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“UKRAINE WITHOUT JEWS”?  
NATIONALITY AND BELONGING IN SOVIET UKRAINE, 1943-1948

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores some of the most pressing issues confronting Jews in the newly-liberated Ukraine to reveal how Soviet citizens attempted to articulate, reconstruct, and police the boundaries of their communities following the devastation of war, foreign occupation, and genocide, challenges they shared with millions of other Europeans. Within the context of Soviet Jewish history, this dissertation advocates re-envisioning the years between 1943 and 1948—typically portrayed simply as the period between the Holocaust and the antisemitic policies of Stalin’s final years—as a time of professional, personal, and creative possibilities for Soviet Jews. Such possibilities, which admittedly varied from person to person and place to place as a result of local conditions and relationships, exceeded those available to Jews elsewhere in postwar Eastern Europe, notwithstanding the very real challenges Soviet Jews faced during these years. As I argue, the Jews populating my research were invested in the Soviet project, loyal to their country, and assertive in demanding the rights guaranteed to them both as individuals and as Jews in the Soviet Union.

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## LIST OF ARCHIVAL ABBREVIATIONS

### Archives and Repositories

DAKO	State Archive of Kyiv <i>Oblast'</i>
GARF	State Archive of the Russian Federation
MI-VNLU	Manuscript Institute of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine
RGALI	Russian State Archive of Literature and Art
RGASPI	Russian State Archive of Social and Political History
TsDAHO	Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine
TsDAVO	Central State Archive of the Highest Organs of Government and Administration of Ukraine
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

### Documentation

ark.	arkush (Ukrainian), sheet(s)
d.	delo (Russian), file
f.	<i>fond</i> (Rus., Ukr.), collection
l./ll.	<i>list/listy</i> (Rus.), sheet(s)
op.	<i>opis'</i> (Rus., Ukr.), inventory
spr.	<i>sprava</i> (Ukr.), file
t.	<i>tom</i> (Rus., Ukr.), volume

## LIST OF OTHER ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS, AND RUSSIAN TERMS

<i>gorsovet</i>	city soviet
Gulag	Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps
JAR	Jewish Autonomous Region (Birobidzhan)
JAC	Jewish Antifascist Committee
JDC	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee or Joint
Joint	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee or JDC
<i>kolkhoz</i>	collective farm
<i>kolkhoznik</i>	collective farmer
KP(b)U	Communist Party of Ukraine (Bolshevik)
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
Obkom	<i>Oblast'</i> committee
<i>oblast'</i>	region
Oblispolkom	<i>Oblast'</i> Executive Committee
<i>raion</i>	district
raikom	district committee
Raiispolkom	District Executive Committee's
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic
Sovinformburo	Soviet Information Bureau
SSSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
TsK KP(b)U	Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party (Bolshevik)
UkrGOSET	Ukrainian State Yiddish Theater

UkrNKVD	Ukrainian People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
UkrSSR	Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## INTRODUCTION

And it occurred to me that just as Kozary is silent, so too are the Jews in Ukraine silent. In Ukraine there are no Jews. Nowhere—not in Poltava, Kharkov, Kremenchug, Borispol, not in Iagotin. You will not see the black, tear-filled eyes of a little girl, you will not hear the sorrowful drawling voice of an old woman, you will not glimpse the swarthy face of a hungry child in a single city or a single one of hundreds of thousands of shtetls.

Stillness. Silence. A people has been murdered.

Vasilii Grossman, “*Ukraina bez evreev*”<sup>1</sup>

Silence has dominated the story of Soviet Jewry since writer and war correspondent Vasilii Grossman invoked it to describe a “Ukraine without Jews” in 1943. A qualified silence met this account of the Holocaust in Ukraine, which appeared in translation in the Soviet Yiddish newspaper *Eynikayt* (*Unity*) following *Krasnaia zvezda*’s (*Red Star*’s) rejection of the original Russian composition. Only a few years later, Soviet authorities silenced more fully another work on the Holocaust, the *Black Book of Russian Jewry*, edited by Grossman and fellow writer Ilya Ehrenburg under the auspices of the Jewish Antifascist Committee (JAC), an act of censorship that became emblematic of a longstanding consensus regarding the silence surrounding the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Around the same time, the antisemitic excesses of Stalin’s final years devastated the Soviet Jewish intelligentsia and created an environment in which the very word “Jew” remained unspoken. Elie Wiesel popularized this image of Soviet Jews as invisible

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<sup>1</sup> Vasily Grossman, “Ukraine Without Jews,” trans. Polly Zavadviker, *Jewish Quarterly*, no. 218 (Summer 2011): 11.

<sup>2</sup> On the *Black Book*, see Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, eds., *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry*, trans. and ed. David Patterson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002); Joshua Rubenstein and Ilya Altman, eds., *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories*, trans. Christopher Morris and Joshua Rubenstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008); Yitzhak Arad, T. Pavlova, and I. Al'tman, eds., *Neizvestnaia chernaia kniga* (Jerusalem, Moscow: Tekst, 1993); and Corinne Ducey, “The Soviet Black Book: An Unread History,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 36, no. 2 (December 2006): 141–61.

when he termed them the “Jews of Silence,” who reappeared only when struggling to emigrate.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these developments, the voices of the dead, the anti-cosmopolitans, and the *refuseniks* have drowned out those of the vast majority of Soviet Jews.

This dissertation attempts to restore visibility and voices to some of these Jews by examining their experiences during the mid-1940s. More particularly, it explores some of the most pressing issues confronting Jews in the newly-liberated Ukraine to reveal how Soviet citizens attempted to articulate, reconstruct, and police the boundaries of their communities following the devastation of war, foreign occupation, and genocide, challenges they shared with millions of other Europeans. Within the context of Soviet Jewish history, this dissertation advocates re-envisioning the years between 1943 and 1948—typically portrayed simply as the period between the Holocaust and the antisemitic policies of Stalin’s final years—as a time of professional, personal, and creative possibilities for Soviet Jews. Such possibilities, which admittedly varied from person to person and place to place as a result of local conditions and relationships, exceeded those available to Jews elsewhere in postwar Eastern Europe, notwithstanding the very real challenges Soviet Jews faced during these years. As I argue, the Jews populating my research were invested in the Soviet project, loyal to their country, and assertive in demanding the rights guaranteed to them both as individuals and as Jews in the Soviet Union.

### **Ukraine, With and Without Jews**

Statistics illustrate the incomprehensible absence of Jews that Grossman observed in late

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<sup>3</sup> *The Jews of Silence: A Personal Report on Soviet Jewry*, trans. Neal Kozodoy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).

1943. The 1939 Soviet census registered just over one-and-a-half million Jews in Ukraine, making it the Soviet republic with the largest prewar Jewish population—one that amounted to *half* of Soviet Jewry.<sup>4</sup> According to the secret terms of the German–Soviet Non-aggression Pact, the Soviet Union annexed a large swath of territory from the Baltic to the Black Seas between 1939 and 1940 that brought Ukraine’s Jewish population to over 2.47 million—the largest in Europe—on the eve of the June 1941 invasion by the Nazis. A recent study by Alexander Kruglov estimates that over 1.6 million of these Jews were murdered during the catastrophe that subsequently became known as the Holocaust or Shoah.<sup>5</sup> This catastrophe, as most Soviet Jews referred to it at the time, provides the crucial context of this study.

The mass murder of Jews commenced almost immediately upon the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941—months before most scholars believe Hitler finally committed to the physical extermination of European Jewry—and differed in important ways from the Holocaust as instituted elsewhere in Europe.<sup>6</sup> As Martin Dean has noted, the Nazis’ chosen method of murder in the USSR, mass shooting, was a more personal process than that later represented by the gas chambers typically associated with the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup> These bloodbaths

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<sup>4</sup> This census figure did not include the Jewish population of the Crimea, which remained part of the Russian SFSR until 1954. According to the 1939 census, the RSFSR had the second-largest Jewish population with 956,599 people—a significantly smaller figure than that of the Ukrainian SSR and spread over a much larger territory. Mordechai Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust: A Social and Demographic Profile* (Jerusalem: The Center for Research of East European Jewry, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), 2, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Kruglov, “Jewish Losses in Ukraine, 1941-1944,” in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 273.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, Comprehensive History of the Holocaust (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 309–373, 424–433; Shmuel Spector, “The Holocaust of Ukrainian Jews,” in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 44–45; and Amir Weiner, “Nothing but Certainty,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 47.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000), viii. Massacres of this type also occurred later in parts of Poland occupied by the Nazis since 1939, as discussed in Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998).

usually occurred on the outskirts of towns whose non-Jewish inhabitants witnessed the Jews' roundup and departure, heard the gunshots, and viewed the mass graves.<sup>8</sup> Among these non-Jews in each locality were policemen who collaborated with the Nazis and, according to Dean, "played an indispensable role in the killing process."<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, Jews living within the 1941 borders of the Soviet Union comprised up to one-third of the Holocaust's total victims.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of the local—including local conditions, knowledge, and relationships—to the implementation of the Holocaust in the region extended far beyond the selection of execution sites and the collaboration of the victims' neighbors, and is especially evident in Ukraine. Both new and old political borders largely determined the fates of Jews in a given locale, influencing whether, when, and how they would die. Killing actions generally occurred much sooner after the initial occupation of towns within the Soviet Union's prewar borders than in its newly-acquired territories or in that part of Poland occupied by Germany since 1939, possibly because of the double threat represented by the specter of the "Jewish Bolshevik."<sup>11</sup> Mordechai Altshuler has suggested that this political border further doomed these longtime Soviet Jews by isolating them from the Jewish cultural, religious, or political communities that might have facilitated a stronger collective response to the Nazi threat.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, among the only Jews on occupied Soviet territory to die in the death camps in Poland were those trapped in

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<sup>8</sup> Mordechai Altshuler, "The Unique Features of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union," in *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1995), 185; and Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, viii.

<sup>9</sup> *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, viii. Other collaborators included those who did not participate in the killings but turned Jews over to the Nazis and the police.

<sup>10</sup> Zvi Gitelman, following Yitzhak Arad, states that "at least 1.5 million and perhaps as many as two million Jews who were Soviet citizens in 1941, died at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators." "Soviet Jewry before the Holocaust," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Spector, "Holocaust of Ukrainian Jews," 44–47.

<sup>12</sup> Altshuler, "Unique Features of the Holocaust," 183–185. Barbara Epstein's study of resistance in the Minsk ghetto suggests that this was not the case. *The Minsk Ghetto, 1941-1943: Jewish Resistance and Soviet Internationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

the western Ukrainian region of Galicia, which was incorporated into the Nazi General Government.<sup>13</sup> In the southwest regions of Ukraine occupied by the Nazis' Romanian allies and renamed Transnistria, Jews who survived the initial massacres were far more likely to die of disease or starvation than by more active methods. The survival rate of Jews in Transnistria thus greatly exceeded that of Jews in Nazi-occupied Ukraine.<sup>14</sup> The more expansive borders of the Soviet Union, of course, also provided Jews the opportunity to flee east.

Although the first soldiers and correspondents in the newly liberated regions encountered a "Ukraine without Jews," those who survived the Holocaust on occupied territory soon reemerged and Jewish reevacuees—and, eventually, veterans—followed. Not all of those who survived the Holocaust lived in Ukraine after the occupation, and reliable statistics for Ukraine's Jewish population during the mid-1940s are not available. Still, Ukraine once again became home to significant proportion of Soviet Jewry: the first postwar census in 1959 recorded some 840,311 Jews in the republic, then the second-largest Jewish population within the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> The story of how these Jews responded to the catastrophe that engulfed their loved ones and attempted to rebuild their lives in its aftermath has gone largely untold, as the following section discusses in more detail.

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<sup>13</sup> Frank Golczewski, "Shades of Grey: Reflections on Jewish-Ukrainian and German-Ukrainian Relations in Galicia," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 114–55; and Wendy Lower, ed., *The Diary of Samuel Golfard and the Holocaust in Galicia* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 14–19.

<sup>14</sup> Dennis Deletant, "Transnistria and the Romanian Solution to the 'Jewish Problem,'" in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 156–89.

<sup>15</sup> At this time, the RSFSR was home to some 875,307 Jews—approximately 4% more than Ukraine's Jewish population. Mordechai Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry since the Second World War: Population and Social Structure* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 74.

### **“Black Years” and Backshadowing: Historiography and Sources**

This dissertation’s chronological focus, 1943 to 1948, is bounded by two of the most tragic periods for Soviet Jews, the Holocaust and the so-called “Black Years,” the period from 1948 to 1953 that witnessed the arrest and execution of the Yiddish intelligentsia, the “Doctors’ Plot” in which several Jewish physicians were accused of conspiring to poison Soviet leaders, and rumored plans to deport the Jews to Central Asia or Siberia.<sup>16</sup> This study is conceived as both a pre-history and a counter-history to what Israeli historian Yehoshua Gilboa first dubbed the “Black Years.”<sup>17</sup> As a pre-history, this dissertation attempts to expand our knowledge of the context in which “state antisemitism”—most simply defined as “the willful incitement of antisemitism by a government apparatus”—developed in the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, this work serves as a counter-history to the “Black Years” by resisting narratives that, with the help of hindsight, treat the mid-1940s as a time of impending doom and by embedding the lived experiences of Jews in the broader Soviet and European contexts. In this respect, the period between 1943 and 1948 has a broader significance as well. The year 1943 began with the critical Soviet victory at Stalingrad and ended with the first liberations of Ukrainian cities from the Nazis in 1943, launching a process of postwar reconstruction that would encompass all of

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<sup>16</sup> For a recent review essay of works on these more studied and higher-profile episodes of Stalin's final years, see David Brandenberger, “Stalin’s Last Crime? Recent Scholarship on Postwar Soviet Antisemitism and the Doctor’s Plot,” *Kritika* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 187–204; Konstantin Azadovskii and Boris Egorov, “From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism: Stalin and the Impact of the ‘Anti-Cosmopolitan’ Campaigns on Soviet Culture,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 66–80; Jonathan Brent and Vladimir Naumov, *Stalin’s Last Crime: The Plot Against the Jewish Doctors, 1948-1953* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003); Yehoshua A. Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry, 1939-1953*, trans. Yosef Shachter and Dov Ben-Abba (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Yakov Rapoport, *The Doctors’ Plot of 1953: A Survivor’s Memoir of Stalin’s Last Act of Terror, Against Jews and Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); and Joshua Rubenstein and Naumov, Vladimir P., eds., *Stalin’s Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee*, trans. Wolfson, Laura Esther (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> *Black Years of Soviet Jewry*.

<sup>18</sup> Grossman provided this definition of state antisemitism in the less quoted part of his famous article. “Ukraine Without Jews,” 15.

Europe.<sup>19</sup> By 1948, this initial period of reconstruction, which was accompanied by the assertion of political authority and the creation of a new international system, had come to an end in most of Europe. The State of Israel emerged as part of this new international system in 1948.

The influence of Gilboa's treatment of the postwar Soviet Jewish experience has remained strong. Writing in the 1960s, Gilboa necessarily relied on published memoirs, literary works, and secondary sources to construct his account of Soviet Jewish history from 1939-1953. Subsequent archival-based studies by scholars such as Shimon Redlich, Mordechai Altshuler, and Martin Dean have supported many of Gilboa's claims regarding the influence of "distinctly practical and material considerations" in postwar displays of antisemitism, the acquiescence of Soviet authorities to those manifestations, and Jews' "hopefulness" that the situation would improve.<sup>20</sup> The main problem with Gilboa's account of the mid-1940s, I argue, is in its framing, which always keeps in sight the executions and arrests of 1952-1953. Gilboa acknowledges this in the "author's note" that opens his book, writing that, "Although the term 'Black Years' is used in the text with reference to the period between 1948 and 1953, the book deals with a more extended period, 1939-1953. The author believes that the book's title adequately applies to the nature of the extended period in the life of Soviet Jewry."<sup>21</sup> Characterizing an entire period as "dark," "black," or "gray," however, limits the field of other possible interpretations and does not allow for historical contingency.

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<sup>19</sup> While recognizing that some refer to the Red Army's liberation of Ukraine and other east European territories as an occupation or reoccupation, I will use the term "liberation" throughout in accordance with the subject position of European Jews.

<sup>20</sup> Gilboa, *Black Years of Soviet Jewry*, 34-41 (quotes on 34 and 40, respectively); Mordechai Altshuler, "Antisemitism in Ukraine toward the End of World War II," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 77-90; Shimon Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* ([New York]: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995); and Martin Dean, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Gilboa, *Black Years of Soviet Jewry*, ix.

Later studies have tended to echo Gilboa's vision of the mid-1940s as a time of, at best, misplaced hope. The title of Allan L. Kagedan's contribution to an edited collection published in 1995, "Revival, Reconstruction or Rejection: Soviet Jewry in the Postwar Years, 1944-48," summarizes the general range of historical interpretations of this topic. As Kagedan writes of Jews' hopes for national integration and a return to normalcy, "even the latter goal proved too ambitious—the immediate postwar years brought no revival, and equal measures of reconstruction and rejection."<sup>22</sup> Zvi Gitelman's historical survey of Russian and Soviet Jewry from the late nineteenth century, *A Century of Ambivalence*, omits the years 1943-1948 from its chronology and only refers briefly to a few developments from those years that are treated as precursors to the anti-cosmopolitan (and pointedly anti-Jewish campaign) that intensified around 1948.<sup>23</sup> Similar themes of hope and despair, triumph and tragedy, dominate more general narratives of Soviet Jewish history as well, as the titles of works such as *Century of Ambivalence* and *Revolution, Repression, and Revival* illustrate.<sup>24</sup>

Other treatments of Soviet Jewry during the mid-1940s, while not necessarily focused on foreshadowing the events of the "Black Years," are institutional or literary studies that privilege the experiences of leading artists and intellectuals. The Jewish Antifascist Committee (JAC) is central to any discussion of Soviet Jewry during and after World War II and Shimon Redlich's documentary history of the JAC is an invaluable resource, but only a minority of Jews were involved directly in its work.<sup>25</sup> The importance of Jewish religious societies in the immediate

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<sup>22</sup> "Revival, Reconstruction or Rejection: Soviet Jewry in the Postwar Years, 1944-48," in *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1995), 189.

<sup>23</sup> *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present*, 2nd exp. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 143–147.

<sup>24</sup> Gitelman, *Century of Ambivalence*; and Zvi Gitelman and Yaacov Ro'i, eds., *Revolution, Repression, and Revival: The Soviet Jewish Experience* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*.

postwar period, which Yaacov Ro'i has stressed, also is questionable given the relatively small number of registered societies at the time, although Altshuler has demonstrated the organizational importance of these societies in attempts to commemorate Holocaust victims.<sup>26</sup> Studies of Soviet Jewish writers, performing artists, and publications similarly provide crucial and often fresh perspectives on a subset of the population.<sup>27</sup>

The decision to focus on individuals or institutions reflects the difficulty of locating the Jewish masses in archival records from this period. The archive of the Jewish Antifascist Committee, held at the State Archive of the Russian Federation, is the only state-level archival collection from the era devoted to Soviet Jewry. This makes it an invaluable collection for any study of Soviet Jews during the 1940s, including this one. Only a handful of archival collections from Soviet Jewish institutions exist due to restrictions on religious communities or any non-state organizations with ethnic or national affiliations. Governmental bodies—with the exception of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults—did not separate or otherwise distinguish documents on the basis of religion or nationality. As a result, finding relevant sources depends on serendipity and skimming documents for references to Jews or identifiably “Jewish” names, and relying on those who have already done so, as is the case with records collected by institutions such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. These approaches pose significant problems.

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<sup>26</sup> Yaacov Ro'i, “The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union after World War II,” in *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass, 1995), 263–89; Yaacov Ro'i, “The Reconstruction of Jewish Communities in the USSR, 1944–1947,” in *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin After WW II*, ed. David Bankier (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 186–205; and Mordechai Altshuler, “Jewish Holocaust Commemoration Activity in the USSR under Stalin,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 30 (2002): 271–95.

<sup>27</sup> Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolution Russia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); David Shneer, “From Mourning to Vengeance: Bergelson’s Holocaust Journalism (1941–1945),” in *David Bergelson: From Modernism to Socialist Realism*, ed. Joseph Sherman and Gennady Estraiikh, *Studies in Yiddish* 6 (London: Legenda, 2007), 248–68; and Jeffrey Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

Searching documents for Jews or Jewish names privileges ascribed identity over self-affiliation and misses the paper trails of individuals with ethnically ambiguous names. Working with copies of archival records in an institution such as the USHMM is more efficient, but only because someone else previously scanned the originals for Jewish content and copied the relevant materials. In some cases, unfortunately, these copies include only excerpts from a document or file.<sup>28</sup> I have tried to compensate for these difficulties by relying on sources produced by different central and local institutions as well as memoirs. In addition to materials from the JAC archives, relevant sources include unpublished materials—primarily letters written to Soviet officials and documents prepared by government agencies—located in a variety of different collections in state and regional archives in Russia and Ukraine. The third chapter also examines unpublished ethnographic materials, predominantly songs, collected by Kiev’s Cabinet of Jewish Culture. Finally, chapter four draws from two distinct groups of sources spread across multiple archives: records from local postwar trials of collaborators and documents produced by the various branches of the Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Crimes of the German-Fascist Invaders.

This dissertation seeks to overcome the problems of backshadowing and a focus on elites by distinguishing between the experiences of Soviet Jewry’s de facto leaders and those they tried to represent, and by placing those experiences in a comparative framework. I argue that while members of the Jewish cultural elite, particularly those involved in the Jewish Antifascist Committee, had access to information that sparked early concerns about the status of Jews in the postwar USSR, most Jews operated within a narrower, local frame of reference. This local

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<sup>28</sup> For this reason, the footnotes will indicate whether I viewed the documents in question “on site” in their repositories in Russia and Ukraine, or accessed reproductions held at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In the latter cases, the original archival references are provided in parentheses after the USHMM citation.

perspective, which encompassed local knowledge, relationships, and conditions, largely determined the nature of Jews' experiences in Ukraine from 1943 to 1948. It also allowed more opportunities for Jews—individually and collectively, professionally and socially—in the Soviet Union than elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

In advancing these arguments, I engage with four themes that shaped the experiences of both Jews and non-Jews in the postwar Soviet Union, if in different ways: postwar reconstructions, citizenship, race and antisemitism, and the local. The salience of these themes to the lives of most Europeans in this period facilitates broad and productive comparisons concerning the status of Jews—and potentially other topics as well—across postwar Europe in ways that transcend the emerging Cold War divide. The following section examines the issues raised by these themes.

### **Postwar Reconstructions**

War and foreign occupation devastated all of Europe, making physical reconstruction a priority as the war ended. Poland and the Soviet Union endured more than their share of destruction due to Nazi racial ideas and visions of the “east” as *lebensraum*, or living space, for Germans.<sup>29</sup> Beyond the decimation of the population, homes, neighborhoods, and entire villages were left in ruins. The war “left homeless almost ten million persons in Ukrainian cities and villages,” a likely inflated Soviet figure that nevertheless gives a sense of the larger human catastrophe the war wrought across the USSR’s occupied territories.<sup>30</sup> More mobile belongings—from personal belongings to cultural treasures to farm animals—proved vulnerable

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<sup>29</sup> For an overview of this topic, see John Connelly, “Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice,” *Central European History* 32, no. 1 (1-34): 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR, Institute of State and Law, *Nazi Crimes in Ukraine 1941-1944: Documents and Materials* (Kiev: Naukova Dumka Publishers, 1987), 14.

to this general destruction and also to the Nazis' exploitative economic policy in the occupied USSR.<sup>31</sup>

Across continental Europe, postwar reconstruction went far beyond the clearing of rubble. Both new and newly reestablished regimes had to assert their authority while confronting political challenges ranging from armed opposition to foreign interference to conflicting priorities between leaders and citizens.<sup>32</sup> The legacies of war, occupation, and collaboration proved central to postwar governments' claims to legitimacy, if only in their rejection as part of a "search for a usable past" and the public repudiation of fascism.<sup>33</sup> The success of these efforts was uneven. The Stalinist regimes imposed on countries in east-central Europe lacked popular support, Germans resisted the Allies' de-Nazification policies, and states quickly lost the will to punish more than a symbolic minority of Nazi officials and collaborators.

Even the victorious Soviet Union was not immune to these broader trends and challenges. The regime's broad definition of collaboration classified every prisoner of war, deported forced laborer (*ostarbeiter*), and individual who had remained on occupied territory as possible "traitors of the Motherland." Large numbers of the population had, in fact, cooperated with the occupiers to at least some degree, if only to ensure their survival. Thousands of others had collaborated more actively by staffing the local administrative organs and police, the last of which proved essential to the annihilation of Jews, Roma (Gypsies), Party members, POWs, and partisans. Members of the Ukrainian nationalist movements, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> See Alfred J. Rieber, "Civil Wars in the Soviet Union," *Kritika* 4, no. 1 (2003): 129–62; Mark Mazower, ed., *After the War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943-1960*, Princeton Modern Greek Studies (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Jeffrey Burds, "Agentura: Soviet Informants' Networks & the Ukrainian Underground in Galicia, 1944-48," *East European Politics & Societies* 11, no. 1 (1996): 89–130.

<sup>33</sup> The phrase is from Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

(OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurrection Army (UPA), continued their armed resistance to Soviet power into the early 1950s.<sup>34</sup> The sheer scale of real and imagined collaborators ensured that, despite the best efforts of the military and the secret police to “filter” out enemies, only a minority would be convicted as traitors.<sup>35</sup> Instead, the regime celebrated the sacrifices of all Soviet citizens in the “Great Patriotic War,” which quickly replaced the Bolshevik Revolution as the foundational event legitimizing the Soviet project, as Amir Weiner has demonstrated.<sup>36</sup> As Elena Zubkova, Mark Edele, and others have shown, these sacrifices—together with the wartime liberalization of central rule, censorship, and attitudes toward religion and nationalism—raised the expectations of ordinary Soviet citizens for a more comfortable and less restrictive postwar existence.<sup>37</sup>

The Holocaust and its aftermath exacerbated the disruptive effects of war and postwar reconstructions for those Ukrainian Jews who had managed to survive. Survivors often remained homeless and jobless for some time after their liberation. Jewish evacuees, soldiers, and survivors all struggled emotionally as they confirmed the sad fates of family and friends. Jews

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<sup>34</sup> John A. Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, 3rd ed. (Englewood, NJ: Ukrainian Academic Press, 1990).

<sup>35</sup> On the issue of collaboration, see Devin O. Pendas, “Seeking Justice, Finding Law: Nazi Trials in Postwar Europe,” *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 2 (June 2009): 347–68; Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*; Martin Dean, “Where Did All the Collaborators Go?,” *Slavic Review*, 2005, 791–98; Tanja Penter, “Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material on Soviet Postwar Trials against Collaborators,” *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 782–90; and Jeffrey W. Jones, “‘Every Family Has Its Freak’: Perceptions of Collaboration in Occupied Soviet Russia, 1943-1948,” *Slavic Review*, 2005, 747–70.

<sup>36</sup> Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> E. Iu. Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy 1945-1964*, Seriiia “Pervaia monografiia” (Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1993); E. Iu. Zubkova, *Poslevoennoe sovetское obshchestvo--politika i povsednevnost', 1945-1953*, Seriiia “Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii XX veka” (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000); Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society 1941-1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Juliane Furst, ed., *Late Stalinist Russia: Society Between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 29 (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Julie Hessler, “A Postwar Perestroika? Toward a History of Private Enterprise in the USSR,” *Slavic Review* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 516–42.

also faced anti-Jewish hostility and even violence.<sup>38</sup> The Soviet regime, however, did little to improve the situation of Jews collectively. Indeed, the state's emphasis on the suffering of *all* Soviet peoples during the war effectively served as a refusal to recognize officially those misfortunes particular to the Jews or to accord them any special treatment as the victims of genocide.<sup>39</sup> Similar problems confronted Jews in most of postwar Europe and, in some places, contributed to mass emigration.<sup>40</sup>

### **Race and Antisemitism**

Soviet nationality practices of the 1920s and 1930s, which the third chapter addresses in more detail, considerably muddled conceptual and applied ideas regarding nationality, race, and antisemitism, among other categories.<sup>41</sup> In promoting national cultural development and eventually requiring the inscription of nationality on passports and other official documents, the

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<sup>38</sup> Altshuler, "Antisemitism in Ukraine"; Frank Gruner, "Did Anti-Jewish Mass Violence Exist in the Soviet Union?—Anti-Semitism and Collective Violence in the USSR During the War and Post War Years," *Journal of Genocide Research* 11, no. 2/3 (June 2009): 355–79; and Weiner, *Making Sense of War*.

<sup>39</sup> Zvi Gitelman, "Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 14–42; and Amir Weiner, "When Memory Counts: War, Genocide, and Postwar Soviet Jewry," in *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework*, ed. Amir Weiner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 167–88.

<sup>40</sup> David Bankier, ed., *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin After WW II* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005); Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006); István Deak, "Antisemitism in Eastern Europe (excluding Russia and the Soviet Empire) Since 1848," in *Antisemitism: A History*, ed. Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 222–36; Richard J. Golsan, "Antisemitism in Modern France: Dreyfus, Vichy, and Beyond," in *Antisemitism: A History*, ed. Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 136–49; Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Avinoam Patt, "*We Are Here*": *New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 414–52; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge & the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Francine Hirsch, "Race without the Practice of Racial Politics," *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 30–43; and Weiner, "Nothing but Certainty."

regime reified national difference and treated it as an inherited, and in this sense biological, characteristic. The result, according to Yuri Slezkine, was that in 1941, Soviet Jews “knew that they were Jews in the Soviet sense, which was also—in essence—the Nazi sense. They were Jews by blood.”<sup>42</sup>

This observable similarity between Nazi and Soviet ideas of biological inheritance has caused some to make comparisons between the two regimes’ concepts of race and practice of racial politics. Eric D. Weitz has argued that, despite the Soviet state’s fundamental opposition to racial theories and ideologies, “Under Iosif Stalin, the Soviets practiced—intermittently, inconsistently, to be sure—racial politics without the overt concept and ideology of race.”<sup>43</sup> According to Weitz, Soviet nationality politics of the 1920s and 1930s, the state’s interest in constructing a “new” Soviet people, and the constant search for internal enemies all contributed to what he characterizes as the “Soviet slide from nationality to race.”<sup>44</sup> The forced deportations of entire national groups and state antisemitism characterized the practice of racial politics in the Soviet Union, but Weitz maintains that the absence of a committed racial ideology behind those politics “prevented the unfolding of a full-scale genocidal program along the lines of Nazi Germany.”<sup>45</sup>

Defining antisemitism as theory and practice in general and in the USSR in particular is equally difficult. Scholarly definitions range from the broadest interpretation of the word’s etymology, “hatred of Jews,” to more narrow renderings that emphasize a modern, racially-based

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<sup>42</sup> Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 286.

<sup>43</sup> Eric D. Weitz, “Racial Politics without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

hostility toward Jews.<sup>46</sup> The latter definition better captures the sensibilities of the word's nineteenth-century origins, when those reacting to Jewish success in a post-emancipation world used modern racial theories to reshape traditional anti-Jewish prejudices into a biological threat that required action.<sup>47</sup> Despite the word's modern origins, some scholars apply the term to earlier historical periods.<sup>48</sup>

Nazi ideology and practice clearly embraced this racial component, but in other situations the relevance of race to attitudes typically labeled “antisemitic” is less clear. The slurs and derogatory comments reported in some of the sources analyzed here, for example, are not accompanied by manifestos clarifying whether or not these ideas were informed by racial theories, religious differences, economic competition, or some combination of these factors. Works on popular collusion in the Holocaust and anti-Jewish attitudes immediately after suggest the primacy of greed as a factor in words and deeds deemed “antisemitic.”<sup>49</sup> Henry Abramson has gone so far as to suggest that “the Ukrainian-Jewish conflict is in its essence a normal conflict between socio-economic groups” and, accordingly, that “the use of the term ‘antisemitism’ to define the essentially common conflict between Ukrainians and Jews is misleading.”<sup>50</sup> Such a view fails to address either the impact of Nazi ideology on postwar

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<sup>46</sup> For an overview, see Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy, “Introduction,” in *Antisemitism: A History*, ed. Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–16; Richard Levy, “Political Antisemitism in Germany and Austria, 1848-1914,” in *Antisemitism: A History*, ed. Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 123–124; and Benjamin Isaac, “The Ancient Mediterranean and the Pre-Christian Era,” in *Antisemitism: A History*, ed. Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 34.

<sup>47</sup> Levy, “Political Antisemitism in Germany and Austria, 1848-1914,” 123–124.

<sup>48</sup> Isaac, “The Ancient Mediterranean and the Pre-Christian Era.”

<sup>49</sup> Dean, *Robbing the Jews*; Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002); and Gross, *Fear*; and Jan Tomasz Gross, *Golden Harvest: Reflections About Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Henry Abramson, “The Scattering of Amalek: A Model for Understanding the Ukrainian-Jewish Conflict,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 24, no. 1 (1994): 42.

manifestations of antisemitism, or the relationship between popular and state antisemitism.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Local**

Local knowledge, relations, conditions, and identities—which I will refer to collectively as the local or locality—were central to the experiences of Jews in wartime and postwar Ukraine. As discussed above, the multiple dimensions of locality largely determined the fates of Jews in occupied Ukraine. Throughout Nazi-occupied Europe, local relationships saved the lives of some Jews while condemning others as friends and non-Jewish relatives tried to save their loved ones and rivals settled scores. Local collaborators, of course, were more likely to identify Jews from the area than occupation authorities. Emotional ties to a specific space—to home—was one of many factors influencing the ill-fated decision of many Soviet Jews to remain on occupied territory rather than flee east.<sup>52</sup> Knowledge of local geography enabled a relatively small number of Jews to survive the Holocaust on occupied territory by hiding in forests, swamps, and caves. The political and administrative borders constructed on the space of Ukraine meant the difference between life and death for the Jews trapped there. The consequences of these local factors extended into the immediate postwar period and beyond.

Due to the importance of the local, I have tried to limit my analysis to those Jews who lived within the pre-1939 borders of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. To be clear, this dissertation is very much about Soviet Jewry rather than about “Ukrainian Jewry,” which did not

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<sup>51</sup> Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, “Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union,” in *Antisemitism: A History*, ed. Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 186.

<sup>52</sup> 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, 1941-1954*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 77–104; and Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

even exist as a distinct cultural group. Ukraine is the geographical focus of this study because of its large Jewish population and the very different forms of the Holocaust implemented on its territory. The post-Holocaust Jewish imaginary, moreover, often has ascribed to ethnic Ukrainians a unique strain of antisemitism, portraying them as “the worst” among their tormentors during the Holocaust.<sup>53</sup> Properly assessing the nature of postwar antisemitism in particular necessitates respecting the different local experiences, collectively, of the interwar period. Citizens of Soviet Ukraine during the interwar years lived in a state that prohibited various kinds of discrimination, campaigned against antisemitism, and actively promoted the culture of its national minorities. In the neighboring countries of Poland and Romania, by contrast, popular and state antisemitism were routine. Scholars traditionally have attributed the outbreak of pogroms in western Ukraine in the summer of 1941 to these differences, which were complicated further by the short and disruptive experience of Soviet rule in the region from 1939 to 1941.<sup>54</sup> Ethnic cleansing continued even after the annihilation of the region’s Jewish population, as Ukrainians and Poles attacked each other and the Soviet state engineered population exchanges that conformed to the postwar national borders.<sup>55</sup>

The influence of the local was felt in more positive ways as well. In different historical

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<sup>53</sup> Lower, *Diary of Samuel Golfard*, 23–24.

<sup>54</sup> See Andrzej Zbikowski, “Local Anti-Jewish Pogroms in the Occupied Territories of Eastern Poland, June–July 1941,” in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1954*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 173–79; Golczewski, “Shades of Grey”; Per Anders Rudling, “Bogdan Musial and the Question of Jewish Responsibility for the Pogroms in Lviv in the Summer of 1941,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 35, no. 1 (2005): 69–89; and Jan Tomasz Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*, Exp. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). Oleksandr Melnyk has written on a pogrom that occurred within the UkrSSR’s pre-1939 borders; see “Stalinist Justice as a Site of Memory: Anti-Jewish Violence in Kyiv’s Podil District in September 1941 through the Prism of Soviet Investigative Documents,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 61, no. 2 (2013): 223–48.

<sup>55</sup> Norman M Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage Books, 2010); and Ana Siljak and Philipp Ther, *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

contexts, local identities can transcend or even challenge the primacy of ethnic or other larger group identities. As Judith Pinter has observed of former residents from Dubrovnik who fled to Croatia in the 1990s, for example, “Their sense of superiority does not arise because of genetic, religious, or ethnic claims but is geographic and emotional. The city is theirs because they love it.”<sup>56</sup> Spatial, social, and emotional ties could enhance the postwar lives of Jews at the local level.

### **Outline**

The content of this dissertation is organized around four broad categories of concern to Jews in the newly liberated Ukraine that also provided the physical and conceptual spaces for the construction and policing of community membership. The most intimate of these categories of concern and my first chapter, “Returning Home,” addresses the problems faced by Holocaust survivors, demobilized soldiers, and reevacuees as they attempted to return to their pre-war hometowns or make new homes elsewhere in Ukraine. As many of the same problems confronted both Jewish and non-Jewish returnees—particularly the struggles over housing and private property that not infrequently developed between them and those who had remained in Ukraine during the occupation—this chapter considers the extent to which religious, ethnic, or racial prejudices influenced interethnic conflicts over these issues. The second major category of concern to Soviet Jews, the workplace, represented the key to both respectability and subsistence in the USSR and a vital space of unavoidable interactions between Jews and non-Jews. Chapter two of this dissertation thus centers on accusations of discriminatory employment practices

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<sup>56</sup> Judith Pinter, “Emplaced and Displaced: Theorizing the Emotions of Space in the Former Yugoslavia,” in *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Valeria Sobol (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 189.

targeting the Jewish presence in higher education and cultural institutions, as well as on popular representations of Jews as unproductive laborers. Together with the homecoming experience, this chapter addresses the nature of everyday interactions between Jews and non-Jews after the traumas of foreign occupation and genocide.

The final two categories of research and their respective chapters move from exploring the problems confronted by individual Jews to those faced by Soviet Jews as a group or, in Soviet terms, a nationality. The first of these chapters, entitled “Jews and Community,” examines Jewish responses to three community-wide priorities after the Holocaust: providing material aid to other Jews; cultivating Jewish (and particularly Yiddish) culture; and memorializing Jewish wartime experiences, here through the Kiev Cabinet of Jewish Culture’s project to publish a Yiddish-language collection of “national folklore” from the war years. The final chapter, “Identity and Justice,” explores the participation and visibility of Jews and the Jewish genocide in local war crimes investigations and trials.

## CHAPTER ONE: RETURNING HOME

In February 1944, as the Red Army steadily forced the Nazis and their allies to retreat from Soviet territory, the Jewish Antifascist Committee's (JAC) leaders sent a lengthy letter regarding the status of Soviet Jewry to V. M. Molotov, then vice-chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. The letter began by noting that "no less than 1.5 million Jews were annihilated" by the "fascists" on occupied Soviet territory alone, leaving "all the remaining Jewish population of the USSR dispersed across the Central Asian republics, Siberia, on the shores of the Volga and in a few other central regions of the RSFSR." As the letter's authors observed, this situation, together with the ongoing liberation of the USSR's western territories, "naturally raises for the evacuated Jewish mass, similarly as for all evacuees, the question of return to native places [*rodnye mesta*]. However, in light of that tragedy, which the Jewish people [*narod*] suffered in the current war, this [reevacuation] will not resolve the bulk of the problems in the situation [*ustroistva*] of the Jewish population of the USSR." Foremost among these problems was the question of whether Holocaust survivors and Jewish evacuees could resume their lives in the very places where their friends and loved ones had been murdered. The letter provided a negative answer to this query, asserting that "native places have lost their material and psychological meaning for many evacuated Jews" due to the nature of this particular Jewish tragedy.<sup>1</sup> At least according to the JAC, the mass return of Jews to their prewar places of origin, and even their desire to do so, was improbable and perhaps impossible.

Such observations regarding Soviet Jews obviously supported the JAC's proposal that the state create a "Jewish Soviet Socialist Republic" in the Crimea, but they also reflected real issues

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<sup>1</sup> S. M. Mikhoels, Sh. Epshtein, and I. Fefer to V.M. Molotov, 21 February 1944, in RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, l. 169.

then confronting Jews who had lived in the Soviet territories occupied by the Nazis and their allies.<sup>2</sup> In many cases, these Jews would find not only the “ruined hearths” [*razrushennykh ochagakh*] that could await any returnee but also—and quite literally—“home places [that] had been transformed by the fascists into mass cemeteries of their families, relatives and dear ones.”<sup>3</sup> If the prewar hearths of Jews survived the occupation intact, they typically had been plundered of their possessions or reclaimed in their entirety, a situation this document only alludes to by citing the lost “material” meaning of former home places. Some members of the Jewish intelligentsia, the JAC contended, also faced the prospect of unemployment as non-Jewish specialists replaced them in fields pertaining to the latter’s own national cultures, an issue that the following chapter addresses.<sup>4</sup> “Manifestations of antisemitism” complicated these other difficulties, completing what could be a disturbing reality for Jews returning to the formerly occupied territories.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter examines whether and how individual Jews contended with such issues as they attempted to return to their “home places” in Ukraine from 1943 to 1948. These “homecomings,” as such literal and figurative returns to a place of origin after a long and difficult absence may be defined, provide the context within which the meanings these Jews attached to “home” and its related concepts can be explored.<sup>6</sup> Particular attention is given to the experiences of Jewish reevacuees, who constituted the majority of Ukraine’s Jewish population during the period under consideration here. The efforts of Jews to secure a home in its most basic sense as a dwelling space and the struggles over housing and private property that not infrequently developed between them and those who had remained in Ukraine during the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, l. 171

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, ll. 169-170.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., l. 170.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., l. 171.

<sup>6</sup> Madan Sarup, “Home and Identity,” in *Travellers’ Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ed. George Robertson et al. (London: Routledge, 1994), 94.

occupation then receive consideration. As many of the same housing problems confronted both Jewish and non-Jewish returnees, such disputes offer a glimpse into the nature of interethnic relations in Ukraine at the end of World War II. This chapter concludes by considering the meanings of “home” for those Jews who decided to move to new places both inside Ukraine and beyond its borders in the mid-1940s.

This chapter’s analysis will show that, contrary to the JAC’s claim in the letter discussed above, a significant number of Jews from Soviet Ukraine exhibited strong attachments to the places they had called home before 1941 and displayed determination to return to these home places and rebuild their lives after the occupation, despite the potential obstacles and personal tragedies this may have involved.<sup>7</sup> At least initially, few anticipated any difficulties in pursuing these aims because of their identity as Jews. When they did encounter anti-Jewish sentiment, most Jews interpreted such manifestations of antisemitism as individual, local or—at most—regional issues reflecting the continued influence of Nazi propaganda. Ukrainian Jews, in other words, continued to expect the state to defend their rights as Soviet citizens and demanded as much in the mid-1940s. In the process, they asserted their belonging in Soviet Ukrainian society, even as others attempted to ensure their continued exclusion.

### **The Meaning of “Native Places”**

The fact that Jews’ “home places had been transformed into mass cemeteries” of their loved ones did not negate the status of these spaces as “home places” to the Jews in question.<sup>8</sup> In other words, while the deadly consequences of the Holocaust certainly could affect the nature of

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<sup>7</sup> This argument applies only to Jews who were citizens of Soviet Ukraine *before* the border changes beginning in 1939.

<sup>8</sup> S. M. Mikhoels, Sh. Epshtein, and I. Fefer to V.M. Molotov, 21 February 1944, in RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, l. 170.

Jews' homecomings and whether they, indeed, could return home, these consequences could not erase the affective ties between an individual and what or where s/he considered "home." The Soviet Jewish war hero David Dragunskii expressed this point simply in the language he used to describe his own homecoming to JAC chairman and noted Yiddish actor Solomon Mikhoels in a letter dated December 4, 1945.<sup>9</sup> The letter's first line emphasizes Dragunskii's ties to his prewar home places by the repeated use of words with the Russian root "*rod*," which carries connotations of origins in birth, tribe, and nature:<sup>10</sup> "After four years of war I received the opportunity to visit [my] "native regions [*rodnye kraia*]—my motherland [*rodinu*] the city Novozybkov and the village Sviatsk, where I was born [*rodilsia*]." Dragunskii's observation that "the fellow-townsmen [*zemliaki*] greeted me warmly" upon his return reveals that he still considered himself a member of the local community, a "fellow-townsmen." As he affirmed his ties to his home places, Dragunskii also grieved for what he had lost there, writing "on my motherland [*na moei rodine*] the German-fascist monsters shot all of my family—a total of 74 members from the Dragunskii family." Even Dragunskii's veiled disappointment with locals' treatment of this tragedy—the village soviet had not compiled a list of Nazi victims and, more disturbingly, farm animals roamed over mass graves with exposed bones—did not compel him to repudiate his clear ties to his places of origin.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps more significantly, those who had survived the Holocaust in occupied Ukraine expressed similar feelings of attachment to their home places despite the personal horrors they had endured there. One Holocaust survivor from Brailov, for example, reportedly chose to

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<sup>9</sup> Dragunskii was a war hero in the most literal sense, having been awarded the honor "Hero of the Soviet Union" twice.

