Germans. Although it was they who started the war and led to his family's displacement, his direct experience was with Russians and Poles.

Yankl Saler's message to the world is that people should not fight. He is also concerned about the influence of religion. Although the Muslims in Uzbekistan treated him like a human being, the Christians back in Poland were "like animals," he says.³⁴ Both Mendel and Yankl Saler were deeply affected by the war and their suffering. They learned lessons about humankind and the dangers of violence. Nonetheless, they are both clear that their war experience took place in the Soviet Union. Neither lays claim to the Holocaust, although both mention antisemitic persecution by Poles before and after the war.

Eva Blatt, also placing herself outside of the Holocaust, articulates her status as part of her story. Traumatized by her experience in Soviet Central Asia, Blatt returned to Poland a shattered individual. She had no home and no family, but found a small amount of solace in a collective Jewish dwelling in Lodz. Then a young man named Abe came along and started paying attention to her. He wanted her to leave the "*kibbutz*" and move in with his cousin. He wanted to talk to her about his ideas for starting a business and for escaping from Poland. She only wanted to be left in peace and resolved to tell him all that she had endured. Then, surely, he would realize that she was too wounded to start a relationship. She was on the verge of speaking when she noticed the numbers on his arm. "So I says to him, 'Why do you have a number?' So he started to tell the whole story. I thought I have a story, a better story than he. Then when I met him, forget it. I didn't say nothing anymore."³⁵

At least in her own retelling, Blatt came to see her experience as lesser than that of the Holocaust survivor in the immediate aftermath of the war. She had not known what was occurring in Poland while she struggled to survive in Central Asia. Although she lived on the street, begged for food, and lost her first husband to starvation and disease, she clearly differentiated her experiences from those of Abe, who would become her second husband. At the end of the interview, both she and her daughter express regret that Abe died in 1979, before anyone wanted to listen to the stories of survivors.³⁶

Like Blatt, Boris Baum explicitly differentiates his experiences from those of Holocaust survivors. All of his friends, he says, either survived

the Holocaust or were in Russia, but the two situations were not equivalent. “We were not in front of the Germans,” he states. He adds that his wife also experienced hunger, referring to earlier in the interview when he described having met her begging on the street in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, after having lost her entire family to starvation and disease. But, he says, it was not the same.³⁷

The Salers, Blatt, and Baum all transition fluently from describing their wartime experiences to answering the final interview questions. They provide thoughtful answers yet make a clear distinction between their survival experiences and those of Holocaust survivors. The same is true of Tema Abel, another flight survivor, who, when asked about the influence of the Holocaust on her life, replies as if the question itself is misplaced. “I don’t know how the Holocaust has shaped my life. It shaped my life like everybody else’s.”³⁸

Flight Survivors as Holocaust Survivors

There are some survivors of flight to the USSR and deportation who have managed to produce an integrated narrative of their experiences. They see their trials during the war as one complete story involving chapters in occupied Poland as well as in the unoccupied USSR. This story is not only their war experience but also their Holocaust experience. Yeshajau Lewkowicz lost his three sisters in the initial bombing of Warsaw in 1939. Even though that bombing was meant to pacify the Poles and not to murder Jews, it was nonetheless the beginning of Lewkowicz’s Holocaust. Later he and his father spent some time hiding in Nazi-occupied Poland before escaping to the Soviet side. They fought with the partisans, worked in a shoe factory, and moved around frequently. After the war they went back to Warsaw and found the city and their family utterly destroyed.

When asked by the Hebrew interviewer why he thinks he survived, he replies with many examples of close calls with the Germans and then, finally: “I survived. What is [survival]? It’s a type of fate [*goral*]. I don’t know whether to believe in fate, in God. I don’t know what it is. Possibly there is something [called] fate. Fate.”³⁹ Lewkowicz responds as many other Holocaust survivors do, with an abiding awareness of the contingency of survival. He goes on to explain that, just in case it was God’s doing, he dons ritual phylacteries daily. Lewkowicz feels no need to justify his inclusion in the category of Holocaust survivors.

Similarly, Hersz Bimka has no problem integrating his war experiences on both sides of the Bug. Drafted in the buildup to war, Bimka returned to his hometown near Lodz after the collapse of the Polish army. He was with his family in October 1939, when his father died of a heart attack. After sitting *shivah* (seven days of mourning), he was caught by the Germans outside without his yellow armband. While he was with his punishment work crew, one German beat him, but a second advised him to escape to the USSR. At the end of November, after consulting with his mother, he did just that. Several years later, as part of the Communist-sponsored Polish army, he left the USSR and helped to liberate Eastern Europe. When asked how he survived, Bimka repeats a formula often used by Holocaust survivors: it was due to his promise to his mother. His message to the world is about the importance of a strong Israel to protect the Jews.⁴⁰

Shalom Omri was seventeen when the war broke out in 1939. In the course of the next few months, he faced murderous conditions under the Germans and then escaped to the Soviet side, only to run afoul of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). He managed to survive and then immediately made contact with the Bricha, traveled illegally to Palestine, volunteered for the Haganah, and fought in Israel's War of Independence. His testimony includes all these experiences, which were clearly interconnected and integral to his identity. At least in his own retelling, at the precise moment when the Gestapo leader in Sokal threatened to shoot him if he could not run fast enough, Omri decided that if he survived the war, he would forswear exile and live only in a Jewish state.⁴¹