<sup>10</sup> George Z. Patrick, *Roots of the Russian Language: An Elementary Guide to Russian Word-Building* (New York, Chicago: Pitman Publishing, 1938), 174–175.

<sup>11</sup> D. Dragunskii to S. Mikhoels, 4 December 1945, in RGALI, f. 2693, op. 1, d. 98, l. 3.

remain in his deserted hometown both in recognition of its destruction as a home place to Jews and to counter that destruction with his own presence. As the sixty-year-old tailor Abram Tsigelman explained to Efim Gekhman, a young soldier who had travelled from the front to learn of his family's fate:

You are leaving. But I don't want Brailov to be without Jews, so I shall stay. Even if I'm the only one at first. [...] In my free hours I shall sit over there, at the mill, beside the pit. Everything I had—your whole family too—is buried there.<sup>12</sup>

Assuming that Gekhman accurately conveyed the sentiment behind the tailor's request, if not his exact words, Tsigelman's decision to stay in Brailov resulted from both his strong attachment to his hometown and his desire to remain near the mass grave containing his family's remains. A large group of survivors from Odessa displayed a more positive connection to their hometown in a letter recognizing the assistance given to them both during and after the occupation by Professor Konstantin Mikhailovich Grodskii and his wife Nadezhda Abramovna. Even while recounting the details of their experiences in local ghettos and camps, their dismal material circumstances even after liberation, and the compassion shown by the Grodskii's, these survivors variously referred to "our city," "our native [*rodnogo*] city," and "our blossoming [*tsvetushcheiu*] Odessa."<sup>13</sup> For these Holocaust survivors, as for others, "native" places remained home places.

Jews who had lived out the occupation in the Soviet rear frequently stressed their own desires to return to their native places in Ukraine. In a letter to the editor of the newspaper *Radians'ka Ukraïna* that defended the motives of Jewish reevacuees, "M. B." wrote that "It is perfectly understandable, that from the liberation of Kiev all evacuees rushed back to Kiev, that

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<sup>12</sup> Efim Gekhman, "In My Hometown (Brailov)," in *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry*, ed. Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, trans. David Patterson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 36.

<sup>13</sup> Copy of anonymous letter [76 original signatories] to K. M. Grodskii, 9 June 194[4 or 5?] in RGALI, f. 2693, op. 1, d. 227, ll. 1-1ob.

is to their own home, where each of them was born, lived and where each of them has something that ties him to this city, -- that is accepted among us to call this pull [to] the Motherland [*Rodinu*].”<sup>14</sup> For the reevacuees M.B. defends, “home” is the physical place where they were born and to which they have an emotional connection. The use of the word *rodina* (motherland) here, as in other cases, emphasizes the significance to individuals of their prewar home places—*rodina* is not just the greater Soviet motherland, but one’s own small piece of it.

In sum, the physical and human destruction wrought by war and genocide did not break the connections between individual Jews and their home places. “Home” remained the physical place where one was born and lived before the invasion as well as an imagined space filled with emotional ties, even when no loved ones remained after the liberation to welcome those coming home. Thus Jewish evacuees, who had never left the territory of the USSR—the Soviet Motherland—stressed their desire to return to their individual motherlands, their home places. In this respect, Jews from Soviet Ukraine echoed what Lisa A. Kirschenbaum has identified as the “key constituents of Soviet patriotism” during World War II: “native place (*rodina*), home, and family.”<sup>15</sup>

### **“Our wish is to return home”: The Reevacuation Experience**

The largest segment of Ukrainian Jews to survive the occupation did so by escaping to the east, a real—if sometimes small—possibility that “depended largely on people’s subjective willingness to leave their homes and on the objective conditions that permitted them to follow through on such a decision,” including whether they worked for an industry meriting official

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<sup>14</sup> TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 2812, ark. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, “‘Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families’: Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda,” *Slavic Review* 59, no. 4 (2000): 828.

evacuation and the timing of an area's occupation.<sup>16</sup> The Soviet Union's unpreparedness for the Nazi invasion, the speed with which the Nazi Army advanced, and the inadequacy of available Soviet intelligence during the onslaught further hampered both evacuation proper and individual escape at the war's beginning. Approximations for the number of Soviet Jews who survived by making their way to the rear vary, but it was unquestionably higher than the number of those who managed to survive in either the Nazi or Romanian occupied territories. Based on an extensive survey of Nazi and Soviet records, Alexander Kruglov has estimated that around one million Jews living within the Ukrainian SSR's 1941 borders outlived World War II, although only 100,000 of them managed to survive the Holocaust on occupied territory.<sup>17</sup> Reevacuees, accordingly, would have comprised the majority of the Jewish population in Ukraine during the period under consideration here.

The official procedure for reevacuation depended on the prewar passport regime and various agencies of the state bureaucracy for its implementation and enforcement. As such, an evacuee had to obtain permission from multiple sources to return *legally* to his or her prewar place of residence. These included permission to travel, authorization to leave one's current place of employment, and an official summons (*vyzov*) from local authorities conferring approval to enter and settle in the proposed destination. Although factory managers in the rear could and did deny workers' requests to leave their employ, receiving a summons to return appears to have been the most difficult part of arranging reevacuation. Potential returnees needed to submit

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<sup>16</sup> 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, 1941-1954*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 77-83 [quote on 83].

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Kruglov, "Jewish Losses in Ukraine, 1941-1944," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 273.

proof of housing and employment to the local authorities in their intended destinations, which often proved difficult to arrange while still in evacuation.<sup>18</sup> In some cases, local councils apparently advised evacuees to arrange their summonses through family members already on site—an impossible feat for most Jews, whose relatives rarely survived the occupation.<sup>19</sup> Together, these prerequisites to lawful reevacuation represented something of a bureaucratic gauntlet intended to control the return of civilians to war-ravaged locales lacking the necessary infrastructure and security to accommodate them as the state saw fit.

Similarly to the official evacuation process, priority in reevacuation went to Party leaders, higher-level administrators, skilled workers, and members of cultural and educational institutions. Typically, institutions such as factories, higher education establishments, and cultural organizations returned with their employees as a group, while apparatchiks and members of the security organs made more individual journeys to the liberated regions as ordered. Relevant authorities arranged the necessary permissions and often housing as well for those fortunate enough to fall into these categories. Ideally, this procedure ensured that only politically-reliable individuals with established housing and jobs returned on an as-needed basis to formerly occupied territory—all vital concerns to those charged with reestablishing law and order in what often remained physically ruined and politically volatile areas until well after the end of World War II.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth White, “After the War Was Over: The Civilian Return to Leningrad,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 7 (November 2007): 1149. A June 1945 order from the Executive Committee of the Kiev *oblast'* council lists the authorizations required of potential returnees to the fifty-kilometer zone around Kiev: DAKO, f. 880, op. 11, spr. 94, ark. 159-159zv.

<sup>19</sup> One Jewish woman referred to this problem in a reevacuation request directed to Stalin himself, although she claimed that her relatives had been shot for “participation in a partisan brigade.” Sara Ketsel'man to Iosif Stalin, 19 May 1945, in DAKO, f. 5, op. 3, spr. 1153, ark. 287.

<sup>20</sup> Martin J. Blackwell, “Regime City of the First Category: The Experience of the Return of Soviet Power to Kyiv, Ukraine, 1943-1946” (Ph.D., Indiana University, 2005), 58–63, 175–179; and White, “After the War Was Over,” 1148–1149. A selection of intra-party housing requests may be found in DAKO, f. 5, op. 2, spr. 477, ark. 1-38.

The controls placed on reevacuation failed to stop evacuees from returning to their prewar homes on their own accord. Although evacuation to Central Asia and Siberia provided protection from the immediate horrors of occupation and war, it invariably proved to be a difficult experience. Evacuation represented an extended rupture in individuals' lives, separating them from the places, routines, and people that had comprised their worlds and forcing them to adapt to radically changed environments and circumstances. Many evacuees who remained in evacuation points such as Novosibirsk and Tashkent lived in deplorable physical conditions that, combined with food shortages and long work hours, sometimes sparked bouts of contagious diseases.<sup>21</sup> All evacuees shared similar worries about the fate of their homes and possessions, hometowns, and loved ones whose circumstances remained unknown. The vast majority of evacuees, then, would have longed for home and attempted to return to it as soon as possible following their native region's liberation by the Red Army. Thousands eventually succeeded in doing so even without the necessary permissions or the negative consequences unauthorized reevacuation could involve while authorities focused on reestablishing control and orchestrating reconstruction.<sup>22</sup>

Although individual Jews not infrequently suspected that their difficulties in securing official reevacuation were due to their nationality, thus far no one has found documentation proving that central Soviet authorities uniformly attempted to prevent Jews, as a national group, from returning to the formerly occupied territories. Delays and rejections in the reevacuation

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<sup>21</sup> Kristen Elizabeth Edwards, "Fleeing to Siberia: The Wartime Relocation of Evacuees to Novosibirsk, 1941-1943" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1996), 117-119, 122-124, 186-187, 316-320; William Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction: The Food Supply in the USSR During World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and White, "After the War Was Over," 1147-1148.

<sup>22</sup> Blackwell, "Regime City of the First Category," 59-62, 152-153. Local officials in other cities may have been stricter in punishing unauthorized returnees, as suggested by Elizabeth White in the case of Leningrad; see White, "After the War Was Over," 1153.

process could hassle anyone not on the priority list, regardless of their nationality, and the stated explanations for them—especially the “lack of housing” in any given location—were often true. At least in the case of Kiev *oblast'*, moreover, petitioners did not routinely provide their national identity on requests for summonses to return, nor was this information required, despite its inclusion on internal Soviet passports.<sup>23</sup> In some cases these identities would have been obvious from the individuals’ names or other details appearing in their requests, but this would not have provided an accurate screening method due to ethnically ambiguous surnames, legal name changes, or the ability of children from mixed marriages to assume the official nationality of their non-Jewish parents. Most importantly, Jewish evacuees and, later, demobilized soldiers *did* return to the western republics of the Soviet Union toward the end of World War II.<sup>24</sup> The pertinent question, then, is not whether union-wide reevacuation procedures intentionally discriminated against Jews, but whether local authorities in the Ukrainian SSR ever tried to use those procedures to prevent the return of Jews to the areas under their jurisdiction, as Mordechai Altshuler, Yehoshua Gilboa, and others have maintained.<sup>25</sup>

Requests for summonses sent by evacuated Jews to Kiev *oblast'* authorities rarely indicated that the former expected *or* suspected differential treatment because of their nationality. As mentioned above, petitioners seldom specified their national identity, which was not among the data required of those seeking entry into the fifty-kilometer zone surrounding

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<sup>23</sup> DAKO, f. 880, op. 11, spr. 94, ark. 159-159zv.

<sup>24</sup> Reliable statistics for Ukraine’s Jewish population during the mid-1940s are not available. The first postwar census in 1959 recorded 840,311 Jews in the republic, then the second-largest Jewish population within the Soviet Union. Mordechai Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry since the Second World War: Population and Social Structure* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 74.

<sup>25</sup> Mordechai Altshuler, “Antisemitism in Ukraine toward the End of World War II,” in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 77; and Yehoshua A. Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry, 1939-1953*, trans. Yosef Shachter and Dov Ben-Abba (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 37. In his dissertation on the return of Soviet power to Kiev, Martin Blackwell even suggests that the Communist Party of Ukraine as a whole attempted “to prevent the return of Jews to places like Kyiv.” See Blackwell, “Regime City of the First Category,” 356.

Ukraine's capital city, to use one example.<sup>26</sup> The basic content of such appeals varied little from one to another, including among those whose authors can be identified positively as Jews. Beyond providing the required data, petitioners frequently stressed their desire to return to their "native" (*rodnoi*) places and, whenever possible, invoked the military service of family members as validation of their right to do so. Indeed, for the immediate family members of servicemen on active duty at the time of their evacuation, this right—along with the return or replacement of their prewar housing—was enshrined in law.<sup>27</sup> Military commanders, accordingly, routinely sent memos supporting the reevacuation requests of their subordinates' families to the relevant authorities.<sup>28</sup> In general, only the details of the petitioners' wartime experiences—including mention of loved ones lost to the war—varied. The consistency in content displayed across these appeals reflects both the demands of Soviet bureaucracy and the public's investment in writing to authorities, which constituted a genre in itself.<sup>29</sup> It also may indicate the extent to which Jews considered themselves to be as "Soviet" as other Ukrainian citizens, at least when it came to reevacuation policy.

The efforts of a Jewish woman named Khave Bentsionovna Markovich to return to Kiev *oblast'* illustrate some of these ambiguities in the reevacuation process as they applied to Jews. In April 1945, Markovich wrote a lengthy letter to the Kiev *Oblast'* Executive Committee

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<sup>26</sup> Members of the Kiev *Oblast'* Rada's Executive Committee circulated a directive in June 1945 reminding regional councils (*rady*) of the information required to even consider issuing entry permits. See DAKO, f. 880, op. 11, spr. 94, ark. 159-159zv.

<sup>27</sup> On 5 August 1941, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued a decree guaranteeing servicemen the right to return to the living space from which they were mobilized after completing their service. Blackwell, "Regime City of the First Category," 61–62, 114.

<sup>28</sup> Several supporting memos from military commanders may be found in DAKO, f. 880, op. 11, spr. 94, for example.

<sup>29</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s," *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 4 (December 1996): 831–66; and Vladimir A. Kozlov, "Denunciation and Its Functions in Soviet Governance: A Study of Denunciations and Their Bureaucratic Handling from Soviet Police Archives, 1944–1953," *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 4 (December 1996): 867–98.

(*Oblispolkom*) that detailed her repeated efforts to return from evacuation. Earlier that year, Markovich had appealed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine for a summons to return to either the city of Kiev or to a location in the Kiev *oblast'*. According to Markovich's April 1945 letter, the Central Committee sent her request to the Kiev City Soviet (*gorsoviet*), which subsequently informed her that it had stopped issuing summonses "for the winter period."<sup>30</sup> Two of Markovich's family members—with whom she only recently had reestablished contact after years of uncertainty as to their whereabouts or wellbeing—also attempted to secure her reevacuation around this same time. Local authorities purportedly rejected the request of Markovich's husband for a summons on her behalf because he, as a new student at the Kiev Arts Academy, "lives in a dormitory and does not possess living space."<sup>31</sup> Given these circumstances, Markovich indicated her desire to live with her mother and sister, who had lived in the Belorussian SSR before the war and had since resettled in a village in Kiev *oblast'*. Regional authorities for the village and its environs, however, refused to issue Markovich a summons because she "was evacuated from Kiev, and not from Baryshevskii [*raion*]."<sup>32</sup> Although Markovich's frustration with her situation is palpable, her letter gives no indication that she attributed her troubles to her nationality. Indeed, Markovich did not even state her nationality in this letter, although it was obvious from her traditionally Jewish given name and patronymic as well as her stated prior employment with a newspaper named *Der Shtern*, although she did not identify it as "Yiddish"—in Russian, the same word as "Jewish" (*evreiskii*).<sup>33</sup> Markovich did not even assert her entitlement to return to Kiev proper in terms of the August 1941 law, which presumably applied to her as a prewar Kievan and veteran's wife.

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<sup>30</sup> Kh. B. Markovich to Kiev Oblispolkom, 16 April 1945[?], in DAKO, f. 880, op. 11, spr. 94, ark. 116.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. ark. 116zv.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., ark. 117zv.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., ark. 116.

Her letter, instead, appealed to authorities' sympathies in universal terms, as summarized in its final sentence: "Must I really live in complete solitude when I have found all my relatives and they are waiting eagerly for me?"<sup>34</sup> For their part, the local authorities in question apparently followed the letter of the law when considering Markovich's case. They may be portrayed as indifferent or even uncaring in this letter, but their reported responses and the legalities backing them give no indication that they refused reevacuation to Markovich because she was a Jew.

When prospective Jewish reevacuees did suspect prejudicial motives on the part of local authorities, they typically addressed their complaints to the superiors of the bureaucrats in question. Even then, petitioners often hesitated to identify officials as antisemites, but rather—mindful of both the subsequent need to interact with the same bureaucrats and the regime's official insistence that antisemitism no longer existed in the Soviet Union—hinted at such a conclusion. A certain Captain Z. Ts. Trakhtenberg followed this careful line in August 1945 when he addressed the Supreme Soviet of the USSR regarding the repeated denial of entry permits to Kiev *oblast'* sought by his parents. Although he requested such permits for both his parents and his sister, Trakhtenberg appears to have been particularly outraged that local authorities denied reevacuation permission to his father. The complaint accordingly begins by stating that "My father Trakhtenberg Tsal' Davidovich spent his entire working life in the city of Vasil'kov in Kiev *oblast'*" until his evacuation in 1941.<sup>35</sup> The text that follows weaves between summarizing the elder Trakhtenberg's unsuccessful attempts to return to Vasil'kov and cataloging the man's credentials as an ideal Soviet citizen: a legal official (*pravozastupnik*) "from the first days of Soviet power," a deputy to the Worker's Soviet in his hometown since

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., ark. 117zv.

<sup>35</sup> Captain Z. Ts. Trakhtenberg to Supreme Soviet of the USSR, 20 August 1945, in DAKO, f. 5, op. 3, spr. 1153, ark. 429.

1925, and most recently a member of the Vasil'kov District Executive Committee's (*Raiispolkom*) presidium.<sup>36</sup> Captain Trakhtenberg's assertion that "This clearly contradicts the Great Stalin Law of the Soviet Constitution" emphasized the implicit conclusion that Vasil'kov's District Executive Committee discriminated against his father by denying him an entry permit.<sup>37</sup> Whether this implication would have shamed the relevant authorities into issuing the permits remains an open question as Trakhtenberg's family ultimately returned to Vasil'kov without official permission.<sup>38</sup>

Disabled Jewish veteran Aron Arkad'evich Sokol made a more obvious allegation of antisemitism on the part of at least one local official in charge of issuing reevacuation permits. Upon returning to his hometown of Belaia Tserkov', Sokol went to the city executive committee (*gorispolkom*) to request reevacuation permits for his family members. Sokol desperately needed the assistance of loved ones due to his critical injuries, which included a head wound and a severe paralysis on the left side of his body. Despite these extenuating circumstances, the city executive committee's president, Malashkevich, initially denied Sokol's request, supposedly stating, "I don't need a Jewish *kolkhoz* here and in general here there are enough Jews, who come here in order to trade at the bazaar."<sup>39</sup> Such an unwelcoming statement relied on a long-standing stereotype of Jews as petty traders preying on their non-Jewish customers, which coincided with traditional Soviet values on the nature of productive and unproductive labor. The Soviet regime's disenfranchisement of thousands of Jewish traders and craftsmen in the interwar period and the ongoing movement of Jews into other fields, however, meant that this stereotype

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., ark. 429-429zv., 431; quote on ark. 431.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., ark. 429zv.

<sup>38</sup> Head of the General Division of the Kiev *Oblast'* Council Executive Committee of Workers Deputies Deinego to Captain Z. Ts. Trakhtenberg, 2 October 1945, in DAKO, f. 5, op. 3, spr. 1153, ark. 421.

<sup>39</sup> A.A. Sokol to JAC, [7 February 1945?], GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 1055, l. 37. [Russian letter is identified as a translated copy, presumably from Yiddish.]

had little basis in contemporary reality.<sup>40</sup> Sokol himself asserted that “in the whole of our family all people are workers.”<sup>41</sup> In the end, Sokol wrote in his letter to the JAC, “the president of the Gorispolkom agreed to give me a *propusk* [permit] for [my] mother and one sister, but for the remaining members of [my] family he refused permits.” Significantly, despite this official’s clear display of anti-Jewish prejudice and the fact that Sokol’s audience consisted primarily of Jewish *intelligenty* rather than the Party bureaucrats to whom Trakhtenberg wrote, Sokol does not use the word “antisemitism” in his letter. The accusation instead remains implied as Sokol concludes this section of the letter with the rhetorical question “why was I refused permits.”<sup>42</sup>

Notably, a Jewish academic from Kiev followed this same pattern of only *implying* anti-Jewish discrimination in reevacuation decisions in a letter that specifically identified antisemitism as the reason for his dismissal from the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. On May Day 1944, A. S. Kabalkin wrote the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine for answers to a previous reevacuation request from a group of “former scientific workers,” including himself:

In our appeal we asked about reevacuation to Kiev, to native places. An answer was not given to us on this matter. We feel it our duty and right to urgently ask you to allow us to return to the homeland, to Ukraine, where we were born, where we lived, worked, defending Soviet land from the enemy. I am surprised, because this legal, understandable desire has not yet been satisfied.<sup>43</sup>

Kabalkin’s characterization of this reevacuation request as “legal” and a “right” implied that Ukrainian authorities acted unlawfully by impeding the group’s return. The reason for this infringement also remained implicit as Kabalkin then turned his attention to “the

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<sup>40</sup> Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry since the Second World War*, 5, 7–11.

<sup>41</sup> A. A. Sokol to JAC, [7 February 1945?], GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 1055, l. 37.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> A. S. Kabalkin to Secretary of the CC CP(b)U Kirichenko, 1 May 1944, in TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 863, ark. 3.

mass dismissal of scientific workers from membership of the Academy of Sciences of the UkrSSR,” nearly all of whom Kabalkin identified as Jews.<sup>44</sup> This seemingly abrupt transition, together with the letter’s concluding plea to “help me *return to work* in [my] native Kiev,” indicates that Kabalkin rightly associated the reevacuation problems he and other “scientific workers” experienced with their dismissals.<sup>45</sup> It follows, then, that Kabalkin applied his explanation for these dismissals to the group’s reevacuation troubles as well:

I, having observed this whole “process” of dismissals, have in no way dismissed the belief, that not everything was plain, that the nationalistic factor plays a certain role and not a minor one after all. Everything subsequently not only did not dissuade, but all the more confirms me in this belief. Should I be silent? Considering, that antisemitism is an evil, which should be battled, I put forward and will put forward this question.<sup>46</sup>

By explicitly condemning the influence of antisemitism on the group’s dismissal from the Academy of Sciences while leaving a similar causality in the reevacuation process implicit, Kabalkin still adhered to the trend of Jewish petitioners to avoid directly attributing reevacuation decisions to antisemitism in their appeals to Communist Party officials.

Letters such as those by Kabalkin, Sokol, and Trakhtenberg remain unclear as to whether their authors viewed such implied manifestations of antisemitism as a localized or larger issue. This may reflect, in part, the limited frame of reference within which most Jews would have approached this question. The nature of the official reevacuation process made it likely that Jews’ earliest encounters with anti-Jewish prejudice would come from the local authorities in Ukraine to whom they applied for permission to return. Antisemitic expressions on the part of

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., ark. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., ark. 6 [my emphasis].

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., ark. 4.

the regional authorities to whom Jews could then appeal would not necessarily undermine the assumption that antisemitism was effectively a local problem. Only conversations with Jews from other areas could provide the framework necessary to understand the nature of antisemitism in Ukraine, or in other Soviet republics, as a whole. With their familial circles decimated and dispersed by war, genocide, and evacuation, it likely would have proven difficult for most Jews to maintain such wide-ranging contacts during this period. The partially paralyzed Sokol, for example, could not easily travel, while his family members could not judge the situation in Ukraine while they remained in evacuation. Obviously, other Jews in the Belaia Tserkov' area who might have interacted with Sokol at this time were likely to have similar stories of their mistreatment by the president of the city's executive committee, again reinforcing the local nature of antisemitism. Sokol's only point of broader comparison, then, seems to have been his experience on the front, where he "fought arm-in-arm with Ukrainian, Russian, and other comrades"—presumably without experiencing tensions or prejudice.<sup>47</sup> Some Jews, of course, may have suspected that antisemitism was not only a local problem but hesitated to make such claims based on their own rather limited experiences and due to their awareness of the limits of political speech.

Some evidence indicates that members of the Jewish intelligentsia, and particularly those associated with the JAC, expressed different opinions on the nature of antisemitism in the USSR due to their connections with Jews across the Soviet Union. As the only central Jewish institution in the USSR, the JAC became the "address" to which Soviet Jews directed their concerns at this time. Requests for reevacuation assistance appear to have been one of the two

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<sup>47</sup> A. A. Sokol to JAC, [7 February 1945?], GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 1055, l. 38.

most common topics in letters sent to the JAC and its individual members.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Jews may have been more likely to admit to encountering antisemitism to a *Jewish* institution than they would to representatives of general Soviet governmental institutions. JAC leaders, then, were in a position to hear about the experiences of Jews in different parts of the USSR, and they seem to have recognized antisemitism as a widespread problem. The Yiddish poet Perets Markish purportedly had attached a deeper significance to Jews' reevacuation problems as early as November 1944, when another JAC member and informant claimed that Markish made "politically incorrect and even harmful statements" at the recent JAC plenum meeting, including one in reference to this issue "that Jews again are in the ghetto."<sup>49</sup> The JAC's assertion that "[reevacuation] will not resolve the bulk of the problems in the structure [*ustroistva*] of the Jewish population of the USSR," as discussed at this chapter's beginning, likely reflected its leadership's recognition of the reevacuation and other problems then encountered by Soviet Jews.<sup>50</sup> Over two years later, the JAC demonstrated its continued concern over the "reevacuation process" as it applied to Jews—including their "housing arrangements" upon reevacuation—in a letter requesting reports on this issue from Soviet Information Bureau correspondents in specific Ukrainian and Belorussian *oblasti* "where compact masses of the Jewish population reside." The JAC's deputy secretary, S.M. Shpigel'glias, added weight to this request by noting that these issues "interest the Jewish foreign press," implying that the Soviet regime risked negative

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<sup>48</sup> Among other examples, see GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 917, l. 23; GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 908, l. 93; and GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 1056, l. 68-69. Requests for assistance with housing problems represent the other most common issue appearing in Soviet Jews' letters to the JAC.

<sup>49</sup> Bregman to S. A. Lozovskii, 27 November 1944, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, l. 204.

<sup>50</sup> S. M. Mikhoels, Sh. Epshtein, and I. Fefer to V. M. Molotov, 21 February 1944, in RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, l. 169.

publicity abroad if it displayed insufficient attention to the problems encountered by Jewish reevacuees.<sup>51</sup>

### **“To reconquer apartments”: Housing Disputes**

While the reevacuation process could be lengthy and difficult, more significant problems confronted many evacuees after they had returned to Ukraine and discovered they had inadequate or even no housing. This problem, compounded by authorities’ failure to limit the return of citizens in numbers that the devastated housing stock could accommodate, plagued returnees of all backgrounds. The circumstances of the Holocaust, however, left Jews particularly vulnerable to homelessness upon their return to Ukraine while frequently pitting them against their non-Jewish neighbors in struggles over apartments and personal property.<sup>52</sup> Such disputes proved to be extremely contentious issues capable of inciting, magnifying, and uniting the post-liberation concerns of Jews as well as any tensions between them and their non-Jewish neighbors. Disputes over Jewish property invariably involved the thorny issues of looting and collaboration and thus could raise troubling questions about individuals’ wartime actions. The resolution of disputed property cases, moreover, could have potentially dire material consequences for the losing parties in this time of scarcity. More importantly for postwar Soviet

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<sup>51</sup> The Soviet Information Bureau, or Sovinformburo, was the USSR’s central news agency as well as the supervisory institution to the JAC and the other wartime “antifascist” committees. Letter from Deputy Secretary of the JAC S. M. Shpigel’glas to Commissioner of the Sovinformburo’s Correspondent Network Colonel Rizin, 11 June 1946, in GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 1058, l. 2.

<sup>52</sup> The use of the term “property” here serves as a convenient shorthand for both personal belongings and immobile property (such as apartments or homes) from a perspective that privileges physical possession of and personal (or affective) ties to the “property” in question over its legal status. Defining property in this way corresponds to the tension that often existed between an individual’s understanding of the property he or she possessed or used and the actual status of that property under Soviet law, with its ideologically-informed hostility to private property. Petitioners routinely referred to their “own” homes, for example, even when those homes legally belonged to the state or to some collective.

society as a whole, however, disputes over property could signify larger conflicts over an individual's inclusion in a neighborhood, city, or some other type of community.

In the occupied regions of the Soviet Union, the Nazis had expanded their Europe-wide policy of looting Jewish property by targeting the non-Jewish population as well, although Jews still bore the brunt of the plundering.<sup>53</sup> While a community's Jews remained alive, the Nazis subjected them to extraordinarily high monetary levies. Nazi military and civil authorities, as well as individual soldiers, also demanded an array of property ranging from kitchen utensils to clothing to living space from Jews under their "protection." After the murder and flight of an area's Jews, of course, any remaining valuables and property could be confiscated.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, two of the three "major characteristics" that Mordechai Altshuler has identified as "unique" to the Holocaust in the Nazi-occupied USSR—"the murder of Jews just a short time after the occupation; [and] their extermination in close proximity to their homes"—allowed locals to partake of the plunder together with the Nazis and to enjoy their new living quarters or material goods for a few years before the return of Soviet authority and the Jews threatened their gains.<sup>55</sup> As Yitzhak Arad notes in an article on the plunder of Soviet Jews' property, Nazi officials sometimes sanctioned this plunder in order to support their personally-appointed local governors, policemen, and other collaborators. Orders occasionally stipulated that the Jews' confiscated possessions and homes go to locals in need—particularly ethnic Germans—or to non-Jews evicted from their own dwellings during the establishment of ghettos.

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<sup>53</sup> A document collection detailing Nazi crimes in Soviet Ukraine, for example, contains extensive evidence of "The economic pillage of the Ukrainian and other peoples of the Soviet Union, including the removal of priceless cultural treasures." Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR, Institute of State and Law, *Nazi Crimes in Ukraine 1941-1944: Documents and Materials* (Kiev: Naukova Dumka Publishers, 1987), 9.

<sup>54</sup> Yitzhak Arad, "Plunder of Jewish Property in the Nazi-Occupied Areas of the Soviet Union," *Yad Vashem Studies* XXIX (2001): 121–148.

<sup>55</sup> Mordechai Altshuler, "The Unique Features of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union," in *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1995), 185.

At other times, Nazi administrators sold Jews' confiscated apartments to their non-Jewish neighbors, strengthening the latter's sense of proprietorship. Many locals also looted the property of Jews and settled into their homes without the Nazis' explicit approval, including those without official ties to the new regime.<sup>56</sup> Since so much of the property plundered from Jews remained in their original neighborhoods, then, Jewish survivors and returned evacuees could hope to recover some of their possessions.<sup>57</sup>

The number of Soviet Jews who experienced difficulties in obtaining or reclaiming living space or personal belongings after the liberation remains unclear. Certainly, in most cases, necessity compelled Jewish survivors and returnees either to repossess their prewar homes (if they remained standing) and any property left therein, or to acquire different housing and material necessities. Only those determined to live in looted and abandoned but physically intact neighborhoods and villages, such as the tailor Tsigelman from Brailov, could return to their former residences without delay.<sup>58</sup> Naturally, those Jews who secured living space and other desired property with minimal problems, as well as those who refrained from communicating their difficulties in writing, appear in the sources infrequently. However, similar concerns about housing and personal belongings surface frequently enough in the sources to suggest that a significant number of Jews encountered problems relating to these important issues.<sup>59</sup> Members of the Jewish Antifascist Committee evidently reached a similar conclusion in May 1944 when their chairman, Solomon Mikhoels, issued an appeal to Vyacheslav Molotov to “[u]ndertake urgent measures to eliminate all abnormal phenomena regarding Jewish survivors in the liberated

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<sup>56</sup> Arad, “Plunder of Jewish Property,” 131–132, 134–135, 138–142.

<sup>57</sup> Some of the more involved collaborators—particularly policemen—left the occupied Soviet territories with the retreating *Wehrmacht* and possibly with some of their private plunder. *Ibid.*, 133–138.

<sup>58</sup> Efim Gekhman, “In My Hometown (Brailov),” 31, 36.

<sup>59</sup> Of course, property disputes between Jews and non-Jews occurred in other Soviet Republics as well toward the end of World War II.

regions, to regulate their legal situation, *to return their homes and property*, [and] to obtain employment and material aid for them.”<sup>60</sup> In requesting the adoption of “*urgent measures*” throughout the USSR’s newly liberated territories—rather than in specific cities, regions, or republics—this plea points to the pervasiveness of such problems among Soviet Jews even after the Nazis’ retreat.

While not subject to the same exterminatory measures as their Jewish neighbors, non-Jews living in the Axis-occupied territories also endured the deprivations of life in a war zone and found themselves displaced and dispossessed of their belongings as the war drew to a close. Many of those left homeless by the war could not hope to reclaim their homes for they had been destroyed. Personal belongings proved vulnerable to this general destruction as well as to the Nazis’ exploitative economic policy in the occupied USSR.<sup>61</sup> When their homes remained standing, however, non-Jews were much more likely than their Jewish neighbors to retain possession of them and of their other belongings. In such circumstances, non-Jewish Communist Party members and forced laborers deported to Germany likely endured the highest rates of displacement and dispossession, but family members of the latter typically remained to watch over homes and belongings, while the former—when they survived—enjoyed priority in recovering or obtaining property after liberation.<sup>62</sup> Finally, with the possible exception of other minority groups, non-Jews attempting to recover looted property toward the war’s end would not

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<sup>60</sup> S. Mikhoels and Sh. Epstein to V. M. Molotov, 18 May 1944, document 46 in Shimon Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* ([New York]: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 244 [emphasis mine].

<sup>61</sup> The document collection *Nazi Crimes in Ukraine* contains extensive evidence of “The economic pillage of the Ukrainian and other peoples of the Soviet Union, including the removal of priceless cultural treasures.” Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR, Institute of State and Law, *Nazi Crimes in Ukraine*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Shortly before the Nazi invasion of the USSR, the German Armed Forces High Command authorized the routine execution Communist Party members, and political commissars in particular, with the so-called “Commissar Order.”

have faced the prejudice that complicated similar efforts by Jews. More often, then, the nature of the Nazi occupation appears to have put non-Jews in the position of having to defend their claims to newly acquired property at the war's end rather than having to recover prewar belongings.

Obviously, material need and greed cannot be overlooked as possible motives of either the non-Jews clinging to their new homes or of the Jews trying to reclaim them. Living space in the Soviet Union's major cities had been in short supply before the Nazi invasion, and the destruction wrought by the war only increased the severity of the housing shortage in the formerly occupied areas. Unsurprisingly, then, the newest occupants of homes subsequently claimed by their returned Jewish owners often refused to vacate. Such non-Jews often represented the first significant barriers to Jews' plans to reestablish a presence in their prewar hometowns, as some Jews attempted to evict these interlopers themselves.

Several Jews embroiled in housing disputes certainly imputed the baser of these potential motives—greed—to their non-Jewish adversaries. One B. S. Milver, for example, made the following causal observation on interpersonal relations in Vinnitsa in mid-1944: “Part of the local population is not especially friendly towards the re-evacuated, because disputes arise over the return of apartments and demands for the return of plundered property when it is found.”<sup>63</sup> Moshe Prives, a Polish Jewish refugee and subsequent detainee in the Soviet labor camp network, found a similar situation in newly-liberated Kharkov, where a “national conflict” had erupted over the issue of looted property.<sup>64</sup> A significant number of Kharkov's Jews apparently managed to evacuate before the Nazis had entered the city, and Prives claimed that in their absence, the “Ukrainians occupied their homes, shops, workshops, [and] they ransacked

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<sup>63</sup> B. S. Milver to Sh. Epshteyn, 14 July 1944, document 35 in Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 226.

<sup>64</sup> Moshe Prives, *Uzniek nadezhdi*, trans. Efraim Baukh (Jerusalem: Israel Journal of Medical Sciences, 1994), 197–198.

everything that could be.” When local Jews returned after the liberation and attempted to recover their belongings, they found that “the Ukrainians don’t want to return anything.”<sup>65</sup>

Emiliia Borisovna Kotlova of Kiev issued a more direct and personal charge of greed against her former neighbor in a letter seeking the assistance of renowned writer, war correspondent, and JAC member Ilya Ehrenburg with her own dispute: “That neighbor, who denounced me to the Gestapo, settled into my apartment and took all my belongings. She lives in luxury with my goods....”<sup>66</sup>

Jews returning to the Ukrainian countryside perceived the same greed factor at work among the non-Jews who had occupied their homes, even though the latter would not have faced the extreme housing shortage so common in the metropolitan areas. Thus, one member of what had been an all-Jewish *kolkhoz*, or collective farm, in Ozet village before the war wrote to Ehrenburg that the farm’s “entire inventory and property was plundered by several ‘kind’ neighbors” from whom he and fellow reevacuees repossessed their homes “only after great difficulty.” Disputes apparently remained over other belongings, however, for this *kolkhoznik* also lamented the farm’s current condition, claiming that the new “leaders think only about preserving what they plundered, not about the harvest.”<sup>67</sup> In early September 1944, Major Ruvim Markovich Oksenkrug wrote to Ehrenburg of four families who had recently encountered similar problems returning to their homes in what previously had been another Jewish agricultural colony. The new occupants of one of these farmers’ homes purportedly “drove him

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>66</sup> “Kak ia spaslas’ ot Gitlera. Vospominaniia uchitel’nitsy Emilii Borisovny Kotlovoi (iz pisem I. G. Erenburgu). 1945 g.,” in *Neizvestnaia chernaia kniga*, ed. Yitzhak Arad, T. Pavlova, and I. Al’tman (Jerusalem, Moscow: Tekst, 1993), 54.

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous to [JAC], [undated], document 38 in Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 228.

from the courtyard” when he arrived not to repossess the home but simply to store some items in the on-site shed.<sup>68</sup>

Although some proved hesitant to use the word “antisemitism” when documenting such issues, Jews certainly made the connection between this prejudice and the problems they experienced in securing housing upon their return to Ukraine. A Holocaust survivor from Odessa made this connection explicit in an emotional letter he wrote to Ehrenburg on June 22, 1944 describing the distressing conditions in which Jewish Odessans remained even after the city’s liberation. The letter writer addressed the issue of antisemitism almost immediately, providing his own ironic explanation for the recent resurgence of anti-Jewish sentiment in the city: “Admittedly, antisemitism, at least Odessan [antisemitism], does not especially worry me, because I characterize it only as a manifestation of love for Jewish belongings and, since they have in fact been plundered already, it is natural to think, that the lovers of such belongings will soon realize, that there is no longer any cause for the demonstration of hostile feelings toward the Jewish nation.” The writer then noted that demands by Jewish survivors and reevacuees for the return of their property further inflamed this greed-driven antisemitism by “perturb[ing]” the current non-Jewish possessors of the belongings in question. The biting ironic tone of these comments, however, together with the missive’s other remarks on bureaucratic as well as popular indifference toward the Jews’ plight, suggest that their author feared the more serious implications of this “Odessan” antisemitism. Indeed, far from feeling comfortable in his home city, the writer claimed to be “suffocating in an atmosphere, poisoned by fascist propaganda,” a reference that clearly identifies the current anti-Jewish environment as a legacy of the Axis

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<sup>68</sup> Major Ruvim Markovich Oksenkrug to Ilya Ehrenburg, 4 Sept. 1944, letter 14 in Mordechai Altshuler, Yitzhak Arad, and Shmuel Krakowski, eds., *Sovetskie evrei pishut Il'e Erenburgu, 1943-1966* (Jerusalem: Prisma-Press, 1993), 150–152.

occupation.<sup>69</sup> In representing antisemitism as a local problem and attributing its presence to the influence of Nazi or Romanian propaganda, these comments are representative of the approach Jews followed when discussing antisemitism in the post-liberation period. Such an approach acknowledged both the inability of most Jews to comment on conditions beyond their locales and the sensitivity required when broaching the subject of antisemitism in the Soviet Union, where, officially, such prejudice no longer existed. The political propriety of such an explanation notwithstanding, long-time Jewish residents of Soviet Ukraine may well have interpreted their postwar experiences with antisemitism accordingly, particularly given the stark contrast between the Soviet regime's generally positive nationality policy before the war and the Nazi's genocidal one.

The connection between greed and antisemitism depicted by this Odessan survivor also indicates how quickly the efforts of Jewish returnees to recover their prewar homes and looted belongings became a target of non-Jews' animosity. Housing difficulties in particular could affect anyone in the liberated regions, of course, and disputes over housing typically evoked the more general tensions between evacuees and those who remained on occupied territory.<sup>70</sup> The Jewish component in these tensions, however, became magnified and attached to specifically anti-Jewish tropes. A feuilleton by the Ukrainian writer Ostap Vyshnia, published in *Radians'ka Ukraina's* August 21, 1946 issue, itself serves as an illustration of how widespread this negative association of Jews with housing woes had become. The piece, titled "Allow me to make a mistake!" and ostensibly about the writing process, generated a good deal of controversy for its disparaging remarks aimed at an unspecified segment of the population understood to be Jews.

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<sup>69</sup> Anonymous to Ilya Ehrenburg, 22 June 1944, letter 9 in *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>70</sup> Blackwell, "Regime City of the First Category," 64, 238.

Referring to the point in a literary work's development when the characters had largely been formed, Vyshnia wrote that "It was already clear to some extent, who fought on the front, who in Fergana or in Tashkent, who, having returned, will restore and renovate, and who will trade in beer or carbonated drinks and reconquer apartments."<sup>71</sup> Vyshnia's reference to those "who fought on the front, who in Fergana or in Tashkent" alludes to the widespread stereotype of Jews as cowards who avoided military service and spent the war in the safety of the rear—the so-called "Tashkent partisans."<sup>72</sup> By making this allusion, Vyshnia clearly signals to his audience that he is criticizing Jews in this entire sentence. The association of Vyshnia's unnamed characters with small traders further confirms that Jews are the subject of the sentence. This sentence, then, effectively presents Jews as interlopers who prey on the rightful members of Soviet society by performing unproductive labor and stealing their apartments. The fact that it appeared almost randomly in a seemingly unrelated context, moreover, lends the remark a carelessness that suggests its wider acceptance.

Readers of *Radians'ka Ukraina* recognized this anti-Jewish message and a number of them protested it in letters sent to the paper's editor and to various Party institutions. While not every letter used the word "antisemitism," enough did so to make this subtext clear even in letters that evaded this central issue. The letters typically rebutted each of the points raised by Vyshnia in that single sentence: Jewish military participation, the value of labor, the intent behind reevacuees' return, and the housing issue. Like Jews' requests for reevacuation and housing, these protest letters emphasized individuals' attachment to their home places and their right to return to them, as well as their right as Soviet citizens to housing. Some writers referred

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<sup>71</sup> Ostap Vyshnia, "Dozvol'te pomilitis'!", *Radians'ka Ukraina*, August 21, 1946, 166 (7600) edition, 3.

<sup>72</sup> Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 192, 221–222.

specifically to the August 1941 law guaranteeing the return of prewar homes to the families of soldiers who had enlisted by the time of their evacuation. Others claimed similar entitlements for those who had labored in essential industries while in evacuation. Writers also invoked the Soviet government's own pronouncements and laws on equality to support their arguments.<sup>73</sup> In addition, several writers condemned the editors of *Radians'ka Ukraina* for printing such inflammatory remarks in the official organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine. Altogether, enough complaints were voiced that *Pravda*, the union-wide newspaper, printed a retraction and commentary on Vyshnia's piece in its August 29 issue, which *Radians'ka Ukraina* ran the following day.<sup>74</sup>

Vyshnia's public attack on Jews' membership in Soviet Ukrainian society and the response it provoked—particularly his comments concerning the housing issue—also suggests that both Jews and non-Jews placed a more symbolic importance on disputed property as well, a conclusion that other evidence supports. Like many other Jewish reevacuees, M. Mamud returned to Odessa to find his apartment occupied and the new resident unwilling to leave. Instead of seeking temporary shelter elsewhere, Mamud camped out by the doorway for at least seven days—a display that nevertheless failed to earn him an invitation indoors from the neighbor. Mamud acknowledged in his letter to Ehrenburg that “All this is nonsense in comparison with what the Germans did,” but the fact that he invoked such a contrast at all is

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<sup>73</sup> Among others, see I. A. Lev to the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the All-union Communist Party and to the Editor of *Pravda*, [August 1946], in TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 41, spr. 15, ark. 166; M. B. to the editor of *Radians'ka Ukraina*, [August 1946], in TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 2812, ark. 2-6; and Nikolai Shevchuk to the editor of *Radians'ka Ukraina*, 31 August 1946, in TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 41, spr. 15, ark. 150-151.