Unlike these men, with distinct memories of violence and oppression by German soldiers, Diana Ackerman, who was born in 1931, has no recollection of interactions with Germans. Indeed, much of her story is told through the eyes of a child. She has little sense of duration or the reasons that her family moved around the Soviet Union. Her first experience with antisemitism was in 1946, when her family repatriated to Poland. After consulting with other Jews they met, her parents insisted that the entire family pretend to be Polish. Only several months later, when they reached Vienna, did they return to outward Judaism.⁴² Yet when asked about her "Holocaust experience," Ackerman does not falter. She tells the interviewer that she used to wake up screaming in the night, remem-

bering the war. The interviewer next asks why she thinks that she survived. Ackerman says that she was lucky and then adds that on the Soviet deportation train, when they were all weeping and cursing their fate, a rabbi told them not to fear. He was right, she explains, because that trip led to their survival. When the interviewer asks how the Holocaust has affected her life, Ackerman explains that she is always consumed by worry.⁴³

Lewkowicz, Bimka, Omri, and Ackerman all exhibit normative responses to the final questions of their Shoah Foundation interviews. None of them is derailed by the use of the terms *Holocaust* or *survivor*. On the contrary, they seem to feel that those terms apply to them as well. They see their entire war experiences, under the Nazis, the Soviets, and even afterward, as part of one integrated whole that entitles them to be included under the rubric of Holocaust survivors.

Identity Confusion

Unlike the witnesses mentioned thus far, a small number of Polish deportees interviewed by the Shoah Foundation express confusion over their identities, especially during the final questions of the interview. Up until that point, Rivka Agron related her experiences in a clear and informed manner. Although she was young during the war, she evidently spoke to other relatives and read about their experiences later. She narrates her family's travels from Lvov to Sverdlovsk, to Talitsa, to Bukhara and their losses along the way. It seems to be a harrowing tale in its own right.

Then, at the end of the testimony, the interviewer asks Agron about the consequences of having lived through that period and about her message, and she suddenly switches from discussing her own experiences to talking about the Holocaust. As the interview was conducted in Hebrew, Agron says that she carries her "Shoah" upon her shoulders and that it is impossible to escape. She adds that, at times, she even viewed the Arabs as equivalent to the Germans. With some awareness that this is an odd statement, she clarifies that even though she was not with the Germans, she felt them as if she "had received the blows," as if she had been killed "in some sort of Auschwitz."⁴⁴

It is tempting to try to seek some objective criteria to make sense of the varied responses to questions related to the Holocaust and its legacy. For example, does a certain number of months under Nazi occupation or

a deeply traumatic event perpetrated by the Nazis automatically place someone under the rubric of the Holocaust? Indeed, some reparations organizations use similar benchmarks for granting payments to survivors. Alternately, it may be a function of age. Perhaps those individuals who were too young to remember their experiences under the Nazis are less likely to claim survivor status. Could it be that those who have told their stories numerous times are more likely to have reached a firm sense of their identities and where to place their stories?

The testimony of Symcha Burstin challenges all of these logical assumptions. A jolly and outgoing man, at the time of his interview in 1997 Burstin was active in the Jewish community, especially with regard to Yiddish and to Holocaust commemoration, in his adopted home of Melbourne, Australia. As such, one would expect that he would have considered himself a Holocaust survivor, or at least that he would have developed a strong sense of where to place his survival story. Indeed, his story seems almost rehearsed, and he includes many tangential details about the politics, culture, and economy of the Jews and surrounding populations. Burstin's message to the world is not to forget. He raised his four children speaking Yiddish, and they know all about his remarkable experiences.

Burstin, who was fifteen at the time, vividly remembers the initial attack on Warsaw. His entire extended family was crowded together in one apartment on Yom Kippur when a bomb fell on their building. He remarks sadly that the first dead body he had ever seen was his cousin Moshe's. He recalls weeks of starvation and humiliation at the hands of Germans and Poles before the family decided that the men would be better off going to Soviet territory until things calmed down. On the way to crossing the border, Burstin and his father were caught by German guards, robbed of all their valuables, and beaten with sticks. Here is clearly a man with direct and personal experience of the Nazi occupation.

The remainder of Burstin's story is equally detailed and engaging. He remembers each place where he and his father settled and worked in the USSR and the challenges they faced there. On two different occasions Burstin's father managed to get himself arrested for making impolitic remarks. They almost starved to death at one point and were afflicted with several deadly diseases. There are also fascinating interactions with

Polish Catholics, NKVD agents, Uzbek peasants, and others. Burstin appears to be a man with a neatly integrated identity who enjoys telling stories. But then the interviewer turns to the broad concluding questions.

She begins by inquiring whether people in Australia often ask him about his experiences. Although she does not use the word *Holocaust*, Burstin seems to assume it as the subtext. He shares a story of a time when his colleagues at an accounting conference asked him about the past: "At that conference, after the main items were finished, a group of us of about twenty-odd were sitting around, and somebody asked me about it and I started to tell them about my life [*pause*] in [*pause*] about the German occupation of Poland, about the Holocaust. And they were sitting from about around half past nine, ten o'clock at night till well into the next morning to about three or four the next morning, just listening to me relate about the Holocaust, about the ghettos, about the Shoah."⁴⁵

Burstin experienced very real suffering at the hands of the Germans. He went on to fight for survival in the USSR over the course of several years. He has numerous harrowing stories of his own to tell, but when asked about whether Australians have shown an interest in his story, he turns to a prototypical Holocaust incident of which he had no personal experience. This is not simply a misunderstanding. It is yet another example of the slippage in identity. Even a seemingly proud and confident witness like Burstin ultimately retreats in the face of the Holocaust.

Interviewer Confusion

At times, the confusion is caused by the ignorance of the interviewer rather than factors inherent to the interviewee's self-perception. Chaim Zemel, an elderly Yiddish speaker tries to tell his story in a linear fashion, but the interviewer keeps interrupting and prompting him. She allows him to describe his terrible experiences during the infamous death march from Hrubieszów to Sokal in December 1939, but once he reaches Soviet territory, she loses patience. "How long were you in Russia?" she asks with obvious confusion. Soon afterward, as he is describing his efforts to get back to his family and his wife's final missive, telling him not to return, the interviewer tells him to speed up. For her, obviously, Zemel's stay in Russia is not his Holocaust story. She continually cuts him

off and tries to lead the conversation back to Poland. In the end, both of them are frustrated. He is unable to tell his own story and leaves out crucial information as she pushes him forward, and she, quite simply, does not get the story she wanted. She does not even bother to ask him the closing questions.⁴⁶

Individuals interviewed by the Shoah Foundation submitted a written questionnaire in advance of their interviews. This was designed to allow the interviewer to familiarize himself or herself with the broad outlines of the person's story and prepare accordingly. However, most of the interviews were conducted by volunteers without a great deal of training or historical knowledge. More obscure stories, such as those by Polish Jews who survived the war in the Soviet Union, were beyond their experience and, in many cases, did not fit their own understandings of survival. Although Zemel's interview was particularly difficult to watch, there are other cases where the problem of definition and identity appears to stem more from the interviewer than the witness.

Just as Ann Benjamin-Goldberg begins to describe the conditions under which she both worked and studied in Aktyubinsk, Kazakhstan, the interviewer asks her whether she was receiving information about the situation back in her hometown.⁴⁷ Benjamin-Goldberg quickly realizes that her premedical courses, loneliness, and hunger in Soviet exile are not of interest to the interviewer. She truncates her own story to answer the interviewer's more insistent questions about the death of her family members back in Poland and her own growing awareness of their plight. The interviewer also asks her quite a bit about her life in the DP camps. The result is an interview that replaces the sought-after 20 percent prewar, 60 percent war, and 20 percent postwar ratios with over 50 percent devoted to postwar experiences and reflections.

Given the clear assessment provided by the interviewer, it is hardly surprising that Benjamin-Goldberg ends up dismissing her own suffering during the closing questions. When asked how her experiences have affected her life, Benjamin-Goldberg begins by trying to describe what it meant for a teenager who had never left home to suddenly find herself entirely alone. She says that it created a pain that was almost physical. She goes on to refer to the constant hunger and her bout with typhus leading to hospitalization and a coma. In the end, however,

in view of what she learned afterward, she concludes, “This becomes negligible.”⁴⁸

It is, of course, impossible to know what Benjamin-Goldberg might have said to a different interviewer more interested in her unique story or at least better informed about it. The opportunity to tell her story in full might have encouraged her to place greater value on her own survival, but it could just as easily have ended with the same ambivalence and dismissal.

CONCLUSION

Scholars, aid agencies, states, testimony collection bodies, memorial institutions, and support groups must define terms such as *Holocaust* and *survivor* for the sake of clarity, fairness, and transparency. Their definitions, however, are varied. Then there is the overlapping, yet distinct, popular conception of the two terms and what they stand for. To quote Annette Wieviorka: “A veritable social imperative now transforms the witness into an apostle and prophet.”⁴⁹

Given the high social stakes, as well as the reigning confusion, surviving Polish Jewish refugees find themselves betwixt and between. While some see themselves as Holocaust survivors, others are equally sure that they are not. A third category is unsure of its identity and can become caught up in questions that explicitly or implicitly probe these issues.

Part of the confusion lies in the significant overlap between the experiences of Polish Jews on both sides of the Bug. The distinction between the Polish Jews who stayed in their homes and those who crossed into Soviet territory hangs on momentary decisions made under enormous pressure. Those who crossed over did not imagine that they were seeing their families for the last time. On the contrary, many left only temporarily or planned to return soon in order to bring their remaining family members with them. Moreover, the fact that they were deported eastward and thus beyond the Nazi reach was not even their own decision. Nor was their safety assured. Polish Jewish refugees who settled in western Ukraine or the Crimea had to flee German advances for a second time. For much of 1941 and 1942, it looked as if the Germans could

not be halted. Survival in any part of the Soviet Union was thus contingent on the fighting.