<sup>74</sup> “Nepravil'yi vystup gazety ‘Radians'ka Ukraina’,” *Pravda*, 29 August 1946; and “Nepravil'nyi vystup gazety ‘Radians'ka Ukraina’,” *Radians'ka Ukraina* 172 (7606), 30 August 1946, pg. 4.

significant.<sup>75</sup> This statement, closing a letter that began by describing the mass shooting of local Jews and the plunder of their property, implicitly compares the disregard and contempt currently shown to Mamud by his erstwhile neighbors to the murderous attention he would have received from the Nazis. Having escaped that latter denial of his spatial and physical belonging, Mamud refused to let the comparable “nonsense” of the former continue to impede his belonging in the community. Mamud’s days-long sojourn outside his doorway thus served as a very visible assertion of belonging in his home and in his hometown, while the neighbor who appropriated his apartment effectively denied Mamud’s spatial belonging in Odessa as a whole by preventing him from promptly reestablishing physical belonging there in the form of housing.

More contentious disputes that attracted random participants demonstrate non-Jews’ exploitation of housing and property disputes to deny spatial belonging to Jews even more clearly, and represented a strategy whose success depended upon the antisemitic sentiments of others. A September 1944 state security, or NKGB, report on “antisemitic manifestations in Ukraine” summarizes two incidents in which Jews attempting to recover their possessions or apartments encountered violence from individuals otherwise uninvolved with the disputes at hand. One incident occurred when a Jewish army sergeant arrived at his prewar apartment in Kiev to recover unspecified possessions but not the apartment itself. According to the report, the new resident, Dmitrii Mikhailovich Khomenchuk, “refused to give up the things and raised a shout, that Jews were beating him. At the noise neighbors came running, including Krupko Vera and Khomenchuk Ul’iana, who attacked the sergeant with knives and forks, trying to deal him blows.”<sup>76</sup> While Dmitrii Khomenchuk obviously misrepresented the situation, those who

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<sup>75</sup> M. Mamud to Ilya Ehrenburg, 10 Aug. 1944, letter 12 in Altshuler, Arad, and Krakowski, *Sovetskie evrei pishut Il’e Ehrenburgu*, 148.

<sup>76</sup> [“Special Report on Antisemitic Manifestations in Ukraine,” 13 Sept. 1944], in TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 1363, ark. 6 [capitalization of surnames changed here].

responded to his call for help certainly would have seen that only one Jew was present and that Khomenchuk was not in danger, yet they still proceeded to attack him. Ul'iana Khomenchuk, admittedly, likely was related to the apartment's current occupant and thus had a material interest in the dispute, but presumably Vera Krupko was not, nor were the other neighbors who assembled and watched the attack. This attack, coupled with the refusal to return the belongings in question, conveyed to the sergeant that these non-Jews considered him an unwelcome intruder in both the building and the community.

A larger and more violent crowd conveyed this same message to a Jew reclaiming an apartment in the city of Dnepropetrovsk that August. According to the NKGB report, Iuzef Markovich Petelevich had obtained authorization from the public prosecutor to move into his former apartment, currently occupied by a woman named Pelageia Tikhonovna Orlova. Although authorities had assigned another apartment to Orlova, she refused to vacate Petelevich's apartment at the appointed time and raised a commotion that attracted an estimated audience of 200 people. These onlookers supported Orlova by shouting such antisemitic slurs as "Beat the Yids, save Russia," "Death to the Yids," and "They killed thirty-seven thousand Yids, and we will finish off the rest."<sup>77</sup> Four individuals—including an army sergeant, a local policewoman, and Orlova's sister—emerged as the crowd's primary instigators and reportedly "provoked the crowd to finish off the Jew Petelevich," who was then assaulted by two rock-bearing women.<sup>78</sup> After venting their fury on Petelevich, this group then turned its attention to

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., ark. 5. This final chant presumably refers to the estimated number of local Jews killed by the Nazis. It is unclear if this figure simply was exaggerated or included deaths in the surrounding countryside, as recent estimates put the number of Jews murdered in Dnepropetrovsk at around 20,000-30,000. See A.N. Farimets, "Dnepropetrovsk," ed. I.A. Al'tman, *Kholokost na territorii SSSR: entsiklopediia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009), 274; *The Holocaust Chronicle* (Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International, 2003), 272, 273.

<sup>78</sup> ["Special Report on Antisemitic Manifestations in Ukraine," 13 Sept. 1944], in TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 1363, ark. 5.

the nearby apartment of another Jew: “the specified group of persons fetched the crowd, broke open the door and, entering the apartment, danced and began to break the furniture to the accompaniment of antisemitic shouts.”<sup>79</sup> Apart from Petelevich, only Orlova and, by extension, her sister had any personal investment in this disputed apartment, yet Petelevich’s legal attempt to move in and evict Orlova in the process apparently infuriated a large number of nearby non-Jews. This crowd’s menacing chants and the attacks its leaders initiated not only against Petelevich but also against the property of a random Jewish target, then, cannot be attributed to such a base motive as greed but rather to a desire to deny Jews the physical objects or spaces that would confer on them a sense of belonging in the community. Indeed, the crowd’s actions even suggested that Jews’ very existence in the community could not be tolerated.

### **“The Question of Resettlement”: Finding a New Home**

In arguing that a significant number of long-time Jewish residents of the Ukrainian SSR endeavored to return to their prewar homes after the Nazi occupation and firmly asserted their rights to do so through 1948, this chapter does not presume that all Jews followed this pattern. The postwar period witnessed continued population shifts and movements involving Jews as well as other ethnic or national groups. Some Jews never returned to Ukraine following its liberation but remained further east in the Soviet Union, some found themselves living in Ukraine for the first time, and many established new homes elsewhere within Ukraine’s borders. Several thousand Jews who first came under Soviet authority between 1939 and 1941, moreover, were encouraged to leave and received official permission to do so as part of the ethnically-ordered population transfers between the Ukrainian SSR and its western neighbors, including Poland,

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., ark. 6.

Czechoslovakia, and Romania.<sup>80</sup> As a consequence of these various moves in the postwar period, “the already-urban Jewish community became a metropolitan population,” which Mordechai Altshuler characterizes as “[c]oncentrations of more than 100,000 Jews.”<sup>81</sup>

Altshuler contends that the majority of Jewish reevacuees to Ukraine “did not return to their former places of residence because of the continuing antisemitism they encountered there and also because many could not bring themselves to live on the site of their families’ slaughter.”<sup>82</sup> While these considerations doubtlessly influenced some Jews’ decisions to seek new homes and explains the general trend of Jews’ migration to large cities, the evidence presented in this chapter suggests that Altshuler may have overstated his case, at least as applied to Ukrainian Jews in the immediate post-liberation period. In addition, a large number of Jewish evacuees hailed from cities, a factor that facilitated their successful evacuation attempts in the first place. Cities also offered more opportunities for skilled laborers and professionals, as well as a more anonymous haven for those who returned without the required permissions from authorities—important considerations for any returnee.

Interest in large-scale plans to resettle Jews in comparatively compact settlements may offer a better indication of the degree to which antisemitism in particular influenced individuals’ decisions to relocate during this period. As mentioned previously, this issue was one of the factors that prompted the JAC to propose the creation of a “Jewish Soviet Socialist Republic” in the Crimea. JAC leaders specifically addressed manifestations of antisemitism and the responses they generated among Soviet Jews, including the “growth of nationalistic and chauvinistic

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<sup>80</sup> Mordechai Altshuler, “The Soviet ‘Transfer’ of Jews from Chernovtsy Province to Romania, 1945-1946,” *Jews in Eastern Europe* 36 (1998): 54–75; and Jerzy Kochanowski, “Gathering Poles into Poland: Forced Migration from Poland’s Former Eastern Territories,” in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 135–54.

<sup>81</sup> Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry since the Second World War*, 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

feelings among some strata of the Jewish population,” in the February 1944 letter presenting the Crimea proposal.<sup>83</sup> One of the main reasons the letter provided for Crimea’s selection as the site of a future Jewish SSR—it “conforms to the requirements in relation to the spaciousness for resettlement”—also points to the significance of antisemitism by implicitly suggesting it would be less of an issue in a more sparsely-populated region.<sup>84</sup> It is not clear if the JAC’s leadership had learned of Stalin’s impending expulsion of the Crimean Tatars before submitting this proposal, but this mass deportation would soon lower the peninsula’s population density even more.<sup>85</sup> Despite the JAC’s support for this proposal, which would help seal the fate of its leading members after 1948, the committee continued to intercede on behalf of Soviet Jews determined to reestablish their lives in their prewar home places.<sup>86</sup>

Although plans to establish a Jewish SSR in the Crimea never went far and the JAC initially expressed little enthusiasm for resettling Jews in the Far East’s Jewish Autonomous Region (JAR) of Birobidzhan, the JAR’s leaders aggressively promoted the latter initiative among Ukrainian Jews in 1947-1948. In August 1947, two leaders of the JAR’s local government bodies requested the assistance of Lazar M. Kaganovich, then secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party’s Central Committee, in carrying out the JAR *oblast’* committee’s (*obkom*) resolution to “send a group of workers from the party-soviet apparatus of the *oblast’* to Ukraine to conduct explanatory work in places with concentrated Jewish populations about the prospects for development of the Jewish Autonomous *Oblast’* and to identify those wishing to

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<sup>83</sup> S. M. Mikhoels, Sh. Epshtein, and I. Fefer to V. M. Molotov, 21 February 1944, in RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, l. 171.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>85</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 45.

<sup>86</sup> Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, eds., *Stalin’s Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee*, trans. Laura Esther Wolfson, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

resettle there on a voluntary basis.”<sup>87</sup> Birobidzhan’s communist leadership ultimately hoped to entice between 12,000 and 15,000 Jewish families to relocate to the *oblast'* and contribute to its “cultural-economic development” (*kul'turno-khoziaistvennoe razvitie*). In addition to sending representatives to speak with Ukrainian Jews, JAR officials hoped to organize public meetings and press coverage to reach Jews living in multiple Ukrainian *oblasti*.<sup>88</sup> Notices appeared in *Eynikayt* (“Unity”), the JAC’s Yiddish-language newspaper, as well.<sup>89</sup>

Several hundred Jewish families eventually left Ukraine for Birobidzhan. Memorandums and letters between different governmental agencies typically stressed the voluntary nature of this resettlement effort, even referring to the participants as “those wishing to resettle” (*zhelaiushchikh pereselit'sia*).<sup>90</sup> At least on paper, authorities arranged all of the details for transporting Jewish resettlers and some of their belongings to the JAR, providing them with financial compensation for the move, and ensuring provisions for their rations en route to the Far East.<sup>91</sup> The extent to which housing and employment pressures, interethnic interactions, or some sense of Jewish ethnic or national identity influenced individuals’ decisions to relocate to Birobidzhan after the war remains unclear from the sources available, although Robert Weinberg’s study of migrants’ comments in the local newspaper, *Birobidzhanskaya zvezda* (*Birobidzhan Star*), suggests the primacy of economic considerations to resettlers.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ia. Sheinin and A. Gershkov to L. M. Kaganovich, 18 August 1947, in TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 594, ark. 3.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, ark. 3-4 [quote on ark. 3].

<sup>89</sup> Memo from G. Zhits, 14 April 1947, in GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 1122, ll. 74.

<sup>90</sup> Memo from Liunkis to *Eynikayt*, 13 July 1947, in GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 1056, l. 100.

<sup>91</sup> Provisions for resettlers from Kherson and Nikolaev *oblasti* and from the Crimea, for example, may be found in Council of Ministers of the USSR Resolution No. 3823, 16 November 1947, GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 923, ll. 136-138.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Weinberg, “Jewish Revival in Birobidzhan in the Mirror of ‘Birobidzhanskaya Zvezda’, 1946-49,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 26, no. 1 (1996): 35–53.

## **Conclusion**

The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that after enduring war, occupation, and genocide, Soviet Jews—like most other Soviet citizens uprooted during World War II—simply wanted to return home. For many Jews who had lived in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic before 1939, this typically entailed returning to their prewar hometowns, even though the realities of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union meant that these homecomings were rarely joyous ones. Indeed, despite a high degree of awareness of the general fate met by Jews who had remained on Nazi-occupied territory, the Jews under consideration here still displayed strong affective ties to their “native places” and the memories attached to them. The determination these Jews displayed in attempting to return to their places of origin and reestablish their homes there following the liberation, then, should not be surprising.

A number of Jewish returnees themselves appear to have been surprised, at least initially, by the displays of antisemitism they encountered in the course of their homecomings. While some Jews eventually suspected that individual Ukrainian officials discriminated against them when making reevacuation decisions, anti-Jewish sentiment most often became visible when Jews attempted to recover their prewar homes and belongings. Greed and material necessity certainly played a role in such property disputes between Jews and non-Jews, but these factors quickly became intertwined with antisemitic stereotypes. This linkage encouraged the transformation of such interethnic property disputes into symbolic struggles over Jews’ inclusion, or exclusion, in a given community. In extreme cases, these prejudicial concerns motivated non-Jews with no material interest in the disputes at hand to intervene in actions targeting Jewish claimants.

Given the limits of their own experiences and the ideological context, most Jews appear to have interpreted such manifestations of antisemitism as individual, local, or at most regional problems influenced by Nazi propaganda. Even when they proved reluctant to explicitly attribute perceived discrimination to antisemitism, however, Ukrainian Jews responded by articulating their belonging, as Soviet citizens, to the relevant community. Their appeals and petitions to authorities confirm that they expected higher Soviet authorities to defend their rights accordingly in the immediate post-liberation period.

## CHAPTER TWO: SUSPECT LABOR

Re-imagining the period from 1943-1948 as one of possibilities is particularly important when considering the issue of anti-Jewish discrimination in the workplace, the subject of this chapter. Such allegations were taken seriously by those involved, since the “workplace” represented both the key to respectability and subsistence in the USSR and a vital space of unavoidable interactions between Jews and non-Jews. As with other developments that affected Soviet Jews negatively during the mid-1940s, cases of suspected anti-Jewish discrimination in employment during these years have traditionally been portrayed as precursors to the more severe cases that occurred from 1948-1953. These included the economic trials of Jews accused of theft, bribery, and speculation; the targeting of the Jewish intelligentsia as “rootless cosmopolitans;” and the popular response to the Doctors’ Plot, which made all Jewish doctors suspect. A resurgence of economic trials aimed at Jews also occurred in the early 1960s under Khrushchev. When the evidence from mid-1940s is considered on its own terms, however, rather than as signs of what was to come, the image of employment discrimination against Jews that emerges is a contradictory and individual one formed in the absence of any central directives, subject to the personal decisions and prejudices of local employers and officials, and sometimes based on educated guesses as to the latest interpretations of Soviet nationality policies. Allegations of discrimination made by both Jews and non-Jews were based first and foremost on basic socioeconomic considerations, although accusations of cooperation with the Nazis or Romanians and longtime associations of Jews with unproductive labor, respectively, also influenced complaints and denunciations.

## **Soviet Labor**

As the fundamental principle in Marxist ideology and its many derivations, labor was central to the platform of the Bolshevik Party long before the revolution that brought it into power. The early Bolshevik Party styled itself as the “vanguard of the proletariat,” the oppressed working class epitomized by the urban industrial worker. The demographic realities of what remained an overwhelmingly agrarian society in 1917 compelled the state to incorporate the peasantry—at least rhetorically—into its proletariat power base, although many leading Bolsheviks continued to harbor suspicions regarding the peasantry’s ideological sympathies for years to come. To help ensure the success of a proletarian revolution in a country without much of a proletariat, the Bolsheviks ascribed class identities to their subjects and deprived those newly designated as class enemies of various rights. Into the 1930s, then, the past work performed by individuals and their family members—or rather, their alleged relationship to labor and the means of production—justified the disenfranchisement of large segments of the Soviet population.<sup>1</sup> At different times, the social background of these disenfranchised people (*lishentsy*) subjected them to additional attacks that threatened their current educational and employment prospects and the benefits associated with them, such as housing and rations.<sup>2</sup> The *lishentsy* only became enfranchised citizens with the promulgation of the 1936 Constitution, popularly known as the Stalin Constitution, although class background remained a vulnerable point for individuals throughout the Stalin period.

Soviet law emphasized an individual’s right and duty to work, and the state enforced these principles with palpable consequences for all involved. Article 118 of the 1936

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<sup>1</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (New York: Routledge, 2000), 20–46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

Constitution proclaimed that “Citizens of the U.S.S.R. have the right to work, that is, the right to guaranteed employment and payment for their work in accordance with its quantity and quality.”<sup>3</sup> As with the previous constitution of 1918, however, the citizen’s obligation to work was presented as more fundamental than the right to work itself. Article 12 thus declared that “Work in the U.S.S.R. is a duty and a matter of honour for every able-bodied citizen, in accordance with the principle: ‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat.’ The principle applied in the U.S.S.R. is that of Socialism: ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.’”<sup>4</sup> In practice, this principle condoned a differential pay scale as well as the significant benefits awarded to certain categories of workers, effectively creating a privileged stratum consisting of the intelligentsia and the bureaucratic elite.<sup>5</sup> Every worker also had the duty “to maintain labor discipline,” as enshrined in Article 130.<sup>6</sup> The consequences for those who failed to meet these obligations could be severe. As discussed in the first chapter, entitlement to living space frequently depended upon one’s employment. During periods of rationing, which included most of the war and post-war years (1939-47), an individual’s position and field of work directly determined the level of rations she or he received. Those accused of violating labor discipline or stealing socialist property risked being condemned to years in the Gulag.

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Stalin, *On the Draft Constitution of the U.S.S.R.: [Report Delivered at the Extraordinary Eighth Congress of Soviets of the U.S.S.R., November 25, 1936]*, Library of Marxist-Leninist Classics (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1950), 118.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 72–73.

<sup>5</sup> The classic critique of this stratum, often referred to as the *nomenklatura*, is Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957). Also see Julie Hessler, “Cultured Trade: The Stalinist Turn Toward Consumerism,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (New York: Routledge, 2000), 184, 198–199; and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1988), chap. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Stalin, *On the Draft Constitution of the U.S.S.R.*, 123.

## Jewish Labor

In some respects, the labor performed by Jews had concerned Soviet leaders since the early days of the Bolshevik Revolution. Tsarist-era restrictions on the rights of Jews—which, among other things, prohibited them from owning land, confined their residence to a compact territory known as the Pale of Settlement, and limited their educational opportunities—resigned many to lives as petty traders, merchants, peddlers, craftsmen, and artisans. While the revolution brought an end to such restrictions, the Bolsheviks’ economic policies and especially their war on trade affected Jews negatively by putting petty traders and merchants out of work or forcing them to work illegally. Nevertheless, many Jews remained in these traditional occupations in the 1920s. During the resurgence of private trade during the period of the “New Economic Policy,” approximately 70-78 percent of traders surveyed for the 1926 census in Ukraine were Jewish.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, many of these traders were disenfranchised because of their “capitalist” endeavors. Given the high number of Jewish artisans, merchants, and peddlers, this meant that “Over 40 percent of shtetl inhabitants were barred from voting in 1927 elections in Ukraine [and] in 1926-1927, nearly a third of the Jews in all of Ukraine were ineligible to vote” due to their status as *lishentsy*.<sup>8</sup>

Communist policymakers and especially the leadership of the *Evsekttsiia*, the Jewish Section of the Communist Party, attempted to address these problems by transforming Jews into productive laborers, particularly as agriculturalists. With the financial support of foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations, a number of Jewish agricultural colonies were established throughout the traditional centers of Jewish settlement in Belorussia and Ukraine, as well as in

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<sup>7</sup> Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 124n78.

<sup>8</sup> Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present*, 2nd exp. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 92–93.

the Crimea and in Russia's Far East, where a "Jewish Autonomous Region" was eventually established.<sup>9</sup> However, it was not until the industrialization campaign launched at the end of the 1920s that significant numbers of Soviet Jews began moving first from small towns to cities and then into new professions, including industry. Already in 1930, the percentage of Jewish industrial workers in the Soviet Union was 16.3%, and by 1939 had increased to 30%, nearly the same as the percentage of workers in the general population (32.6% in that year).<sup>10</sup> This new economic mobility, along with an end to tsarist-era restrictions on the number of Jews in higher education, also resulted in an increase in the number of educated Jewish professionals.

Although many Soviet Jews remember the 1920s and 1930s as a time when an individual's ethnicity or nationality no longer mattered, anti-Jewish sentiment did not disappear.<sup>11</sup> Particularly in the 1920s, Jews were subjected to occasional verbal and even physical assaults at work, school, and in other public places. Economic envy of Jews also followed them into their new occupations. As Benjamin Pinkus has noted, "At the time of Jewish settlement in the Crimea, there was an outcry that the best land was being handed over to the Jews and that they were getting the best-paid posts. The old envy of 'the successful Jews' now assumed the form, 'They're being given everything at the expense of the Russian people.'"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan L. Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land: Jewish Agricultural Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924-1941* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); Allan L. Kagedan, *Soviet Zion: The Quest for a Russian Jewish Homeland* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); and Robert Weinberg, *Stalin's Forgotten Zion: Birobidzhan and the Making of a Soviet Jewish Homeland: An Illustrated History, 1928-1996* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 95.

<sup>11</sup> These sentiments reappear in oral histories of Ukrainian Jews conducted after 1991. For examples, see Iosif Shubinsky, interview by Ella Orlikova, December 2001, <http://centropa.org/index.php?nID=30&x=bGFuZlF9zZWxlY3Rvcj0xOTE7IHNIYXJjaFR5cGU9QmlvRGV0YWl1OyBzZWZyY2hWYWxlZT0zMDY7IHNIYXJjaFNraXA9MTA=>; and Anna Ivankovitsker, interview by Ella Levistkaya, June 2002, <http://www.centropa.org/index.php?nID=30&bioID=148>.

<sup>12</sup> Pinkus, *Jews of the Soviet Union*, 86.

Most discussions of employment discrimination against Soviet Jews during and immediately after World War II are based on hearsay. The use of such anecdotal evidence often reflects the paucity of sources available to scholars before the collapse of the Soviet Union and the difficulties involved in researching such a topic even in the days of relatively open archives. For example, Yehoshua Gilboa's treatment of employment discrimination in his classic study, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry, 1939-1953*, relies on word-of-mouth evidence, as this excerpt demonstrates:

A Jewish woman, a longtime Communist and underground fighter, was advised "as a friend" by Khrushchev to rewrite her curriculum vitae, as required by the Party's personnel department, and continue using the forged Aryan papers with which she had concealed her Jewish identity during the occupation, if she wished to keep her job in the secretariat. It is reported that just before the end of the war, the Party Center in Moscow circulated a secret and carefully phrased directive to the local branches, urging them to take account of the anti-Semitic mood prevailing as a result of the German occupation, and refrain from employing Jews in key positions.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the basic questions of reliability, authenticity, and typicality that such sources raise, hearsay and accounts of personal experiences lend themselves more easily than other types of sources to backshadowing, a tendency made particularly problematic by the more systematic discrimination that occurred after 1948. This chapter attempts to counter this problem by considering documented allegations of discrimination—or the lack thereof—made between 1943 and 1948 by Jews in professions targeted during the period of state antisemitism from 1948 to 1953: culture workers and medical professionals. It also examines two categories of workers most likely to encounter employment discrimination in the mid-1940s—scientific workers and agricultural workers—as well as the widespread stereotype of Jews as unproductive laborers.

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<sup>13</sup> Yehoshua A. Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry, 1939-1953*, trans. Yosef Shachter and Dov Ben-Abba (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 37.

## Culture Workers

In many respects, culture workers comprised the most vulnerable category of Jewish workers toward the war's end. The close links between members of the Jewish creative intelligentsia, moreover, facilitated a heightened awareness of this vulnerability among leading Jewish cultural figures. Accordingly, Mikhoels, Fefer, and Epshteyn framed this issue as one factor necessitating the establishment of a Soviet Jewish republic in the Crimea in their February 1944 letter to Stalin on that proposal:

In the second place, in view of the extraordinary growth among the fraternal peoples (of the USSR) of national cadres who are building their own cultures, a significant part of the intelligentsia of Jewish nationality, which previously worked in various fields of national culture of the fraternal peoples, are increasingly finding less use for their energies. This leads to a lack of suitable employment for a large part of the intelligentsia.

The intelligentsia of Jewish nationality could utilize to the utmost the cultural energies which it has amassed over the ages to build Jewish Soviet culture, which already has great achievements. However, the dispersion of the Jewish population, which amounts to an insignificant minority in all republics, does not permit the possibility of achieving this.<sup>14</sup>

This letter's use of the passive voice to characterize the current underemployment of Jewish culture workers obscures the reasons why these *intelligenty* "are increasingly finding less use for their energies." As the sources analyzed in this section suggest, the "growth...of national cadres who are building their own cultures" that JAC leaders highlighted in this letter enabled cultural policymakers to act on concerns about Jews' capacity to produce and represent (non-Jewish) culture. The consequences of prewar Soviet nationalities policy and the Holocaust, of course, also contributed to the precarious postwar prospects for Jewish culture workers.

As the following chapter discusses in more detail, the mass closure of Jewish cultural

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<sup>14</sup> Translation in Shimon Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* ([New York]: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 265.

institutions in the mid- to late-1930s threatened the livelihoods of Yiddish writers, journalists, and actors even before the Nazis decimated the audience for their works. Wartime hardships only compounded the difficulties faced by Jewish culture workers, and by writers in particular. As a JAC petition to Shcherbakov from April 1943 noted of evacuated Yiddish writers, “The situation of these writers...is difficult in the extreme. Some of them have no living quarters, clothing, or any means for their existence.”<sup>15</sup> The liberation of Ukraine failed to improve the situation of some writers, as a group letter from the Yiddish writers N. G. Lur'e, G. M. Orland, Der Nister, and A. Iu. Gontar' to Andrei Zhdanov, Central Committee Secretary and executor of Soviet cultural policy, demonstrates:

We, Yiddish writers of Ukraine, evacuated at the same time together with all writing organizations, in the period of reevacuation seem to be in an exceptional situation, which has forced us to appeal to you in this letter. At the time of the return of writers of Ukraine to their home places, the leadership of the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine explained to us, that in the coming years the reconstruction of Jewish cultural institutions in Kiev is not expected and therefore Yiddish writers in Ukraine will not have a base for the development of creative works, the realization of their works. Hence, apparently, from this, our apartments in the home of writers were passed on to Ukrainian writers.<sup>16</sup>

This last line emphasizes the significance of employment in the Soviet Union. Refused reevacuation and the resumption of their prewar positions in Ukraine, these men also lost their rights to the housing and other benefits provided by the Ukrainian Writers' Union. As a result, these writers found themselves “literally [*bukval'nom smysle*] homeless” in Moscow, where they currently lived, and requested that Zhdanov help secure one-room apartments for each writer and his family.<sup>17</sup> Although this copy of the letter was undated and not filed with any response, at least two of these writers appear to have returned to Ukraine not long after sending this letter:

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<sup>15</sup> Translation in *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from N. G. Lur'e, G. M. Orland, Der Nister, and A.I u. Gontar' to A. A. Zhdanov in GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 792, l. 153.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

Lur'e visited the Dnepropetrovsk region in the fall of 1944 on JAC business, and A. Gontar' served as *Eynikayt's* correspondent for the Kiev region from at least 1944.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, the Russian translation of one of Gontar's pieces for *Eynikayt*, titled "Returning to Native Kiev," celebrates the return of several Jewish writers to Kiev, including David Gofshtein, Itsik Kipnis, and Abram Kagan, and names four others who would be returning "shortly."<sup>19</sup>

While the assessment of Jewish culture's future in Ukraine that these writers reported ultimately proved accurate, the state continued to support Soviet Yiddish culture at some level through 1948, when the Yiddish Section of the Ukrainian Writers' Union was disbanded. The JAC also did its best to assist writers by providing them with employment, serving as a literary agent, and interceding with authorities on their behalf. In fact, the circumstances these writers described to Zhdanov may have reflected contemporary tensions and disputes within the Ukrainian Writers Union more than any directives coming from the all-union Writer's Union or another central cultural agency. A special report from the Ukrainian NKVD to Ukrainian Party Secretary Khrushchev in March 1943 noted that "extreme discontent with the leadership of deputy senior secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine Rybak has been observed on the part of the main mass of Ukrainian writers."<sup>20</sup> The report asserted that, notwithstanding allegations that Rybak abused his authority, the writer's nationality was the real issue:

...[T]he main point of all discontent is connected with his [Rybak's] national membership [*natsional'noi prinadlezhnost'iu*]. Around this goes a mass of all sorts of judgments and antisemitic manifestations. Characteristic in this light is the view of movie director Aleksandr Dovzhenko: 'The little Jew has done much damage to Ukrainian culture. They hated us, hate us and will hate us. They try everywhere to squeeze through and take everything in their own hands. The fact

<sup>18</sup> See Lur'e's report on the situation of Jews in the Dnepropetrovsk and Stalinskii raiony of Dnepropetrovsk oblast', c. Sept. 1944, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.28 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 139, ll. 385-388ob].

<sup>19</sup> USHMM, RG-22.028M.73 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 163, l. 103].

<sup>20</sup> Special Report from Sergienko, UkrNKVD, to N. S. Khrushchev, Secretary of the TsK KP(b)U, 22 Mar. 1943, in TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 685, ark. 82.

that the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine is led by the rotten little Jew  
[*parshivyi evreichik*] Rybak is outrageous.<sup>21</sup>

Comments by other writers quoted in the report echo this dissatisfaction with the fact that “a Jew runs Ukrainian literature.”<sup>22</sup> The report’s conclusion that removing Rybak from his position “would to a considerable extent promote improvement in the atmosphere in the [U]nion of [S]oviet [W]riters of Ukraine” clearly sanctions discrimination according to nationality in this one case.<sup>23</sup> Since this report was produced while the Ukrainian Writers’ Union was still in evacuation, it is possible that similar reasoning influenced the union’s decision to deny reevacuation to Lur'e, Orland, Gontar', and Der Nister, particularly as this would have involved apportioning them apartments from the capital’s devastated housing stock that otherwise could go to ethnic Ukrainian or Russian writers.

Although this evidence supports the case for discrimination against *individual* Jewish writers only, interethnic tensions apparently remained strained within the Ukrainian Writers’ Union after the institution’s return to Kiev. As Yiddish writer I. Kipnis complained to Stalin in the first half of 1945 regarding the treatment of Jewish writers in the union, “In Kiev before the war the two strongest groups [*otriada*] were the Ukrainian, and then the Yiddish.... Before the war the Yiddish writer was in no way separated in his creative moral and material rights from his brothers of other nationalities. Now this is not the case.”<sup>24</sup> Social snubs purportedly directed at Jewish writers by their non-Jewish colleagues particularly incensed Kipnis, who claimed that “the Jewish brother is not invited to the festivities of the Ukrainian brother,” including the recent fiftieth-birthday celebration of Maksim Fadeevich Ryl'skii. Kipnis explicitly compared this

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., ark. 84.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., ark. 87.

<sup>24</sup> TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 41, spr. 3, ark. 16-17.

conduct to the ideals of Soviet nationality policy and the friendship of the nations, noting that, “My generation, educated in the best that Lenin and Stalin taught us, does not understand from where comes this turn, this sudden, noticeable estrangement. Being in one organization, meeting in one room, we are not even separated in a separate section, but feel like strangers.”<sup>25</sup>

Determining the extent to which other Jewish writers would have agreed, at least privately, with this assessment is difficult. During one of the interrogation sessions that followed his arrest in month 1949, Kipnis reportedly told the investigator that “like other representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia, I expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that after the German occupiers were driven out, in Ukraine and, particularly, in the city of Kiev, Jewish cultural and educational institutions were being revived only very slowly.”<sup>26</sup> Kipnis subsequently named David Hofshstein, Abram Kagan, and Riva Baliaska as those sharing this view.<sup>27</sup> According to Mordechai Altshuler, however, even before the war Kipnis’s personality and his failure to adhere to the dictates of socialist realism had earned him severe criticism and “kept him distant from public activity and detached from the circles of Yiddish writers.”<sup>28</sup> Kipnis inspired a new controversy in May 1947 when his story “Without thinking, without calculation” [*On khokhmes, on khesboynes*] appeared in an unauthorized and uncensored form in the Polish-Yiddish weekly *Dos naye lebn*. Published almost a year after Zhdanov’s infamous critique of literature lacking in Soviet values, this story’s portrayal of a Ukrainian who betrays a Jewish woman to the Nazis and for its concern over the Jewish identity of two children saved by a Ukrainian peasant woman brought renewed charges of Jewish nationalism against Kipnis. The fallout from this scandal

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., ark. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Interrogation protocol from 29 Aug. 1949, translated by Mordechai Altshuler, “Itzik Kipnis - The ‘White Crow’ of Soviet Yiddish Literature: The MGB File of 1949,” *Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe* 53, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 119.

<sup>27</sup> Interrogation protocol from 2 Sept. 1949 in Ibid., 121.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 72.

isolated Kipnis even further. The Yiddish literary establishment, represented by the Yiddish Section of the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine and given voice by *Eynikayt*, swiftly responded by condemning Kipnis and recommending his expulsion from the Writers' Union. Nevertheless, Kipnis retained his union membership until after his arrest two years later, a delay that Altshuler attributes to the union leadership's fear of additional charges of Ukrainian nationalism and antisemitism.<sup>29</sup> The fact that Kipnis retained his union membership also assisted the Yiddish literati's defense of Soviet policy against allegations made in the American Yiddish newspaper *Forverts* that Kipnis's case epitomized the current repression of Jewish culture in the USSR.<sup>30</sup>

### **Scientific Workers**

Letters sent to party officials and to JAC chairman Solomon Mikhoels in the mid-1940s indicate that Jewish scientific workers in certain Ukrainian academic institutions experienced systematic discrimination when these institutions prepared to return from evacuation. A letter sent to Mikhoels around this time provides a frank assessment of the situation in one institution that merits quoting at length here:

At the time of the reevacuation to Kiev of the Kiev Polytechnic Institute, temporarily located in Tashkent, [and] included in the Central Asian Industrial Institute, from the lists of persons for reevacuation, were, for reasons unknown to me, excluded a number of scientific workers.

In the number of those found themselves excluded are docent, *kandidat* of Sciences Grinberg, docent Notkin..., senior professor Epshtein, *kandidat* of sciences Laifer, Sporgonskii, Treivish, Gal'traf and others.

As luck would have it, it turned out that from the overall number of scientific workers, excluded from the lists, composed, it seems of 16 people, the majority are Jews by nationality.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 77–85.

<sup>30</sup> See the editorial "Upside Down" by Itsik Fefer in *Eynikayt*, Aug. 9, 1947 (no. 533). A Russian translation of this letter as well as other documents relating to this scandal can be found in TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 640.

There are only two non-Jews – professors Lundersgauzan and still one [other] person – by birth German.

Although the possibility that in our country, in which the principle of equality of nations, affirmed by the constitution, is clear to every schoolchild, may be found an actively working antisemite seems absolutely out of question, in searches for the reasons that the overwhelming majority of those excluded are Jews, the theory about manifestations of antisemitism is supported.

The majority of those excluded from the lists are valued workers, [and] talented scientists....<sup>31</sup>

Jewish scientific workers employed by the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in other institutions also found themselves excluded from reevacuation plans and, effectively, dismissed from their positions. As geologist Kalman Gershevich Bronshtein wrote in 1944 to the Ukrainian Central Committee's Agitprop Department regarding the selective reevacuation of the Academy of Sciences' personnel, "Among those left behind are over 80 people, the vast majority of whom are Jews, doctors, *kandidaty* of sciences and senior scientific workers."<sup>32</sup> Anatolii Semenovich Kabalkin, a *kandidat* of economic sciences, referenced a March 1944 appeal from "a *group* of former scientific workers of the Academy of Sciences of the UkrSSR" to Khrushchev in one of his own subsequent petitions to various authorities.<sup>33</sup> In his April 7, 1944 appeal to Georgii F. Alexandrov, secretary of the all-union agitprop department, Kabalkin also claimed to know that the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party "had received a number of appeals from other employees of the Academy Sciences" regarding these developments.<sup>34</sup>

As these quotations suggest, Bronshtein, Kabalkin, and others clearly attributed their dismissals from Ukrainian academic institutions to their nationality. Following his observation that Jews comprised the majority of the eighty-some people excluded from the Academy of

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<sup>31</sup> USHMM, RG-22.028M.232 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 905, l. 15]. This appears to be a copy of the original letter, and the signature was cut off from the page; this may also explain the letter's missing date.

<sup>32</sup> TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 863, ark. 1. An English translation of another part of this letter may be found in Blackwell, "Regime City," 354-355.

<sup>33</sup> TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 863, ark. 3; emphasis mine.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, ark. 2zv.

Sciences' reevacuation plans, Bronshtein noted, "It is difficult to accept, that only Jews appear to be the least qualified for scientific work in the Academy. Here we are face to face with a completely intolerable introduction of 'percentage norms.'" As a Jew who claimed to have worked in Ukraine since 1922, only a few years after the 1917 revolutions, Bronshtein would have associated such "percentage norms" with the tsarist regime.<sup>35</sup> Kabalkin raised similar concerns over the fact the most of the dismissed academics were Jews in his May 1944 letter to Secretary of the TsK KP(b)U Kirichenko, which came after "several" of his previous appeals to various Ukrainian and central authorities:

It is all known to me, as a propagandist, from party experience to speak about that our Bolshevik party always sensitively, without delay and sharply responds to any manifestation of nationalism and in particular, if they are found in either its ranks or in scientific organizations.

To me, having watched over this entire "process" of dismissals, [it is difficult to] give up from the belief, that not all was smoothly, that the national factor still plays a certain role and not a small one. Everything further not only did not dissuade, but all the more confirms me in this view. Should I be quiet? Considering, that anti-Semitism is an evil, with which one must fight, I place and will place this question.<sup>36</sup>

Both men rejected the reasons given for their dismissals as disingenuous rationalizations intended to obscure the antisemitic motives behind these large-scale firings.

Significantly, the unknown author of this letter did not write to Mikhoels to protest the discrimination he detailed at length, but rather to ask Mikhoels to reach out to a docent Notkin, who had become severely depressed and even suicidal in response to these developments—and particularly the dawning realization that "his forced departure from the Kiev Institute is because he is a Jew." The nature of this request, together with the bitterly ironic tone used to describe the situation that triggered Notkin's despair, suggests that the writer did not expect an appeal from

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., ark. 1-1zv.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., ark. 4.

Mikhoels to the proper authorities to have any effect on the anti-Jewish discrimination in question. Rather, he believed Mikhoels could prove most helpful by writing a heartening letter to Notkin, who purportedly admired Mikhoels “as a voluntary group activist, an artist, an actor and a person.”<sup>37</sup>

Despite his certainty that the Academy’s leadership had targeted Jews, as a group, Kabalkin apparently hoped that his appeals to authorities would lead, at the very least, to a review of his credentials and to his reinstatement with the Institute of Economics. Toward the end of his May 1944 appeal to Secretary of the TsK KP(b)U Kirichenko, Kabalkin details his research on the Donbass coal industry and notes the importance of that industry “now, in the third year of the great Patriotic war,” before asking, “Naturally and appropriately the question arises: in whose interests is the dismissal of a scientific worker – a communist, specializing in questions of Donbass coal?”<sup>38</sup> Together with this appeal, Kabalkin submitted a reference from fellow academician L. Ia. Iasnopol'skii, whose letter assured any reader that,

A.S. Kabalkin is sufficiently [*dostatochno*] acquainted with a number of questions of coal matters in the Donbass and has proved himself to be a sufficiently competent worker, specializing in the field. It would be a great pity if he had to be removed from work in the brigade of the AN UkrSSR for the reconstruction of the coal Donbass, where he could be considerably helpful.<sup>39</sup>

It is likely that Kabalkin sent this reference, dated August 25, 1943, along with some of his other petitions to authorities as well.<sup>40</sup> The significance of Iasnopol'skii’s reference and Kabalkin’s similar self-protestations lies in the reasoning behind such arguments—namely, that Kabalkin’s individual proficiencies could compensate for his Jewishness even in a situation marked by anti-Jewish employment discrimination. Such logic, in fact, facilitated the employment of talented

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<sup>37</sup> USHMM, RG-22.028M.232 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 905, l. 15ob].

<sup>38</sup> TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 863, ark. 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, ark. 9.

<sup>40</sup> See *Ibid.*, ark. 6 for a reference to this enclosure.

Jews in high-profile or highly sensitive positions even during such periods of heightened state anti-Semitism as the years 1948-1953 or in 1967 at the time of Israel's Six Day War.

While the Academy of Sciences dismissals appear to be the most significant and supported case of discrimination against Jews as a group during this period, even they were not absolute. Many Jews remained with the Academy and returned to Ukraine with their non-Jewish colleagues. Most of the academics dismissed from Kiev-based institutes in the mid-1940s, moreover, appear to have found employment elsewhere, although not necessarily in Ukraine. The unidentified petitioner concerned about docent Notkin's morale stated that some former employees of the Kiev Polytechnic Institute "remained in Tashkent at the Central Asian Industrial Institute, some of them have transferred to work in other cities – Moscow, Leningrad, Gor'kii. Two have come to Kiev for work outside the institute."<sup>41</sup> As of February 1944, when Bronshtein wrote his complaint to the all-Union agitprop department, the geologist remained in Ufa where he worked on a team searching for oil on the Second Baku platform.<sup>42</sup> Compared to the more publicized case of professional discrimination against Jewish doctors a few years later, the careers and reputations of the dismissed Jewish scientific workers were not destroyed, and at least some of them were quite assertive in protesting what they considered to be unfair and unconstitutional treatment.

### **Doctors**

For Nelli Mel'man, then finishing her studies at the Kiev Medical Institute, 1947 was the pivotal year for her professional struggles as a Jewish therapist, a narrative made explicit by the

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<sup>41</sup> USHMM, RG-22.028M.232 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 905, l. 15].

<sup>42</sup> TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 863, l. 1zv.

title of her published memoir, *Only Facts: Antisemitism in Institution [sic] of Education and Science*.<sup>43</sup> Despite an earlier reference to the visibility of antisemitism “at all levels [*na vsekh urovniakh*]” in newly-liberated Kiev,<sup>44</sup> Mel'man writes in her memoir that, “The first flourishing [*rastsvet*] of antisemitism that I identified with my own eyes I saw with the placement of our graduates.” That April, “Jews, including high achievers [*otlichniki*] and participants in the war, received the worst assignments. I also received one of the worst assignments, but I was not upset, because I believed that I would be assigned to scientific work.” Mel'man further notes that her parents were “not very surprised” at this turn of events, as “they knew of quite a few similar cases.”<sup>45</sup> Despite graduating with honors, Mel'man’s post-graduate application to the Department of Hospital Therapy was rejected on the grounds that there was a “more worthy candidate.”<sup>46</sup> Only the intervention of Maks Moiseevich Gubergrits, a distinguished professor of introductory therapy at the Kiev Medical Institute and head of the clinical department of the Institute of Nutrition whose patients included Polina Zhemchuzhina-Molotov and the family of Nikita Khrushchev, secured Mel'man’s place in the department of postgraduate and clinical studies.<sup>47</sup> Mel'man continued to experience problems that she attributed to antisemitism in the following years, however, including the rejection of her *kandidatskaia* dissertation.<sup>48</sup>

In mid-1946, Iakov Braul, a doctor of medicine and professor of pathology at the Crimean Medical Institute in Simferopol', also raised the issue of anti-Jewish discrimination in the Crimea, a region that would not become part of the UkrSSR until 1954 but had—unlike

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<sup>43</sup> The memoir itself is in Russian, but this English translation of the title is the one provided on the book’s title page. Mel'man immigrated to the United States in 1989. *Tol'ko fakty: Antisemitizm na puti k obrazovaniu i nauke* (New York: GSTANISLAV Company, 2004).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 54–58.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 61–65.

western Ukraine—experienced two decades of Soviet power before the war. In a letter addressed to Aleksandr Nikolaevich Poskrebyshev, Chief of the Special Department of the Central Committee, Braul reported that he just “had become convinced of the validity” of rumors circulating since his demobilization that “they do not hire Jews for work in the Crimea.” Braul, acting as a department head at the Crimean Medical Institute, decided to hire a “very well known capable pathologist” who also happened to be Jewish. The institute’s director, however, purportedly refused to approve the hire because the *oblast’* committee (*obkom*) recently had criticized the number of Jews in his employ.<sup>49</sup> Braul then turned to Il’ia Karpovich Dekhtiarev, a member of the institute’s Party bureau and head of the department of Marxism and Leninism, who allegedly told Braul that “he personally had heard from workers of the *obkom* that Crimea should be Russian and it was not necessary to hire Jews for work.”<sup>50</sup>

The Crimean *obkom* investigated Braul’s allegations and, in a report addressed to Zhdanov, refuted most of them. According to *obkom* secretary N. Solov'ev, Dekhtiarev “categorically denie[d] the allegations of Braul,” while the Crimean Medical Institute’s director asserted that the institute could not hire the Jewish pathologist recommended by Braul because he had “not yet been demobilized.”<sup>51</sup> The report also countered Braul’s claims of “‘persecution’ against Jews” by providing statistics showing the high proportion of Jews in the medical institute, where they purportedly comprised 37.5% of the junior faculty, 42.8% of the department heads and full professors, and 20% of the student body.<sup>52</sup> The real problem, the report argued, rested with the attitudes of Braul and like-minded Jews both inside the institute and in other professions. Director Dekhtiarev apparently used this strategy when denying Braul’s claim that

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<sup>49</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 405, l. 21.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 22.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 24 and l. 23, respectively.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 23.

he had told the latter that the institute could not hire another Jewish pathologist, as the report paraphrases his claims that “in the Medical Institute among the Jewish part of the workers is a great deal of elements of nationalism, which uses talk about antisemitism as a cover [*kotorye prikryvaiutsia razgovorami ob antisemitizme*]” and that “Braul himself is a nationalist and shields the sinister [*vrednuiu*] work of others with talk about antisemitism.”<sup>53</sup> The following page expanded upon this suspicion of a Jewish nationalist conspiracy by noting that, “The ‘Jewish’ question in the Crimea is not new. Before the war there was a Jewish Zionist society (pro-American) here, which had its own influence on this part of the population.” Even worse—at least from the perspective of the Crimean *obkom*—some of the institute’s Jewish professors had attended a November 1944 meeting of the Jewish religious community that had included Yiddish-language speeches of a “nationalistic and religious character.”<sup>54</sup>

### **Professionals**

In her memoir, Nelli Mel'man also blamed anti-Jewish discrimination for the premature end to her husband’s career in aviation. Efim (then Khaim) Abramovich Kaminker had studied at the Institute of Civil Aviation in Kiev and then at the School of Civil Aviation in Chardzhou, Uzbekistan before entering the Red Army, where he piloted a small transport plane that supplied munitions and other supplies to the front. After his demobilization, Kaminker unsuccessfully applied for readmittance into Kiev’s Institute of Civil Aviation. According to Mel'man, “It seemed to him that this was impossible by reason of his ‘suspect’ [*neblagonadezhnoi*] nationality.” Kaminker subsequently enrolled in the mechanics department of the Kiev

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., l. 24.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., l. 25.

Polytechnic Institute.<sup>55</sup> As with similar claims, it is impossible to verify whether Kaminker's nationality negatively impacted his postwar application to the Institute of Civil Aviation. This problematic example also relies not only on an individual's memory of an event over fifty years later, but on a second-hand account—Kaminker himself died shortly before his wife's emigration in 1989 and Mel'man dedicated only a few pages in her memoir to his biography. After recounting this incident and another from a few years later, in fact, Mel'man criticizes her late husband's tendency to be “very lenient toward all kinds of outrages, including antisemitism,” casting further doubt on how Kaminker interpreted his failed bid to reenter the aviation institute at the time.<sup>56</sup> Then again, Kaminker legally changed his first name from Khaim to Efim sometime after the war, when he had started going by the latter, more Russian name.<sup>57</sup> The institute's decision not to readmit a former student and veteran pilot, moreover, seems questionable. Based on other accounts of discrimination during these years, it is not unreasonable to accept that Kaminker and his inner circle might have attributed this outcome to anti-Jewish discrimination. Such perceptions, of course, shape reality.

### **Jewish *kolkhozniki***

A small but significant group of Jewish workers faced the loss of their homes and livelihoods by default when Soviet authorities neglected to rebuild Jewish agricultural settlements in the formerly occupied territories. Although a handful of these settlements traced their roots to tsarist-era reform efforts, most were established in the 1920s and 1930s as part of the Soviet regime's effort to normalize the status of Jews vis-à-vis other Soviet nationalities by

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<sup>55</sup> Mel'man, *Tol'ko Fakty*, 84.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–85.

granting them national territorial units and transforming them into productive workers—in this case, farmers. In theory, Jews constituted a majority among the residents of such rural settlements, which possessed Yiddish-language councils, courts, schools, and even presses.<sup>58</sup> The very names of these colonies proclaimed their Jewishness, with properly Soviet appellations in Yiddish such as Ershtmaisk (“May first”) and Kalinindorf (“Kalinin’s village”). Any actions inhibiting the return of Jews to their former homes in such officially Jewish locales, then, would seem to be denying Jews’ very belonging in these places—negating, in effect, the areas’ Jewish character.

Although the Soviet state eventually promoted the primacy of the Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan, established in 1928 in Russia’s Far East for strategic international and economic reasons, as the national homeland of Soviet Jewry, the agricultural colonies of southern Ukraine and the Crimea achieved considerable success with the support of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC or Joint). According to historian Jonathan Dekel-Chen, who has studied the Joint-supported colonies of southern Ukraine and the Crimea, when the Joint was forced out of the USSR “[i]n 1938, it left behind eighty-six demographically stable, prosperous Jewish kolkhozes in Crimea and approximately twice that number in southern Ukraine, under the reasonably competent leadership of state agencies. Barring the German invasion, the colonists might well have prospered for many years.”<sup>59</sup>

Despite the destruction of these colonies and a significant number of their Jewish residents during the occupation, these agricultural settlements represented the possibility of renewal for Soviet Jews, even inspiring the JAC’s proposal to establish a “Jewish Soviet

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<sup>58</sup> Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land*, 157–158; and Kagedan, *Soviet Zion*, 100–105.

<sup>59</sup> Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land*, 206.

Socialist Republic” in the Crimea. The evidence suggests, moreover, that at least some of these settlements could have been restored as demographically, and perhaps culturally, Jewish settlements if the political will to do so had existed. The agricultural settlements supported by the Joint in particular largely had escaped “the process of internationalization in Jewish kolkhozes elsewhere in the country” before the war, and Dekel-Chen has estimated that “perhaps up to 60 percent of all the former settlers who evacuated to Central Asia in 1941 voluntarily returned to the Crimean settlements between 1944 and 1946.”<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately, the state took no action to redevelop these Jewish agricultural settlements, and even proceeded to rename some of them. The Yiddish writer Perets Markish reportedly raised his concerns about these developments in a September 1944 meeting of the JAC’s presidium. According to Solomon Bregman, another member of the presidium who informed Solomon Lozovskii, the JAC’s Sovinformburo minder, of Markish’s “politically incorrect and even noxious [*vrednyi*] opinions,” Markish characterized the “[r]enaming of the agricultural districts – of Dnepropetrovsk *oblast'* to Stalinskii and Kalininskii (in place of “Stalindorf and Kalinindorf”)...as the abrogation of the Stalin Constitution.”<sup>61</sup>

Jewish *kolkhozniki* who returned to the Ukrainian countryside encountered many of the same problems as other Jewish returnees, and, as elsewhere, they turned to local authorities for assistance when their own attempts to recover prewar plots and belongings failed. To Jews, such a means of recourse would have seemed promising since authorities served as on-site representatives of a state committed to equality and rule of law. Local functionaries also belonged to the communities in which they served, however, and in some cases they acted to

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 204 and 193, respectively.

<sup>61</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, l. 204.

police the boundaries of those communities by attempting to exclude Jews. These competing ties of legality and locality—complicated, no doubt, by the challenges of rebuilding war-torn regions—combined to produce the rather ambivalent responses displayed by local authorities as a group to property disputes between Jews and non-Jews.

A well-documented example of how authorities' collective ambivalence toward dispossessed Jews shaped disputes over material and spatial belonging occurred in southern Ukraine, where returning Jews faced a rather unwelcoming atmosphere created by some local residents and authorities. According to Major Oksenkrug, non-Jewish residents and authorities in the village of Ershtmaisk and the town of Kalinindorf ignored multiple written requests from evacuated Jewish inhabitants for passes to come home. Such permits authorized citizens' relocation in what remained a time of war, effectively confirming that their services were not needed elsewhere. An unspecified number of Jews who nonetheless managed to return—including a "Rukinglaz, Rubin and others"—took their cases to the chairman of the larger Kalinindorf district, who allegedly dismissed them: "Why did you come, who needs you, no one called for you."<sup>62</sup> Moreover, in Ershtmaisk, returned *kolkhoznik* Grisha Belyi purportedly "had to forcibly evict the new inhabitants from his own home, since the local authorities didn't take any measures [to do so]."<sup>63</sup> Other reevacuees faced similar problems, as mentioned earlier.

If the prospect of making an unauthorized return to a home now occupied by others was not enough to make Jewish evacuees and survivors reconsider returning to Ershtmaisk and Kalinindorf, these settlements provided ever-present reminders of the Holocaust. The pit holding the bodies of over 700 Jews from Ershtmaisk remained uncovered and unfenced when

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<sup>62</sup> Oksenkrug to Ehrenburg, 4 Sept. 1944, 151-152; quote on 152.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

Oksenkrug visited at the end of August 1944, while in Kalinindorf two roads crossed through the antitank ditch serving as the final resting place for some 2,500 Jews. In addition, no one had attended to the smaller graves of those executed individually, which also remained without fences or monuments. “Such treatment of the victims’ graves demoralized the arrivals among the reevacuated residents and the entering officers and soldiers of the Red Army,” Oksenkrug reported.<sup>64</sup> Even worse, Oksenkrug charged that several local Nazi collaborators remained in the area, including the steward of a collective farm in Ershtmaisk who purportedly “took an active part in the mass shootings of Jews and was an active accomplice of the Germans.”<sup>65</sup> Regardless of the truth of these allegations, they must have created fear among Jewish survivors and reevacuees who were aware of the tragedy that had taken the lives of their friends and family members and experienced unexpected hostility from some officials and neighbors.

The language and content of Oksenkrug’s letter to Ehrenburg strongly suggests that the major—himself a prewar Jewish resident of Ershtmaisk—considered the treatment of the area’s Jews as part of a larger attempt by Soviet authorities and local looters of Jewish property to impede the return of Jews to the area. While greed and the need to secure basic necessities may partially explain why non-Jews refused to vacate homes previously belonging to Jews, such motivations cannot necessarily be ascribed to the local officials who ignored Jews’ requests for return permits or for help in reclaiming prewar living space. Only callousness toward the dead, at best, or a more calculated attempt to intimidate returning Jews, at worst, would seem to account for the condition of the still open mass grave in particular, a public health threat that additionally compromised the victorious ideology then current. That such insults and injustices

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 152.

occurred in what had been a Jewish agricultural colony before the invasion made them even more offensive.

Ehrenburg may have agreed with such an assessment, for in response to Oksenkrug's missive he sent at least three letters to local and regional authorities whose responses provide another view of contemporary events in Ershtmaisk and Kalinindorf. A certain Bugrov, the chairman of the executive committee of the district encompassing Ershtmaisk, took a somewhat defensive tone in his reply to Ehrenburg, which opens with a list of "the...work in creating living conditions for returning residents of our district [which] is being carried out by local soviet authorities."<sup>66</sup> According to Bugrov, such measures included providing reevacuees with housing and other material assistance as well as employment. Bugrov justified local authorities' policy of allowing wartime residents to remain in their newly appropriated homes until the former inhabitants returned, at which time he claimed that local authorities "quickly evict [the unlawful occupants] and they give the homes to the real owners."<sup>67</sup> Bugrov also noted that the secret police had arrested the Nazi collaborator named by Oksenkrug and that authorities had issued orders to tend to the graves of the Nazis' victims.<sup>68</sup> Bugrov did not address the issue of Jews' neglected requests for permits to return to Ershtmaisk, possibly for lack of an appropriate explanation given the otherwise irreproachable account he provides of regional authorities' interactions with reevacuees.

The response Ehrenburg received from the new secretary of the Kalinin district committee regarding the problems encountered by Jews returning to Kalinindorf, by contrast, largely corroborated Oksenkrug's account and indicated that the committee had instituted

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<sup>66</sup> Bugrov, Snegirev district, to Ilya Ehrenburg, Moscow, [Sept. or Oct. 1944], letter 14a in *Sovetskie evrei*, 152.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-153; quote on 153.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

corrective measures. Secretary Ustiukov claimed that the process of issuing permits for return to the district had changed since September 1 and would eliminate the delays previously experienced, and he also pointed to Kalinindorf's current housing shortage in explaining the difficulties initially caused by reevacuees' attempts to recover their homes.<sup>69</sup> These were Ustiukov's only attempts to excuse the issues apparently raised in Ehrenburg's letter, however, for he immediately proceeded to acknowledge that, "Many reevacuees, turning to the district council to chairman comrade Polovko, didn't receive due response and help." Ustiukov proceeded to assure Ehrenburg that "now all these matters have been settled and all reevacuees have received their homes and live in them, with the exception of two householders, who in the near future—2-3 days—will receive their homes...."<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, after discussing Ehrenburg's letter at a recent meeting, the district committee's governing bureau ordered the chairman "to settle in a two-day period issues about the return of homes to owners arriving from reevacuation, and to respond more sensitively to the complaints of workers." The bureau also censured the chairman and the former secretary for "behav[ing] formally toward the ordering of the graves of those killed at the hands of the fascist invaders" and established a commission to oversee such work, which Ustiukov indicated would include closing the roads going through the mass grave.<sup>71</sup>

Finding themselves under the scrutiny of Ehrenburg, an influential public figure, the authorities responsible for Ershtmaisk promptly insisted that reevacuees now received proper treatment and those with jurisdiction over Kalinindorf acknowledged past problems that were in the process of being solved. The available sources do not indicate whether or not the authorities

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<sup>69</sup> Ustiukov, Kalinin district, to Ilya Ehrenburg, Moscow, 12 Oct. 1944, letter 14b in *Sovetskie evrei*, 154-155.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

in question indeed altered their treatment of returning Jews, but the various displays of bureaucratic hostility, negligence, and eventual contrition evident in this case certainly conveys an image of local authorities acting ambivalently—or at least without unified direction—in regard to property disputes. As Oksenkrug’s letter intimated that a significant number of evacuated Jews desired to return to the region late in the summer of 1944 and talk of establishing a large Jewish autonomous settlement in the Crimea also circulated at this time, it is reasonable to question whether such official ambivalence—combined with potentially hostile popular attitudes toward returning Jews—contributed to the demise of these distinctly Jewish districts after the war.<sup>72</sup>

As in other cases, both the Jews seeking help and those who tried to assist them consistently employed certain tropes in an effort to demonstrate their worthiness to society while simultaneously casting doubt on the virtues and politics of their antagonists. References to an individual’s or family member’s military service appear throughout the letters both to define those in need as honorable Soviet citizens and to highlight the injustice of their current treatment. Reevacuees and survivors who could not point to their own military service or to that of a close relative emphasized their belonging to the greater Soviet community in terms of their productive labor. A *kolkhoznik* from Ozet who wrote to the JAC for assistance in recovering his property proudly noted that he had “participated in the founding of this kolkhoz” and that his fellow Jewish *kolkhozniki* had “put a lot of labor into the soil and achieved good harvests.” This Jew further bolstered his own labor credentials with details of his political participation in the village.<sup>73</sup> In contrast to his own self-image as a new Soviet Jew, this *kolkhoznik* claimed that

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<sup>72</sup> Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land*, 194-196.

<sup>73</sup> Anonymous to [JAFIC], [undated], 227-228; quote on 228.

during the occupation, “A certain Zinchenko in particular distinguished himself, by hanging Jews and partisans (he has now been executed) but this didn’t prevent his brother Nikolay Andreyevich Zinchenko from becoming chairman of one of the *kolkhozes*.”<sup>74</sup> As noted above, Major Oksenkrug also alleged that several local collaborators with the Nazis continued to live undisturbed in Ershtmaisk.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, when writing about another case, Kiva Veksel'man concluded his letter to Ehrenburg by requesting an investigation into the identity of Ivan Drozdov, the man who allegedly thwarted Veksel'man’s efforts to recover his former apartment. As Veksel'man wrote, “According to several residents, he [Drozdov] was a recruiter of workers to Germany.”<sup>76</sup> Such accusations of treason cast suspicions on individuals’ loyalties and the legitimacy of their belonging in the community.

### **The Value of Labor**

Clearly, the issue of labor productivity that had concerned Soviet and Jewish leaders in the 1920s resurfaced in postwar discussions about Jews and their occupations. As discussed in chapter one, disabled Jewish veteran Aron Arkad'evich Sokol complained to the JAC that Malashkevich, the *gorispolkom* president in Belaia Tserkov', had derided the labor performed by Jews, saying “I don’t need a Jewish *kolkhoz* here and in general here there are enough Jews, who come here in order to trade at the bazaar.”<sup>77</sup> This statement curiously combined the long-standing stereotype of Jews as petty traders, which coincided with official Soviet values on the nature of productive labor, with contempt for the interwar drive to productivize Jews by transforming them into agriculturalists. Ukrainian writer Ostap Vyshnia relied on more

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>75</sup> Oksenkrug to Ehrenburg, 4 Sept. 1944, 152.

<sup>76</sup> Veksel'man to Ehrenburg, [Aug. 1944], 150.

<sup>77</sup> A. A. Sokol to JAC, [7 February 1945?], GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 1055, l. 37.

traditional associations of Jews with unproductive labor when he wrote of postwar society, “It was already clear to some extent, who fought on the front, who in Fergana or in Tashkent, who, having returned, will restore and renovate, and who will trade in beer or carbonated drinks and reconquer apartments.”<sup>78</sup> By associating the stereotype of Jewish cowards, the so-called “Tashkent partisans,” with the image of Jews as small traders, Vyshnia effectively presents Jews as interlopers who prey on the rightful members of society by performing unproductive labor and stealing their apartments.

Some readers of *Radians'ka Ukraïina* protested this anti-Jewish message, attacking each of Vyshnia’s points. One of these letters, signed by three engineers—two of them with identifiably Jewish surnames—attacked the larger implications of Vyshnia’s criticism of those who “trade in beer or carbonated drinks,” asking: “What is criminal in the sale of beer or water? And are all sellers of beverages really thieves, and therefore this is a shameful occupation? But it is known that these jobs are given only to disabled veterans or families of the fallen. And they are all thieves, or so O. Vyshnia has revealed. Or should we give up water because of Vyshnia?”<sup>79</sup> It is significant that while these engineers firmly reject the criminality of small trade, they do not categorize vending as a “productive” occupation. Rather, their comments marginalize vending even more by associating it not with Jews, but with the disabled and with war widows, and by suggesting implicitly that these easy jobs represent partial payment of society’s debt to these groups for their wartime sacrifices.

Other letter writers defended those who had spent the war in Fergana, Tashkent, or other locations in the rear by noting the vital role workers performed in supplying Soviet soldiers with

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<sup>78</sup> Ostap Vyshnia, “Dozvol'te pomilitis'!,” *Radians'ka Ukraïina* 166 (7600), 21 Aug. 1946, pg. 3.

<sup>79</sup> TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 41, spr. 15, ark. 134.

the weapons and other materials needed to win the war. A letter by S. Ia. Khenkin and D. L. Dorfman, both professors at the Berdichev Teachers' Institute, quoted two analogous comments by Stalin to this effect, one of them: "The labor feats of the Soviet people in the rear, as well as the military feats of our soldiers on the front, have their source in the ardent and life-giving Soviet patriotism."<sup>80</sup> According to Semen Borisovich Perl', bureaucratic technicalities denied many of these essential laborers the credentials that would have proved the worth of their contributions to the war effort: "The majority of reevacuees cannot even receive medals 'for heroic labor' because work in the east is regarded as a break from [their] record of service in one place...." As Perl', himself an engineer and *kandidat* in technical sciences, continued in his letter to the editor of *Pravda*, "On this subject I could write a great deal, but I have refrained because all of this is known to you, of course, without me."<sup>81</sup> The ease with which the image of the "Tashkent partisan" overshadowed the "labor feats" of evacuees clearly rankled Soviet Jews. Even decades later, it inspired one L. L. Mininberg to publish a book intended to "show the role of several professional categories and individual social groups of the Jewish population in the struggle with Nazism," specifically "those who created armaments, and also built plant facilities, [and] supplied factories and the army with transportation services, [and] electricity."<sup>82</sup> Mininberg's dedication of the book to "the veterans of the Second World War – scientists, engineers, workers" leaves no doubt that he considered the wartime contributions of professionals in military industries equal to those of soldiers and partisans.<sup>83</sup> Although negative stereotypes made Jewish workers particularly concerned about demonstrating their contributions

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<sup>80</sup> TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 2812, ark. 19.

<sup>81</sup> Semen Borisovich Perl', Khar'kov, to the editor of *Pravda*, [Moscow], 31 Aug. 1946, in TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 2812, ark. 12.

<sup>82</sup> L. L. Mininberg, *Sovetskie evrei v nauke i promyshlennosti SSSR v period Vtoroi mirovoi voyny: 1941-1945 gg.: ocherki* (Moscow: Its-Garant, 1995), 10.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

to the war, they were not alone in wanting recognition for their efforts: an August 1945 report summarizing the most common questions posed to regional Party officials throughout Ukraine included, “When will medals be issued ‘For heroic labor in the Patriotic War of 1941-1945’?”<sup>84</sup>

The realities of private trade at the bazaar were more complex than any of these sources admitted. The intense physical destruction wrought by the war meant that the earliest returnees struggled to survive in a particularly fragile economy with limited legal employment opportunities. In the memoir chronicling his “red boyhood” under Stalin, Anatole Konstantin recalled the dismal prospects his mother faced upon their return to the city of Khmelnik (Vinnitsa *oblast'*) in 1944: “While the town began regaining some functions of Soviet normalcy with its NKVD and party offices, there was no work to be had that Mother could do, since the restaurant and food stores had not yet reopened.”<sup>85</sup> Konstantin claims that his mother resorted to speculating in sunflower oil only after her search for legal employment proved fruitless. Significantly, Konstantin’s relatively brief discussion of Khmelnik’s post-liberation economy as one dominated by the reemerging Soviet bureaucracy, the clothing artel, the bakery, and the bazaar suggests that when it came to employment, local material circumstances—not anti-Jewish discrimination—affected his family. Konstantin might have intended his remark that his “Mother exhibited a commercial ability that neither she nor I had suspected she possessed” to counter the traditional association of Jews with speculation, but he portrays the most active vendors at the local bazaar as peasants and wounded soldiers and refuses to judge members of either group for doing what was necessary to survive.<sup>86</sup> This perspective reflected the reality of

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<sup>84</sup> “Informational Bulletin no. 72: “On questions, asked by the population in meetings, lectures, and talks,” 3 Aug. 1945, in TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 182, ark. 99.

<sup>85</sup> Anatole Konstantin, *A Red Boyhood: Growing Up Under Stalin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 170.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

trade and enterprise in the immediate postwar period as reconstructed by Julie Hessler, who has noted that, “Until shortages finally abated in 1949-50, market vending remained a universal occupation and an essential channel for the acquisition of food and consumer goods.”<sup>87</sup>

The sentiments Vyshnia voiced regarding the value of Jews’ labor and suspicion of Jews’ motives for returning to Ukraine may help explain the emphasis *Eynikayt* placed on showcasing Jewish workers and professionals. A May 1944 article by A. Gontar’ on the return of Jews to Berdichev, for example, quoted a letter written by a returnee and mason named Sholom Gen, who reported that the town soviet’s “chairman was very glad that I came with skilled workers, eight carpenters and five roofers.” In introducing Gen’s letter to friends in Moscow, Gontar’ maintained that although Gen’s party of reevacuees “knew that none of their relatives had escaped the Germans, they were eager to get back and take part in the rehabilitation of Berdichev.”<sup>88</sup> Clearly, then, this article depicts Jewish reevacuees as skilled laborers returning to take part in the physical reconstruction of their hometown. Two successive drafts of a Russian-language article apparently intended to demonstrate the USSR’s commitment to religious freedom similarly portrayed Jewish returnees in the city of Proskurov as professionals engaged in productive pursuits. The article purportedly quotes Berl Lekht, head of the city’s Jewish religious community, in characterizing the town’s population of some 5,000 Jewish returnees, all of them “settled and working in their specialties”:

A considerable part of the returning Jews are people of intelligentsia labor: engineers and technicians, doctors, pharmacists, teachers and accountants. Doctor Iosif Lifshits – head therapist at the city polyclinic. Doctor Isaak Kogan – heads the maternity home, and pharmacist Boris Fliaksman – the city pharmacy. Chemist Iosif Bal'tser – head engineer of the sugar trust. Teacher Esfir' Medovaia

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<sup>87</sup> Julie Hessler, “A Postwar Perestroika? Toward a History of Private Enterprise in the USSR,” *Slavic Review* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 533.

<sup>88</sup> A. Gontar’, “Returning to Berdichev,” May 19, 1944, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.28 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 64, l. 110. This quote is from the article’s English translation, which I verified against the Russian translation on l. 109.

teaches mathematics in the upper grades of the Russian boy's school.<sup>89</sup>

An earlier draft of this article clearly shows that an unknown reviewer had deleted the sentence preceding this quotation, which noted that “many” of the Jewish returnees “work in the cooperative artels as tailors, shoemakers, hatters, in the trade shops as clerks, storekeepers, managers of shops, kiosks, and also in enterprises and in institutions.”<sup>90</sup> Presumably, the reviewer thought it best not to include this image of Jews employed in traditional crafts associated with the shtetl and in jobs conforming to the negative stereotype of Jews as petty traders and artisans.

Other works penned by Soviet Jews at this time included images of traditional Jewish artisans, but portrayed them in a more nostalgic manner. The full text of Grossman's original, Russian-language article “Ukraine without Jews,” published only in an abridged Yiddish translation in *Eynikayt*, features such tradesmen prominently. Immediately following the oft-cited lines that begin with the categorical statement that “[i]n Ukraine there are no Jews,” Grossman emphasizes the totality of the Jewish catastrophe by methodically listing the victims' wide-ranging pursuits and occupations. This expansive list begins by lamenting, “Murdered are elderly artisans, well-known masters of trades: tailors, hatmakers, shoemakers, tinsmiths, jewellers, housepainters, furriers, bookbinders....” By placing such tradesmen at the beginning of this martyrology, Grossman assigned more importance to a dwindling group of individuals engaged in ideologically questionable vocations than to any other category of Jewish victims, including the various “workers” in whose name the state ruled. While depictions of such artisans populate representations of traditional Jewish life in the former Pale of Settlement, the 1939

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<sup>89</sup> Baranovskii, “Glava proskurovskoi evreiskoi religioznoi obshchiny o zhizni evreev v Proskurov,” c. May 1946, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.05 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 14, l. 462].

<sup>90</sup> Baranovskii, “O proskurovskoi evreiskoi obshchine,” c. May 16, 1946, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.05 [GARF f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 14, l. 464].

census recorded only 8.1 percent of the entire Soviet Jewish population as private craftsmen.<sup>91</sup>

Grossman acknowledges that this group was a dying breed even before the Nazi invasion by describing them as “elderly.” Two paragraphs later, Grossman more firmly situates Jewish tradesmen in the realm of memory while invoking the “living portrait of Jewish people in the cities, shtetls and villages of Ukraine” “absorb[ed]” by anyone growing up in Ukraine:

“...[R]emember self-important shtetl shoemakers, sitting on rickety stools in front of the rickety doors of their shops; remember naïve, humorous signs hanging above the locksmith, hat-maker and tailor shops; remember bearded wagon drivers showered in bags of wheat flour tied up in their aprons....”<sup>92</sup> The disappearance of this group enabled Grossman to portray it nostalgically.

### **Conspiracy Theories**

In June 1946, an anonymous letter sent to the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party accused an engineer named Isaak Iulisovich Barenboim—a member of the Communist Party, recipient of the Order of Lenin and the gold medal “Hammer and Sickle,” and Hero of Socialist Labor—of leading a “Zionist conspiracy organization.” Assembled from letters clipped from different print sources, the short letter makes its meaning clear despite its many misspellings, missing letters, and other grammatical errors:

The boss of construction project numbers 1 and 150 I. Iu. Barenboim is leading a Zionist conspiracy organization. They hate the Slavs, turning them into slaves. They do not allow them into positions of leadership. Only Jews must lead trading and stealing. Barenboim set up a staff of six people who register in Kiev Jews coming from all over and arrange apartments and an easy life for them. In party organizations democracy is suppressed. Slavs in construction have been robbed of everything. These are the facts of the sale of Slavs.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Mordechai Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry since the Second World War: Population and Social Structure* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 10.

<sup>92</sup> Vasily Grossman, “Ukraine Without Jews,” trans. Polly Zavadviker, *Jewish Quarterly*, no. 218 (Summer 2011): 11.

<sup>93</sup> USHMM, Acc. 1996.A.0169.02 [TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 5002, ark. 11/120].

As it turned out, one element of this complaint echoed that of an anonymous denunciation sent to Khrushchev the previous month. That Ukrainian-language letter primarily denounced the “crook” [*zhulik*] Boria Efimov, an inspector in the Kiev city council’s housing division, but it also deplored the many times “Efimov together with hero of labor Barenboim registered ‘their people’ [*svoikh liudei*] as workers at the Mostootriada [bridge detachment].”<sup>94</sup> The following sentence clearly identified Efimov and Barenboim’s “people,” claiming that “Among themselves the Jews say - our Efimov is a fine fellow [*molodets*].”<sup>95</sup> These lines reinforced the importance of the link between jobs and housing to Soviet citizens, and maintained that Jews conspired to ensure that their fellow Jews—“their people”—received good ones. The resulting report on this denunciation by the head of the Ukrainian Communist Party’s personnel department stated that Efimov had been shown “cases of irregular treatment of visitors and individual workers of the *gorispolkom*, and also a number of serious shortcomings in [his] work,” but did not address the question of preferential treatment toward Jews. The report did not comment on the denunciation’s alleged connection between Efimov and Barenboim.<sup>96</sup>

Within a year of these letters’ creation, another denunciation reached Ukrainian authorities, this one detailing the corrupt activities of Barenboim and his Jewish colleagues (or co-conspirators) in eight full pages. Although the accusations in this letter were presented in a more sophisticated manner than the one discussed above, the chief complaint against Barenboim—specifically his preferential treatment of Jews—remains the same, as the letter’s beginning indicates: “The boss of bridge division No. 2, General-Director of Roads and

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<sup>94</sup> TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 41, spr. 14, ark. 44.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, ark. 45

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, ark. 51.

Construction of the 3<sup>rd</sup> rank comrade Barenboim I. Iu., distorts the national question by his practice of forming his crew based on the one-sided national selection of personnel and by cultivating bootlicking among them and other negative moments....<sup>97</sup>

These allegations of Jewish clannish and conspiratorial aims were hardly new ones. Much about the context in which these particular claims were made, however, *was* new, including their application to Jewish leaders in industry, the climate of postwar Ukraine, and the individual—as opposed to collective—nature of anti-Jewish discrimination during the immediate postwar years. Also new, if not visible in Barenboim’s case, was the assertiveness with which Jews challenged perceived cases of employment discrimination during this period. These elements together demonstrate the importance of distinguishing the period of 1943-1948 from the so-called “Black Years” when exploring the history of Soviet Jews.

As alluded to above, this note’s allegation of a Jewish plot in the construction industry represents a relatively new development among anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, one made possible by the Soviet industrialization campaign beginning in the late 1920s. Before then, the number of Jewish workers in industry—whether as skilled engineers or unskilled laborers—was too small to give such an accusation any validity. The author of this letter was especially concerned about the number of Jews in positions of leadership, which may have been influenced by a more general anti-elitist attitude during this period. The author’s description of this conspiracy as “Zionist” may also reflect the Soviet regime’s long-standing opposition to Zionism, although it more likely serves here as a negative code for “Jewish.” The most recent development reflected in this note lies in its description of Jews coming to Kiev “from all over.” To some non-Jews who had lived in Nazi-occupied Ukraine and witnessed the Holocaust, the

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<sup>97</sup> USHMM, Acc.1996.A.0169.02 [TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 5002, ark. 3/106].

return of Jews to the newly liberated areas was unwelcome as it introduced more competition for jobs, apartments, and material resources during a time of scarcity and hardship. Apartments in particular were in demand—and a source of contention between the current occupants and Jews demanding the return of their prewar apartments—so attributing housing arrangements to the conspiracy led by Barenboim would have resonated with many, especially in Kiev.

The second, much longer letter leveled several serious claims against Barenboim and his Jewish colleagues, including the hiring and advancement of Jews over more qualified non-Jewish workers, the resulting dominance of Jews in both leadership positions and—in some divisions—among rank and file workers, and the misuse of company funds and supplies by the Jews placed in these positions of authority. The author of this letter identified himself as Director-Lieutenant Colonel Kitsak, head of one division within the Darnitskii railroad bridge construction project, lending credence to the specific examples he cites in support of his many complaints. Still, it is impossible to evaluate the accuracy of these claims from the information provided, much of which is infused with apparently personal animosity and anti-Jewish sentiment. For example, criticizing the qualifications of recently promoted Jews, Kitsak often resorts to name-calling, dismissing a certain Gofman as a “crook” and an “ignorant person” and one Pogrebetskii as a “hack engineer, a big fumbler and a gossip.”<sup>98</sup> Kitsak describes other undeserving comrades as “lazy, egotistical, self-loving bureaucrats,” and accuses the members of one brigade of fostering “a cult of ‘uncle Isaak’” devoted to “glorify[ing]” Barenboim.<sup>99</sup> At times, Kitsak seems almost obsessed with chronicling the misdeeds of his Jewish colleagues: the first page of his *eight-page* letter lists the names and positions of 27 individuals in leadership

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., ark. 4/107.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., ark. 5/108.

positions who he identifies as Jews.<sup>100</sup>

Both of these letters were reviewed by the Chief Ministry of State Security (MGB) officer of the Southwestern Railroad, who forwarded them to the Central Committee's Deputy Secretary of Transportation in May 1947.<sup>101</sup> What happened next is not known, an uncertainty that is all too common with sources on this topic, particularly those selected for reproduction in foreign archives such as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. If authorities investigated the allegations against Barenboim, it appears that nothing came of it: he died a presumably natural death at the age of 74 following a long and decorated career as an engineer. In either 1947 or 1948, Barenboim was awarded the Stalin Prize, and sometime between 1948 and 1950 he was promoted to the leadership of one of the most respected bridge-building companies in the Soviet Union, where he remained until his retirement. Perhaps Barenboim's expertise in bridge-building made him too valuable to lose, although the disastrous prewar purge of the Soviet military leadership suggests that no one can be characterized in this way. Regardless, Barenboim's professional success during the mid-1940s can be considered one example of the contradictory and individual nature of anti-Jewish discrimination in employment during this period.

Accusations of employment discrimination in the immediate post-liberation period went both ways. Ukrainian Jews who considered themselves or their acquaintances to be the victims of discrimination did not hesitate to voice their complaints and demand the rights promised them in the Stalin Constitution of 1936. This assertive behavior was particularly noticeable among individuals such as veterans, who felt that their participation in the war and related personal

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., ark. 2/106.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., ark. 2/105.

sacrifices entitled them to special consideration.<sup>102</sup> Thus, M. I. Dargol'ts—himself a lieutenant in the Red Army—invoked the military service of his comrades when protesting their treatment in Kamenets-Podol'sk to Stalin:

My comrades, disabled veterans, who have lost their health at the front: legless, eyeless[,] are not admitted to demanding jobs by the party committee (Secretary Bgatov), although before the war they occupied positions of importance and now, returning from the front, battle-hardened, politically mature, they occupy insignificant posts while positions of importance are held by persons who lived under the Germans and worked under the Germans, for example: 1) office manager of the fruit and vegetable factory Romanko who held this position under the Germans; 2) director of typography Iavorskii, who also was director of typography under the Germans; 3) director of the city trade committee Gorlov, a former member of Communist Party, who remained under the Germans and now works; 4) the manager of the factory “Motor,” who worked under the Germans; [and] 5) the director of “Mezhraibaza” was under the Germans and worked together with its organs, and quite a number of others.<sup>103</sup>

Significantly, this complaint comes after Dargol'ts's assertion that “In the city of Kamenets-Podol'sk reigns a terrible unbridled anti-Semitism, ignorant of bounds, which does not meet rebuff from the side of local organizations.” This suspicion of those who had lived and worked under the Nazis and the concern displayed over who occupied what jobs demonstrate how jobs and the workplace functioned as physical and conceptual spaces for the construction and policing of community membership in the immediate postwar period. Dargol'ts's complaints about anti-Jewish discrimination in the distribution of housing also were duly investigated by local officials, who judged them unfounded.

Letters sent to local and union authorities under the pseudonyms of “demobilized captain Kozlov and major Oklobin” emphasized similar concerns about job opportunities and housing while invoking their authors' entitlement to these things as veterans. In the summer of 1946, the

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<sup>102</sup> On veterans' claims to entitlement, see Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society 1941-1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>103</sup> TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 41, spr. 2, ark. 154-155.

pair wrote to Nikolai Shvernik, the new chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, to complain of their treatment by a range of military and civilian officials since the war's end, claiming:

...[M]any of us found ourselves not needed, down and out. Ignoring the fact that we served up to 15 years, have 2-3 children, don't have professions and we are forced to sell our last overcoat at the bazaar, in order to feed our family. They don't employ us, here, there, and everywhere they spurn us[,] even in the obkom of the CPbU of Poltava. One instructor announced: "You have a decoration so eat it." And now, wherever one finds himself, there is a line of demobilized officers.<sup>104</sup>

Like Dargol'ts, Kozlov and Oklobin decried the "thousands of cases, when people working under the Germans now work in major posts," which they claimed was a particular problem in Kiev. The duo blamed these misfortunes, however, on a variety of "others," including Jews: "How many marauders are here in the NKVD, in the NKGB, but the Jews won't give life to the Russian people. In the city public prosecutor's office there is a line from 3 a.m., they bring money, butter, eggs, in order to evict [others] from apartments. Where is the truth, where is the local power. For this we fought. We are first of all officers, Russian people... - give us work."<sup>105</sup> This protest united feelings of entitlement based on both military service and nationality with a scorn for corruption in multiple organs of power that the petitioners clearly associated with Jews. In the following paragraph, the petitioners denounced the "hundreds" of "parasites, who sat in headquarters for years, did not see gunpowder, did not finish military school, but now decide the fate of a colonel, who spent 25 years in the army."<sup>106</sup> Although this paragraph did not specifically identify these unworthy military officials as Jews, the inference would have been clear to readers. This letter also triggered an investigation, which identified the real writers and

<sup>104</sup> TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 41, spr. 3, ark. 25-26.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., ark. 26.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., ark. 27.

judged their claims unjustified.

As these sources suggest, charges of unfair employment practices leveled by one group against another were interchangeable to a certain extent. Although complaints raised by non-Jews typically incorporated traditional anti-Jewish stereotypes, grievances also resulted from basic concerns about survival and from non-ethnic subject positions such as those of veterans, reevacuees, or non-elites. It would be naïve to assume that factors never pitted members of one nationality against each other, as an intriguing anecdote revealed in one elderly man's oral history suggests. Iosif Shubinsky recalled in a 2001 interview that, sometime after 1948, his Jewish boss at the Republican Library refused to hire Yiddish scholar Khaim Loitsker, a former member of the Cabinet of Jewish Culture who recently had been released from prison, stating, "We are two Jews here – why do we need a third one?" Shubinsky concluded this anecdote by noting, "Such things happened as well," suggesting that other Soviet Jews may have acted similarly during this period in an effort to protect their own interests.<sup>107</sup> In this case, hiring a scholar previously arrested for his involvement in a liquidated "Jewish nationalist" institution would have entailed quite a risk and required no small amount of courage.

## **Conclusion**

As the liberation of Ukraine proceeded, the status of Jews as workers became uncertain. Jewish "scientific workers" proved particularly vulnerable to discriminatory employment policies despite the republic's dire need for these skilled teachers, scientists and scholars. Jewish writers also faced prejudice and threats to their livelihoods, although in this case of Yiddish writers this was attributed to the recent decimation of their reading audience. Popular opinion,

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<sup>107</sup> Shubinsky, interview.

meanwhile, perpetrated a long-standing association of Jews with unproductive labor—a serious offense in the “worker’s state.” At the same time, the prewar models of Soviet Jewish productivity, the *kolkhozniki*, lost their national agricultural districts by default when the state failed to support their reconstruction. Still, discriminatory employment practices were not applied uniformly, official allegations of antisemitism in the workplace were duly investigated, and new literary works were written and published in Yiddish. Educational and employment opportunities for Jews in the mid-1940s, while circumscribed, still exceeded those available in later years. The historical significance in cases of suspected discrimination both against and in favor of Jews during this period, meanwhile, seems to rest in their prominence as sites for the construction and policing of community membership.

In employment as in other matters, local circumstances mattered. V. Ia. Rybal'chenko, an agitator from the city of Shchors in Chernigov *oblast'*, identified antisemitism as one of five local problems requiring the central government’s attention in a letter sent to the Moscow-based journal *Sputnik agitatora* at the end of 1945. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Rybal'chenko attributed the “practical fact” of antisemitism not to the Nazis’ legacy but to the “accumulation [*skoplenie*] of persons of Jewish nationality in the produce-distribution organizations (the ORSes).” Instead of advocating increased agitation against antisemitism, however—similar to the campaign in the 1920s and a response ideologically consistent with the country’s stated values—Rybal'chenko recommended limiting the number of Jews employed in these organizations. As he put it, “In order to prevent [this] it would be reasonable to not permit Jews to amass in grocery organizations, train in technical professions, and to do [*ustraiivat'*] physical

labor.”<sup>108</sup> For whatever reason, Rybal'chenko claimed that local authorities refused to take action on this and other issues and required Moscow's intervention, even though he acknowledges that this issue and others may be local concerns.<sup>109</sup> Leonid Roitman, who lived on the other side of Ukraine in Odessa *oblast'*, has described a more positive image of postwar Jewish employment opportunities in the memory book he compiled for his hometown of Khashchevato. Roitman, who consulted other former residents of Khashchevato for the book, proudly noted that the Khashchevato middle school employed at least twelve Jewish teachers in the postwar years, including Isaak Nikolaevich Shkol'nik, who served as the school's manager from 1946-1955 and director from 1955 to 1982.<sup>110</sup> He also chronicled the academic successes of the town's Jewish students after the war.<sup>111</sup> For Roitman, a Jewish Khashchevato ended not with the Holocaust or the “Black Years,” but with massive Jewish emigration in later decades.

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<sup>108</sup> V. Ia. Rybal'chenko, Shchors, Ukraine, to *Sputnik agitatora*, Moscow, copy with received signature of 28.12.45, in RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 310, l. 60.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Leonid Roytman, *Khashchevato: main shteitele: kniga pamiati* (Staten Island, NY: Publishing House Gelany, 2002), 113 (see also 115).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 119.

### CHAPTER THREE: JEWS AND COMMUNITY

This chapter considers the question of Jewish difference more broadly by examining Soviet Jews' efforts to achieve community-oriented objectives in a multinational state that classified its Jewish citizens, collectively, as a national minority. In addressing the most pressing concerns confronting their national community after the liberation, Jews navigated the tensions produced by the Holocaust's aftermath and the dictates of Soviet policy. Analyzing how Jews approached the rebuilding of their community and the commemoration of its wartime experience, then, allows us to see how they positioned themselves as one national minority within the Soviet family of nations.

The challenges Jews faced as a collective at the war's end, like the problems confronted by individual Jews, reflected both the general devastation of war and occupation and the particular consequences of the Holocaust. However, the ambiguities and complexities of Soviet nationalities policy—particularly as they related to Jews—further complicated Jewish efforts to rebuild their local and national communities and to construct a narrative of their wartime experience in ways that had not applied to individuals' efforts to rebuild their lives after the war. Jews had occupied an ambiguous position in Bolshevik nationality policy even before the revolution, uncomfortably straddling the boundaries of nation, ethnic group, and religion. Their religion, close ties to a worldwide diaspora, and association with capitalist practices all made Jews a suspicious element in the eyes of Soviet leaders. Nevertheless, Soviet Jews received the trappings of nationhood during the 1920s and 1930s—including schools and courts in their national language (Yiddish), the assignment of their own national territory in the Far East, and the inscription of nationality in their internal passports. If, as some scholars have argued, the closure of most Jewish national institutions in the late 1930s represented a denial of Jewish

nationhood, the Soviet regime reaffirmed the existence of a Jewish nation by creating the Jewish Antifascist Committee (JAC) during World War II. The activities of the JAC, ironically, resurrected Soviet leaders' suspicions regarding Jews by fostering a sense of Jewish national unity and by renewing and cultivating contact between Soviet Jews and Jews in the capitalist West. The JAC's attempts to address the consequences of the Jewish genocide also heightened authorities' concerns by distinguishing the Jewish tragedy from the suffering of *all* Soviet peoples during the Great Patriotic War.

The efforts Soviet Jews undertook on behalf of their fellow Jews at the war's end demonstrate their awareness of these political complexities. Whenever possible, the de facto community leaders justified their efforts to rebuild Jewish communities with appeals to Soviet ideology and law. At the same time, these efforts reflected a very particular concern for the fate of a people and culture devastated by genocide. This chapter details the interplay of this convergence between Sovietness and Jewishness in the efforts of Ukrainian Jews to provide material aid to their Jewish neighbors, cultivate Jewish (and particularly Yiddish) culture, and memorialize the catastrophe we know as the Holocaust or Shoah.