Just as these individuals started the war in the same position as all Polish Jews—enduring the same bombings and facing the same decisions—they also rejoined the remnant of Polish Jewry after the war. Following their repatriation to Poland, the returnees joined those who had managed to remain alive in Poland in searching for surviving relatives, trying to rebuild Jewish life, and moving illegally into DP camps in Germany and Austria. Like other Polish Jews, they sought information about their missing and murdered relations. Some tried to reclaim property, while others heeded threats and warnings and accepted their losses. Together with the rest of Polish Jewry, they engaged in memorializing the past, but also in building families for the future.

When they arrived in the countries where they would eventually settle, the various types of refugees from Poland received identical treatment. All had to be clothed, housed, and fed by Jewish philanthropies. Relatives who sponsored their immigration heard their stories of loss and encouraged them to find work and learn the language of the land. With their foreign accents and manners, their internal and external scars, and their motivation to settle down and lead normal lives, the new immigrants were largely indistinguishable. Indeed, they often married one another and lived in similar neighborhoods, speaking their Old Country languages and reminiscing about towns and cities no longer recognizable. Together they funded and wrote memorial books to those lost homes, even as they built new ones.

This sense of being part of a community of survivors comes across clearly in the testimony of Symcha Burstin, several minutes after the episode cited above. When asked whether he thinks often about the “Holocaust,” he responds, “quite often,” and goes on to explain:

I have continually the feeling of something terrible done to the Jewish people, to Jewish individuals, to my family, to myself, and I cannot, I really cannot, make peace with this . . . I feel this almost every day. Notwithstanding that so many years have gone by [*pause*]. After all, the last time I saw my mother I was fifteen years old. My sister was at that time thirteen years old. My sister was gassed when she was sixteen years old. She didn’t

have any life; as a teenager, as a person [*pause*]. My children never had any aunties, cousins, uncles. They never had a grandfather, a grandmother.⁵⁰

Unlike above, where the introduction of the Holocaust led to the eclipse of his own narrative, here Burstin articulates many of the factors that tie together the two experiences. The losses of the Holocaust are his own, felt on a daily basis, and even affect the lives of his children. Like the children of other survivors, they grew up without the benefits of living relatives.

And yet even though Polish Jews shared so much history, and had all suffered greatly as a result of the war that Hitler started and the genocide he unleashed against the Jews, their experiences during the war were in fact distinct. Over time one narrative, that of the Holocaust, came to dominate, and the other largely disappeared. By choosing on a given day to cross a newly created border, the refugees effectively crossed outside of historical memory. Whereas the story of the Holocaust has grown in importance over the ensuing decades, their story has only become more obscure.

This chapter stems from an effort to uncover that story. My purpose in going through one oral testimony after another was to gather historical data. How did the Polish Jewish refugees interact with Soviet Jews and other Soviet populations during their time in the USSR? How much did they know about what was happening back in Poland? What were their survival strategies? To what degree was cultural and religious life possible for them? But in addition to finding answers to these and other historical questions, I could not help but be struck by the recurring moments of rupture, when their personal narratives broke down in the face of a larger cultural narrative.

Uncovering their story necessitates not only reconsidering its placement but also examining what can be learned from its displacement. Although many people seem to have a neighbor or great-uncle who survived the war in Central Asia, there is remarkably little scholarship on the experience. Historians of the Holocaust and the DP experience generally mention the Polish Jewish refugees only in passing, as they leave the occupied zone and again when they return after the war.⁵¹ Polish historians have an interest in the ethnic Poles who were deported for more

overtly political reasons. Some good work has been produced about the Anders army and Soviet oppression, but, once again, the Jews are minor players in the greater drama. The story of Soviet population evacuation during the war has recently attracted some attention, but, given the huge numbers involved, Jews and refugees can only be marginal.⁵² Thus far the Polish Jewish deportees to the Soviet Union have fallen between the cracks of established scholarship.

However, as Symcha Burstin articulates so poignantly, the stories are intimately connected. Whether they spent three days or three months under Nazi tyranny before fleeing across the eastern border, there can be no question that the Holocaust had a profound effect on the lives of the Polish Jewish refugees. Not only was their flight directly precipitated by the German invasion, but they returned to find everything and everyone gone. It should be possible to integrate their war story such that experiences on both sides of the new border receive attention. They too, after all, are part of the greater story of the impacts of World War II on European Jewry.