### **“The need of the Jews is very great”: Charity and Jewish Community**

In many respects, the material conditions in which Jews lived emerged as a contested marker of Jewish difference in the immediate post-liberation years. The combined consequences of war, foreign occupation, and genocide made Jews particularly prone to privation, but many encountered difficulties securing the material assistance they needed, which some Jews interpreted as evidence of discrimination. The response of Soviet Jews to these circumstances demonstrated a broad knowledge of their particular plight, a sense of Jewish community that

transcended other divisions, and the will to act on these factors in spite of the inherent challenges they posed to Soviet ideology and policy. While Jewish communities and organizations abroad played an important role in determining the nature of this response, they alone cannot account for the agency Soviet Jews displayed in attempting to provide for the material needs of their fellow Jews toward the war's end.

Certainly, Jews were not alone in their suffering during the occupation or its aftermath. Millions of Soviet citizens lost their lives or their loved ones in the war. Millions more endured the material deprivation that accompanied the war, including the extreme shortages and rationing of basic goods.<sup>1</sup> Subsistence proved particularly challenging for those who had lived in the regions occupied by the Nazis and their allies, given both the difficult conditions often faced by evacuees and the scale of destruction confronting those who remained in or returned to the formerly occupied territories. Unfortunately, government assistance was not always forthcoming or timely, even when the would-be recipients of such aid were veterans and their families, then still a particularly entitled group.<sup>2</sup> To cite just one example, a Kiev Obkom report from April 1944 on the verification of complaints by Soviet organizations and institutions bluntly declared that “[t]he letters of front-line soldiers to the Kiev Gorsoviet are not answered” before describing such injustices as the eviction of a lieutenant's family from their apartment and the unanswered pleas of a partisan's widow for shoes, clothes, and ration cards.<sup>3</sup> If the needs of veterans and their families routinely went unmet in places, then, the failure of authorities to provide for less

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<sup>1</sup> See Donald A Filtzer, *The Hazards of Urban Life in Late Stalinist Russia: Health, Hygiene, and Living Standards, 1943-1953* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and William Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction: The Food Supply in the USSR During World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> See Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society 1941-1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 362–371.

<sup>3</sup> DAKO, f. P-5, op. 3, spr. 678, ark. 64-66 [quote on ark. 64].

privileged segments of the population during this time of need would not have been unexceptional, as the famine of 1946-1947 ultimately proved.<sup>4</sup>

Still, Jews found themselves in a particularly vulnerable position during this period. As discussed in chapter one, the majority of Holocaust survivors and Jewish reevacuees returned home to find their apartments or houses occupied and their personal possessions looted. Even in ideal circumstances, where Jews quickly recovered their prewar homes or were assigned new ones, very few recovered their belongings—a significant disadvantage in a centrally-planned wartime economy characterized by rations, bribes, and barter. Holocaust survivors, whose bodies had been weakened by years of deprivation and hard labor, had even fewer physical defenses to help them through these conditions. Human resources were equally scarce: the death toll, supplemented by the dispersal of Jews in evacuation and the military, meant that comparatively few Jews could turn to family or close friends for support in their time of need. Together, these circumstances placed many Soviet Jews in dire material straits.

The letters Jews addressed to loved ones abroad and to the Jewish Antifascist Committee testify to their extreme need. A May 1945 Ukrainian NKGB report on intercepted letters to foreign addressees quotes a particularly telling plea from Etia Itskovna Sigal, a Jew living in Kiev, to a woman in Tel-Aviv:

We remain naked and barefoot, without an apartment and without belongings. I earnestly ask and implore you to send us a package of old, used clothes, as you can manage. I will be thankful to you my whole life. We are left a small handful [*kuchka*] of Jews, try to support us. The single hope of our Jews is in American Jews and in Palestine, that after the war you will clothe and provide shoes for us. Our life is very difficult....<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In the case of the postwar famine, according to Nicholas Ganson, “[t]he government essentially victimized grain-producing regions in an effort to assure the unimpeded procurement of food to the urban population and especially urban centers.” Nicholas Ganson, *The Soviet Famine of 1946-47 in Global and Historical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 150. See also Filtzer, *Hazards of Urban Life*, 163–253.

<sup>5</sup> USHMM, Acc.1996.A.0169.02 [original: TsDAHO f. 1, op. 23, sp. 1477, ark. 7/13].

Sigal's references to a "small handful of Jews" and "*our* Jews" strongly suggest that she wrote on behalf of a group larger than just her intimate circle—in other words, some form of Jewish community.<sup>6</sup> She clearly envisioned and depended upon links between her local Jewish community and communities of Jews abroad as well. According to the NKGB report, "Letters of similar content were also sent to relatives and acquaintances, living abroad" by two other Jewish women and one ethnic Ukrainian woman living in Kiev.<sup>7</sup> As the "Jewish address" in the Soviet Union during this time, the JAC—as well as its prominent members and newspaper, *Eynikayt*—received a large number of requests for material aid from Jews both in evacuation and in the formerly occupied territories. An undated letter sent to the JAC by Efrem Borisovich Barkovetskii on behalf of an unspecified number of Jews in Polonnoe strikes a particularly desperate tone: "Dear Friends. Save us from starvation. Send a parcel with clothing and food. We are ashamed to ask, but there is no alternative, [and] We will never forget your brotherly help" [*sic*].<sup>8</sup> Another appeal for "brotherly help" reached the JAC from an anonymous author in Mogilev-Podolsk, writing "in the name of 160 thousand Jews" who survived the Holocaust in Ukraine. Their Soviet liberators had conscripted the able-bodied male survivors for labor, and the letter claimed that these men "are working in the liberated territories in difficult material conditions, [and] they are swollen from hunger." Significantly, the members of this community of survivors hailed from Finland, Poland, and Romania and wanted to return to these countries,

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<sup>6</sup> USHMM, Acc.1996.A.0169.02 [TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 1477, ark. 7/13]. Emphasis added.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Significantly, all of these women had jobs, and thus would not have been as destitute as unemployed Jews. This report excerpted letters from Jewish men as well.

<sup>8</sup> USHMM, RG-22.028M.288 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 1173, l. 45]. A translation of a nearly identical letter (the attribution and punctuation differ) archived in a different *delo* is provided as document 37 in Shimon Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* ([New York]: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 227.

but their presence on Soviet territory and their self-identification as Jews made appealing to the de facto leaders of Soviet Jewry an obvious choice.<sup>9</sup>

The JAC, as the only central Jewish organization in the Soviet Union, played a vital role in efforts to help Soviet Jews in need. Created to mobilize the support of wealthy Jews in the West for the Soviet war effort, the JAC was responsible for nurturing the relations with foreign Jewish organizations that resulted in such support.<sup>10</sup> As the war progressed and concerns about the postwar fate of survivors increased, these organizations approached the JAC with proposals to assist Soviet Jews and foreign-born Jewish refugees in the USSR. In particular, representatives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC or Joint), a humanitarian organization that had actively supported Soviet Jewish agricultural settlements in the interwar period, raised the issue of aiding Soviet Jews during meetings with JAC Chairman Solomon Mikhoels and Yiddish writer Itzik Fefer when the two men visited America in the summer of 1943.<sup>11</sup> By the end of that year, the Joint had “resumed a historic humanitarian relationship” with the Soviet Union, as Executive Vice-Chairman Joseph C. Hyman announced in the December 1943 issue of *The J.D.C. Digest*. “According to the terms of the agreement,” Hyman continued, “the J.D.C. will send food, clothing and other relief supplies into Russia for distribution to civilians on a non-sectarian basis in Kazakstan [*sic*], Uzbekistan, and the lower Volga regions, whose populations are predominantly Jewish. Present plans call for the shipment

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<sup>9</sup> USHMM, RG-22.028M.288 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 1173, l. 12]. An English translation of a duplicate letter archived in another *delo* is in Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 226-227 (document 36).

<sup>10</sup> For an account of the JAC’s creation and activities, see Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*.

<sup>11</sup> The Joint’s involvement in these agricultural settlements ended in 1938. Joseph C. Hyman, “Return to Russia,” *The J.D.C. Digest* 2, no. 8 (December 1943): 8–9. For more information on the organization’s activities in the interwar Soviet Union, see Michael Beizer and Mikhail Mitsel, *The American Brother: The “Joint” in Russia, the USSR and the CIS* (New York: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 2004); and Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land*. For details on Mikhoels’s and Fefer’s Western tour see Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 74–77, 305–313.

of \$500,000 worth of supplies for distribution by the Russian Red Cross.”<sup>12</sup> Both the Joint and the JAC expected the value of the Joint’s donations to increase over time and to extend to the USSR’s western regions following their liberation by the Red Army.<sup>13</sup> This agreement considerably expanded the scale of the Joint’s year-old relief program in the Soviet Union, a parcel delivery service arranged with the Polish Government-in-Exile that applied only to Polish nationals (both Jewish and non-Jewish) in the USSR and operated under firm restrictions: aid parcels had to be “addressed to specific individuals, . . . less than twelve pounds in weight and had the duty prepaid.”<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, charitable donations from other foreign Jewish organizations went to the Russian Red Cross for non-sectarian distribution as well.

The JAC’s involvement in efforts to aid Soviet Jews continued after this new agreement between the Joint and the Soviet government had been reached. The mass of letters and reports that the JAC received regarding Jews’ material conditions concerned the committee’s leaders, who repeatedly raised the issue with central state officials.<sup>15</sup> As early as May 1944, the JAC’s leadership seems to have concluded that Jews, as a category, were the victims of discrimination by the agencies in charge of doling out material aid. The appeal Mikhoels and JAC secretary

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<sup>12</sup> Hyman, “Return to Russia,” 8. Shimon Redlich’s characterization of this agreement as a “compromise” between the JDC and the Soviet government does not give the JDC due credit for its intentions given the organization’s long history of helping non-Jews living in the communities of the Jews it assists. See “About JDC,” website of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, <http://www.jdc.org/about-jdc.aspx?s=header>, accessed 10 November 2010; and Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 76, 83.

<sup>13</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 76.

<sup>14</sup> These conditions apparently remained in effect for direct charitable contributions, as discussed below. Oscar Handlin, *A Continuing Task: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1914-1964* (New York: Random House, 1964), 84. See also Beizer and Mitsel, *American Brother*, 171; Hyman, “Return to Russia”; Alexander Kahn, “The Story of a Package,” *The J.D.C. Digest* 2, no. 8 (December 1943): 9–10; and “The Question Box,” *The J.D.C. Digest* 3, no. 8 (January 1945): 9.

<sup>15</sup> An undated “Report on the Activities of the Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR” written shortly after the Mikhoels-Fefer foreign tour states that “[i]n its first ten months of work the JAC received more than five thousand letters.” The report estimated that the JAC now received “around 1000 letters a month” from Soviet Jews and (presumably) foreign Jewish refugees in the USSR. In total, according to the report, “[i]n the time of its existence the JAC has received upwards of 20 thousand letters from Soviet citizens.” USHMM, RG-22.028M.233 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 913, ll. 6, 7].

Shakhno Epshtein sent that month to Vyacheslav Molotov, deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, regarding the "extremely difficult mental and physical situation" of Jewish survivors addressed the issue of material aid in detail:

It is a glaring fact that food and material aid received by the Red Cross from various countries for evacuees and returnees rarely reach Jews in need. It should be pointed out that Jewish organizations abroad are aiding the Soviet population suffering from the war without regard to nationality, but they still pay special attention to regions which contain a significant number of Jews. Satisfying the wishes of foreign Jewish organizations with regard to aiding these regions will also serve to stimulate an even larger campaign of aid to the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup>

The letter concluded with four proposals intended to rectify the problems it had identified, three of which pertained to material aid. The first proposal called for Soviet authorities to "[u]ndertake urgent measures to eliminate all abnormal phenomena regarding Jewish survivors in the liberated regions," including "obtain[ing]...urgent material aid for them." The third point specified the means of accomplishing this objective vis-à-vis Jewish evacuees: "To give the Red Cross a special directive to systematically aid Jews in evacuated areas on the same basis as the population in liberated regions." Finally, the letter proposed that the government "create, either within the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee or some other Soviet institution, a special commission to aid Jews who have suffered from the war."<sup>17</sup> Only months after the Joint had agreed to the non-sectarian distribution of its aid through the Red Cross, then, the JAC's leadership had determined that only the targeted distribution of aid *to Jews*—preferably under the supervision of the JAC itself—would ensure that the material needs of Soviet Jews were met.

Around the same time, the JAC also contacted President Krutikov of the Commission on the Distribution of Donated Goods [*darstvennogo imushchestva*] regarding the distribution of

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<sup>16</sup> Translation from document 46 in Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 243–244.

<sup>17</sup> Translation from document 46 in *Ibid.*, 244.

foreign aid to Jews.<sup>18</sup> This letter summarized the terms under which foreign Jewish organizations donated aid before charging that, despite the provision that “special attention [be] given to areas with a substantial Jewish population,” “[n]o material help from either the ‘Red Cross’ or other organizations and institutions has been provided to them [Soviet Jews]. In many places people are driven to despair.”<sup>19</sup> The letter concluded by calling on the Commission on the Distribution of Donated Goods to “take urgent measures for the elimination of these glaringly abnormal developments in the distribution of aid received from abroad,” beginning by providing help to Jews in a list of Ukrainian cities as well as in the Central Asian republics.<sup>20</sup>

JAC leaders observed no real change in the material situation of Jews following these interventions. At the beginning of August 1944, the JAC sent a letter to both Molotov and to deputy chief of the Sovinformbureau Solomon Lozovskii, who supervised the JAC’s activities, again proposing the creation of a “special commission” under its auspices to coordinate the collection of aid from foreign Jewish organizations and its dispersal to Soviet Jews. Although this letter did not directly allege discrimination against Jews in aid distribution, it cited the “exceptionally difficult material circumstances” of Jews in the newly liberated regions as one reason for the proposed aid commission, stating that “[t]he help, sent by foreign Jewish organizations through the Red Cross, does not reach them.”<sup>21</sup> Mikhoels and Epshtein dispatched a more blunt letter on inequities in aid distribution to both Molotov and Sovinformbureau head A. S. Shcherbakov nearly three months later, on October 26. This letter begins by asserting that

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<sup>18</sup> This document is an undated and unsigned copy of an original letter whose reference to destitute Jewish women in Odessa dates it after that city’s liberation on April 10, 1944. GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 792, ll. 184-184ob.

<sup>19</sup> GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 792, ll. 184.

<sup>20</sup> GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 792, ll. 184-184ob.

<sup>21</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, l. 184. Itsik Fefer signed on to the copy of this letter sent to Molotov. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, l. 187. An English translation of the letter to Lozovskii is available in Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 246-247 (document 50).

“the Jewish population, with very few exceptions, is completely ignored by local organs of power in the distribution of this kind of aid. Even Jewish partisans of Belorussia, Ukraine and other republics receive nothing.”<sup>22</sup> The claim about Jewish partisans here supports the JAC’s allegation of discrimination against Jews *as a group* since partisans and regular military veterans theoretically received priority in terms of material aid and other forms of social support. The letter further cites the appeals Jews directed to the JAC as evidence of anti-Jewish discrimination, stating that “[f]rom numerous letters and statements, which we continue to receive from different ends of the USSR, it appears that the disregard of the Jewish population in the distribution of aid from abroad continues, and that it takes the character of a gross violation of Soviet principles and of the humiliation of a people, who suffered exceptionally from fascism.”<sup>23</sup> This sentence underscored the seriousness of the JAC’s allegations of anti-Jewish discrimination by openly denouncing the illegality of such “disregard” and—with the veiled reference to the ongoing genocide—by introducing the comparison with Nazi anti-Jewish policies.

The alleged failure of Soviet Jews to receive aid donated by their fellow Jews abroad not only outraged the JAC’s leadership but also threatened a public relations crisis for the Soviet government. As the letter to President Krutikov of the Commission on Donated Goods observed, “[t]his situation is intolerable in terms of the Soviet nation and her prestige and may greatly damage further developments in the campaign for help from abroad.”<sup>24</sup> The JAC’s letter to Molotov and Lozovskii from August 1944, in fact, relied entirely on this publicity angle to

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<sup>22</sup> My translation is from the letter to Shcherbakov in RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, ll. 202. The letter to Molotov can be found in USHMM, RG-22.028M.215 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 792, ll. 63-64], with an English translation in Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 248-249 (document 51).

<sup>23</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, ll. 202ob.

<sup>24</sup> GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 792, ll. 184.

support its proposed commission to oversee the distribution of aid to Jews. The letter noted that foreign Jewish organizations had expressed their concerns regarding the aid situation to both the JAC and the Soviet General Consul in New York. As the letter continued:

The fact, that Poles, Armenians, and other nationalities directly engage in the distribution of foreign aid among their fellow tribesmen [*soplemennikov*] in the USSR, but Jews thus far do not have this opportunity, results in false rumors [*krivotolki*] among the Jewish community in the USA and other countries and gives nourishment to anti-Soviet elements. We have no doubt that accepting our proposals will promote the development of campaigns of help abroad and wrest a weapon from the hand of the anti-Soviet clique, led by the New-York *Forverts*, which, using the developing situation, calls for a stop to aid.<sup>25</sup>

The October 26 letter to Shcherbakov repeated these points, placing even more emphasis on the “anti-Soviet propaganda” coming from the “profascist” [*profashistskii*] newspaper *Forverts*.<sup>26</sup>

The space devoted to such arguments in the JAC’s protests suggests that its leaders expected the threat of foreign censure and diminished aid to be more persuasive than appeals to Soviet law.

Jewish institutions in the West, in fact, displayed considerable interest in the circumstances of Jews in the Soviet Union, which the JAC’s efforts encouraged. While the *Forverts* or *Jewish Daily Forward*, a Yiddish newspaper in New York, was exceptional in vocalizing its criticism of Soviet aid distribution so early and forcefully, even friendlier organs of the foreign Jewish press demonstrated reservations regarding the distribution of donated aid, as an article by Raymond A. Davies in the October 13, 1944 edition of the weekly *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* reveals.<sup>27</sup> The article begins by describing the circumstances that placed “Repatriated Jews in Dire Need of Relief,” including their flight from the Nazi invaders with “nothing more

<sup>25</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, ll. 184ob.

<sup>26</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, l. 202.

<sup>27</sup> The *Forverts* had initially praised “the beginning of new relief relationships between the ‘Joint’ . . . and the Soviet government.” See “Soviet Government Permits ‘Joint’ to do Relief-Work in Russia,” English translation of article from the *Jewish Daily Forward*, 5 Dec. 1943, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.215 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 794, l. 46].

than the clothes on their back,” the war-related destruction of their hometowns, and the lack of basic supplies in the newly-liberated regions. Davies does not mention the genocide as a factor distinguishing the experience of Jews from other reevacuees, but nevertheless accepts the assertion of Moscow Jewish community president Samuel Chobrutsky that “[t]he need of the Jews is very great and all possible aid should be extended to them.” The means of ensuring such aid reached Soviet Jews in need, however, remains unclear. As Davies wrote, “Asked whether special Jewish aid is needed, [Moscow-based representative of the organization Russian War Relief Lev] Gruliow replied: ‘All aid is currently distributed by Soviet relief agencies without regard to race or religion.’” While Davies proceeds to quote Gruliow’s personal knowledge of Jews who received food from the U.S. and reports that such material assistance had just reached Jews in the Saratov area, his final sentence reinforces a sense of uncertainty over aid distribution: “It was indicated that the question of admission of representatives of Jewish relief groups from the United States is not yet clear, and that ‘no definite reply to this question can be obtained at the present.’”<sup>28</sup>

The JAC’s October 1944 letter finally provoked a response from Molotov, who ordered an investigation into its allegations.<sup>29</sup> The resulting report, issued less than a month later by Deputy Commissar V. Popov of the People’s Commissariat for State Control, decisively refuted the validity of the JAC’s claims. As part of the investigation, Popov met with Mikhoels and Epshtein and reviewed the fifteen letters from Soviet Jews that the latter produced in support of their accusation of discrimination. Popov rejected the evidentiary value of these letters, deeming them the “*personal requests* of individual citizens” for material aid, “*but not complaints* about

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<sup>28</sup> Raymond A. Davies, “Repatriated Jews in Dire Need of Relief,” *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, October 13, 1944, 15, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2Q0AJrNhS->.

<sup>29</sup> USHMM, RG-22.028M.215 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 792, ll. 63]. An English translation of this order is in Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 249 (document 52).

the disregard of their needs by local authorities in the distribution of donated goods.”<sup>30</sup> The apparent failure of these letters to mention previous appeals to local agencies for material assistance reinforced this distinction. The statistical results of spot checks directed by the People’s Commissariat of State Control in the Russian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian republics, however, provided the key evidence for the report’s assertion that “as a rule, the Jewish population receives donated goods on a greater scale than the rest of the population.”<sup>31</sup>

According to the report, a check of thirteen “organizations” in Ukraine showed that 64.9% of their 2,645 workers received “gifts” from abroad. The percentage of Jews among this sample who received such gifts reportedly came to 72.5%, suggesting that Jews were more likely than their non-Jewish counterparts to receive foreign aid.<sup>32</sup> Similar figures supporting this conclusion were presented for the Belorussian and Russian republics.<sup>33</sup> Together, as Popov summarized, “[a]ll the above-cited facts testify to the baselessness [*neobosnovannost’*] of the statement of comrades Mikhoels and Epshtein. That statement appears to yield unfounded conclusions of independent facts, which cannot characterize the general situation with the distribution of donated goods.”<sup>34</sup>

While these statistics may have satisfied Molotov and other Soviet officials, they do not prove equity in aid distribution any more than Jews’ appeals to the JAC prove discrimination. The report does not indicate how investigating officials chose the thirteen organizations that comprise the sample for Ukraine, the location of these organizations, or the occupations of the workers in question. Without this information, it is impossible to assess how representative these

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<sup>30</sup> GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 792, l. 64. Emphasis original. An abridged English translation of a duplicate report archived in another *delo* is in Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 250-251 (document 53).

<sup>31</sup> GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 792, l. 64.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 66-67.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 67.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 67.

figures were. Indeed, the percentage of Jews in this sample, at just over 12%, is significantly higher than the proportion of Jews in the general population, although it could have corresponded roughly to local population ratios depending on the geographical locations of the sampled organizations.<sup>35</sup> This possibility could reflect an adherence to the provision that Jewish foreign aid reach regions with significant Jewish populations. The survey's failure to account for the quantity or value of the distributed aid or how closely its allocation coincided with individuals' needs further weakens its value as reliable evidence of aid distribution patterns in the newly liberated territories. The propensity of Soviet bureaucrats to adjust statistics according to the dictates of plan or policy should not be discounted either. Still, the fact that Molotov felt compelled, for whatever reason, to look into the JAC's allegations is in itself significant.

In the end, the veracity of the JAC's allegations of anti-Jewish discrimination in the distribution of foreign aid is less important than the fact that the committee voiced them. The committee's leaders, as experienced political actors, would not have made such claims lightly. Rather, they based these claims on what they considered to be sufficient evidence of widespread need among and neglect of Jews in a post-genocide environment populated with other examples of anti-Jewish sentiment. Unlike disputes over housing or rumors of employment and educational quotas, the involvement of foreign Jewish funds and sensibilities in this particular inequity would have strengthened the JAC's resolve to protest any irregularities in the distribution of material aid. In doing so, the JAC's leaders demonstrated not only agency and political savvy, but also a concern for Soviet Jews as members of a national community.

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<sup>35</sup> According to the first postwar census in 1959, Jews comprised only 2% of the UkrSSR's total population, but made up a significantly higher percentage of the population in individual cities. Cities with Jewish populations at or above 12% in 1959 included Berdichev (12.1%), Kiev (13.9%), Zhitomir (14%), Odessa (16%), Vinnitsa (16%), Korosten' (17.9%), Tul'chin (20.8%), Mogilev-Podol'skii (22.4%) and Chernovtsy (25%). Mordechai Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry since the Second World War: Population and Social Structure* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 74, 85–87.

The JAC continued raising the issue of foreign Jewish aid until at least mid-1946, although it seems to have stopped emphasizing the poor material conditions of Soviet Jews or directly alleging anti-Jewish discrimination in aid distribution. Instead, the JAC tried to obtain authorities' consent to allow foreign Jewish organizations "the possibility of sending their assistance directly to their designated objectives – regions, villages, children's homes, hospitals, schools, and museums, in coordination with the appropriate Soviet organs," as Mikhoels and Fefer wrote to Central Committee Secretary Malenkov in August 1945.<sup>36</sup> Central authorities never acquiesced on this point, variously citing the established policy on aid from abroad, the allegedly subversive motives of foreign Jewish organizations, fear of inciting antisemitism, and the issue's irrelevance with the war's end.<sup>37</sup> Significantly, a preliminary search lends some weight to the JAC's previously quoted claim that "Poles, Armenians, and other nationalities directly engage in the distribution of foreign aid among their fellow tribesmen in the USSR, but Jews thus far do not have this opportunity."<sup>38</sup> The June 4, 1944 edition of the Ukrainian-language newspaper *Kyivs'ka Pravda* included a short report on targeted foreign aid under the heading "Canadians of Ukrainian origin gather funds for equipping Soviet hospitals in Chernovtsy and L'vov."<sup>39</sup> The newspaper followed up on this piece six days later by printing the letter sent by the Ukrainian-Canadian Association in Calgary to M. Hrechukh, chairman of the presidium of Ukraine's *Verkhovna Rada* (Supreme Council), regarding this fundraising effort.<sup>40</sup> Although the aid in question would have benefitted ill citizens of all nationalities, the publication of these two pieces signified an official acceptance of a foreign organization's ability to specify

<sup>36</sup> Translation from document 57 in Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 257.

<sup>37</sup> See document 58 in *Ibid.*, 258–259.

<sup>38</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op 125, d. 246, l. 184ob.

<sup>39</sup> "Kanadtsi ukraïns'koho pokhodzhennia zbyraiut' koshty dlia obladdannia radians'kykh hospitaliv u Chernivtsiakh i L'vovi," *Kyivs'ka Pravda* 110 (148), June 4, 1944, 1.

<sup>40</sup> ["Z Kalgari, Kanada..."], *Kyivs'ka Pravda* 114 (152), June 10, 1944, 1.

the recipients, broadly, of its charity that was never granted to foreign Jewish organizations during this period.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, authorities suggested that the JAC not even reply to a 1945 letter from the Committee of Ukrainian *Zemliachestva* (associations of Jewish immigrants from the same areas) offering \$150,000 “for equipping hospitals in Zhitomir, Berdichev and Staro-Konstantinovka.”<sup>42</sup> In the spring of 1946 the Joint announced a one-million dollar plan to outfit seven hospitals in Ukraine and Belorussia—an agreement undoubtedly facilitated by the organization’s established relationship with the Soviet government and its control of significantly more funds than any *zemliachestvo*—but it seems that these plans were never realized.<sup>43</sup>

Locally, Jews living in such places as Zhitomir and Berdichev demonstrated concern for the welfare of their Jewish neighbors. Local Jewish charitable efforts appear to have centered around the functioning religious societies, although these activities were not officially sanctioned and they involved Jews who were not registered as “believers.” A November 1946 “Report on the unfavorable situation in religious organizations in the USSR and shortcomings of the work of the Council on the Affairs of Religious Cults [CARC] and its apparatus,” which singles out the improper activities of the Berdichev Jewish religious society as a “typical” example, notes that, among other transgressions, “[t]he society engages in charity [*blagotvoritel'nost'*], helping the families of Jews returning from evacuation.”<sup>44</sup> The report expands on this comment two pages later, claiming that “Jewish religious societies everywhere engage in charitable activity,

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<sup>41</sup> It is also worth noting that the geographical location of both cities in western Ukraine ensured that ethnic Ukrainians would compose the majority population of the area served by the hospitals.

<sup>42</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 121, d. 537, l. 50. See also ll. 49-56.

<sup>43</sup> “J.D.C. to Provide Seven Hospitals in U.S.S.R.,” *The J.D.C. Digest* 5, no. 3 (April 1945): 12. *The J.D.C. Digest* contains no follow-up pieces on this program, nor is it mentioned in either Beizer and Mitsel, *American Brother*, or Handlin, *A Continuing Task*.

<sup>44</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 405, l. 99.

collecting for orphans and the disabled [*invalidov*] and directly giving them aid.” A sampling of other CARC reports from the mid-1940s seems to verify this claim and indicates that these charitable activities continued through the end of the period studied here, even as the wartime relaxation of religious oppression subsided and the antic cosmopolitan campaign heated up. For example, a CARC report covering the last quarter of 1948 noted that activists in the Kharkov religious society—most of whom the report identified as non-believing *intelligenty*—“aim to carry out widespread charity for rendering help to needy Jews, building a special home for aged and homeless single people.” Even more troubling, “[t]hey plan to carry out their philanthropic activity with the widespread involvement in this matter of the whole Jewish population of Kharkov” and even arranged a public meeting on this issue in the city’s synagogue.<sup>45</sup> From the perspective of authorities, then, Jewish religious societies not only overstepped their limited rights in seeing to the material—rather than spiritual—needs of local Jews, but displayed nationalistic tendencies by including unreligious Jews in their efforts.

The charitable pursuits of local Jewish religious societies relied in part on the aid donated by foreign Jewish organizations, notwithstanding the restrictions central Soviet authorities had placed on such contributions or the suspicion with which CARC representatives viewed them. According to the 1946 CARC report, “Many [Jewish religious societies] receive parcels of food and clothing from foreign communities. The distribution of the parcels is performed in the synagogues. In some places, where there are no religious societies, individual adventurers [*avantiuristy*] create fictional Jewish societies for the receipt of parcels and other help from abroad.”<sup>46</sup> This image of Jews distributing packages of goods in their synagogues reinforced a

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<sup>45</sup> USHMM, Acc.1996.A.0169.02 [TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 5667, ark. 28/59].

<sup>46</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 405, l. 101.

long-standing association of Judaism with speculative behavior that typically received direct attention elsewhere in CARC reports.<sup>47</sup> In some cases, CARC officials tracked the number of packages received from foreign organizations as well as details on their distribution. A report from the third quarter of 1946 displayed particular dismay at the situation in Staro-Konstantinovka, where Gorsoviet employees joined members of the synagogue's council in allocating supplies from the 42 packages the Jewish religious society received from the Joint during the first half of 1946.<sup>48</sup> This report further charged that “[a]t the same time the Gorsoviet tolerated the disregard of...the question” of one elderly Jew's welfare, implying that local authorities should have spoken to the Party card-carrying daughter of Lazar Isakovich L. regarding his care instead of allowing the Jewish religious society to “take him under its ‘beneficence.’”<sup>49</sup> These comments all allude to the corrupting influence of such sectarian foreign aid, which could taint CARC officials as well. Indeed, one internal party report from 1947 denounced P. I. Kotliarov, a representative of the Council on the Affairs of Religious Cults in Chernovtsy *oblast'*, for accepting “gifts” that Chernovtsy's Jewish Religious Community had received as donations from foreign Jewish organizations.<sup>50</sup> As these cases illustrate, CARC officials interpreted the distribution of foreign aid by Jewish religious activists as yet another example of the link between religion and material exploitation, a basic theme in Soviet antireligious propaganda.

Despite the antireligious bias inherent in CARC reports, these documents attest to both the significance of foreign aid to local Jewish charitable efforts and to the strength of solidarity

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<sup>47</sup> For examples, see RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 405, l. 103; and USHMM, Acc1996.A.0169.02 [TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 4556, ark. 2/130].

<sup>48</sup> The report does not indicate the nationality of the Gorsoviet employees in question. USHMM, Acc.1996.A.0169.02 [TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 4555, ark. 392].

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, ark. 392-393.

<sup>50</sup> USHMM, Acc.1996.A.0169.02 [TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 4138, ark. 1-3].

among Jews living in Ukrainian communities. As noted above, the involvement of unreligious Jews in local philanthropic activities points to the inclusiveness of religious activists' concept of Jewishness. The allocation of aid according to the circumstances of Jews similarly suggests the insignificance of religious beliefs to these community self-help efforts. CARC figures on the distribution of foreign aid by the religious society in L'vov indicate that citizenship and political affiliation were not determining factors in aid distribution either: during an unidentified period of time before July 1947, the society reportedly distributed some 430 foreign aid packages—approximately 21% of the total under its management—to pre-1939 Polish Jewish citizens who ultimately repatriated to Poland.<sup>51</sup> Even if accurate, these figures cannot be considered representative since few other Ukrainian cities had a similarly large population of foreign Jewish repatriates, a reflection of L'vov's interwar Polish governance and postwar location near the Polish-Soviet border.<sup>52</sup> L'vov's Jewish religious society also demonstrated a high level of activism during the immediate postwar years and thus came under the scrutiny of the officials who documented its activities in detail. Still, these figures provide some idea of Jewish aid allocation on the local level. The leadership of L'vov's religious society privileged those who had fought and died in the war when allocating aid: approximately 30% of the total foreign aid at the society's disposal went to those identified as “disabled veterans of the Patriotic War,” “demobilized soldiers,” “families of killed defenders of the motherland,” “families of officers,” and “partisans of the Patriotic War.” While mostly noncombatants, Jewish repatriates to Poland nevertheless represented a distinct category of Jewish war victims, most having spent the war years in Soviet Central Asia as refugees or internees. Holocaust victims, including “orphans of

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<sup>51</sup> USHMM, Acc. 1996.A0169.02 [TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 4556, ark. 133].

<sup>52</sup> In western Ukraine, only the border city Chernovtsy (part of interwar Romania) had a similarly high proportion of foreign nationals.

tortured and annihilated parents” and “people returning from fascist camps,” received a combined share of 11% of the distributed aid—a comparatively low figure undoubtedly reflecting the small number of survivors, particularly in the L'vov region.<sup>53</sup> Significantly, the religious society’s allocation of well over one-third of its aid to Jews whose needs did not directly result from the war or genocide—including students and disabled workers—suggests a concern for the welfare of Jews independent of the extraordinary circumstances of the time.<sup>54</sup>

While the number of Jews assisted by the L'vov religious society demonstrates the importance of foreign aid to Soviet Jews, securing that aid often depended on the persistence and ingenuity of its intended recipients locally. Larger volumes of aid from foreign Jewish organizations never reached Soviet Jews because of authorities’ insistence on non-sectarian aid distribution and, possibly, because of anti-Jewish discrimination. In spite of these difficulties, Soviet Jews asserted the rights of their national communities and, with the assistance of Jews in the Soviet Union and abroad, succeeded in obtaining some material help for their fellow Jews in need.

### **“Longing for the Yiddish word”: Culture and Jewish Community**

The state of Jewish culture in the USSR emerged as another issue uniting Jews, some of whom considered the restoration of their community’s cultural life to be nearly as vital as its physical reconstruction after the liberation. While sectarian charitable efforts organized to help Jews rebuild their lives often defied the principles enshrined in Soviet law, however, attempts to restore and cultivate secular Jewish culture enjoyed legal protection and material support. The

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<sup>53</sup> The majority of aid distributed to Holocaust victims (68.5%), in fact, went to the orphans of victims, not to survivors themselves. USHMM, Acc. 1996.A0169.02 [TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 4556, ark. 133].

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

state of Jewish culture in the mid-1940s thus provides a measure of the status of Jews within the Soviet family of nations. At the same time, the context in which postwar efforts to promote Jewish culture unfolded allows us to examine how Jews approached the rebuilding of their community after war and genocide as well as the significance they attached to these traumas in their cultural endeavors.

This section's survey of Jewish—and particularly Yiddish—cultural production in postwar Ukraine emphasizes the possibilities this period offered for Jewish culture. From 1943 to 1948, when engaging with Soviet authorities, activists hoping to restore Jewish culture to its prewar height embraced the war's physical and demographic consequences as a way of disregarding the internal dismantling of Jewish cultural institutions in the late 1930s and concentrating on the pragmatic reasons for increased “mass cultural work” in Yiddish. At the same time, these efforts to promote Jewish culture proceeded in full awareness of the recent Jewish catastrophe, which inspired this drive to salvage and promote Jewish culture as well as many of the cultural artifacts it produced.

Both before and after the war, the Soviet state served as the main patron of Jewish culture, as it did for the cultures of other national minorities. Indeed, the Soviet state not only protected the cultural rights of national minorities, but its nationality policies during the 1920s and early 1930s actively promoted the cultural activities and institutions of the country's various ethnic and national groups. Part of the so-called “nativization” (*korenizatsiia*) campaign, these policies aimed to spread the new regime's ideology and create cadres locally among the non-Russian-speaking populations. In the resulting “affirmative action empire,” as Terry Martin has termed the interwar Soviet Union for this policy, language emerged as the primary marker of

national identity and, by extension, as the main conduit of national culture.<sup>55</sup> The regime accordingly recognized Yiddish—the language of the east European Jewish masses, as opposed to the religious language of Hebrew—as the native language of its Jewish population and promoted Yiddish cultural production so long as it remained “national in form, socialist in content.” Through the late 1930s, a number of Yiddish-language newspapers and journals appeared regularly, as did volumes of literature and poetry, including new works by state-subsidized writers. Amateur and professional Yiddish theaters proliferated in areas with significant Jewish populations. A small number of Jewish scientific institutions operated in Ukraine and Belorussia, while public libraries in these republics created Yiddish sections and even branches. In the newly-organized Jewish autonomous districts located in the former Pale of Settlement—created to normalize both the economic status of individual Jews and the territorial status of Jews as a nationality—local soviets, courts, and primary and technical schools functioned in Yiddish.<sup>56</sup>

In Ukraine, traditionally home to a large Jewish population, the size of this cultural output alone ensured that it did not go unnoticed by its target audience. The republic had an extensive network of state-supported Yiddish-language theaters that reached its peak at twelve theaters in 1933.<sup>57</sup> The cities of Kharkov, Kiev, Odessa, Vinnitsa, Zhitomir, Dnepropetrovsk, L'vov, Chernovtsy, and Ternopol' each boasted their own State Yiddish Theater at some point

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<sup>55</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>56</sup> For an overview of these developments, see Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present*, 2nd exp. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 59–115. More specialized studies of these endeavors include Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land*; David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); and Veidlinger, *Moscow State Yiddish Theater*.

<sup>57</sup> Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 255.

between 1925 and 1941. Kiev, the republic's capital after 1934, was home to the all-Ukrainian State Yiddish Theater (UkrGOSET) as well the more unique State Yiddish Children's Theater and Yiddish Puppet Theater. Most of these theaters closed in the late 1930s, leaving only UkrGOSET, the Odessa State Yiddish Theater, and the newly opened theaters in L'vov, Chernovtsy, and Ternopol' in operation on the eve of the Nazi invasion.<sup>58</sup> Amateur Yiddish theaters also bloomed across Ukraine in the 1920s and 1930s, staging a variety of productions in the schools, workplaces, and clubs of Yiddish-speaking communities.<sup>59</sup> The Mendele Moykher-Sforim Museum of Jewish Culture, established in Odessa in 1927, became the only one of its kind in the Soviet Union after the closure of its Leningrad counterpart in 1929.<sup>60</sup> The collections of some 225 Ukrainian libraries reportedly included over 100,000 Yiddish- and Hebrew-language items in the mid-1920s, including new works from Soviet Jewish writers as well as contemporary Yiddish periodicals and serials.<sup>61</sup> State and scientific libraries in Kiev and Kharkov held research-caliber Judaica collections that supported the work of the Jewish scholarly institutions in those cities, including (at various times) a Jewish folklore division in

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<sup>58</sup> Although Jeffrey Veidlinger cites the establishment of state Yiddish theaters in L'vov and Ternopol' between 1939 and 1941, O. Pidopryhora names L'vov and Chernovtsy—but not Ternopol'—as the locations of new theaters in those years. Photographs held in the library of the Moscow Jewish Community Center document a “Ternopol' Jewish Kolkhoz Theater” rather than a “Ternopol' State Yiddish Theater.” Jeffrey Veidlinger, “Soviet State Yiddish Theaters,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, accessed March 1, 2011, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Soviet\\_State\\_Yiddish\\_Theaters](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Soviet_State_Yiddish_Theaters); “Istoriia odnogo teatra: Sovsem nemnogo ob istorii Ternopol'skogo evreiskogo kolkhoznogo teatra,” *Moskovskii evreiskii obshchinnnyi tsentr*, July 23, 2008, <http://www.mjcc.ru/news/2034>; and O. Pidopryhora, “Ievreis'kii teatr,” in *Narysy z istorii ta kul'tury ievreiv Ukrainy*, ed. Leonid Finberh and Volodymyr Liubchenko (Kiev: Dukh i litera, 2005), 407–409. On the difficulties involved in counting the number of state Yiddish theaters in the USSR, see Pinkus, *Jews of the Soviet Union*, 121–122.

<sup>59</sup> Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, chap. 3.

<sup>60</sup> S. Borovoi, “Odessa (k 150-Letiu so Dnia Osnovaniia),” *Istorieskii Zhurnal*, no. 5–6 (June 1944): 48; and Benyamin Lukin, “An-Ski Ethnographic Expedition and Museum,” trans. I. Michael Aronson, *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, accessed July 17, 2011, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/An-ski\\_Ethnographic\\_Expedition\\_and\\_Museum](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/An-ski_Ethnographic_Expedition_and_Museum). Lukin gives the museum's name as the Mendele Moykher-Sforim All-Ukrainian Museum of Jewish Culture.

<sup>61</sup> Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, “Tentative List of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Axis-Occupied Countries,” *Jewish Social Studies* 8, no. 1 (supplement) (1946): 64.

Kharkov and, in Kiev, the Jewish Historical-Archeographical Commission and Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture and its successors. Of these institutions, only the Cabinet of Jewish Culture in Kiev—the successor to the Department of Jewish Culture and the Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture—survived into the 1940s.<sup>62</sup>

The popularity and content of these diverse cultural institutions and products varied. Until recently, most scholars had dismissed Yiddish cultural artifacts from the Soviet period as artificial pieces of propaganda with minimal Jewish content; the popularity of these cultural products among Soviet Jews received even less consideration.<sup>63</sup> As Harriet Murav has pointed out, however, judging Soviet Jewish cultural output based on its Jewish content—or alleged lack thereof—puts scholars in the same position as Soviet censors and “precludes the discovery of anything new.”<sup>64</sup> Assessing the popularity of Soviet Jewish culture is just as problematic. Admittedly, works by the most well-known Yiddish literary figures in the Soviet Union were read primarily by the educated elite, and therefore cannot be considered “popular” regardless of their content.<sup>65</sup> Recent assessments of other Soviet Jewish cultural products, however, are more

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<sup>62</sup> See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Folklore, Ethnography, and Anthropology,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, accessed April 1, 2011, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Folklore\\_Ethnography\\_and\\_Anthropology](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Folklore_Ethnography_and_Anthropology); Viktoriia Khiterer, ed., *Dokumenty sobrannye Evreiskoi istoriko-arkheograficheskoi komissiei Vseukrainskoi akademii nauk* (Kiev: Instytut Iudaiki, 1999); Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, “Tentative List of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Axis-Occupied Countries,” 64–65; and Alfred Abraham Greenbaum, *Jewish Scholarship and Scholarly Institutions in Soviet Russia, 1918-1953* ([Jerusalem]: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Centre for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry, 1978), 1–85.

<sup>63</sup> Writing in the late 1980s, for example, Benjamin Pinkus asserted that, “Any Jewish national features in Yiddish literature grew fewer and fewer in the 1930s until they disappeared.” Pinkus, *Jews of the Soviet Union*, 114. For a discussion of factors contributing to this dismissive attitude, see Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolution Russia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); and Harriet Murav, “Violating the Canon: Reading Der Nister with Vasili Grossman,” *Slavic Review* 67, no. 3 (2008): 642–643.

<sup>64</sup> Murav, “Violating the Canon,” 647–648 [quote on 648].

<sup>65</sup> The most notable exception may have been Itsik Fefer, who wrote in a simple style. See G. Estraikh, *In Harness: Yiddish Writers’ Romance with Communism*, 1st ed, Judaic Traditions in Literature, Music, and Art (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 34–35, 138–139; and Gennady Estraikh, “Itsik Fefer: A Yiddish Wunderkind of the Bolshevik Revolution,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 20, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 17–18, 20, 31.

ambiguous. Anna Shternshis, based on her interviews with Jews who grew up in the USSR during the interwar period, has suggested that Yiddish songs and plays produced in the 1920s as so-called “transitional” works intended to ease Jews into the Soviet milieu proved more popular than the more Sovietized cultural products created in the 1930s. Even Jeffrey Veidlinger, whose study of the Moscow State Yiddish Theater convincingly “demonstrate[d] how Jewish writers and artists were able to promote their own national culture within the confines of Soviet nationality policies,”<sup>66</sup> has claimed that the regional state Yiddish theaters such as those in Ukraine faced greater ideological restraints than their Moscow predecessor and consequently performed mostly “propaganda pieces of questionable artistic merit and little popular appeal.”<sup>67</sup> At least in the case of amateur Yiddish theaters, however, other factors also influenced reception, as Shternshis has argued:

For many contemporaries, the content of the performances was less important than the fact of their actual existence. Yiddish amateur theaters were the places where Yiddish was openly spoken, Jewish-related issues were discussed publicly, and, most important, Jews met regularly. Even though the content of the performances was frequently heavily propagandistic and filled with unpopular messages, almost every amateur performance was widely attended.<sup>68</sup>

In this way, Shternshis argues, amateur theaters assumed many of the roles previously served by now taboo and often non-existent synagogues.<sup>69</sup> The popularity of Soviet Jewish cultural products, then, also depended upon the availability of alternatives.