Nonetheless, from the initial aftermath of the war to the present, this has proved challenging. Even the early reports penned before the invention of the terms *Holocaust* or *survivor* downplay one experience in favor of the other.⁵³ Additionally, in the face of some recent attempts to equate the Holocaust with Soviet tyranny, Holocaust scholars are understandably reticent to allow any equivalencies.⁵⁴

Yet whether or not it is ever possible to offer a more integrated narrative of Jewish life and death during World War II, the awareness of these overlapping narratives should at the very least inform our use of oral testimonies. It is noteworthy that it was precisely in the section of the interview often dismissed by scholars as extraneous or cinematic that the contingency of identity came through most strongly. Except for the most egregious interventions by the interviewers, and the dramatic testimony of Eva Blatt's sobering and silencing discovery of her soon-to-be husband's tattoo, both the diversity and the instability of issues of identity would be invisible in the Shoah Foundation testimonies. In most cases, it takes the jarring final questions to elicit what was always under the surface. But what of the interviews where no such questions are asked? And what of other unasked questions to which we will never know the answers?

This research demonstrates both the potential importance of seemingly superfluous questions to understanding the enduring and unfolding legacy of the Holocaust and the contingent and constructed nature of all testimony. Recorded oral testimonies are some of the most important primary sources available to scholars seeking to understand Jewish experiences during the war. Yet they are also framed and mediated by the agencies that oversaw their creation and by the conduct of individual interviewers.⁵⁵ They do not allow us to ask the follow-up questions spurred by our own curiosity, and they necessarily reflect the concerns, knowledge, and goals of a particular institution, interviewer, and point in history. This insight should encourage us to pay attention to the border that lies between us and the witnesses, as well as to expand the borders of our research.

Notes

1. Harry Berkhammer, USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (VHA) interview 14300, Toronto, Canada, 16 April 1996, tape 1, minute 24, through tape 2, minute 4.
2. “Secret Additional Protocol to the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the USSR concerning Delimitation of German and Soviet Spheres of Interest in Eastern Europe,” in *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations, 1939–1945*, vol. 1, 1939–1943, ed. General Sikorski Historical Institute (London: Heinemann, 1961), 40.
3. “German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty,” in *ibid.*, 42. See also the “Supplementary Protocol to the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty of September 28, 1939, on the Delineation of the Frontiers between Germany and the USSR,” in *ibid.*, 57–61.
4. For more on this question, see Eliyana R. Adler, “Hrubieszów at the Crossroads: Polish Jews Navigate the German and Soviet Occupations,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 28, no. 1 (2014): 1–30.
5. Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews in Poland after World War II* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1985), 12.
6. The only full-length scholarly treatment of this experience remains Yosef Litvak, *Jewish Refugees from Poland in the Soviet Union, 1939–1946* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1988).
7. See, for example, John Goldlust, “A Different Silence: The Survival of More than 200,000 Polish Jews in the Soviet Union during World War II as a Case Study in Cultural Amnesia,” in this volume; Atina

- Grossmann, “Remapping Relief and Rescue: Flight, Displacement, and International Aid for Jewish Refugees during World War II,” *New German Critique* 39, no. 3 (2012): 61–79; Albert Kaganovitch, “Jewish Refugees and Soviet Authorities during World War II,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 38, no. 2 (2010): 85–121; Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics, the Return of Jewish Refugees to Poland, and Continued Migration to Palestine, 1944–1946,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 59–94; and Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 373–99.
8. *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 70.
 9. Litvak, *Jewish Refugees from Poland*, 18.
 10. See, for example, Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 75; and Kaganovitch, “Jewish Refugees and Soviet Authorities.”
 11. Adler, “Hrubieszów at the Crossroads,” 21–22 passim.
 12. See chapter 2 (table 1), by Mark Edele and Wanda Warlik, in this volume.
 13. For more on this period, see, for example, Litvak, “Refugees in Soviet Territory,” chap. 1 in *Jewish Refugees from Poland*, 21–88; Dov Levin, “Refugees in a Temporary Haven,” chap. 8 in *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry under Soviet Rule, 1939–1941* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995); and Dmitrii Tolochko, “Polish Refugees in Eastern Belorussia, 1939–1941,” *Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe* 1, no. 56 (2006): 5–30.
 14. On the deportation of Jews from the Baltic states, see Dov Levin, *Baltic Jews under the Soviets, 1940–1946* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1994); and Eliyana R. Adler, “Exile and Survival: Lithuanian Jewish Deportees in the Soviet Union,” in *That Terrible Summer: 70 Years since the Destruction of the Jewish Communities of Lithuania* [Hebrew], ed. Michal Ben Ya’akov, Gershon Greenberg, and Sigalit Rosmarin (Jerusalem: Efrata College, 2013).
 15. For an overview of the historiography, see the introduction to this volume.
 16. For the 30 percent estimate, see Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939–1948* (New York: St. Martin’s Press,

- 1994), 18. Edele and Warlik's reconstruction in chapter 2 of this volume, by contrast, would imply only 22–23 percent.
17. For more on the army, see Yisrael Gutman, "Jews in General Anders' Army in the Soviet Union," *Yad Vashem Studies* 12 (1977): 231–96.
 18. Ibid. See also Ryszard Terlecki, "The Jewish Issue in the Polish Army in the USSR and the Near East, 1941–1944," in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 161–71.
 19. See, for example, Stanislaw Kot, *Conversations with the Kremlin and Dispatches from Russia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 182.
 20. Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2006).
 21. Tony Kushner, "Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation," *Poetics Today*, 27, no. 2 (2006): 292.
 22. Zoë Vania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.
 23. Ibid., 158.
 24. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 273.
 25. On the earliest collection efforts, see Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
 26. For the approved institutional history, see *Testimony: The Legacy of Schindler's List and the USC Shoah Foundation* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2014).
 27. Ibid., 170. For more on the indexing, see the material in ibid.; also see Mary Crystal, "Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation: An Introduction to Its Indexing Methodology," *Indexer* 21, no. 2 (1998): 85–89.
 28. Noah Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimonies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 113–21.
 29. Michael Rothberg and Jared Stark, "After the Witness: A Report from the Twentieth Anniversary Conference of the Fortunoff Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale," *History and Memory* 15, no. 1 (2003): 89. See also Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 178–86; Leah Wolfson, "'Is There Anything Else You Would Like to Add?' Visual Testimony Encounters the Lyric," *South*

- Atlantic Review* 73, no. 3 (2008): 87–88; Michael Berenbaum, “Video History of the Holocaust: The Case of the Shoah Foundation,” in *Humanity at the Limits: The Impact of the Holocaust Experience on Jews and Christians*, Michael A. Signer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 348–54.
30. During an on-site interview conducted in July 2012, Stephen Smith, the executive director of the VHA, showed me an internal study the VHA had conducted based on an analysis of this same section, titled, “Messages for the Future: Summary Report.” It had not been published.
 31. These questions were taken from a 2004 list of “topical questions” for Shoah Foundation interviewers provided by the organization. Their archives are not yet catalogued, and finding an earlier version would have been difficult. Nonetheless, the lists of questions were created based on the same template and would not have changed greatly over time.
 32. The general terms about the relative size of the groups are based on listening to approximately fifty Shoah Foundation oral testimonies in the course of this research. However, as some of the interviewers never insert the final questions, some of the answers are ambivalent, and the sample size remains small. I have not included exact numbers or attempted any statistical analysis.
 33. Mendel Saler, VHA interview 45281, Victoria, Australia, 24 June 1998, tape 3, minutes 25–26.
 34. Yankl Saler, VHA interview 41969, Melbourne, Australia, 18 March 1998, tape 8, minutes 27–28.
 35. Eva Blatt, VHA interview 05884, Yonkers, New York, 10 November 1995, tape 3, minutes 15–17.
 36. Ibid., tape 4, minute 7.
 37. Boris Baum, VHA interview 11354, Hillandale, Florida, 25 January 1996, tape 3, minutes 13–14.
 38. Tema Abel, VHA interview 14584, Toronto, Canada, 26 April 1996, tape 4, minute 20.
 39. Yeshajau Lewkowicz, VHA interview 32039, Tel Aviv, Israel, 23 July 1997, tape 5, minute 6.
 40. Hersz Bimka (Bimko), VHA interview 43830, Brooklyn, New York, 18 May 1998, tape 5, minutes 3–7.
 41. Shalom Omri, VHA interview 41743, Holon, Israel, 1 March 1998, tape 3, minutes 14–15.

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42. Diana Ackerman, VHA interview 02418, Chicago, Illinois, 4 May 1994, tape 2, minutes 1–3.
43. Ibid., tape 2, minutes 10–13.
44. Rivka Agron, VHA interview 22887, Jerusalem, Israel, 11 November 1996, tape 5, minutes 9–10.
45. Symcha Burstin, VHA interview 31555, Melbourne, Australia, 22 July 1997, tape 6, minutes 15–16.
46. Chaim Zemel, VHA interview 26622, Chicago, Illinois, 23 February 1997.
47. Ann Benjamin-Goldberg, VHA interview 11455, Huntington, New York, 14 December 1995, tape 2, minute 0.
48. Ibid., tape 3, minutes 10–13.
49. Wiewiora, *Era of Witness*, 136.
50. Burstin, interview, tape 6, minutes 20–22.
51. For one recent example, see the very thoughtful work by Zeev W. Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
52. Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).
53. See, for example, Jacob Pat, *Ashes and Fire*, trans. Leo Steinberg (New York: International Universities Press, 1947). Pat, who had been fortunate enough to settle in the United States just before the war, returned to Poland afterward as a representative of the Jewish Labor Committee. He met with survivors and refugees across the country to offer support and assess need. His book was written to awaken American Jewry to the tremendous suffering, need, and heroism of Polish Jewry. As such, the vast majority of the powerful stories he included were about suffering under the Nazis. Yet he also had occasion to interact with many survivors of flight into the Soviet Union, and they frequently appear in the background of the pictures he paints.
54. The attention surrounding the publication of Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands* has helped bring this issue into public debate. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). For one response, see Dan Michman, "Bloodlands and the Holocaust: Some Reflections on Terminology, Conceptualization, and Their Consequences," *Journal of Modern European History* 10, no. 4 (2012): 440–45.

55. As Jovan Byford has recently demonstrated, the culture of memory in different countries is also an important factor in the construction of testimonies. Jovan Byford, “Remembering Jasenovac: Survivor Testimonies and the Cultural Dimension of Bearing Witness,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 28, no. 1 (2014): 58–84.