Finally, although antireligious campaigns and biases severely damaged Judaism in the interwar Soviet Union, traditions rooted in religion did not disappear from the cultural world of Soviet Jews, particularly in less urban regions with large Jewish populations. Many of the

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<sup>66</sup> *Moscow State Yiddish Theater*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> For more on the reasons behind these repertory differences, see *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>68</sup> Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, 104–105.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

subjects interviewed as part of various oral history or ethnographic projects in the last two decades recall family members incorporating some aspect of traditional religious culture into their lives during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>70</sup> A number of interviewees confirm that they or their close relatives continued a few of these practices—such as the preparation of special foods or the use of heirloom dishes on select holidays—into the decades following World War II.<sup>71</sup> Thus, even as these practices increasingly became detached from their original religious significance, they remained part of distinctively Jewish family traditions.

The Soviet state's support of Yiddish culture, of course, also made Jewish cultural output dependent on both the state's shifting nationality policies and the leadership's attitude toward Jews. Changes in nationality policies in the mid- to late-1930s, together with the continuing assimilation of the country's Jewish population, placed Soviet Jewish culture in a vulnerable position as most Yiddish theaters, newspapers, and magazines ceased to operate. Most scholars agree that only the annexation of borderland regions with large Jewish populations between 1939 and 1940 extended the life of state-supported Jewish culture in the USSR. The war made the

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<sup>70</sup> For examples of testimonies available online, see those available as part of the oral history project "Recovering Jewish Daily Life in the Pre-World War II Soviet Union," organized by Zvi Gitelman and Anna Shternshis, <http://sovietjewishculture.org/>, as well as the much larger collection of oral histories on the website of the Central Europe Center for Research and Documentation (Centropa) as part of its project, "Jewish Witness to a European Century," <http://www.centropa.org/?nID=52&countryID=191>. Affiliates of the Kiev-based Center for the Study of the History and Culture of East European Jewry (formerly the Institute of Jewish Studies) conducted the interviews of Ukrainian Jews for this project; transcripts of many of these interviews are available at USHMM (RG-31.027). The Jewish Heritage Center "Petersburg Judaica" has sponsored several ethnographic expeditions in Ukraine in the last decade; see <http://www.judaica-spb.com/index.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Of the postwar decades, Maria Reidman recounted that she and her husband "knew a lot about Jewish holidays, but we only observed traditions on Pesach. I made traditional meals from matzah, stuffed fish and my father conducted the seder." Reidman, interviewed by Oksana Zhmyr, Kiev, June 2002, <http://videos.centropa.org/index.php?nID=30&x=c2VhcmNoVHlwZT1CaW9EZXRhaWw7IHNIYXJjaFZhbHVlPTI3MA==>. Vladimir Goldman's mother always prepared gefilte fish on holidays; see the interview by Natalia Fomina, Odessa, September 2002, <http://centropa.org/index.php?nID=54&bioID=115>. Also see Elissa Bemporad, "Behavior Unbecoming a Communist: Jewish Religious Practice in Soviet Minsk," *Jewish Social Studies* 14, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 1–31; and Elissa Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in a Jewish Metropolis, Minsk 1917-1939*, forthcoming.

future of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union even more precarious as the annihilation of up to two million Soviet Jews during the Holocaust decimated the audience for Jewish cultural products and destroyed some of its creators. The plunder of Jewish cultural treasures by the Nazis along with the disruption and destruction cultural institutions endured during the occupation created further challenges. At the same time, the preservation and promotion of Jewish culture assumed a new urgency in the genocide's aftermath. Armed with this renewed sense of purpose and emboldened by both the JAC's activities and the contribution of Jews to the war effort, Jewish cultural activists struggled to restore Jewish culture to its prewar heights.

The Jewish Antifascist Committee led efforts to revitalize Jewish culture in the USSR toward the war's end. The committee's leading members, themselves performing artists and writers, were personally invested in the future of Jewish culture. The JAC became an advocate of Yiddish writers in particular. While state support of Yiddish culture in the 1920s and 1930s had offered Yiddish writers a level of economic security unparalleled in the capitalist West—and influenced several writers' decisions to return to the Soviet Union during this period—the sharp decline in Yiddish-language publications during and after (and, in fact, before) the war threatened writers' livelihoods.<sup>72</sup> The JAC brought this issue to the attention of the relevant officials as early as April 1943, when it petitioned Shcherbakov on behalf of evacuated Yiddish writers:

The situation of these writers...is difficult in the extreme. Some of them have no living quarters, clothing, or any means for their existence. This difficult situation is a result of a drastic reduction in the publishing of Yiddish books and periodicals. Before the Patriotic War there were four Yiddish dailies and several weekly newspapers, as well as three monthly magazines and a number of

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<sup>72</sup> Gennady Estraikh, "Anti-Nazi Rebellion in Peretz Markish's Drama and Prose" (presented at the Jewish Studies Workshop, Urbana, IL, 2010).

bimonthly anthologies, but all that remains now is the newspaper “Eynikayt” which comes out once every ten days.<sup>73</sup>

This letter, written just two months after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, requested only that Shcherbakov “instruct the Writers’ Union and local Party and Soviet organizations to give speedy assistance to the most needy writers.”<sup>74</sup> Later, once the threat to the country’s survival had passed, the JAC lobbied more directly for the production of more Yiddish-language media, and particularly for increasing the frequency and circulation of its newspaper, *Eynikayt*.<sup>75</sup> The request of *Eynikayt*’s editorial staff to rebrand the newspaper for peacetime as a Yiddish daily would have provided employment to additional writers and journalists. According to Shimon Redlich, who has worked with the JAC’s archive extensively, “the Committee acted as an agent for numerous other writers, whose articles and literary works were sent for publication abroad.” The JAC also hosted its own cultural events, particularly “literary evenings,” and generally facilitated ties between proponents of Jewish culture throughout the USSR.<sup>76</sup> *Eynikayt* regularly reported on Jewish cultural developments throughout the country and—although it fulfilled its role as a propaganda organ by distributing these “cultural briefs” to Jewish media outlets abroad—its staff also petitioned Soviet authorities on behalf of its readers’ cultural rights, as discussed below.

For all of the JAC’s support, Ukraine’s surviving Jewish institutions most directly influenced the postwar state of Jewish culture in the republic and thus deserve credit for the admittedly modest successes they achieved. These institutions were few in number. Although at least two of the remaining state Yiddish theaters from Ukraine managed to evacuate enough

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<sup>73</sup> Translation in Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 272.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> See *Ibid.*, 273–275, 277–279, 281.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

personnel to continue staging performances during the war, neither returned permanently to their prewar locations after the victory. A Russian translation of an *Eynikayt* article entitled “A Chronicle of Yiddish Theater Life in the USSR” distributed to foreign Jewish press organs around August-September 1946 indicates that the Odessa State Yiddish Theater remained in Tashkent, where it had recently performed Sholem Aleichem’s “Stempeniu.” An unknown reviewer of this translation subjected the brief reference to the theater’s whereabouts to a telling editorial change: the word “now” or “at present” (*seichas*) replaced the word “still” (*eshche*) in a clause identifying the theater’s location in Tashkent, thus removing any suggestion that the theater’s continued residence in evacuation two years after the liberation of its hometown was unusual.<sup>77</sup> The other entries in this cultural brief—including sections on the Belorussian Yiddish State Theater, then “preparing to return to its native Minsk,” and a “theatrical reading” of Yiddish works by actors from the Kiev State Yiddish Theater on tour in Moldavia—may have influenced the editor’s decision to make this subtle change in meaning.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, authorities quickly transferred the recently reevacuated Ukrainian State Yiddish Theater from Kiev to Chernovtsy.<sup>79</sup> References to the wartime fate of the Ternopol' and L'vov State Yiddish Theaters are difficult to find, but apparently neither theater resumed operations in postwar Ukraine.<sup>80</sup> The

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<sup>77</sup> D. Manevich, [trans.], “Khronika evreiskoi teatral'noi zhizni v SSSR,” in USHMM, RG-22.028M.20 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 47, ll. 249, 251].

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 248, 250-251.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 312.

<sup>80</sup> O. Pidopryhora’s overview of Yiddish theater in Ukraine provides no information on these theaters except for their dates of establishment, while actress Amalia Blank recalled in her Centropa interview that while still in evacuation, she “found out that the L'vov theater was closed down after the war.” The library of the Moscow Jewish Community Center has reported online that most members of the Ternopol' theater’s troupe “remained on occupied territory,” where presumably they were killed. Pidopryhora, “Ievreis'kii teatr,” 409; Amalia Blank, interview by Ella Levitskaya, September 2005, <http://www.centropa.org/index.php?nID=15&x=bGFuZlF9zZWxlY3Rvcj0xOTE7IHNIYXJjaFR5cGU9cGhvdG9kZXRhaWw7IHNIYXJjaFZhbnVPUVTQUJMMDA2OyBzZWZyY2hTa2lwPTA7IG9yaVNUPWZhbWlseWluY291bnRyeTsgb3JpU1Y9Qmxhbms=>; and “Istoriia odnogo teatra: Sovsem nemnogo ob istorii Ternopol'skogo evreiskogo kolkhoznogo teatra.”

Mendeleyev-Moykher-Sforim Museum of Jewish Culture did not reopen after the war either, even though part of its substantial collections survived.<sup>81</sup> The Cabinet of Jewish Culture fared far better: the institution returned from evacuation in Ufa to Kiev in 1944 and, during its brief postwar existence, played an important role in preserving and cultivating Jewish culture in Ukraine. The Yiddish Section of the Ukrainian Writers' Union, established in 1927, was the remaining major Jewish cultural institution operating in Ukraine during the mid-1940s.

It is more difficult to determine the extent to which amateur theatrical groups were reestablished after the liberation as such groups rarely left much of a paper trail. Shternshis's discussion of these groups in interwar Ukraine, which she correctly identifies as the first study of its kind, relies on oral testimony for this very reason.<sup>82</sup> *Eynikayt's* cultural briefs rarely covered events organized by amateur groups. One exception was a September 1946 report on a new club in Chernovtsy for members of a local producer's co-operative. The club's leaders planned to sponsor an ambitious program of literary evenings, lectures, and concerts in addition to its self-education and amateur arts groups.<sup>83</sup> It is unclear whether this club or its members had any ties to similar prewar clubs, although Chernovtsy obviously did not have a long history of Soviet rule and institutions. Two other sources, however, suggest that Ukrainian Jews attempted to reorganize the kinds of amateur cultural groups they had participated in before the war. In December 1947, I. Liumkis, head of *Eynikayt's* culture section, wrote to the presidium of the Kharkov region Promsoviet on behalf of a reader who complained about the "indifferent attitude of the leadership of the producers' co-operation's [*promkoop*] club to the work of the Jewish drama circle...[and] about the lack of help to workers of the drama circle." This brief letter

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<sup>81</sup> See Lukin, "An-Ski Ethnographic Expedition and Museum."

<sup>82</sup> Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*.

<sup>83</sup> [D. Manevich, trans.], "Khronika evreiskoi kul'nurnoi zhizni v SSSR," c. 21 Apr. 1946, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.20 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 47, l. 237].

concluded by requesting that the presidium's comrade Verkhovskii investigate the situation and "take corresponding measures for the improvement of the work of the Jewish drama circle."<sup>84</sup>

Liumkis did not identify the leaders of the co-operation's club or suggest an explanation for their behavior; only the drama circle's director, Vorkel', was named. Once again, while there is nothing to suggest that this drama group had a prewar predecessor, Kharkov—unlike Chernovtsy—had been under Soviet rule for the two prewar decades and its long-time residents would have been familiar with the tradition of such amateur groups.

A newspaper clipping preserved in the Cabinet of Jewish Culture's archive provides evidence of one case of continuity between pre- and postwar amateur groups. The undated article from *Radians'kii shliakh* ("Soviet Way"), Berdichev's local Ukrainian-language newspaper, begins by stating that the "Jewish drama collective, which existed in the city before the war, has resumed its work attached to the club of the 'Komsomolets' factory." The collective's twenty-five members—identified as employees at "Komsomolets", the "20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of October" artel, and an unnamed sewing factory—were reportedly preparing to stage "200,000," a play by Sholem Aleichem, in cooperation with the Palace of Pioneers and the city's musical-drama theater. Preparations for a "large" concert, complete with singers, dancers, and storytellers, were also underway. The article noted that the drama collective was affiliated with the Cabinet, "from where the artists-amateurs receive repertoire and directions for further work," thus explaining the clipping's preservation in that institution's archive.<sup>85</sup> A poster filed together with this clipping indicates that Berdichev's Jewish drama collective staged at least one other major production during its postwar existence: a three-part production featuring two of

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<sup>84</sup> I. Liumkis [Moscow] to Verkhovskii [Khar'kov], 17 Jul. 1947, in GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 1122, l. 76.

<sup>85</sup> MI-VNLU, f. 190, n. 223.

Sholem Aleichem's stories followed by a performance of "Jewish folklore."<sup>86</sup> A more detailed, Russian version of this article, dated August 5, 1947 and catalogued in the JAC's archive, identifies this performance as the group's postwar premiere. This version has two additional sentences regarding the collective's wartime fate, although there is still no hint that the group or its members faced any particular challenges as Jews. Instead, the war is presented as an unfortunate disruption of daily life: "The war, the period of German occupation, interrupted the artistic work of the stage enthusiasts. The Germans even destroyed the building of the club in which the amateur actors had worked."<sup>87</sup> Still, the local publication of this article—which concludes by calling the collective's activities a "considerable development in the cultural life of the city" that "deserves the thorough help of the whole community"—as relatively late as August 1947 attests to the possibilities for the development Jewish culture in Ukraine that existed until the onset of the so-called "Black Years" in 1948.<sup>88</sup>

Next to theatrical performances, the "literary evening" became the most ubiquitous manifestation of Jewish culture in Ukraine after the war. The Writers' Union, Cabinet of Jewish Culture, and even local libraries and regional newspapers sponsored occasional literary evenings across Ukraine. The program of these events could vary, and often included a musical component. Around 1946 the Ukrainian Writers' Union sent David Hofshstein, Abram Kagan, and Hershl Polyanker on a traveling circuit of literary evenings in such smaller cities as Mogilev-Podol'sk, Zhmerinka, and Shargorod, where they read from their recent works and discussed the state of Yiddish literature with the audience. Each of these literary evenings concluded with a

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<sup>86</sup> MI-VNLU, f. 190, n. 223.

<sup>87</sup> Curiously, this version of the article is signed by a G. Borko, while the clipping from *Radians'kii shliakh* is attributed to Ie. Kolesnyk. "Evreiskii dramaticheskii kollektiv v Berdicheve," in USHMM, RG-22.028M.50 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 112, l. 247].

<sup>88</sup> MI-VNLU, f. 190, n. 223.

musical performance by Nikolai Furman, who sang Jewish folk songs.<sup>89</sup> Other literary evenings honored such giants of Yiddish literature as Yitskhok Leybush Peretz and Sholem Aleichem with speeches and musical performances.<sup>90</sup> Due to Sholem Aleichem's stature in the Soviet Union, the mainstream Soviet press marked the thirtieth anniversary of his death as well. *Radians'ka Ukraïna*, the republic's central Ukrainian-language newspaper, published a large biography of the Yiddish writer in its May 14, 1946, edition.<sup>91</sup> Later that week the paper also ran brief accounts of the evenings held in the writer's honor in Kiev and Moscow as well as a good-sized editorial reflecting on the collective experience of Sholem Aleichem's "people"—the Jews—in the Soviet Union.<sup>92</sup> In the fall of that same year, the Cabinet held a more somber evening of readings and reminiscences in memory of three Yiddish poets who had died on the frontlines of the Great Patriotic War.<sup>93</sup>

Other public offerings of Jewish culture in Ukraine during this period included stand-alone concerts, lectures, and a relatively small number of publications. Jewish folksingers Samuil Samoïlov and Mikhail Epel'baum each gave an unspecified number of concerts in Kiev in the second half of 1946.<sup>94</sup> Earlier that year, the Moldavian State Jazz Orchestra performed

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<sup>89</sup> D. Manevich, [trans.], "Khronika kul'turnoi zhizni evreev v SSSR" and "Jewish Cultural Life in the USSR," c. 23 Oct. 1946, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.80 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 179, ll. 379, 382]. The Yiddish original of this piece ran in the Oct. 12, 1946 edition of *Eynikayt*.

<sup>90</sup> For the evening dedicated to I.L. Peretz, see A. Kagan, "Khronika kul'turnoi zhizni evreev v Kieve," trans. D. Manevich, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.80 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 179, ll. 387-388]. For evenings in honor of S. Aleichem, see the following two footnotes and Kh. Ilin (Vainerman), "A yontev fun di yidishe kultur," in USHMM, RG-22.028M.115 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 289, ll. 250-253].

<sup>91</sup> Ie. Loïtsker, "Sholom Aleïkhem (do 30-richchia vid dnia smerti)," *Radians'ka Ukraïna* 95 (7529), 14 May 1946, 4.

<sup>92</sup> "Vechir, prysviachenyï Sholom-Aleïkhemu," *Radians'ka Ukraïna* 97 (7531), 17 May 1946, 3; "Vechir pam'iaty Sholom-Aleïkhema," *Radians'ka Ukraïna* 98 (7532) 18 May 1946, 3; and Leonid Pervomaiskyï, "Myr vam!," *Radians'ka Ukraïna* 98 (7532) 18 May 1946, 3.

<sup>93</sup> The fallen poets were B. Olevskii, G. Diamant, and M. Gartsman. See A. Kagan, "Khronika kul'turnoi zhizni evreev v Kieve," trans. D. Manevich, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.80 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 179, l. 387].

<sup>94</sup> [D. Manevich, trans.], "Khronika evreiskoi kul'turnoi zhizni v SSSR," in USHMM, RG-22.028M.20 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 47, ll. 237-242].

Moldavian and Jewish folk music in Vinnitsa during the ensemble's summer tour.<sup>95</sup> Associates of the Cabinet of Jewish Culture frequently gave public lectures on their work as part of the Cabinet's program for "mass-cultural work."<sup>96</sup> Together with the literary evenings this institution sponsored and the wide-ranging work of its Folklore Division—discussed in detail in the following section—the Cabinet maintained a high public presence, particularly for an academic institution. Small runs of new Yiddish-language publications were available as well, at least in the larger cities, although not even Kiev boasted a dedicated Jewish bookstore after the war.<sup>97</sup> As *Eynikayt* editor G. Zhits pointed out in an October 1948 letter to L. F. Ilyichev, Deputy Head of the Central Committee's Agitprop Department, the only national newspaper in Yiddish was available by subscription and could not be found in newsstands.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps the most noteworthy Yiddish publication from this period was *Der Shtern* ("The Star"), a short-lived literary journal founded in Kiev in 1947 in response to writers' repeated appeals for Yiddish literary outlets.<sup>99</sup> Again, this late date is indicative of the uncertainty in Soviet policy—and the corresponding opportunities this presented for Jewish culture—until the decisive adoption of state antisemitism around 1948. Presumably, some of these publications could be found in public libraries, particularly those Jewish sections or branches that reopened after the war. These included the Central Jewish Library in Odessa and the Jewish Section of the Kharkov State Library. Part of the latter's collection of Jewish books survived the Nazis thanks to library

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 313, 318.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 167-168. Mark Derbaremdiker recalled attending some of the lectures in his Centropa interview. See Mark Derbaremdiker and Ella Orlikova, Mark Derbaremdiker (A Lively Narration), May 2002, [http://www.berdichev.org/mark\\_derbaremdiker.htm](http://www.berdichev.org/mark_derbaremdiker.htm).

<sup>97</sup> A. Kagan, "Khronika kul'turnoi zhizni evreev v Kieve," trans. D. Manevich, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.80 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 179, l. 389]; and Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 276-277.

<sup>98</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 281.

<sup>99</sup> Both *Der Shtern* and its Moscow counterpart, *Heymland* ("Homeland"), were published in 1947-1948. *Ibid.*, 156n28-29.

employees who had hidden them among books from the general collection. This allowed the Jewish section to reopen after the war and, with the help of donations from private citizens, the Jewish section's collection numbered approximately 8,000 Yiddish books and 2,000 Hebrew books by early 1947.<sup>100</sup>

Judaism also contributed to the cultural life of Soviet Jews in the immediate postwar years. Yaacov Ro'i has long maintained that this period saw an upsurge in synagogue attendance on holy days and in the performance of religious rites such as circumcision, although he recognizes that this did not necessarily reflect any increase in the number of Jewish believers.<sup>101</sup> Whether spurred by conviction or renewed national awareness, Jews took advantage of the wartime relaxation of Soviet religious policy by reestablishing their prewar religious communities and attempting to register new ones according to Soviet law. Ukrainian Jews were especially active in this respect, and by the end of 1947 they had succeeded in registering a total of 79 synagogues—by far the largest number of official synagogues in any Soviet republic.<sup>102</sup> Authorities locally and in Moscow likely had rejected an equal or greater number of registration applications for religious communities, some of which presumably continued to function illegally as *minyanim*.<sup>103</sup> As discussed in the previous section on charity within the Jewish

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<sup>100</sup> Kh. Nadel, "Dos vort funem leyener," and Kh. Nadel, "Di yidishe opteylung fun kharkover melukhe-bibliotek," in USHMM, RG-22.028M.108 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 268, ll. 109-111, 149-150].

<sup>101</sup> Yaacov Ro'i, "The Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union after World War II," in *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass, 1995), 263–89; and Yaacov Ro'i, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communities in the USSR, 1944-1947," in *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin After WW II*, ed. David Bankier (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 203.

<sup>102</sup> Ro'i, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communities in the USSR, 1944-1947," 189. Ro'i cites a CARC report that counted a total of 185 registered Jewish religious communities in the USSR by the end of 1947. The RSFSR, with just under half of the number of registered synagogues in Ukraine (38), was the republic with the second largest number of officially-recognized Jewish religious communities in the Soviet Union.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. According to Ro'i, the CARC rejected 235 applications for the registration of Jewish religious communities throughout the USSR from the time of its formation in May 1944 to mid-1947. For estimates on the number of *minyanim* in various locales, see Ro'i, "Jewish Religion in the Soviet Union after World War II," 267-268.

community, these religious communities undertook projects unrelated to their officially-sanctioned religious functions that often involved Jews who did not consider themselves religious. As a result, in the words of Vladimir (Ze'ev) Khanin, Jewish religious communities in Ukraine “became valuable centers for information, socializing, mutual support, ethnic culture, education, and informal business activities,” although he cautions that “[t]heir role in the reconstruction of national and cultural tradition, although important, was quite limited.”<sup>104</sup> Again, in-home practices with religious origins that eventually became regarded as Jewish or even family traditions survived the post-1947 re-closure of many synagogues and lingered for decades in some families and communities.<sup>105</sup>

Contrary to long-held assumptions, these cultural events and products frequently addressed the recent Jewish catastrophe. An undated brief on several Jewish literary evenings held in Odessa includes a reference to a “special evening held on the interesting work of the writer Khaim Kheifits, who has gathered rich material about Jews saved from the Odessa ghetto and the death camps in Bogdanovka and Domanovka.”<sup>106</sup> That same edition of *Eynikayt's* “Chronicle of Jewish Cultural Life” also announced (erroneously, as it turned out) that the Cabinet’s collection of “Jewish folklore of the Patriotic War”—much of which consisted of

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<sup>104</sup> Vladimir Khanin, “Judaism and Organized Jewish Movements in the USSR/CIS after World War II: The Ukrainian Case,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 11, no. 1–2 (Spring 1999), <http://www.jcpa.org/cjc/cjc-khanin-s99.htm>.

<sup>105</sup> When Charles E. Hoffman, a JDC administrator working in post-Soviet Ukraine, visited Shargorod in the 1990s, he learned that *mezuzot* had survived the communist period in this so-called “red shtetl,” although the town’s Jews did not associate these artifacts with religion. Anna Shternshis provides a more personal example of this tendency in the acknowledgements to her book *Soviet and Kosher*, writing that as a child, “I had no idea that the special dinner they [her grandparents] served every spring was a version of the Passover seder. Nor did I know that when my grandmother kissed the upper corner of the door three times when entering and leaving the house she was acknowledging the nonexistent mezuzah.” Charles E. Hoffman, *Red Shtetl: The Survival of a Jewish Town Under Soviet Communism* (New York: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 2002), 110–111; and Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, ix.

<sup>106</sup> D. Manevich, [trans.], “Khronika evreiskoi kul'turnoi zhizni,” in USHMM, RG-22.028M.20 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 47, l. 170].

“songs from the ghettos and concentration camps, [and] the battle songs of partisans”—would soon go to press.<sup>107</sup> Some of these songs may have been performed in concert by the folk singer Mikhail Epel'baum, who purportedly included pieces collected by the Cabinet as part of this project in his repertoire.<sup>108</sup> Another cultural brief from the fall of 1946 noted that copies of G. Smoliar's *From the Minsk Ghetto* had sold out after only a few days in Kiev.<sup>109</sup> As Harriet Murav shows in her recent work on Jewish literature in post-revolution Russia, a number of Jewish writers in both Russian and Yiddish treated the catastrophe in their works.<sup>110</sup>

This focus on the Holocaust is evident in a September 1945 *Eynikayt* article on the postwar debut of the Kiev State Yiddish Theater in the capital. Although A. Idin, the article's author, began by describing the premiere as a play “portraying the participation of Soviet Jews in the struggle of the freedom-loving peoples against German fascism,” he quickly situated the play in its specifically Jewish, post-genocidal context. The very title of this play by M. Pinchevskii, which can be translated as “I Live” or “I am Alive,” lent itself to this double meaning of Soviet and Jewish triumph, as did the beginning of the performance. According to Idin, the curtain onstage opened to reveal an inner curtain inscribed with the Yiddish words “The Jewish People Lives,” a message whose unveiling garnered a round of “wild, unceasingly long applause” from an audience that included representatives of various Soviet Ukrainian cultural institutions.<sup>111</sup> Idin's explanation for this response combined an awareness of the particularly Jewish wartime

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., l. 169.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., l. 239.

<sup>109</sup> A. Kagan, “Khronika kul'turnoi zhizni evreev v Kieve,” trans. D. Manevich, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.80 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 179, l. 389].

<sup>110</sup> Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train*.

<sup>111</sup> The quotations in this paragraph are modified versions of this article's English translation, which I have checked against the Russian text. A. Idin, “Kievskii Evreiskii Gosudarstvennyi teatr nachal svoi spektakli v Kieve” and “Kiev State Jewish Theatre Reopens,” trans. D. Manevich, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.34 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 80, ll. 260, 262].

tragedy with the official narrative of Soviet ideology: “In Kiev, where the German barbarians annihilated many thousands of Jews, the first postwar performance in Yiddish turned into a grand demonstration of the friendship of the Soviet peoples.”<sup>112</sup> The two spectator responses quoted in this article similarly celebrate the play’s staging as an achievement of Soviet nationality policies while acknowledging the performance’s particular significance to Jews so soon after the genocide. Actor and National Artist of the UkrSSR Gnat Iura reportedly characterized the premiere as an “occasion for rejoining both for Ukrainian and Jewish culture,” noting that, “The German savages aimed to annihilate the Jewish people, Jewish culture. Thanks to the Soviet government, the Jewish people lives, and its culture lives.” Major-General Vasilii Babushkin declared that the play “filled me with the deepest grief for the untold sufferings that the Jewish people lived through” before expressing his gratitude that, “With the aid of the great Russian people the Jewish people will find new joy and happiness in the fraternal family of the Soviet nations.”<sup>113</sup> Ultimately, the dual postwar and post-Holocaust context in which even non-Jews apparently understood this play may have contributed to its censure by Ukrainian Party officials by the end of 1947, when a report issued by the Ukrainian Committee on the Arts cited it as one of three examples of “plays containing more or less open appearances of national narrow-mindedness, reflecting the bourgeois-nationalistic character of [their] themes.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> A. Idin, “Kievskii Evreiskii Gosudarstvennyi teatr nachal svoi spektakli v Kieve” and “Kiev State Jewish Theatre Reopens,” trans. D. Manevich, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.34 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 80, ll. 261, 262ob.]. Curiously, although both translations of this article specify that this message appeared in Yiddish, a reproduced photograph of a curtain decoration used by the theater clearly shows that the phrase “The Jewish People Lives” is written in Hebrew. See Pidopryhora, “Ievreis’kii teatr,” 412.

<sup>113</sup> A. Idin, “Kievskii Evreiskii Gosudarstvennyi teatr nachal svoi spektakli v Kieve” and “Kiev State Jewish Theatre Reopens,” trans. D. Manevich, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.34 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 80, ll. 261, 262ob.].

<sup>114</sup> TsDAVO, f. 4763, op. 1, spr. 79, ark. 3-5 [quote on ark. 3-4]. Upon relocating to Chernovtsy, the theater continued to perform “I Live” in 1946. See TsDAVO, f. 2708, op. 4, spr. 36, ark. 9.

The Holocaust also was visible, quite literally, in some of the plastic arts from this period. In his piece on a 1944 art exhibition in Kiev, which highlights the work of several artists with identifiably Jewish surnames, A. Kagan provided a long and detailed description of pieces depicting the Jewish catastrophe. This description comprises nearly half of the article's text, but it is sandwiched between brief references to pieces with more predictable subject matters—including a portrait of Stalin and “canvasses of exotic Bashkiria and sunny Uzbekistan landscapes”—as if Kagan hoped to camouflage its content. The English translation of the relevant passage, prepared for distribution to the foreign Jewish press, reads:

Stakhov's high reliefs, which in the main are plastic sculptural forms, leave a strong impression. His high reliefs [of] Babi Yar in Kiev and Zelenaya Gora in Berdichev where thousands of Jews were done to death [*sic*] are rendered with tremendous force. In them the artist has attained the highest form of expression. In the foreground is a hitlerite tearing an infant from its mother's arms in order to hurl it into a heap of bodies lying in a ditch. The mother, desperately clutching at her baby, is conveyed with such forcefulness that one feels the tragedy and despair not only in her desperate hands but in the tenseness of her entire figure as well.

Another picture shows a hitlerite hangman dragging a little Jewish boy to the ditch.

Exceptionally well done are the old Jews with their patriarchal beards and the people driven to the death ditch.

Stakhov's high reliefs have won him universal praise.<sup>115</sup>

Neither the English nor the Russian translations of this article indicate how these pieces identified which mass execution sites they reportedly depicted.<sup>116</sup> Even if the inspiration for these works remained somewhat private—identifiable by the artist, but not provided on the pieces themselves or any explanatory texts accompanying them—the images of “old Jews with

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<sup>115</sup> A. Kagan, “At an art exhibition in Kiev,” 14 Jun. 1947, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.09 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 34-34ob.].

<sup>116</sup> A. Kagan, “At an art exhibition in Kiev” and “Na khudozhestvennoi vystavke v Kieve,” trans. D. Manevich, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.09 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 34-34ob., 37-37ob].

patriarchal beards” would have marked the scene as one of Jewish tragedy. Kagan’s description of the piece is especially significant in this respect as it leaves no space for the ambiguities often attached to Nazi atrocities in the Soviet press: the subject is the mass shooting of *Jews* at Babi Yar in September 1941, not the subsequent executions of “peaceful citizens” from other nationalities at that ravine during Kiev’s occupation. The Jewish catastrophe thus was not only a topic of interest to Soviet Jews, but was also incorporated into their cultural life.

Certainly, not all Jews were interested in, or even had access to, the cultural offerings of this period. A number of Jews did participate in the various attempts to rebuild Jewish cultural institutions in postwar Ukraine, however, and evidence suggests that an additional number of Jews desired access to the existing publications and cultural activities. In the summer of 1946, for example, the chief editor of *Eynikayt* forwarded a letter received by the newspaper to the Ukrainian Communist Party’s Central Committee with the following explanation: “The editorial staff of the newspaper ‘Eynikayt’ has received numerous letters from the Ukraine complaining about the lack of cultural-education activities among the Jewish population in their native language. We are relaying to you one of these letters from a demobilized Red Army officer, comrade Kuperman. We request that you notify us what decision is taken with reference to this letter.” B. S. Kuperman’s letter, dated June 18, began by describing how his eagerness to read, speak, and hear Yiddish again after four years at war had quickly turned to dismay at the language’s absence in postwar Kiev. As he wrote, “I rushed home to Kiev, my native city, one of the greatest Yiddish cultural centers of the country, but found that in spite of this, there is no cultural activity in Yiddish taking place here.” Kuperman specifically contrasted the current lack of Yiddish-language publications with their availability before the war, concluding that “Jewish culture in Kiev simply does not exist today.” Without suggesting alternative explanations for

this absence of Yiddish culture in the capital—and, he maintained, in all of Ukraine—Kuperman rejected the idea that Jews themselves simply were not interested in their culture. Rather, he observed that “the Jewish population of Kiev displayed a colossal interest in Yiddish culture” at a recent Russian-language literary evening in honor of Sholem Aleichem in Kiev.<sup>117</sup> To satisfy this interest—and his own “longing for the Yiddish word”—Kuperman recommended the renewed production of Yiddish media and more regular cultural activities.<sup>118</sup>

For some Jews, as discussed earlier, the simple availability of Yiddish cultural products mattered more than any personal interest they had in them. Just as Kuperman deplored the postwar absence of a professional Yiddish theater in Kiev, one man cited the theater’s presence in Chernovtsy as one of several factors that made that city a good place for Jews to live in the immediate postwar period. Zakhar Benderskiy, a Romanian Jew who survived the occupation in Tashkent, moved to Chernovtsy with his family in 1945 after briefly returning to his native Kishinev. As he later recalled in an interview sponsored by Centropa, “I was very glad that we moved to Chernovtsy, which is a beautiful town. The Jewish population constituted about 60 per cent. [...] People spoke Yiddish in the streets, and there was a Jewish theater, school and synagogue until 1948. There was a very warm and friendly atmosphere in Chernovtsy.”<sup>119</sup> The Jewish school Benderskiy referred to appears to have been the only Yiddish school in the postwar UkrSSR, a concession to the unusually large population of native Yiddish speakers in a border city that only recently had become part of the USSR.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 276.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>119</sup> Zakhar Benderskiy, interview by Ella Levitskaya, August 2002, <http://videos.centropa.org/index.php?nID=54&x=c2VhcmNoVHlwZT1CaW9EZXRhaWw7IHNIYXJjaFZhHVlPTMw>.

<sup>120</sup> Although scholarly consensus maintains that the Yiddish-language schools of the 1920s and 1930s had no (positive) Jewish cultural content, this Yiddish school purportedly had a choir whose members celebrated the beginning of the 1946 school year with a performance of Jewish folk songs. [D. Manevich, trans.], “Khronika

Promoters of Jewish culture relied on such positive sentiments as they attempted to secure additional support for Jewish cultural developments from local and central authorities. In these appeals, cultural activists wisely attributed the current, rather stunted state of Jewish culture in the USSR to the destruction wrought by the Nazis, allowing them to ignore the mass closure of Jewish cultural institutions in the late 1930s in a bid to reverse its consequences. Although Soviet Jewish culture never recovered to its prewar height, the remaining Jewish institutions in postwar Ukraine actively promoted Jewish culture *with* the state's support through 1948. Many of the resulting cultural products combined an awareness of the current "party line" with particularly Jewish concerns relating to the Holocaust's aftermath, as detailed in the following section on the Cabinet of Jewish Culture's activities in the mid-1940s.

### **"In a Moment of Severe Trials": The Case of the Cabinet of Jewish Culture**

In November 1948, a certain S. Shakhovskii issued his review of "Jewish Folklore from the Days of the Great Patriotic War," a Yiddish-language manuscript prepared by the Folklore Division of the Cabinet of Jewish Culture in Kiev and consisting of a "preface, several stories and legends, a considerable number of songs and verses and the commentary apparatus required for such a publication." Shakhovskii declared the manuscript's publication both "feasible and desirable" for two reasons, which he summarized as follows:

The collection offered for publication has, in the first place, a scientific interest. Oral folklore, as always, reflects the thoughts and hopes of the masses, and as material for studying national consciousness it is very demonstrative and educational.

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evreiskoi kul'turno zhizni v SSSR," c. 21 Sept. 1946, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.20 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 47, l. 238]. An English translation of this edition of the "Chronicle of Jewish Cultural Life in the USSR" may be found in USHMM, RG-22.028M.156 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 429, ll. 373-376].

The collection has considerable political interest. It attests that in a moment of severe trials the Jewish people displayed a tremendous patriotic love to their Fatherland, to the USSR, trusting in the victory of the Soviet people over fascism, all their thoughts with those, who defended the Fatherland.<sup>121</sup>

Still, Shakhovskii's support for the manuscript's publication was contingent on the completion of rather significant editorial changes—including the removal of “a number of the texts”—to correct several ideological issues.<sup>122</sup> The most serious of these concerned the nature of the “severe trials” in question. “At times,” he wrote, “the normative emphasis becomes on what Jews suffered, but without the necessary emphasis on what Soviet citizens suffered,” a criticism that reflected the regime's emphasis on the suffering of *all* Soviet peoples during the war.<sup>123</sup> A related problem posed by the collection, which contained a number of so-called “ghetto and camp songs,” was its generally negative tone, the result of a narrative style that Shakhovskii characterized as “passiv[e], distressed, energetic only in [its] foul language.” He further noted that, “For all that the songs have a great deal of language about tragedy, about blood, about butchery, there is little about active revenge, about the destruction of the enemy.”<sup>124</sup>

Even Shakhovskii's conditional endorsement of the manuscript seems remarkable given its timing. This review appeared toward the end of a year that began with the murder—orchestrated at the highest levels of the Soviet government—of Solomon Mikhoels, the renowned Yiddish actor and head of the Jewish Antifascist Committee. For historians of Soviet

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<sup>121</sup> MI-VNLU, f. 190, no. 322, l. 2.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 7.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 4. On the universalization of Soviet suffering, see Zvi Gitelman, “Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union,” in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 14–42; and Amir Weiner, “When Memory Counts: War, Genocide, and Postwar Soviet Jewry,” in *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework*, ed. Amir Weiner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 167–88.

<sup>124</sup> MI-VNLU, f. 190, no. 322, l. 4.

Jewry, this event has traditionally marked the beginning of the so-called “Black Years,” a period of state-sponsored antisemitism that escalated up until Stalin’s death.<sup>125</sup> That November, around the time Shakhovskii submitted his review, authorities liquidated the JAC and arrested many of its surviving leaders.<sup>126</sup> Just two months later, in January 1949, the secret police arrested Elie Spivak, the director of the Cabinet of Jewish Culture. The Academy of Sciences, with the approval of the Ukrainian Communist Party’s Central Committee, liquidated the Cabinet the following month.<sup>127</sup> More arrests followed, including that of Moshe Beregovsky, the ethnomusicologist who headed the Cabinet’s Folklore Division and co-edited, with linguist Ruvim Lerner, “Jewish Folklore from the Days of the Great Patriotic War.” That manuscript was never published. Along with the collection of folk songs from which it was compiled and Shakhovskii’s review, it eventually entered the repository of the Vernadsky National Library’s Manuscript Institute in Kiev, where the Cabinet’s archival collection was rediscovered in 1991 after having been forgotten or presumed destroyed for half a century.<sup>128</sup>

The fate of the manuscript—and, indeed, of the Cabinet of Jewish Culture—has relegated it to a footnote in a larger narrative of Soviet anti-Jewish repression. The collection of wartime folklore itself, in turn, is presented as something of a curiosity or anomaly in such a historiographical tradition, when it is even mentioned. This section attempts to correct this retrospective view by situating “Jewish Folklore from the Days of the Great Patriotic War”

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<sup>125</sup> Yehoshua A. Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry, 1939-1953*, trans. Yosef Shachter and Dov Ben-Abba (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971).

<sup>126</sup> On the fate of the JAC’s members, see Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, eds., *Stalin’s Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee*, trans. Laura Esther Wolfson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>127</sup> USHMM, Acc. 1996.A.0169.01 [TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, spr. 5665, ark. 77].

<sup>128</sup> Lyudmila Sholokhova, “The Phonoarchive of Jewish Folklore at the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine,” trans. Illia Labunka, 2001, <http://www.archives.gov.ua/Eng/NB/Phonoarchive.php>. According to USHMM’s music curator Bret Werb, who graciously shared the unpublished text of his chapter on postwar songbooks with me, the State Archives of Cinematographic, Photographic and Audio Documents in St. Petersburg holds a more complete copy of “Jewish Folklore from the Days of the Great Patriotic War.”

within the larger context of both Soviet and Jewish archival creation in the immediate aftermaths of World War II and the Jewish genocide. The Soviet context in particular gave Cabinet members every expectation that this volume would be published as one example of national folklore from the war years. Accordingly, the volume's editors attempted to construct a Soviet *and* Jewish narrative of the Jewish wartime experience, an effort most visible in the sections on “war songs” and “songs about the friendship of the peoples.” Folklore of the Soviet Jewish wartime experience necessarily included the Holocaust, however, a subject and experience that set Jewish folklore apart from that of other national groups. The strong regional influence of many of the “ghetto and camp songs” selected for publication made this collection of folklore even more particularly Jewish.

Part of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, the Cabinet of Jewish Culture was the successor to a string of Jewish scientific institutions in Kiev (including the Department of Jewish Culture and the Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture) whose employees, collections, and research agendas it largely inherited upon its formation in 1936.<sup>129</sup> At that time, the Cabinet was one of a handful of Jewish research centers in the Soviet Union.<sup>130</sup> Only the Cabinet, however, survived the Great Purges into the 1940s.<sup>131</sup> The Cabinet ultimately consisted of three divisions—linguistics, folklore, and literature—and maintained active ties with colleagues throughout the Soviet Union. Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Cabinet was evacuated to Ufa, in the Soviet interior, where it remained for the next three years.

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<sup>129</sup> Variations of the institute's names are common in the secondary literature due to translation choices.

<sup>130</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, the Belorussian Academy of Sciences (Minsk) had its own Jewish Section, and Jewish folklore divisions were attached to academic institutions in Moscow and Kharkov, Ukraine. I. Gerasimova, “K istorii evreiskogo otdela institute belorusskoi kul'tury (Inbelkult) i evreiskogo sektora belorusskoi akademii nauk v 20-kh-30-kh godakh,” *Vestnik evreiskogo universiteta v moskve* 2(12) (1996): 144–67; Greenbaum, *Jewish Scholarship and Scholarly Institutions in Soviet Russia, 1918-1953*; and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Folklore, Ethnography, and Anthropology.”

<sup>131</sup> Terry Martin addresses the context in which these closures took place in *Affirmative Action Empire*, 426.

Its members continued their scholarly pursuits while in evacuation, although by the time the institution returned to Kiev in 1944 most had adopted projects relating to the war.<sup>132</sup> During its brief postwar existence, the Cabinet supported a full research agenda, worked to restore its prewar library and archive, and even added to its staff at a time when a number of Jews reportedly experienced employment discrimination.<sup>133</sup>

Beregovsky, now recognized as “the most important ethnomusicologist of Jewish music in the Soviet Union,” headed the Folklore Division from its inception in 1927 as part of the Department of Jewish Culture until the liquidation of the Cabinet of Jewish Culture in 1949.<sup>134</sup> According to Mark Slobin, who has edited two English-language compilations of Beregovsky’s writings, “what is important about Beregovski’s work is its quality,” which distinguishes it as “the only corpus of research on its topic that stands up to present-day ethnomusicological standards of fieldwork, transcription, and analysis.”<sup>135</sup> The quality of that corpus makes it size even more remarkable: one scholar has estimated that Beregovsky “collected, classified and studied over 8,000 items of Jewish folk music” over the course of his career.<sup>136</sup> As much as half of this archive consisted of the recordings, scores, and songs that Beregovsky and his colleagues gathered during interviews, expeditions, and from amateur folklore collectors (*zamlers*);

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<sup>132</sup> Kh. Loitsker lists Cabinet members’ recent publications and current research projects in “The Cabinet of Jewish Culture of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences,” USHMM, RG-22.028M.167 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 462, ll. 174-194].

<sup>133</sup> On anti-Jewish discrimination in employment, see Gitelman, *Century of Ambivalence*; and Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*.