Epilogue

MARIA TUMARKIN

I ask my auntie what she remembers about their time in Uzbekistan. A scorpion on the white wall. A scorpion on the white wall of their tiny room at Station Malyutinskaya, Gal-Aralskiy District, Samarkand Region. The room is adjacent to the clinic my aunt's aunt, Tamara, runs, while my aunt's mother, Faina, takes care first of two, then of three, children. The scorpion is monstrous.

Also—a nice dress made dirty by the nuts she gathered. It is the shells that do the damage. Did Faina—quiet-spoken, kindhearted Faina—have some words to say about the stains? My auntie cannot recall. All she remembers is the dress—dirty and vivid.

Funny the stuff little girls remember—scary bugs and ruined dresses.

My auntie was three and a half when Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The stutter she would have through her childhood arrived courtesy of her first bomb raid. Messerschmitts bombed a road they were taking out of Dubovyazovka, a village in Ukraine's Sumskoy Region, where the war caught them in June 1941.

Who is there with my auntie under the bombs? Her mother of course, pregnant with her sister, plus her aunt, a young doctor recently graduated from the Kharkiv Medical Institute, plus her aunt's daughter, the little cousin Vera. Women and children.

Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich, the best historian I know, says that when women speak about the war, it is a different war they speak about. “Woman’s war,” she writes in her unbearable, luminous book *War’s Unwomanly Face*, “has its own colours, odours, its own lighting, its own sentient space. Its own words. No heroes, no extraordinary feats, only people busy with the inhuman human task. And it’s not only

people who suffer in this war, but the earth itself, and all the birds, and all the trees. Everyone who lives with us in this world. They all suffer wordlessly.”¹

My aunt’s name is Lina. Actually, it is Lenina. She is called that after you-know-who. She is born into the family of Ukrainian Jews, of Ukrainian Jews who are true believers. Born at the end of 1937. The worst year of you-know-what.

They have just started evacuating, Tamara, Faina, Lenina, Vera; they do not know where they are going. Kiev, where they are from, is already cut off. It is just the beginning, but already Lina has typhus. Her fever is off the scale. Tamara does not think she will make it. When Faina speaks to her sister about getting an abortion—it is the war, how could anyone think of giving birth now, babies are the very last thing people should be having—Tamara says, with a nod to Lina, “This daughter of yours will probably die, look at her, so you better try to hang on to the one in your tummy.” Faina listens to her sister and does not abort my mother.

My mum’s first memory is from the time they are back in Kiev—the family returns there sometime in 1944, after the city is liberated at the end of 1943. My mum is two and a bit. She is in a room, lying on a *raskladozhka*, a sort of a camp bed, made of canvas stretched on two poles between two crosses. She is near a *pechka*, a Russian oven. The *pechka* makes her feel really hot, and then, all of a sudden, she is freezing—it is another shaking fit—she remembers her body going up and down, jumping up and down on the bed, flying, levitating.

All five of them got sick with malaria in Uzbekistan. All five of them get these shaking chills.

The blanket falls on the floor. My two-year-old mum looks down to where it is lying. It looks impossibly far away. This is how tiny she is. She is desperate for the blanket, but there is no way she can reach it. She lifts her eyes and sees a rat scurrying across a hall.

Funny the things little girls remember—busy rodents and fallen blankets.

Malaria is why they left Uzbekistan. It is why Faina wrote “Save us. We won’t make it here” to her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law, who were evacuated to Chkalov, an industrial city near the river Ural. When

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the war started, Faina’s husband, my grandfather Iosif, became a leader of a partisan group in Ukraine. In Uzbekistan, Faina received a notice that he was missing in action—a code for dead, but with no identifiable gravesite. The staple male death of that war.

By the time Faina writes “Save us”—Faina, the least self-dramatizing person who has ever walked this earth—she has long since given birth to her baby daughter. She has long since gotten used to being all alone with two kids and a baby. Tamara is working day and night; she is often away visiting *kishlaks* (rural settlements). From *kishlaks* she brings melons, different types of goat cheese, cured meats—this food keeps them alive. Faina is the home front. The baby refuses to be put down, and Faina has to do all her chores holding my mum in one arm. When one of Faina’s arms gets severely burned and hangs useless in a sling, she still has to hold the baby—with what, a phantom third arm, her teeth?—while cooking on bricks of *kizyak* (dry goat dung) used as fuel, while milking an obstinate, hot-tempered goat, while bringing water from an *aryk* (an aqueduct in a street) filled with dirty water. She does it, though. In that war, in all wars, people do things that cannot be humanly done.

And they get through typhus too, even through the time Tamara—the one with the balls in the family, the one who could whip milk into cream, who was going to make them all survive no matter—is lying unconscious on the floor, for days, weeks, devoured by lice.

They get through their first-ever month at Station M too. Nothing to eat, nothing to sell, no money. Not even a blanket.

Malaria—now *that* they do not think they could get through. Not in Uzbekistan.

Akrikhin—the name of antimalaria medicine. It makes your skin mustard-colored. And the taste—nothing, mum tells me, has ever tasted so bitter in her life.

My mother’s name is Svetlana. *Svet* means “light” in Russian. She is not named after a mass murderer. She is her aunt’s first-ever real-life delivery.

When, after the war, Faina and Tamara speak of their time in Uzbekistan—just under two years for Faina and the kids, longer for Tamara, who did not go to Chkalov but stayed on until she could return

to Kiev—they say, “Thank God, we were together.” They also say, “Thank God, Tamara is a doctor.”

In Uzbekistan, Samarkand was their first point of call. They arrived on a train, barely alive. Their first night was in a city square, camping alongside countless others. They must have slept deep and hard that night, even though they were starving and it would have been cold, and noisy, and smelly, and utterly, dizzyingly alien; they must have slept deep and hard, because in the morning they discovered that their bag—their only bag—which had all the money, documents, and belongings in it, was stolen.

At the Oblispolkom—the Regional Executive Committee—Tamara says, “I am a doctor, I have worked as a doctor, I am here ready to be a doctor, to help, to work. I am here with my family. My bag with documents got stolen.”

The men and women of the Oblispolkom say, “You know, there are hundreds like you here, maybe even thousands. The so-called doctors. The so-called engineers. All of you come to us, all of you ask for a job. Documents. We need documents. No documents—no work.”

Outside the Oblispolkom, Tamara thinks it is all over. She lifts her eyes but cannot see anything. Then, as if through a fog, she sees a familiar face. At first she cannot work out how she knows this man. Then she remembers—he is a professor at the Kharkiv Medical Institute, her teacher. In class he would always single her out, would make her feel as if he noticed her diligence and hard work.

Tamara says, “Do you remember me?”

The Professor says, “I didn’t recognize you at first. You’ve lost your good looks.”

Her face is red and wet and swollen with tears.

The Professor is the first of their Saviours. He verifies Tamara’s identity. Organizes for the Samarkand Regional Executive Committee to dispatch her to Station Malyutinskaya, where a medical *punkt*, the most rudimentary one-doctor medical station, is sorely needed. Trains with the wounded travel through the station, stop there. The Professor organizes for Tamara, Faina, and the kids to be driven to their destination.

An empty mud hut. Nothing in it. No medical equipment, no medication, no furniture. The only way to communicate is through a Teletype

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machine at the station. It takes more than a month for stuff to begin arriving.

Anna Akhmatova, who was evacuated to Tashkent from Leningrad, who, too, fell into deep typhus delirium, who screamed in her delirium, “Strangers everywhere,” wrote famously that in Uzbekistan she learned what human kindness was.

The truth, we know, is almost always more complicated. Human kindness lives in close quarters with prejudice, indifference, fear, hatred.

Tamara is assigned a nurse and a medical orderly from the local population. The orderly is the second of their Saviours. The nurse wishes Tamara dead.

The orderly has three kids of her own. Her husband is in the army. She has some goats at home, a fruit and vegetable garden. She speaks a bit of Russian. Admires Tamara. Feels for Faina. Pities the kids. Brings them food. Straw mats to sleep on. Asks Tamara where she studied to become a doctor, for how long. She wants to be a doctor too. A woman doctor.

The nurse loves it when Tamara gets sick. The sicker, the better. Here is her chance to be in charge, to show everyone that Tamara is expendable, not needed. She does not use her medical knowledge to help, to save.

These two women are the truth about Uzbekistan, the truth about what it was like to be a Soviet Jew or a Polish Jew there during the war. For every orderly, there is a nurse. For every nurse, there is an orderly.

In the poem “Requiem,” dedicated to the invisible, nameless, faceless millions who perished in Stalin’s purges, Akhmatova writes,

I’d like to name you all by name, but the list
Has been removed and there is nowhere else to look.
So,
I have woven you this wide shroud out of the humble
words
I overheard you use. Everywhere, forever and always,
I will never forget one single thing. Even in new
grief.²

Tamara’s real name is Sarah. Faina’s real name is Ferga. I remember as a child, in the early 1980s, coming across old letters addressed to Ferga

Berkovna and wondering who this Ferga was. I remember the ground shifting under my feet ever so slightly when I understood that this was my grandmother. I can trace the beginning of my education about my family, my people, to that moment.

They survived—Tamara-Sarah, Faina-Ferga, Lina-Lenina, my mum. My grandfather Iosif survived too. By miracle, he came to find his family in Chkalov. He literally walked down a street one day and bumped into his mother. As Tamara had bumped into her professor in Samarkand.

Each survival in my family was predicated on a miracle.

Each Jewish survival in World War II is predicated on a miracle of one kind or another.

We know that most who survived—did so in evacuation.

Notes

1. Svetlana Alexievich, *U voyny ne zhenskoe litso* [War's Unwomanly Face] (Minsk: Mastatskaya Literatura, 1985).
2. Anna Akhmatova, "Requiem," is available with an English translation at Scott Horton, "From Akhmatova's 'Requiem,'" *Browning's The Harper's Blog, Harper's*, 14 November 2007, [shttps://harpers.org/blog/2007/11/from-akhmatovas-requiem/](https://harpers.org/blog/2007/11/from-akhmatovas-requiem/).

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