<sup>134</sup> This quote comes from Jeffrey Veidlinger, but the sentiment is universally shared by those who have written on Beregovsky. See Joachim Braun, “Jews in Soviet Music,” in *Jews in Soviet Culture*, ed. Jack Miller (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984), 85–86; Mark Slobin, “A Fresh Look at Beregovski’s Folk Music Research,” *Society for Ethnomusicology* 30, no. 2 (spring-summer 1986): 253–60; and Jeffrey Veidlinger, “Klezmer and the Kremlin: Soviet Yiddish Folk Songs of the 1930s,” *Muzykalia 7 / Judaica 2: 3*, accessed February 2, 2011, [http://www.demusica.pl/cmsimple/images/file/veidlinger\\_muzykalia\\_7\\_judaica2%281%29.pdf](http://www.demusica.pl/cmsimple/images/file/veidlinger_muzykalia_7_judaica2%281%29.pdf).

<sup>135</sup> Slobin, “A Fresh Look at Beregovski’s Folk Music Research,” 253.

<sup>136</sup> Ernst Zaltsberg, “Moysey Beregovsky, Encyclopaedist of Jewish Folk Music in Russia,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 28, no. 1–2 (1999): 143. Mark Slobin has estimated that Beregovsky’s archive held roughly 7,000 items by 1946: “A Fresh Look at Beregovski’s Folk Music Research,” 253.

materials the Folklore Division acquired from S. An-ski's ethnographic expeditions in the Pale of Settlement on the eve of World War I and the private archives of folklorists Zinovii Kisselhof and Iulii Engel' made up the balance.<sup>137</sup> Beregovsky lived to see only a fraction of his work published, including three collections of folklore issued in the 1930s.<sup>138</sup> Some of the manuscripts and unpublished articles that survived Beregovsky's arrest and their subsequent confiscation in 1950 have been published posthumously.<sup>139</sup> The rediscovery of the Cabinet's archive, in fact, has inspired a resurgence of interest in Beregovsky and his work.<sup>140</sup>

The Folklore Division's work reflected contemporary developments in Soviet folkloristics both before and after 1941. The Soviet regime had actively promoted the collection, study, performance, and creation of folklore since the mid-1930s. Indeed, as one scholar has observed of the Stalin period, "no other era in Soviet history embraced folklore for pragmatic ends with comparable gusto and effectiveness."<sup>141</sup> Folklore provided a convenient means of fostering properly socialist national identities and communicating political messages. Folk songs

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<sup>137</sup> Eda Beregovskaya, "Once Again about the Destiny of Moyshe Beregovski," *Jews and Slavs* 19 (2008): 298; Sholokhova, "The Phonoarchive of Jewish Folklore at the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine"; and L. V. (Liudmyla Volodymyrivna) Sholokhova, *Fonoarkhiv ievreis'koï muzychnoi spadshchyny: koleksiia fonohrafichnykh zapysiv ievreis'koho fol'kloru iz fondiv instytutu rukopysu; anotovanyi katalog fonotsylindriv ta notnykh i tekstovykh rozshyfovok* (Kiev: Natsional'na akademiia nauk Ukrainy, Natsional'na biblioteka Ukraïny imeni V.I. Vernads'koho, 2001).

<sup>138</sup> Moshe Beregovskii, *Folklor-lider: naye materyaln-zamlung* (Moscow, 1933); M. Beregovskii, ed., *Yidisher muzik-folklor*, Institut far Jidiser Proletariser Kul'tur fun der Alukrainiser Visnsaft-Akademie (Moscow: Meluxiser Muzik-Farlag, 1934); and M. Beregovskii and Itzik Fefer, *Yidishe folks-lider* (Kiev: Meluke-Farlag far di natsionale minderhaytn in USSR, 1938).

<sup>139</sup> Moshe Beregovskii, *Evreiskie narodnye pesni* (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1962); M. Beregovskii, *Evreiskaia narodnaia instrumental'naia muzyka* (Moscow: Sov. kompozitor, 1987); M. Beregovskii and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, *Jewish Instrumental Folk Music: The Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregovski*, ed. Mark Slobin, Judaic Traditions in Literature, Music, and Art (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001); and M. Beregovskii, *Old Jewish Folk Music: The Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregovski*, ed. Mark Slobin, Judaic Traditions in Literature, Music, and Art (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

<sup>140</sup> See Eda M. Beregovskaia, ed., *Arfy na verbakh: prizvanie i sud'ba Moiseia Beregovskogo* (Moscow: Evreiskii universitet v Moskve; Ierusalim: "Gescharim," 1994); M. Beregovskii, *Evreiskie napevy bez slov* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 1999); M. Beregovskii, *Purimshpil: Evreiskie narodnye muzykal'no-teatral'nye predstavleniia*, Biblioteka Instituta iudaiki (Kiev: Dukh i litera, 2001); and Sholokhova, "The Phonoarchive of Jewish Folklore at the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine."

<sup>141</sup> Helena Goscilo, "Foreword," in *Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*, ed. Marina Balina, Helena Goscilo, and M. N. Lipovetskii (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), x–xi.

in particular were valued for their ability to convey messages simply and memorably, resulting in the creation of new folk songs with traditional folkloric forms and contemporary themes.<sup>142</sup>

These developments also affected the Cabinet of Jewish Culture's work, as Jeffrey Veidlinger illustrates in his study of Jewish folk song collections published in the 1930s. Veidlinger argues that, compared to Beregovsky's 1934 compilation of Jewish folk songs, "the goal of ethnographic documentation had been replaced with that of propaganda" in the 1938 volume Beregovsky edited with Itsik Fefer, a Yiddish poet whose only "task was to render popular songs appropriate for Soviet audiences and probably to compose the lyrics to new songs that could be introduced to the masses."<sup>143</sup> Although ideology increasingly shaped the publications of Beregovsky and his colleagues, the materials in the Cabinet's archive confirm that Beregovsky maintained the high scientific standards Slobin praised when recording folk songs.

Folklore about what quickly became known as the "Great Patriotic War" exemplified the "new Soviet folklore." The production, collection, and publication of folklore related to the war began almost immediately following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. From 1941, folk songs, folk tales, proverbs, riddles, and jokes about the war appeared in newspapers, periodicals, and individual volumes with increasing regularity. Published collections often focused on the folklore of specific social, geographical, or national populations: partisans or collective farmers, the Briansk forest or eastern Siberia, Ukrainians or Finnish Karelians.<sup>144</sup> Wartime folklore continued to be a regular subject of scholarly inquiry through the end of the Soviet period and

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<sup>142</sup> Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 2, 13, 13–185; and Felix J. Oinas, "The Political Uses and Themes of Folklore in the Soviet Union," in *Folklore, Nationalism, and Politics*, ed. Felix J. Oinas (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1978), 86.

<sup>143</sup> Veidlinger, "Klezmer and the Kremlin: Soviet Yiddish Folk Songs of the 1930s," 9.

<sup>144</sup> Relevant bibliographies include S. A. Erzin and F. E. Ebin, eds., *Literatura i fol'klor narodov SSSR: ukazatel' otechestvennykh bibliograficheskikh posobii i spravochnykh izdaniy: 1926-1970* (Moscow: Kniga, 1975); and V. E. Gusev, ed., *Russkii fol'klor Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* (Moscow: Nauka, 1964).

beyond. On the surface, then, the Cabinet's Yiddish-language manuscript of "Jewish Folklore from the Days of the Great Patriotic War" was consistent with the wider Soviet practice of collecting and publishing war-era "folk songs" of the country's various national groups, both in their national languages and in Russian translation.

The Folklore Division's effort to collect wartime Jewish songs also resembled—at least in its circumstances and timing—projects undertaken across Europe in response to the Holocaust, including the documentation initiatives carried out by writer and partisan Shmerke Katsberginski in Poland and Lithuania; by the Central Historical Commission in Munich; and by psychologist David Boder in Italy, France, Germany, and Switzerland. According to historian Shirli Gilbert, these three projects showed particular interest in songs written during the Holocaust along with other forms of testimony.<sup>145</sup> In the United States, meanwhile, Ruth Rubin began collecting Yiddish folk songs from Jewish immigrants—many of them Holocaust survivors—around the same time.<sup>146</sup> It is quite likely that the associates of the Cabinet of Jewish Culture knew about the song-collecting activities of Katsberginski, a member of the Vilna ghetto's United Partisans' Organization and the author of several songs popular in that ghetto.<sup>147</sup> Katsberginski's postwar apartment housed the Vilnius Jewish Museum, one of the institutions with which the Cabinet collaborated after the war. The Cabinet's archive contains correspondence between the museum's director and Beregovsky himself in 1947-1948, making it quite unlikely that the head of the Cabinet's Folklore Division would *not* have known about

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<sup>145</sup> S. Gilbert, "Buried Monuments: Yiddish Songs and Holocaust Memory," *History Workshop Journal* 66 (2008): 112–113.

<sup>146</sup> Chana Mlotek and Mark Slobin, "An Introduction to Ruth Rubin's Life and Work," in *Yiddish Folksongs from the Ruth Rubin Collection* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, in cooperation with the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2007), xi.

<sup>147</sup> Katsberginski also was a member of the ghetto's "Paper Brigade," which attempted to rescue Jewish cultural treasures from the Nazis. For an interesting summary of Katsberginski's life and work, see Bret Werb, "Shmerke Kacberginski: The Partisan-Troubadour," *Polin* 20, no. Making Holocaust Memory (2008): 392–412.

Katsherginski's already completed travels around Poland to collect songs and poems about the catastrophe.<sup>148</sup> A handful of Yiddish folk songs in the Cabinet's archive, in fact, were recorded in Vilnius and Kaunas in 1946 and presumably were forwarded to the Cabinet by colleagues in Lithuania, although it is unclear if these songs came from Katsherginski's collection.<sup>149</sup> The question, then, is whether the similarities between these postwar projects extended to their goals. In other words, could (and did) a project so characteristic of larger trends in Soviet folkloristics—and bound by its ideological dictates—also represent a particularly Jewish response to the recent catastrophe?

It is difficult to answer this question definitively. The longer tradition of Jewish ethnography, developed in the late nineteenth century to document traditional Jewish culture while it still survived, inevitably situates *all* of the Folklore Division's collection activities in the tradition of so-called "salvage" or "eleventh-hour" ethnography intended to record the last traces of a vanishing culture.<sup>150</sup> Later commentators, moreover, have imbued even Beregovsky's prewar collecting activities with the sense of urgency that motivated many other archival efforts after the Holocaust. Eda Beregovskaya, for example, has written that her father "hurried to record everything human memory kept, as if he had had a premonition of the catastrophe which would exterminate almost to a man all those who kept Jewish music in their memory."<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, when the Folklore Division launched its first expedition to record wartime folklore in November of 1944, the annihilation of European Jewry left no doubt that that the proverbial

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<sup>148</sup> Gilbert, "Buried Monuments," 113; and Lyudmila Sholokhova, "The Research and Expeditionary Work of the Folklore Division of the Cabinet for Jewish Culture at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in 1944-1949," in *"Samuel" Goldenberg und "Schmuyle": Jüdisches und antisemitisches in der Russischen musikkultur: Ein internationales symposium = Jewish and Anti-Semitic Elements of Russian Musical Culture: An International Symposium*, ed. Ernst Kuhn, Jascha Nemtsov, and Andreas Wehrmeyer (Berlin: E. Kuhn, 2003), 246-247.

<sup>149</sup> See MI-VNLU, f. 190, no. 204.

<sup>150</sup> Gilbert, "Buried Monuments," 110.

<sup>151</sup> Beregovskaya, "Once Again about the Destiny of Moyshe Beregovski," 298.

eleventh hour had arrived. Members of the Soviet Jewish intelligentsia—particularly those with ties to the Jewish Antifascist Committee such as the Cabinet’s associates—fully realized the enormity of the Jewish catastrophe by that time.<sup>152</sup> The available evidence suggests that an awareness of the fact that “no less than 1.5 million Jews were annihilated” on occupied Soviet territory alone lent a special urgency to the Division’s project.<sup>153</sup>

Although scholars traditionally have emphasized the silence surrounding the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, the catastrophe was a regular topic of discussion within the Soviet Jewish community during the 1940s. The JAC’s Yiddish-language newspaper, *Eynikayt*, covered the Jewish tragedy in detail, and—as historian Karel C. Berkhoff has maintained—“if Soviet readers and radio listeners *wanted* to know, they were able to find references to a campaign of mass murder specifically against the Jews” in the Russian-language media.<sup>154</sup> The few surviving Jewish institutions in the USSR openly led efforts to document and memorialize the recent catastrophe. The Jewish Antifascist Committee’s *Black Book*, a planned publication documenting the Holocaust primarily in the Soviet Union, was the largest and most well-known of these projects, but it reflected something of an archival obsession among the contemporary Soviet Jewish intelligentsia.<sup>155</sup> The JAC also had planned to publish a collection of materials documenting Jewish participation in the war effort and had started soliciting testimonies from

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<sup>152</sup> Elie Spivak, the Cabinet’s director, was a member of the Jewish Antifascist Committee. Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 143n111.

<sup>153</sup> This figure is cited by the JAC’s leadership in a letter from early 1944. S. M. Mikhoels, Sh. Epshtein, and I. Fefer to V. M. Molotov, 21 February 1944, in RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 246, l. 169.

<sup>154</sup> “‘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): 99.

<sup>155</sup> On the *Black Book*, see Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, eds., *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry*, trans. and ed. David Patterson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002); and Joshua Rubenstein and Ilya Altman, eds., *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories*, trans. Christopher Morris and Joshua Rubenstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008).

commanders of partisan groups for this project.<sup>156</sup> Itsik Fefer, acting in his capacity as a leading member of the Jewish Antifascist Committee, “tried to locate the Riga Ghetto archives and [historian Simon] Dubnov’s manuscripts.”<sup>157</sup> The director of the short-lived Vilnius Jewish Museum, I. Gutkovich, tried to recover what remained of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research’s plundered archival collection. The institute’s wartime relocation to New York City and the U.S. Army’s discovery of part of YIVO’s prewar collection in Germany largely frustrated his efforts.<sup>158</sup> As Gutkovich wrote to Beregovsky in 1947-1948, referring to the partial recovery of the Cabinet’s archives by Soviet forces in Germany, “You were fortunate, you received part of your pre-war archive. Vilno had no such luck.”<sup>159</sup>

The timing of the first expedition to collect folklore, coming only months after the Cabinet’s return to the devastated Ukrainian capital, indicates the importance and sense of urgency that the Division’s researchers attached to this endeavor. The material conditions under which the first few expeditions occurred provide additional support for this observation: the Cabinet no longer possessed the equipment required to record the songs gathered in the field, which were instead committed to whatever scraps of paper were at hand in this time of shortage, including the backs of propaganda posters and deportation lists. Most significantly, the Division did not limit its collection activities to folklore, but also assisted the Jewish Antifascist Committee in collecting materials for its *Black Book*.<sup>160</sup> A 1945 report by Cabinet director

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<sup>156</sup> USHMM, RG-22.028M.234 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 918, ll. 67-69ob].

<sup>157</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 51.

<sup>158</sup> See David E. Fishman, *Embers Plucked from the Fire: The Rescue of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Vilna*, 2nd exp. ed. (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2009); and Sholokhova, “The Research and Expeditionary Work of the Folklore Division of the Cabinet for Jewish Culture at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in 1944-1949.”

<sup>159</sup> Quoted in Sholokhova, “Research and Expeditionary Work,” 247 [original: Letter from Gutkovich of Vilnius Jewish Museum to Beregovsky, c. 1947-48, MI-VNLU, f. 190, no. 316, l. 11].

<sup>160</sup> Letter from Sh. Epshtein/JAC to Cabinet of Jewish Culture, 23 May 1945, in GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 918, l. 28.

Spivak on the institution's activities, prepared for *Eynikayt* and translated into English and Russian for distribution abroad, confirms that, "Apart from pure folklore[--]folk songs and other [materials—] members [of] this expedition brought back many historical documents illustrating [the] participation of Jews in [the] present war[,] especially in Ukraine."<sup>161</sup> Other *Eynikayt* articles on the Cabinet similarly noted the institution's involvement in the *Black Book* project.<sup>162</sup>

Articles written for *Eynikayt*, some of them translated and released to foreign Jewish media outlets, repeatedly invoked the Jewish catastrophe when discussing the Cabinet's postwar endeavors. Around 1946, Abram Kagan, the Kiev-based correspondent for *Eynikayt*, prefaced his report on the Cabinet's current exhibit at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences with a rather triumphant statement:

The Hitlerite murderers bragged that they exterminated [the] Jewish population in Ukraine and destroyed their culture. Indeed, [the] German butchers annihilated hundreds [of] thousands of Ukrainian Jews but [the] Jewish people lives, its scientists, writers and poets live. In the Ukrainian SSR new Jewish cultural treasures are being created. The work of the Cabinet of Jewish Culture is eloquent confirmation of this fact.<sup>163</sup>

Kagan's original Yiddish article was translated into Russian, English, and Spanish and cabled to pro-Soviet Jewish publications around the world.<sup>164</sup> While the vibrancy of Soviet Jewish culture was a common theme of propaganda aimed at foreign audiences, it was not usually celebrated as proof of the Jews' national survival after the Holocaust. The Yiddish draft of a four-page article by A. Emkin, "The Voice of the Jewish Folk Singer Lives," explicitly addressed the link between

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<sup>161</sup> USHMM, RG-22.028M [GARF f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 31, l. 336].

<sup>162</sup> Examples include A. Emkin, "The Voice of the Jewish Folk Singer Lives," in USHMM, RG-22.028M.09 [GARF f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 21, l. 92ob]; and Kh. Loitsker, "Cabinet of Jewish Culture," in USHMM, RG-22.028M [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 462, l. 186].

<sup>163</sup> Abram Kagan, "Exhibit of the Cabinet of Jewish Culture of the Academy of Sciences of the UkrSSR," trans. D. Manevich, in USHMM, RG-22.028M.167 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 21, l. 2].

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 1-7.

the Jewish catastrophe and the Folklore Division's latest project. After summarizing the Division's research agenda, the piece proclaimed that, "The voice of the Yiddish folk singer and folk-teller has not been suffocated. [...] From everywhere – from the death camps, from the rivers of blood, in which the Hitlerite beasts wanted to drown the Jewish people – remain the folk creations that lament the greatest catastrophe [*khurban*] that the people have encountered...."<sup>165</sup>

The Yiddish-language introduction to the manuscript "Jewish Folklore from the Days of the Great Patriotic War" echoes this trope of voices, although here the voice of the Jewish people is secondary to the that of the Soviet people: "In the greatest catastrophe, that a people and a land can experience and that has no equal in world history[,] this enemy still has not succeeded in suffocating the spiritual life of the Soviet people, therein also the Jewish people. Neither has it succeeded in suffocating the voice of the folk-creators, therein also – of the Jewish folk-creators."<sup>166</sup> Significantly, the "great catastrophe" referred to in this passage is the war—or, more specifically, the Great Patriotic War for the country's survival—not the death camps that haunted the *Eynikayt* article. The more stringent standards of censorship for a volume of national folklore as opposed to a Yiddish newspaper necessitated this shift in milestones, even though the substance of the material described in each piece remained the same.

Despite this rhetorical posturing, the centrality of the Jewish catastrophe in particular and the Jewish war experience more broadly to this folklore project is reflected in the manuscript's table of contents, which divides the material into four uneven sections. Nineteen song titles are listed under the heading "Ghetto and Camp Songs," the title itself an indication that the works in this section concern the uniquely Jewish tragedy of the war. The table of contents lists another

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<sup>165</sup> Emkin, "Voice," in USHMM, RG-22.028M.09 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 21, l. 92ob].

<sup>166</sup> MI-VNLU, f. 190, no. 322, l. 12.

twenty-two titles under the heading of “War Songs,” which included the songs of Jewish partisans and soldiers and sometimes incorporated specifically Jewish images. By contrast, only three titles were included in a section whose name reflects the unmediated influence of Soviet propaganda: “Songs about the Friendship of the Peoples.” A fourth section contained three tales (*mayses*) from the war years, the only other type of folklore the editors intended to include in this publication. As planned, then, the manuscript was not only “national in form”—containing Yiddish-language songs of the Jewish people—but was also heavily *national*—rather than socialist—“in content” due to its emphasis on the Jewish catastrophe as well as the liberal use of traditional Jewish references in the other sections.

Predictably, this portrayal of a specifically Jewish war experience worried the reviewer Shakhovskii, just as it would have generated objections from other censors and publishing officials. References to religious rituals, traditional forms of Jewish socioeconomic organization, and the genocide made many of the songs in this volume inapplicable to the wartime experiences of other Soviet citizens, irrespective of the fact that they would not be reading it in Yiddish. One of the songs Shakhovskii singled out for criticism contains all of these elements, making it the antithesis of the properly Soviet folk song from the war era:

I lie beside a machine gun  
 And whisper a Jewish melody.  
 Around all is silent,  
 Only the blades of grass waver.

I remember: my old mother blessing candles,  
 Face shielded by [her] hands.  
 Now there is an empty shtetl, without people  
 Oy, the houses have been burned down.

But here is the Red Army  
 It gave me the machine gun

I fight and fight the Germans,  
So that my people will live eternally.<sup>167</sup>

Non-Jews—or rather, the ideal “new Soviet man” who was both the victim and hero of the Great Patriotic War—could not have identified with either this nostalgic recollection of the Sabbath ceremony and the *shtetl* or with the particular motives of the soldier-narrator. The same may be said of a verse that locates the contemporary Jewish catastrophe within a long history of threats and violence directed against the Jews. In this verse, the Jewish speaker addresses Hitler with these words:

You are not my first enemy,  
I have had many such,  
I will record your name  
On the list, that begins with Haman<sup>168</sup>

This verse effectively erases the war as such—much less the official Soviet vision of World War II as an epic struggle between socialism and fascism—by portraying the conflict as one between the Jewish people and the latest ruler intent on bringing about their destruction.

Of course, not all of the songs in this manuscript portray such a specifically Jewish view of the wartime experience. Songs such as “A Little Letter to My Bride” and the cleverly titled “Song about Kazakhstan” fit comfortably within the regime’s ideological boundaries. The latter song, which portrayed an encounter between a Jewish evacuee to Central Asia and local Kazakhs, embraced the spirit of the “friendship of the peoples” with lines like “all men are brothers / from one father and one mother.”<sup>169</sup> Other songs attempt to provide a Jewish *and* Soviet image of the war by celebrating the commitment of Soviet Jews to the war effort. Such a

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., ll. 4, 5.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., l. 4.

<sup>169</sup> Quoted in Emkin, “Voice,” in USHMM, RG-22.028M.09 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 21, l. 93ob].

fusion was neither uncommon nor unpopular among the Jewish population in the Soviet Union, as Anna Shternshis has demonstrated, although in some cases this combination seems forced.<sup>170</sup> Thus, the introduction declared, “Soviet patriotism – this is the principal motif of the majority of the folk songs, which were created in the period of the Patriotic war.” The introduction even inserted this theme into the heart of the Jewish tragedy: “In the ghettos and in the camps were created songs, which told about the heroic masses of the Red Army, about...the partisans, about ‘waiting for the Reds’ and ‘the liberators come to the old home.’”<sup>171</sup> Jews living in the Transnistrian ghettos undoubtedly expressed such hopes for their ultimate liberation, but the most prominent themes expressed in the large section of ghetto and camp songs are those of loss and suffering, as the reviewer Shakhovskii had observed.<sup>172</sup>

The dominant image of the Holocaust that emerges in this manuscript is itself a very particular one. First and most basically, the majority of the songs collected in this project were told to the Cabinet’s researchers by Holocaust survivors, already a minority of the Jewish population affected by the Holocaust. Next, while the Folklore Division received materials from *zamlers* throughout Ukraine, almost all of the ethnographic expeditions it conducted between 1944 and 1947 were to regions that had been part of Romanian-occupied Transnistria in southwestern Ukraine, where the long-term existence of ghettos and camps differentiated the Holocaust in this region from the mass shootings that characterized the Final Solution in most of occupied Ukraine.<sup>173</sup> This difference allowed for a higher proportion of Holocaust survivors in

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<sup>170</sup> Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*.

<sup>171</sup> MI-VNLU, f. 190, no. 322, l. 12.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 4.

<sup>173</sup> The expeditions in this region collected materials in Bershad, Bratslav, Chernovtsy, Tulchin, and Zhabokrich. Ghettos also existed longer in the westernmost regions of Ukraine that had been part of independent Poland before 1939 than in the rest of Nazi-occupied Ukraine. Major works in English discussing the Holocaust in Ukraine include Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008); Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower, eds., *The Shoah in Ukraine: History,*

Transnistria than elsewhere in Ukraine, and also made their experiences harder to obscure as general atrocities against “peaceful citizens,” as the very title of the category “ghetto and camp songs” conveys. Several of the songs in this section of the manuscript reference Transnistrian camps such as Karlovka and Pechora, as in the following song:

There in the Ukraine in Russia  
 Is the well-known to Jews camp Pechora  
 There a lot of men die  
 There men die in the day and night

There in a corner that is dark and dreary  
 There sits a mother...  
 Her heart is broken, her heart is dead:  
 I am a mother without children, where should I go[?]

I gave birth to three children, I gave birth to three stars  
 I lost them in the Pechora camp  
 I am a mother alone without children  
 I am a mother without children, where can I go[?]

Significantly, the Holocaust experiences documented in this collection often reflected those of Jews who had been Soviet citizens for under two years. While this was hardly unique in the newly-annexed territories of western Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Baltics, the origins of these Jews in prewar Romania left a particularly regional imprint on this collection. Even the musical elements of the songs apparently reflected this foreign influence, as Beregovsky hints in his 1946 article on “The Altered Dorian Scale in Jewish Folk Music (On the Question of the Semantic Characteristics of Scales).” “The altered Dorian scale,” Beregovsky observed, “is found in all

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*Testimony, Memorialization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000); Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock, eds., *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* (M.E. Sharpe, 1993); Zvi Gitelman, ed., *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); and Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

the basic genres of Jewish folk music: in songs, instrumental works, and textless songs. [...] It is worth noting that in the Jewish songs created in the Soviet period this scale has completely disappeared. It is found again in the songs created during the German occupation in the camps and ghettos of the so-called Transnistria.<sup>174</sup> Elsewhere on the same page Beregovsky notes the presence of the Dorian scale in Romanian and Moldovan folk music as well, allowing the reader to make the implicit connection between the deportation of Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina to Transnistria and the reemergence of this musical scale in the folk songs collected from the region after its liberation. On the other hand, Beregovsky shows in this article that the scale is also associated with laments, making it an obvious choice for songs about the catastrophe. Still, the deletion of identifying information on the provenance of the songs—clearly visible on some of the manuscript’s pages—may indicate a desire by the volume’s editors to obscure the identity of the Jews who created and sang them. Again, not all of the songs speak to this regional experience of the Holocaust, but a significant number of them do.<sup>175</sup>

As this summary of the materials included in “Jewish Folklore from the Days of the Great Patriotic War” suggests, the songs and folktales selected for this manuscript reflected the deliberate editorial choices of Beregovsky and Lerner, with an eye toward content that the relevant bureaucrats and censors would consider acceptable. It was this aspect of the project, accordingly, that corresponded most closely to larger trends in Soviet folkloristics. Shakhovskii’s criticisms notwithstanding, this context, together with the editors’ attempt to construct a Soviet *and* Jewish narrative of the war era, may have secured the manuscript’s

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<sup>174</sup> Beregovskii, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 551.

<sup>175</sup> The table of contents identifies at least one “ghetto and camp” song as pertaining to the mass shooting of Kiev’s Jews in the Babi Yar ravine: “Ikh bin gekumen fun der milkhome (Babi-Yar)” [“I have come from the war (Babi Yar)”]. MI-VNLU, f. 190, no. 322, l. 11.

publication in a different political climate such as that of the 1930s. As it was, not even the deletions Shakhovskii recommended could have changed the collection's fate.

The prominence of Holocaust-related experiences in this manuscript and the wide-ranging collection of materials from which it came distinguish this project as a particular response to the Jewish catastrophe, similar to contemporary initiatives in Europe, the U.S., and among the remaining Jewish institutions in the Soviet Union. As with the JAC's efforts to compile a *Black Book* on the Holocaust, the Cabinet's effort to archive Jewish wartime experiences relied on the cooperation of individuals and institutions at the national, republican, and local levels. The resulting archive was larger, more diverse, and less ideologically-driven than the manuscript it produced. During the mid-1940s, the Cabinet collected songs from Jewish displaced persons in Berlin,<sup>176</sup> Hasidic tales from Bratslav,<sup>177</sup> Russian-language war songs,<sup>178</sup> and religious melodies<sup>179</sup> for this archive, even though none of these materials could be included in a Yiddish-language collection of songs ostensibly celebrating the patriotism of Soviet Jews during the Great Patriotic War.

## **Conclusion**

In striving to reconstitute life on the prewar model, Soviet Jews united to address the challenges confronting their national survival after the Holocaust. As this chapter has shown, communities of Jews at the local, republic, national, and even international levels worked

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<sup>176</sup> MI-VNLU, f. 190, no. 204.

<sup>177</sup> Sholokhova, "The Research and Expeditionary Work of the Folklore Division of the Cabinet for Jewish Culture at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in 1944-1949," 245.

<sup>178</sup> MI-VNLU, f. 190, no. 147 ll. 148-148ob.

<sup>179</sup> Mark Derbaremdiker, interviewed by Ella Orlikova, Kiev, Ukraine (May 2002), Centropa, accessed February 13, 2011, <http://centropa.org/index.php?nID=30&x=PXVuZGVmaW5lZDsgc2VhcmNoVHlwZT1CaW9EZXRhaWw7IHNIYXJjaFZhbnVlPTU5OyBzZWZyY2hTa2lwPTA=> .

together to secure material assistance for their fellow Jews and to rebuild their cultural institutions in the immediate postwar period. Their efforts demonstrate the assertiveness of these Jews, confident of their rights as Soviet citizens, as well as their awareness of the particular difficulties confronting their national community in the genocide's aftermath. The modest successes Ukrainian Jews in particular achieved in assisting their communities and rebuilding cultural institutions—both in spite and because of Soviet authorities—reveal the possibilities that existed for some form of Jewish national life in the USSR from 1943 through 1948, when the Soviet regime committed to antisemitism as a state policy.

## CHAPTER FOUR: IDENTITY AND JUSTICE

In many respects, a longing for justice dominated the postwar concerns of Soviet Jews examined in the preceding chapters. Complaints about discriminatory treatment and the continued employment of those who had advanced under the occupiers centered on notions of “fairness” and “correctness,” as did attempts to recover prewar homes and possessions.<sup>1</sup> The impulse to right wrongs also inspired charitable efforts within the Jewish community and multiple projects intended to memorialize the genocide’s victims, document their wartime experiences, and preserve their cultural legacy. Soviet Jews pursued both legal and extralegal means to achieve some semblance of justice in these situations. Some brought disputes over personal property to the courts, while others settled these issues privately, often with the threat of violence or the venter of state authority, as when uniformed servicemen were dispatched to secure the return of belongings.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, successful efforts to help Jews in need or raise monuments at mass grave sites typically required the complicity of local authorities, whether given freely or bought.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter considers the relationship of Soviet Jews to justice on a larger scale, that of justice for the victims of the Nazis, Romanians, and their collaborators. Once again, some

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<sup>1</sup> "justice, n." OED Online. September 2012. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/view/Entry/102198?rskey=9Qims1&result=1> (accessed October 20, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> For examples of servicemen seeking the return of property in the place of their friends or family members, see Efim Gekhman, “In My Hometown (Brailov),” in *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry*, ed. Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, trans. David Patterson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 36; and Sylvia Rothchild, *A Special Legacy: An Oral History of Soviet Jewish Emigrés in the United States* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 91–92.

<sup>3</sup> On Soviet Jews’ efforts to order and commemorate mass grave sites in the 1940s and early 1950s, see Mordechai Altshuler, “Jewish Holocaust Commemoration Activity in the USSR under Stalin,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 30 (2002): 271–95. Additional information on the commemoration of Jewish victims in specific communities is available through one of Yad Vashem’s online projects, “The Untold Stories: The Murder Sites of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of the Former USSR,” at <http://www1.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/homepage.asp> (accessed 21 October 2012).

pursued less than legal means to avenge the dead, although the involvement of partisans or soldiers could lend legitimacy to individual acts of vengeance.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, though, state institutions—particularly the military, the state security organs, and the newly created “Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Crimes of the German-Fascist Invaders and Their Accomplices”—sought retribution for the atrocities committed on occupied Soviet soil. This chapter examines the participation and visibility of Jews and the Jewish genocide in these institutional efforts to document war crimes and punish war criminals in the immediate aftermath of foreign occupation. Using records from local Soviet Extraordinary State Commissions and trials of collaborators in Ukraine, it demonstrates that a widespread consciousness of the particularity of Jewish victimhood during the occupation, informed by local knowledge of both the Holocaust and its victims, coexisted with the genocide’s relative absence from discussions of atrocities in the mainstream media. These local perspectives also suggest the need to broaden our search for the multiple identities simultaneously held by Soviet citizens—beyond, for example, just Soviet, Jewish, or Soviet *and* Jewish. For many Soviet Jews, these alternative or additional identities proved crucial to their reintegration into postwar society.

This chapter begins by considering the complexities and contradictions involved in any discussion of the Holocaust in the USSR, including the obfuscation of Jewish victimhood in the public sphere. Next, it introduces the institutions with the primary responsibility for documenting and punishing war crimes in the USSR, the Extraordinary State Commission and

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<sup>4</sup> Child survivor Khaim Roytman from Berdichev, for example, reported that his older brother Yasha, who had become a “fighter” during the occupation, “found the scoundrel who had killed our mother, and shot him” shortly after area’s liberation.<sup>4</sup> Joshua Rubenstein and Ilya Altman, eds., *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories*, trans. Christopher Morris and Joshua Rubenstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008), 161. Others likely turned to revenge as well, but few of these cases made their way into the archival record.

the military tribunal. It then analyzes the visibility of Jewish victimhood in the documents produced by local commissions and trials, as well as the participation of Jews as active agents in their proceedings, and what this suggests about the place of Jews in pre- and postwar Ukraine.

### **The Annihilation of “Peaceful Soviet Citizens”**

The mass shootings of Jews on the outskirts of towns and cities, and invariably with some degree of participation by local non-Jews, meant that those who remained on occupied Soviet territory knew that the Nazis and their allies had targeted Jews in particular for annihilation. Soviet leaders also knew of the Nazis’ goal to destroy European Jewry, receiving reports of the Final Solution’s implementation on occupied territory as early as mid-July 1941.<sup>5</sup> Despite this knowledge, the regime did little to assist its Jewish population collectively: central authorities never recommended special evacuation plans for Jews, and reportage of Nazi atrocities in the media often failed to mention Jews as victims of the occupiers, particularly in the first weeks of the war when such warnings may have saved lives.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that wartime Soviet sources never identified Jews as victims—they did: sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, but almost always inconsistently and never with the frequency and urgency that most of us today, with the benefit of hindsight, would consider appropriate. As Karel Berkhoff concluded in his recent study of the Holocaust’s treatment in the Soviet media—the most nuanced and generous one to date—“if Soviet readers and radio listeners *wanted* to know, they were able to find references to a campaign of mass murder specifically against the Jews.”<sup>7</sup> The regime’s

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<sup>5</sup> See Berkhoff, “Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population,” 66–67.

<sup>6</sup> 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, 1941-1954*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 77–104; and Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Berkhoff, “Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population,” 99.

increasing emphasis on the suffering of *all* Soviet peoples as the war progressed, however, ensured that such readers and radio listeners often had to read or listen “between the lines” to learn of the unfolding Jewish catastrophe.<sup>8</sup>

Most often, then, references to “peaceful citizens,” “Soviet citizens,” and “Soviet people” obscured Jewish victimhood in public discussions of Nazi atrocities, although Berkhoff has characterized this obfuscation of the Jewish genocide not as evidence of an official “policy,” but as “a tendency that never became entirely consistent.”<sup>9</sup> Berkhoff has documented Stalin’s personal involvement in this trend to obscure Jewish victimhood and especially the targeted nature of the Final Solution to as early as January 1942.<sup>10</sup> By the time local Extraordinary State Commissions began documenting the human and material devastation of the formerly occupied territories, then, this trend had become an established, if inconsistent, precedent in the Soviet media.

In the Soviet Union, only *Eynikayt*, the Yiddish-language newspaper of the Jewish Antifascist Committee, covered the Holocaust in detail.<sup>11</sup> The tendency to downplay Jewish victimhood nevertheless left its mark on this paper, as drafts from the English translation of B. Mark’s December 1943 article on the Kharkov war crimes trial demonstrate. The opening paragraph introduces the crimes committed by the four defendants—three German prisoners-of-war and a Russian collaborator—in general terms, referring to the murder of “prisoners of war

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<sup>8</sup> Zvi Gitelman, “Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union,” in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 14–42; and Amir Weiner, “When Memory Counts: War, Genocide, and Postwar Soviet Jewry,” in *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework*, ed. Amir Weiner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 167–88. Soviet propaganda targeting Jewish audiences abroad, by contrast, frequently emphasized the unique suffering of Jews during the war.

<sup>9</sup> Berkhoff, “Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population,” 62.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 74–75, 78 [quote on 78].

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 97. Also see Dov-Ber Kerler, “The Soviet Yiddish Press: *Eynikayt* during the War, 1942–1945,” in *Why Didn’t The Press Shout: American and International Journalism during the Holocaust*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Hoboken, NJ: Yeshiva University Press in association with KTAV Publishing House, 2003), 221–49.

and civilians,” the “mass execution of absolutely innocent Soviet people,” the “mass shooting of the civilian population,” and the “extermination of Soviet people.” Details on these victims come only at the end of the first page, which accuses several other Nazi administrators and military personnel of “the brutal mass execution of 30,000 innocent men, women, and children, the healthy and the ailing—Russians, Ukrainians and Jews, local residents and evacuees, civilians and war prisoners.”<sup>12</sup> Placing Jews at the end of this list of victims by nationality suggests—erroneously—that they comprised a smaller proportion of the victims than Russians and Ukrainians. The following sentence, as originally written, would have recognized the unique fate of Jews under the Nazis by noting that, “The four scoundrels on trial have been accused of active participation in criminal and brutal acts at the Kharkov Tractor Plant where 20,000 Jews were destroyed.”<sup>13</sup> However, editing marks on this draft show that, in addition to largely stylistic changes, the insertion of “among others” before “20,000 Jews” subtly but significantly deemphasized the singularity of the Jewish tragedy.<sup>14</sup> This amended version of the sentence made it into the press release sent to Jewish news agencies in London and Johannesburg: “The four scoundrels on trial have been involved in the brutal murders at the Kharkov Tractor Plant where among others 20,000 Jews were killed.”<sup>15</sup> The rest of the article featured similarly conflicted references to the Nazis’ civilian victims, although—notably—both direct and indirect references to Jews as victims never disappeared from this piece.

Internal documents, the differing coverage of the Holocaust in the Soviet Yiddish and the mainstream Russian-language press, and the regime’s willingness to admit the particularity of the Jewish catastrophe to foreign audiences all confirm that authorities made deliberate decisions

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<sup>12</sup> USHMM, RG-22.028M.111 [GARF, f. R-8114, op. 1, d. 275, l. 288].

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 288-288ob.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 288.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 290.

regarding the public portrayal of the genocide in the USSR.<sup>16</sup> These decisions, moreover, have had a lasting legacy in the region. The disregard and destruction of material traces of the Jewish past in Ukraine continues, even as other European countries increasingly recognize the moral, historical, and financial value of preserving this heritage.<sup>17</sup> A 2002 study carried out in Kharkiv suggested that knowledge about the Holocaust remained limited—and not infrequently colored by prejudices—even among highschoolers educated in an independent Ukraine.<sup>18</sup> In many ways, the politics of post-Soviet Ukraine have encouraged the suppression of Holocaust memory as the state constructs new legitimating myths and martyrs grounded in a narrative of Ukrainian national victimhood.<sup>19</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that for decades scholars have emphasized the silence surrounding the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, both during the catastrophe and afterwards. Already in 1951, Solomon M. Schwarz claimed that the genocide was “shrouded in silence” in the USSR.<sup>20</sup> The title of a work by William Korey from the early 1980s, “Down History’s Memory Hole: Soviet Treatment of the Holocaust,” is evocative of his perspective on “the Soviet attempt to obliterate the Holocaust in the memories of Jews as well as non-Jews.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Berkhoff, “Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population”; David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust* (Rutgers University Press, 2010); and Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*.

<sup>17</sup> Compare, for example, Omer Bartov, *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); with Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Students attending the local Jewish school constituted the notable exception to this generalization. Elena Ivanova, “Ukrainian High School Students’ Understanding of the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 402–20.

<sup>19</sup> For an introduction to these issues, see David R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine*, 2nd ed. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009); Johan Dietsch, *Making Sense of Suffering: Holocaust and Holodomor in Ukrainian Historical Culture* (Lund: Media Tryck, Lund University, 2006); J. P. Himka, “War Criminality: A Blank Spot in the Collective Memory of the Ukrainian Diaspora,” *Spacesofidentity. Net* 5, no. 1 (2005); Per Anders Rudling, *The OUN, the UPA and the Holocaust: A Study in the Manufacturing of Historical Myths*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian & East European Studies, no. 2107 (Pittsburgh: Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2011); and Per Anders Rudling, “‘They Defended Ukraine’: The 14. Waffen-Grenadier-Division Der SS (Galizische Nr. 1) Revisited,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 25, no. 3 (July 2012): 329–68.

<sup>20</sup> Solomon M. Schwarz, *The Jews in the Soviet Union* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1951).

<sup>21</sup> William Korey, “Down History’s Memory Hole: Soviet Treatment of the Holocaust,” *Present Tense: The Magazine of World Jewish Affairs* 10, no. 2 (March 1983): 53.

Studies of this topic in recent years, benefitting from open archives and the end of concerns about the contemporary status of Soviet Jewry, have qualified this trope of silence by degrees, noting the inconsistencies and variations that marked public discussion of the Holocaust in the USSR.<sup>22</sup>

### **Institutions of Justice?**

Soviet leaders created the “Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Crimes of the German-Fascist Invaders and Their Accomplices about the Damages Caused by Them to the Citizens, Kolkhozes, Public Organizations, State Enterprises and Institutions in the U.S.S.R.” in November 1942 as a centralized agency to collect information about Nazi crimes in the occupied territories, with the ultimate goal of positively influencing the Soviet Union’s position in postwar Europe. To help conceal the agency’s propagandistic mission and bolster its legitimacy internationally, most members of the central Extraordinary State Commission were not government officials. Subordinate commissions eventually formed at the republic, regional, district, and city levels. In newly liberated areas, local commissions—in conjunction with state security organs and the military’s counter-intelligence unit, SMERSH—coordinated interviews with witnesses, forensic examinations of mass graves, and surveys of physical damage and other material losses attributed to the occupiers. Members of local commissions then drafted reports summarizing their findings. These reports, in turn, were forwarded to the appropriate superior commissions, where they

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<sup>22</sup> Among others, see Yitshak Arad, “The Holocaust as Reflected in the Soviet Russian Language Newspapers in the Years 1941–1945,” in *Why Didn’t The Press Shout: American and International Journalism During the Holocaust*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Hoboken, NJ: Yeshiva University Press in association with KTAV Publishing House, 2003), 199–220; Gitelman, “Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union”; Berkhoff, “Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population”; and Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda During World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

would be incorporated into other, more general reports. Some of the materials compiled by the Extraordinary State Commission were released to the Allies, used by the prosecution in the Nuremberg trials, and referenced in local trials of Nazis and their collaborators in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, but the vast majority of the materials were archived and remained inaccessible to researchers for most of the postwar period.<sup>23</sup>

As an institution, the Extraordinary State Commission has attracted its share of criticism from scholars in the past two decades. Despite its purported independence from the government, the commission served the regime's goals, functioning as what Marina Sorokina characterizes as “[o]ne of the immediate participants in the creation of the Stalinist war myth.”<sup>24</sup> It helped ferret out collaborators and colluded in the state's attempts to misrepresent crimes committed by Soviets—most notably the massacres of Polish officers and nationals at Katyn—as ones perpetrated by the Nazis. Members of the central Extraordinary State Commission in particular took orders from high-ranking government figures, which resulted in reports with inflated figures and other falsified facts. Moreover, Molotov and then Stalin approved the small number of heavily edited reports that eventually appeared in the Soviet press.<sup>25</sup> As scholars have shown,

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<sup>23</sup> Marina Sorokina, “People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR,” trans. David Habecker, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 4 (2005): 797–831; and Marian R. Sanders, “Extraordinary Crimes in Ukraine: An Examination of Evidence Collection by the Extraordinary State Commission of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 1942--1946” (Ph.D. diss., Ohio University, 1995), esp. 71–96. For a discussion of the use of these materials in other countries, see Martin Dean, “Crime and Comprehension, Punishment and Legal Attitudes: German and Local Perpetrators of the Holocaust in Domachevo, Belarus, in the Records of Soviet, Polish, German, and British War Crimes Investigations,” in *Holocaust and Justice: Representation and Historiography of the Holocaust in Post-War Trials*, ed. David Bankier and Dan Michman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2010), 265–80.

<sup>24</sup> Sorokina, “People and Procedures,” 801.

<sup>25</sup> The materials produced by the various branches of this commission were not originally intended for public release in the USSR, and according to Marina Sorokina, the Extraordinary State Commission “publishe[d] only 27 small official “Reports” in 1943-45.” *Ibid.*, 804.

“peaceful citizens” and similar constructions routinely replaced references to Jews in these published reports.<sup>26</sup>

While the scope of the Extraordinary State Commission was unique among the war’s combatants, the Soviet Union’s internal trials of both foreign war criminals and native collaborators reflected a larger pursuit of justice that occurred across postwar Europe and continued for decades.<sup>27</sup> In their earliest incarnations, these trials served to reassert and legitimize the authority of the state, meet popular demands for retribution, and absolve the masses of citizens who cooperated with the enemy in some way by punishing the most egregious collaborators.<sup>28</sup> The earliest public tribunals in the Soviet Union, such as the widely-publicized July 1943 trial in Krasnodar, also served to unify the population and to warn potential collaborators in those Soviet territories that remained under foreign occupation.<sup>29</sup>

As with the Extraordinary State Commissions, Soviet military tribunals reflected what Ilya Bourtman has referred to as “authorities’ systematic lies and falsifications.”<sup>30</sup> The falsification of evidence, coerced confessions, and other restrictions on defendants’ rights all marred these proceedings. Most trials were closed, and their designation as military tribunals meant that those found guilty had no right to appeal, although the speed with which death

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<sup>26</sup> Berkhoff, “Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population”; Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*; Sorokina, “People and Procedures,” 804, 829; and Kiril Feferman, “Soviet Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR: Documenting the Holocaust,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, no. 4 (December 2003): 587–602.

<sup>27</sup> See especially Devin O. Pendas, “Seeking Justice, Finding Law: Nazi Trials in Postwar Europe,” *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 2 (June 2009): 347–68; and David Bankier and Dan Michman, eds., *Holocaust and Justice: Representation and Historiography of the Holocaust in Post-War Trials* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of these functions in the Soviet context, see Ilya Bourtman, “‘Blood for Blood, Death for Death’: The Soviet Military Tribunal in Krasnodar, 1943,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 256, 260–261.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 256, 258–259.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

sentences typically were carried out also precluded such an opportunity.<sup>31</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, it also is important to note that while these and other trials did not give special status to crimes committed against Jews *as Jews*—the definition of genocidal acts—they did recognize crimes against Soviet Jews among the long list of offenses that condemned “traitors of the motherland.” Today, we may consider this a manifestation of the regime’s obfuscation of the Jewish genocide, but at that time—and in the absence of any precedent for prosecuting the perpetrators of genocide—it also reflected a broad conception of both victimhood and citizenship.

The sources used in this chapter pose an even more fundamental problem. Like other recent studies of the Extraordinary State Commission and Soviet war crimes trials, this chapter relies on microfilm reproductions of the relevant archival documents acquired by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).<sup>32</sup> The reproductions of Extraordinary State Commission materials in particular consist mainly of excerpts rather than complete copies, often omitting the sections on the material losses attributed to the Nazis and even those dealing with the abuse of POWs and the exploitation of forced laborers as well. While the tallies of lost crops, livestock, and other property admittedly would interest few of the scholars using these documents at the museum, the redacted records of the larger human tragedy wrought by the Nazis and their allies inhibits the ability of researchers to understand fully the context in which these records made Jews legible, or failed to do so. When and where are other nationalities—including Russians and Ukrainians—specified? What other identities (professional,

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<sup>31</sup> Bourtman, “‘Blood for Blood, Death for Death’”; Vadim Altskan, “On the Other Side of the River: Dr. Adolph Herschmann and the Zhmerinka Ghetto, 1941–1944,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 2–28; and A. V. Prusin, “‘Fascist Criminals to the Gallows!’: The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials, December 1945–February 1946,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 1–30.

<sup>32</sup> See Altskan, “On the Other Side of the River”; Penter, “Collaboration on Trial”; Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*; and Sanders, “Extraordinary Crimes in Ukraine.”

generational, religious, etc.) are invoked? How are the witnesses quoted in reports identified? Is there any internal consistency on these issues within individual Extraordinary Commission records? Properly judging the treatment of the Jewish genocide requires answers to these and other questions. Fortunately, the reproductions of the trial cases tend to be more complete, although they too were selected by the museum's representatives because of their relevance to the Holocaust.

### **Jews as Victims**

While statements from local and regional Extraordinary State Commissions are replete with general language about crimes committed against the “Soviet people” and “peaceful citizens,” they also contain more straightforward assessments of those crimes and their victims than those found in the mainstream media, including the published reports of the Extraordinary State Commission itself. With regards to Jewish victims, the visibility of the Holocaust on occupied Soviet territory undoubtedly contributed to the visibility of the Jewish catastrophe in the documents produced by local commissions. At the local level, most commission members held posts in the local civil and military organs or otherwise ranked as high-profile members of the community, which meant that they sometimes knew the victims whose deaths they investigated. The members of the Extraordinary State Commission for Iaryshevskii *raion* in Vinnitsa *oblast'*, for example, included the district's prosecutor, military commissar, newspaper editor, *Komsomol* secretary, *raikom* secretary, and *ispolkom* president, in addition to a doctor.<sup>33</sup> The chairmen of state and collective farms and even priests—a reflection of the regime's

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<sup>33</sup> USHMM, RG-31.018M.10 [original: Criminal Case no. 26, l. 258].

wartime entente with Orthodoxy—served on other local commissions.<sup>34</sup> The locals interviewed as witnesses during these investigations, including Jews, also may have known some of the victims.<sup>35</sup> Such local knowledge and ties undoubtedly help explain why the local Extraordinary State Commissions “provided a limited podium for alternative memory discourses that differed from the official Soviet discourse” of the war, including the Holocaust, as Tanja Pentter has observed in reference to local military trials of collaborators.<sup>36</sup>

The statement [*akt*] on the city of Kremenchug, dated November 29, 1943, begins with universalizing language about “the mass extermination [*istreblenie*] of Soviet peoples” under the Nazis and uses references to “peaceful citizens” and “Soviet citizens” throughout its report on the human tragedy of the occupation, most notably in the section subtitled, “The Mass Extermination of Peaceful Citizens.” The logic of the report’s language and its recognition of the special fate of Jews under the Nazis, however, strongly suggests that members of the local Extraordinary State Commission employed these generalizing terms in an inclusive—rather than evasive—manner. The report attempted to address separately the crimes committed against each major group of Nazi victims, and the categories themselves seem to reflect the priorities of a state at war. Accordingly, the first section of the report chronicles the “Torture and Mass Execution of Soviet Prisoners of War,” a placement recognizing the essential role of soldiers to the war effort, notwithstanding the fact that Soviet POWs who survived the war subsequently endured suspicion and mistreatment from their own government. The report’s use of “prisoners of war” as a category of victims lends a rational credence to the terms applied to the occupier’s

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the archival copy of the *akt* for the city of Novaia Ushitsa in Kamenets-Podol'skaia *oblast'*, dated June 12, 1944, contained in the KGB file of Grigorii Vasil'evich Andrusev, who was investigated and tried for war crimes only in the 1960s. USHMM, RG-31.018M.10, ll.260-261.

<sup>35</sup> A copy of the first act from Yaltushkov in Vinnitsa *oblast'* includes the names of nine local witnesses as signatories; two of them have identifiably Jewish names. USHMM, RG-31.018M.10, l. 257

<sup>36</sup> Pentter, “Collaboration on Trial,” 789.

civilian victims, who—compared to soldiers, POWs, or partisans—were in fact “peaceful citizens.”<sup>37</sup> Distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants in this manner also adhered to the long-standing international conventions regulating wartime conduct on which postwar trials could be expected to rule. Notably, the section on “The Mass Extermination of Peaceful Citizens” appeared before the one devoted to the Nazis’ exploitation of forced laborers deported to Germany, another group the regime viewed with suspicion but which lacked the strategic importance of soldiers.<sup>38</sup>

The report’s frank discussion of the Jewish catastrophe further suggests that its authors did not intend to conceal or universalize the genocide. Although the short introduction and the relevant section on crimes against civilians each begin with general references to the victimized “people” and “citizens,” both sections also comment specifically on the uniquely Jewish tragedy. The two-paragraph introduction even concludes by acknowledging that “An especially difficult fate befell the Jewish population of the city and Soviet POWs, held in camps.”<sup>39</sup> As the report elaborates several pages later:

The Germans displayed particular cruelty in the moment of the extermination of the Jewish population living in the city of Kremenchug. From the first days of the occupation a special regime was established for the whole Jewish population, whose aim was the full isolation of them from the rest of the city’s inhabitants. All persons of Jewish nationality were ordered by the German military power to wear on their arms a white band. In addition the inhabitants of the city were allowed to walk about in the evening until 7 p.m., but the Jewish population only until 5 in the evening. Jews were not allowed to be where Ukrainians were.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> USHMM, RG-31.015M.04, “Records of the Ukrainian Extraordinary State Commission, 1943-1944,” [original: *Derzhavnyi arkhiv Poltavs'koi oblasti* (DAPO), f. p-3388, op. 1, spr. 688, ark. 1].

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, ark. 4, 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, ark. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, ark. 5.

This regime of segregation did not last long. According to a witness named Elena Aleksandrovna Vradenburg, on September 27, 1941—less than three weeks after the Nazis occupied Kremenchug—the new rulers announced their decision to relocate the city’s Jews to barracks at the nearby settlement of Novo-Ivanovka. The mass executions of these Jews began about one month later.<sup>41</sup>

The paragraph describing this series of mass shootings, which continued into the beginning of November, clearly identifies the victims as Jews (*evrei*) and describes a scale of destruction that obviously meets the subsequently accepted definition of genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical [sic], racial or religious group”:<sup>42</sup>

The German murderers shot all the Jews gathered in the barracks at Novo-Ivanovka in the last days of October 1941 and in the beginning of November within the limits of Peschanaia gora in the North-eastern part of the city of Kremenchug in total number up to 8000 people. They shot all the women, children, and old people. They took children from the arms of their mothers and in front of their eyes threw them alive into the graves, and they smeared the lips of some with a toxic substance.

The lines following these horrific images of Jewish suffering bemoan the similar fate of the “peoples of science [*liudei nauki*]”: “So in the period of these shootings were shot the professor-pedagogue Kantel', and the eye doctor Makson, a very old man of more than 80 years.” More than the heart-rending but anonymous images of murdered Jewish mothers and their children, the specific reference to these two Jewish professionals identifies these men (and presumably others) not just as Jews but as important members of the local community—as “local citizens.” The

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., ark. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1948, <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html>.

corroborating testimony of Mikhail Vasil'evich Reznik, a man described only—but tellingly—as “an eyewitness to the mass shooting of the Jewish population,” similarly uses such specific terms as “Jews” (*evrei*) and the “Jewish nationality” (*evreiskoi natsional'nosti*) to identify the victims he saw going to their deaths.<sup>43</sup>

This unambiguous account of the Holocaust in Kremenchug continues, albeit in a less focused form, in the report’s forensic summary. Although this summary appears at the end of the section devoted to the “Mass Extermination of Peaceful Citizens,” it covers the results of the commission’s examination of mass graves in and around the city, including those at local prisoner of war camps as well as at Peschanaia gora. The reported findings at the latter location incorporate both generic and specific references to the identity of the victims, often in the same sentence. The most sustained forensic discussion of these graves, for example, begins by stating that, “On the territory of Peschanaia gora the overwhelming majority uncovered were corpses of the civilian population [*grazhdanskogo naseleniia*], that suggests that within the limits of Peschanaia gora they shot the Jewish population of the city and the last of those imprisoned in the Kremenchug jail.”<sup>44</sup> This portion of the report even implies the equivalence of these two identities in its reference to one particular mass “grave of the civilian population (Jewish).” Details uncovered in the sample exhumations of these graves—including the execution of women and children and the presence of “household” objects such as plates and teapots—serve to confirm the wholesale nature of these shootings. The death toll that concludes this section of the report also clearly includes the city’s Jewish victims as citizens while recognizing them—as Jews—as the largest group of civilian victims: “Of 60,000 dead Soviet citizens in the city of

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<sup>43</sup> USHMM, RG-31.015M.04 [DAPO, f. p-3388, op. 1, spr. 688, ark. 6].

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Kremenchug, up to 50,000 were prisoners of war, up to eight thousand [were] of the Jewish population and up to 2000 of the rest [*prochego*] of the civilian population.”<sup>45</sup>

Other Extraordinary State Commission reports from Poltava *oblast'* display the inconsistency and diversity that marked the treatment of the Jewish genocide by local commissions across Ukraine. The statement on Nazi crimes in the city of Khorol, compiled nearly two months earlier in 1943 than the one for Kremenchug, contains a much less coherent and detailed account of the Holocaust. The first several paragraphs of this report rely exclusively on such generic descriptions of the victims as “our locals [*nashikh mestnykh*],” “citizens of the city,” and “Soviet citizens,” except when referring to the maltreatment of POWs. The first explicit reference to “annihilation” uses a more unusual, but still ambiguous formulation, claiming that, “The German barbarians methodically and brutally annihilated all those who built the Ukrainian nation [*ukrainskii narod*] during the years of Soviet power.”<sup>46</sup> Still, the second page of the report notes specifically that the “Germans treated the Jews to more cruelty” by marking them with red ink, stars, and tar; an account of the roundup and execution of the “whole Jewish population of the city of Khorol” follows a few pages later.<sup>47</sup>

The Khorol report also echoes the Kremenchug one in singling out victims of the Soviet intelligentsia, some of whom bear recognizably Jewish names: “They killed and tortured Lazar' David [illegible] of Kiev, Gol'dberg Semen from Dnepropetrovsk, Liubovich Mikhail from Kislovodsk, Levitan[?] Petr from the city of Stalino, Goncharovskii Mikhail from Kherson, Zetel' Iosif from Kharkov, Sandler from Feodosiia, [illegible] from Kiev, Podgaetskii from Kiev.” By neglecting to explicitly identify some of these “*intelligenty*” as Jews—a fact that still

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., ark. 7.

<sup>46</sup> USHMM, RG-31.015M.05 [DAPO, f. p-1876, op. 8, spr. 104, ark. 17].

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., ark. 17zv., 19.

would have been obvious to any Soviet reader of the report—but instead grieving their loss as “scientific workers, doctors, [and] teachers,” the Khorol Extraordinary State Commission included them as members of a broader Soviet community that crossed the boundaries of nationality and locality.<sup>48</sup> A combined report from the Poltava *oblast'* Extraordinary State Commission, covering Nazi crimes and thefts in the cities of Zolotonosha, Kremenchug, Poltava, Kobeliaki, and the surrounding villages, similarly identified Jewish members of the intelligentsia both implicitly and explicitly. When addressing the abuse of Soviet prisoners of war by the Nazis, the report lists the specialties of eleven of the “21 qualified doctors” among the POWs executed in December 1941. Although the doctors’ nationalities are not provided, at least five have recognizably Jewish surnames.<sup>49</sup> This section of the report concludes by asserting that “the German invaders systematically exterminated Soviet citizens, workers, *kolkhozniki* and the *Soviet intelligentsia*.”<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere, this report noted that “the Jewish population in the *oblast'* was completely annihilated, prominent among them, all the distinguished citizens. In the city of Kremenchug were shot: the eminent professor-pedagogue Kantel', an old man of 80 years, doctor oculist, who saved the eyesight of not one thousand people Moxsin; [and] doctor gynecologist Drazin.”<sup>51</sup> Once again, these excerpts emphasize the importance of the prewar Soviet Ukrainian intelligentsia, including its many Jewish members, and hint at the multiple identities simultaneously held by Jews and recognized by their fellow non-Jews in Soviet Ukraine.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., ark. 19.

<sup>49</sup> The five “Jewish” names are Krainis, Forshtein, Nissel'maker[?], Gol'dberg, and Kostman. The percentage of Jews listed here may be even larger as five of the remaining names are either illegible or ethnically ambiguous (the final name is Georgian). USHMM, RG-31.015M.03 [DAPO, f. p-4085, op. 3, spr. 227b, ark. 6-7].

<sup>50</sup> Emphasis mine. Ibid., ark. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Although the spellings differ, this eye doctor “Moxsin” appears to be the same “Makson” referenced in the Kremenchug report. Ibid., ark. 5.

Extraordinary State Commission records from other regions of Ukraine also speak to these multiple identities while conveying a realistic narrative of the violence committed by the Nazis, Romanians, and their collaborators. A short but intriguing list of “Soviet citizens shot and tortured by the German-Fascist occupiers” in the Andreevskii district [*raion*] of Zaporozhskaia *oblast'* includes a column for “notes” (*primechanie*) alongside the more typical columns enumerating the victims’ names, years of birth, and prewar places of employment. In several cases the “notes” simply indicate the specific fate of individuals, as with the four *kolkhozniki* “shot on the street on 16/IX-1944.”<sup>52</sup> In other cases, however, the notes provide explanations—according to the occupiers’ logic—for the victims’ deaths. Thus, the one-word note beside the name of Mariia Grigor'evna Ivashchenko reads “*komsomolka*,” while the individuals who may have been her parents, Grigorii Grigor'evich Ivashchenko and Paraskov[']ia Kliment'evna Ivashchenko, were shot because, respectively, “in the family were members of the VKP(b)” and she was the “wife of an activist.” The reasons provided for another family’s murder are equally explicit: Iakov Iudovich Levin (b. 1916) was “shot by the German gendarmerie because [he] was by nationality a Jew,” and the boys who appear to have been his sons—Viktor Iakovlevich Levin (b. 1940) and Anatolii Iakovlevich Levin (b. 1942)—were shot “as the children [sic] of a Jew [*kak deti evreia*]” and “as the son of a Jew,” respectively.<sup>53</sup> While this list’s heading correctly but generically identifies all of these victims as “Soviet citizens,” the notes hint at some of the additional identities, both national and professional, ascribed to these individuals while also recognizing both Jews and Communists as targeted victims of the Nazis.

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<sup>52</sup> The year given here seems to be a (repeated) typo. Soviet forces appear to have liberated the Andreevskii district by March 17, 1944, when the district’s “*kolkhozniki*, workers and intelligentsia” expressed their public thanks to Stalin in *Izvestiia*. See *Izvestiia* no. 65 (8367), 17 Mar. 1944, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> USHMM, RG-22.002M.01 [GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 7, l. 3/7]

The structure of the Extraordinary State Commission and archival organization and collection practices have complicated efforts to assess the visibility of Jewish victimhood in records produced by local commissions. According to the USHMM's records, for example, information about Nazi victims in Mirgorod can be found in at least three completely different collections (*fondy*) at the State Archive of Poltava *Oblast'*. In one file, a handwritten "list of residents of the city of Mirgorod, shot by the occupiers" gives no explicit indication of the victims' nationalities,<sup>54</sup> while a document filed in another *fond* specifies that among the "peaceful citizens" killed in the city were "146 people, children 48, of them Jews[:] 94 adults, 48 children, doctors 3, agronomists 12, [and] teachers 6 people."<sup>55</sup> In addition, the aforementioned report on Poltava *oblast'*, archived in a yet another *fond*, refers only generally to atrocities located near Mirgorod and in the Mirgorodskii district but comments specifically on the Jewish catastrophe as it unfolded in the region as a whole.<sup>56</sup> To complicate matters further, copies of these and related records, or reports compiled from them, also exist at the Central State Archive of the Highest Organs of Government and Administration of Ukraine (TsDAVO) in Kiev and at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) in Moscow.<sup>57</sup> Looking at only one of these documents would provide only a partial glimpse into how the Extraordinary State Commissions in question documented the Holocaust in this one location.

The categorization of Nazi victims in post-liberation trials of Soviet collaborators generally mirrored that found in the reports of Extraordinary State Commissions. This reflected not only the goals of the state that commissioned both the Extraordinary State Commission and

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<sup>54</sup> USHMM, RG-31.015M.02 [DAPO, f. p-3388, op. 1, spr. 1624, ark. 2-10].

<sup>55</sup> USHMM, RG-31.015M.09 [DAPO, f. p-1876, op. 8, spr. 91, ark. 9].

<sup>56</sup> See USHMM, RG-31.015M.03 [DAPO, f. p-4085, op. 3, spr. 227b, ark. 4].

<sup>57</sup> TsDAVO, f. 3538, op. 1 and GARF, f. 7021, op. 70. Copied selections of these records are available at USHMM as RG-31.002M.14M and RG-22.002M.04, respectively.

the prosecution of collaborators, or “traitors,” but also the sharing of materials between the officials and agencies involved in these institutions. In some cases, copies of witness statements collected for Extraordinary State Commission reports appear in the case files of those tried as collaborators, and commission members sometimes provided testimony as expert witnesses at tribunals. Crimes against Jews stand out in these materials as the only ones regularly committed against a specific ethno-national group as opposed to other groups characterized by their military status, or lack thereof. “Soviet citizens of the Jewish nationality,” in other words, appear distinct from POWs, partisans, and other non-combatants (the generic “peaceful Soviet citizens”).

Those investigated and tried as collaborators, or “traitors of the motherland,” were complicit in crimes besides the Holocaust as well. From the perspective of Soviet officialdom, these collaborators betrayed the motherland initially by entering into the occupiers’ services. Those who served as *politsai* or policemen participated in actions against Communist Party members, POWs, partisans, and other “peaceful citizens,” including Jews. Their guilt, when correctly attributed to them, lay in all of these acts. While few of these trials, then, may be considered Holocaust trials either in intent or content, they nevertheless include allegations of misconduct against Jews specifically. The evidence attesting to these Holocaust-related crimes, though compiled under varying conditions of duress and subject to falsification and exaggeration, still provide alternative narratives of the occupation in general and the Jewish genocide in particular. Whatever their individual inaccuracies, together these narratives provide a cohesive composite image of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union that is consistent with accounts from other sources.

The November 1944 indictment of one I. F. Shapochka for treason serves as a typical example. A native of Mirgorod, Shapochka reportedly volunteered for the police immediately

after the occupation of his hometown in October 1941. Subsequently, Shapochka allegedly “arrested Soviet citizens and conducted searches of their homes. He escorted convoys of Jewish families and Red Army prisoners of war, and he also participated in trips to capture Soviet partisans.” In this case, as in others, details supplementing the general charge of treason relate to specific actions undertaken by the accused. Shapochka’s roles in the destruction of the local Jewish community in November 1941 included “arrest[ing] all the members of the family Mantserovykh, lead[ing] a search, and bring[ing] the arrested under convoy to bazaar square, where the arrested Jewish families were concentrated.” That same month, Shapochka “participated in conveying the arrested Jewish families to the place of their execution.”<sup>58</sup> In both of these sentences, as throughout this document, Jewish victims are identified specifically as Jews (*evrei*). Furthermore, although the purpose of this document was to enumerate Shapochka’s crimes—not to elaborate on local atrocities during the Nazi occupation—these lines still reveal that Shapochka participated in a larger operation aimed at ghettoizing and ultimately killing the Jewish population of Mirgorod.

The secretive nature of these tribunal proceedings, the majority of which were closed, may explain, in part, the relatively open references to the Jewish catastrophe in these documents, but other factors came into play as well. As with the Extraordinary State Commission materials, some variety is evident in the treatment of Jews and the Jewish catastrophe across the documents collected as part of these trials. The most obvious differences, in the form of word choices, appear in the witness depositions and interrogation records. When addressing crimes against civilians, some officials asked specifically about the fate of “Jews” or “Soviet citizens of the Jewish nationality,” while others asked about crimes against “peaceful Soviet citizens” more

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<sup>58</sup> USHMM, RG-31.018M.07 [I. F. Shapochka, l. 39].

generally, even when these would have included actions now understood as part of the unfolding genocide. More often than not, respondents would answer using the same terms posed in the questions.

Occasionally, interviewees would invoke the term “Jews” in response to general questions about atrocities committed against civilians. When questioned by local MGB officials in July 1944 regarding the wartime actions of his deputy, F. K. Liashchenko, in the Belaia Tserkov' city police, M. V. Tomasevich was asked “What roles Liashechenko took in the mass extermination of Soviet citizens.” Tomasevich’s recorded reply incorporated both the terms “Soviet citizens” and “Jews,” making the frequent overlap between these categories clear: “In the mass extermination Liashchenko took active measures, he assigned orders to the police to escort Soviet citizens to the place of execution, often bringing to the police Jews, detained in different places in the city and *raion*, he sent them to jail, and then these Jews were shot.”<sup>59</sup>

While trial records attest to the inclusion of Soviet Jews as victims warranting the prosecution of local collaborators, Jews’ memories of postwar trials sometimes suggest otherwise. In his published memoir of “growing up under Stalin,” Anatole Konstantin expresses doubts regarding authorities’ interest in prosecuting locals who had participated in the Holocaust. He claims that,

While the authorities dealt severely with nationalists, they did not seem very eager to prosecute those who had collaborated with the Germans. [...] Several policemen were caught and imprisoned in Vinnitsa, the regional capital. However, when some of the surviving Jews wanted to testify against them, they were given a run-around to such an extent that many gave up trying, because travel was difficult, there was no place to stay, and they could not take that much time off from work. Our landlady, Frieda, thought that their

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<sup>59</sup> 31.018M.01 vol. 1, l. 132

testimony was not wanted because the crimes they had committed had been mostly against Jews.<sup>60</sup>

Neither Konstantin nor his mother could provide eyewitness testimony in these cases as they had fled Ukraine in 1941, so secondhand information necessarily influenced their awareness of and attitudes toward such proceedings. By contrast, Nisson Ovshievich Iurkovskii and an unidentified female acquaintance of his, both apparently lifelong Jewish residents of Tul'chin, rather casually mentioned the postwar trial of a local Russian doctor to researchers from the Petersburg Judaica Institute in 2005. They brought up the doctor without prompting after a brief discussion about local healers, which apparently brought the “doctor-scum” in question to mind. According to the pair, a Doctor Beletskii, who had “organized” the expulsion of Tul'chin’s Jews under the Romanian occupation, received a sentence of twenty years.<sup>61</sup>

The post-Soviet testimony of Basya Chaika, who served as a court assessor in Konotop’s military tribunal, illustrates how later experiences and knowledge color memories of the past. While she recalls convicting “traitors of the motherland,” including a Ukrainian doctor accused of killing Soviet prisoners of war, she told her interviewer, “I don’t remember ever convicting anyone for shooting the Jews in Konotop, although I’m sure there were such shootings. But we did not register such places or people who took part in them at that time.” Chaika may not have participated in a trial of collaborators who targeted Jews, and she is correct that the military tribunals did not aim to “register” local sites of execution or mass burials, tasks delegated to the Extraordinary State Commissions. However, records from local trials in the Konotop area demonstrate that tribunals charged local collaborators for crimes committed against Soviet

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<sup>60</sup> Konstantin, *Red Boyhood*, 175.

<sup>61</sup> Nisson Ovshievich Iurkovskii and “Unknown Female,” interview by Iu. A. Miagkova and S. A. Egorova, July 20, 2005, transcript, Petersburg Judaica Institute, St. Petersburg, Russia.

citizens, including Jews.<sup>62</sup> Again, the absence of specific charges for genocide reflected the newness of that crime and the broad conception of both victimhood and citizenship promoted in the Soviet Union, as Chaika recognized in her next comment: “We convicted those locals who betrayed their fellow men, sending them to death.”<sup>63</sup> Chaika’s observation on the absence of trials of those complicit in the Holocaust, then, likely stems from her subsequent awareness of the regime’s relative silence on the genocide in an atmosphere marked by state antisemitism. She also may have been responding to the direct question of her interviewers, or have volunteered this information according to her expectations of what an interviewer from a Jewish studies institute would want to hear. After all, if the tribunals had intended to keep Jews out of its proceedings, a young Jewish girl would never have been employed to sign death sentences.

### **Jews as Agents**

Jews generally appear less often as witnesses than as victims in local Extraordinary State Commission records, though this likely reflects the realities of the Holocaust more than any attempt to conceal their mass murder. The small percentage of Jews who survived the genocide on occupied territory inevitably placed the burden of witnessing on non-Jews. Furthermore, not all materials produced by the local commissions—or at least preserved in the archives—contain statements from eyewitnesses. Jews do appear occasionally as witnesses, however. As mentioned above, the report on Kremenchug repeatedly quotes the testimony of a witness named Elena Aleksandrovna Vradenburg, whose surname suggests that she was Jewish.<sup>64</sup> In this

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<sup>62</sup> See USHMM, RG-31.018M.12, case numbers 9640 and 6150 [originals: USBU Sumskoj oblasti].

<sup>63</sup> Basya Chaika, accessed April 12, 2011, <http://videos.centropa.org/index.php?nID=54&x=c2VhcmNoVHlwZT1CaW9EZXRhaWw7IHNIYXJjaFZhbHVlPTQ2>.

<sup>64</sup> None of the eight witnesses named in this section of the report are identified by their nationality.

respect, it is telling that the content of Vradenburg's testimony relates to the first phase of the Holocaust in the city, during which the Jews were relocated to barracks at Novo-Ivanovka.<sup>65</sup> Among the witness statements filed with the Extraordinary State Commission report for Bereznegovatskii *raion* in Nikolaev *oblast'* is that of Ol'ga Moiseevna Lapidus, whose Jewish nationality is noted beside the appropriate space on the NGKB's official form for interrogation records.<sup>66</sup> Lapidus's testimony also addresses the fate of the district's relatively small Jewish population in specific terms, even though the first question reportedly posed to her was phrased in general terms, asking about "atrocities" committed in the *raion*. If we accept this transcript as a faithful rendering of Lapidus's statement to investigators, we find that she too used multiple labels to refer to "the humiliation and annihilation of civilians [*mirnikh zhitelei*] especially [those] of the Jewish nationality." Although Lapidus employs the terms "civilians" and even "peaceful citizens" repeatedly, they almost always appear in the same phrase as "Jew" or "Jewish," while these latter identifiers also appear unaccompanied in Lapidus's characterization of individual victims or groups of victims.<sup>67</sup> In this way, this survivor simultaneously recognized the atrocities committed against all locals, including non-Jews, and the particular, deadly assault on Jews. Witness depositions such as this one, by both Jewish and non-Jewish witnesses, generally provide the strongest and most coherent narratives of the Holocaust—or Penter's "alternative memory discourses"<sup>68</sup>—found in records compiled by local Extraordinary State Commissions.

Some evidence suggests that Jews appeared as active agents in local trials of collaborators more often than in investigations coordinated by Extraordinary State Commissions.

<sup>65</sup> USHMM, RG-31.015M.04 [DAPO, f. p-3388, op. 1, spr. 688, ark. 6].

<sup>66</sup> USHMM, RG-22.002M.01 [GARF, f. 7021, op. 68, d. 177, l. 65].

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 66-66ob.

<sup>68</sup> Penter, "Collaboration on Trial," 789.

Local military trials of suspected “traitors” capitalized not only on the denunciations gathered in the course of the commissions’ investigations, but also on the testimony of witnesses—including Jews—who sometimes subsequently testified at trials. The Soviet Union actually distinguished itself in its willingness to put Jews on the witness stand, becoming the only prosecuting ally to do so at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, where the emphasis prosecutors placed on documentary evidence together with their general failure to distinguish between crimes against humanity and war crimes resulted in the notable absence of Holocaust survivors as witnesses.<sup>69</sup>

Unsurprisingly, witness statements from Jewish survivors provide the most cohesive accounts of the Holocaust as it unfolded in villages and cities across Soviet Ukraine. Soviet security organs do not appear to have treated the testimony of Jews differently from other witnesses. Indeed, Soviet investigators seem to have sought out Holocaust survivors—though not recognized in such terms—as witnesses in appropriate cases involving policemen. Thus, the February 1946 interview of Iosif Srulevich Gorokovsky relates entirely to the mass murder of Jews in the area of Ruzhin in *Zhitomir oblast'*, although the initial question posed to him was phrased more generally, asking what he knew about “atrocities and evil deeds [*zverstvakh i zlodeianiiakh*]” in the area during the occupation. Gorokovsky’s response conveys the totality of the Jewish catastrophe, at least locally, and establishes his authority as a survivor, even though he uses less precise terms than we would today:

In the period of the German occupation of Ruzhinskii *raion* there were the mass annihilation of Jews, [and] the taking of Soviet citizens to penal servitude in Germany, living in Ruzhinskii *raion*, I personally survived five Jewish pogroms the result of which was the complete annihilation of around two and a half

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<sup>69</sup> Lawrence Douglas, *The Memory of Judgment: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 78; and David Bloxham, “Jewish Witnesses in War Crimes Trials of the Postwar Era,” in *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements*, ed. David Bankier and Dan Michman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 539–54.

thousand Jews living in the small town of Ruzhin and in Ruzhinskii *raion*, including annihilated women and children.<sup>70</sup>

At the investigator's prompting, Gorokhovsky proceeded to identify the German gendarmerie and the police as organizers of the "Jewish pogroms," name the local collaborators in charge of the police, and chronicle their specific involvement in anti-Jewish actions.<sup>71</sup> Gorokhovsky was one of ten witnesses, at least three of whom were Jews, scheduled to testify before the tribunal itself in the trials of I. D. Rudenko and D. F. Vozniak. Six of these witnesses lived in Ruzhin and another three lived elsewhere in Ruzhinskii *raion*, increasing the likelihood that others in the local community would have been aware of these particular trials and the witnesses' involvement.<sup>72</sup>

Despite authorities' ongoing efforts to minimize perceived and actual ties between Soviet power and Jews, Jews also served as government agents in these military tribunals. As mentioned above, Basya Chaika, a 16-year-old Jewish reevacuee in newly-liberated Konotop, became a court assessor in the local military tribunal. If Chaika advanced to this position because she, as a *Komsomol* member and reevacuee untainted by the occupation, was considered politically reliable,<sup>73</sup> another Jewish returnee apparently was selected for the tribunal process because of his nationality. According to Yehoshua Gilboa, a Jewish prosecuting attorney from Ukraine "was appointed defense counsel for the pro-Nazi collaborators and others charged with crimes against the state, since, as a Jew—he was told—he would personally be far better off in this capacity." Gilboa cited the story of this unnamed Jewish lawyer as an example of the

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<sup>70</sup> USHMM, RG-31.018M.08, I. D. Rudenko and D. F. Vozniak [Original from USBU of Zhytomirskiy district, N 2522, d. 1396, ll. 122-122ob.].

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 245.

<sup>73</sup> Chaika, interview.

“increasing disappointments and frustration” encountered by Jewish returnees at the war’s end.<sup>74</sup> While this appointment may have been unwanted and caused the lawyer considerable inner turmoil, it also reflected non-Jews’ recognition of the Jewish catastrophe as a distinct crime committed by the Nazis and their collaborators. Further, the nationality-based explanation provided for this assignment suggests either a desire to preserve the tribunal’s image of integrity by preventing its use as a vehicle for personal justice, or a way to undermine the strength of any defense—or to accomplish both of these objectives. Interpreted in this way, this attorney’s assignment to the defense—if rather insensitive and personally uncomfortable—supported the larger goal of bringing collaborators to justice, including those who had committed crimes against Jews.

Another reason for the greater visibility of Jewish participants in local war crimes trials is less positive. The regime’s expansive understanding of collaboration theoretically exempted no one from trial and punishment as a “traitor of the motherland,” even if an individual had cooperated with the occupiers to save his or her own life, or the lives of others.<sup>75</sup> Soviet authorities accordingly investigated and tried around two dozen Jews for collaboration, including leaders of the Judenräte, or Jewish councils, of ghettos.<sup>76</sup> According to Vadim Altskan, Soviet authorities arrested at least four members of the Zhmerinka ghetto administration, including ghetto leader Adolph Hershmann (or Gershmann), who received the death penalty at his trial in December 1944.<sup>77</sup> Hershmann’s knowledge of German and Romanian, together with his

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<sup>74</sup> Yehoshua A. Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry, 1939-1953*, trans. Yosef Shachter and Dov Ben-Abba (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 37.

<sup>75</sup> Penter, “Collaboration on Trial,” 784.

<sup>76</sup> Altskan, “On the Other Side of the River,” 28 n57. Microfilm copies of documents relating to Hershmann’s trial documents are available in USHMM, RG-31.018M.08, Adol’f Samsnovich Gershman [USBU Vinnitsa, case no. 10875].

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 28n55.

experience in dealing with Romanian authorities as a lawyer in prewar Cernăuți (Chernovtsy), made him a valuable intermediary in the Romanian-occupied zone of Transnistria. Hershmann's dealings with the ghetto's Romanian overlords—including his involvement in preparing a list of subsequently expelled and executed refugees from the Nazi-occupied town of Brailov—and the strict rules he implemented in the Zhmerinka ghetto later served as evidence of his guilt. As Altskan shows, however, these same actions contributed to the survival of approximately 3,000 Jews in Zhmerinka, a fact that did not enter into Soviet authorities' calculation of Hershmann's guilt.<sup>78</sup>

Although cases like Hershmann's seem to suggest an equal-opportunity approach to collaborators, the trial records of one Jew who survived the occupation under an assumed name show a curious preoccupation with the man's "real" identity. The heading of an interrogation record from November 24, 1943, labeled the "Transcript of Interrogation [*protokol doprosa*] of the arrested Nesvezhinskii Abram Zel'manovich, alias Nesterov Aleksandr Alekseevich," highlights the recurrent question of the defendant's identity by juxtaposing his "real," obviously Jewish name with his Russian-sounding "alias." The brief biographical summary that follows leaves little doubt as to A. N.'s true identity, at least as determined by SMERSH: "Nesvezhinskii A. Z., year of birth 1910, native of the city of Kremenchug, a Jew...."<sup>79</sup> This file also contains a decree ruling that Aleksandr Alekseevich Nesterov was, in fact, Abram Zel'manovich Nesvezhinskii.<sup>80</sup> The significance of Nesterov/Nesvezhinskii's nationality to the accusations that he betrayed underground Soviet organizations to the Nazis is unclear.

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<sup>78</sup> Altskan, "On the Other Side of the River."

<sup>79</sup> USHMM, RG-31.018M.01 [Galuzevyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Sluzhby Bezpeky Ukrainy (GDA SBU), f. 5, case N 38989, t. 1, l. 41].

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 316.

## Conclusion

In recent years, scholars have noted the comparative visibility of Jews and the Jewish genocide in local materials compiled by the Extraordinary State Commissions and trials of collaborators, and studies uncovering these alternative narratives of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union have deepened our understanding of the complexities surrounding this topic. Still, there is something troubling about searching through these documents to find references to “Jews” hidden among those to “Soviet citizens”—as the Nazis themselves had done—and then “unmasking” those Soviet citizens as Jews—as the Soviets did only a few years after the Holocaust. As recent works by scholars such as Harriet Murav, David Shneer, and Anna Shternshis have shown, Soviet Jews could be, and were, both Soviet *and* Jewish, while simultaneously identifying as locals, workers, intellectuals, parents, children or any number of other characterizations.<sup>81</sup> If we hope to understand the complex ways in which Soviet citizens thought about themselves and their fellow Soviets, we must broaden our search for these various identities. One way to do this is to take the multiple identities ascribed to both Jews and non-Jews in these materials more seriously. As this analysis of materials from local Extraordinary State Commissions and war crimes trials suggests, members of committees and tribunals locally—including Soviet Jewish participants—sometimes recognized these multiple identities as they chronicled the destruction of peaceful Soviet citizens and Jews, or brought local collaborators to justice.

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<sup>81</sup> Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train*; Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*; Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*.

## CONCLUSION

The story of what came next for Soviet Jewry is widely known. The murder of Solomon Mikhoels in January 1948 and the subsequent liquidation of the Jewish Antifascist Committee and arrest of its leaders sent a widely understood message about the limits of Jewish national organization in the USSR. The liquidation of the Cabinet of Jewish Culture, the Yiddish Sections of the Writers Union (at both the republican and all-union levels), UkrGOSET and the Moscow State Yiddish Theater, and the few remaining Yiddish literary outlets followed. At around the same time, the number of synagogues in operation, which had reached a postwar high in 1947, began to decline.<sup>1</sup> The antic cosmopolitan campaign also became more aggressively anti-Jewish, and educational and employment opportunities for Jews narrowed. Finally, in 1953, the anti-Jewish sentiment evident in the Doctors' Plot raised fears of pogroms and a new purge targeting Jews. Only Stalin's death in March 1953 averted these possibilities. Within weeks, the media reported that the doctors had been wrongly accused and released. The rehabilitation of other Jewish (and non-Jewish) victims of the anti-cosmopolitan campaigns followed, but antisemitic attitudes amongst the Soviet leadership and population remained, as did anti-Jewish quotas in education and employment. Cold War policies combined with anti-Semitic prejudices and long-standing Soviet anti-Zionism to produce occasional periods of heightened anti-Jewish hostility, such as during the Six Day War in 1967. The cumulative result of these offenses, together with a younger generation's search for their roots and better opportunities, was the movement for emigration.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ro'i, "Reconstruction of Jewish Communities," 189–190.

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of these developments, see Gitelman, *Century of Ambivalence*, 147–195.

In hindsight, it is not difficult to identify harbingers of these developments in the mid-1940s or even in the late 1930s, but this outcome was not inevitable. Indeed, the decisive turn toward antisemitism as state policy around 1948 followed from international factors as much as domestic (or—in the case of Stalin’s prejudices—personal) ones. Jeffrey Veidlinger has argued persuasively “that Soviet acts of aggression against the Jewish population of the Soviet Union in the years 1948-53 can be understood as part of a general Soviet suspicion of diaspora nationalities that intensified existing anti-Semitism.”<sup>3</sup> The enthusiasm with which Soviet Jews greeted the creation of the state of Israel made their loyalties more suspect at the very moment they became a diaspora nationality. The Israeli government’s early orientation toward the West in the nascent Cold War only worsened the situation.<sup>4</sup>

Until then, the story of Jews in the Soviet Union immediately after the Holocaust had much in common with the experiences of Jews across postwar Europe. Many of Richard J. Golsan’s observations on antisemitism in postwar France could, with a few substitutions, be applied to the Soviet case:

...[A]ntisemitism persisted, and indeed thrived in a variety of contexts in the postwar period. Equally disturbing, the resurgence of antisemitism in France was largely downplayed and even ignored by many, and for a variety of reasons. Members of the victorious Resistance were intent upon stressing their own martyrdom exclusively. The followers of Charles de Gaulle preferred to emphasize the sufferings and courage of *all* the French, rather than dwell on the fate of any particular minority. This they did in the name of national unity. Finally, the French Jewish community itself thought largely in terms of reintegration and therefore tended to downplay its own victimization which, after all, distinguished it as a group distinct from other French. While this was very much in line with the prewar ethos of assimilated French Jews, it also reflected a

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Veidlinger, “Soviet Jewry as a Diaspora Nationality: The ‘Black Years’ Reconsidered,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 33, no. 1 (2003): 22.

<sup>4</sup> Veidlinger, “Soviet Jewry as a Diaspora Nationality”; G. Kostyrchenko, “Golda at the Metropol Hotel,” *Russian Studies in History* 43, no. 2 (2004): 77–84; and Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 109–119, 373–411.

more current—and sinister—reality: many of the French police who had arrested and deported Jews under Vichy and the Nazis were still exercising power.<sup>5</sup>

Those who had benefitted materially from the Jewish catastrophe or had reason to fear some form of Jewish revenge further complicated the situation for Jews survivors. In Eastern Europe particularly, these factors contributed to outbursts of violence against Jews that, combined with a lack of economic opportunities, spurred massive Jewish emigration from the region.

Mass emigration was not an option for Soviet Jews facing these same post-war and post-Holocaust challenges. Although a small number of individuals managed to leave illegally, it is difficult to determine whether sizeable numbers of Soviet Jews would have been willing to emigrate in the mid-1940s. Like other Soviet citizens, Jews emerged from the war as victors feeling entitled to better lives in the country they had served, whether in the military or in terms of essential wartime labor. Jews also situated their claims to entitlement in the context of their unique victimhood during the war, even though this went against the regime's narrative of equal suffering. The Soviet regime's past Jewish policy and ideological commitments to equality gave Jews every hope that their position in the Soviet family of nations would return to prewar status quo. In some places, local relationships, conditions, and identities eased this return to normality. As a result, Jews living in Soviet Ukraine in the mid-1940s enjoyed more possibilities to build normal lives—personally, professionally, and socially—than Jews elsewhere in postwar Eastern Europe.

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<sup>5</sup> “Antisemitism in Modern France: Dreyfus, Vichy, and Beyond,” in *Antisemitism: A History*, ed. Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 140.

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