DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG

HOLOCAUST MEMORY AND THE COLD WAR

REMEMBERING ACROSS THE IRON CURTAIN

Edited by Anna Koch and Stephan Stach

RETHINKING THE COLD WAR

DE G

Holocaust Memory and the Cold War

Rethinking the Cold War

Edited by
Kirsten Bönker and Jane Curry

Volume 13

Holocaust Memory and the Cold War

Remembering across the Iron Curtain

Edited by
Anna Koch and Stephan Stach

DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG

This publication was made possible thanks to the grant Inclusion of the Jewish Population into Postwar Czechoslovak and Polish Societies, no. 16–01775Y, funded by the Czech Science Foundation.

The book has been published with the support of the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah and the costs of making the publication open access were funded by University College London.

ISBN 978-3-11-067241-1
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-067265-7
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-067277-0
ISSN 2567-5311
DOI https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. For details go to https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024941233

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

© 2024 the author(s), editing © 2024 Anna Koch and Stephan Stach, Published by Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston
The book is published open access at www.degruyter.com.

Cover image: Laying of the foundation stone of the “Tombeau du Martyr juif inconnu” (grave stone of the unknown Jewish martyr), Paris, 17 May 1953 © Mémorial de la Shoah
Typesetting: Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.
Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyter.com

Acknowledgments

The idea for this project grew out of a conference on “New Approaches to the History of Jews under Communism” held in Prague in May 2017. Chatting during a coffee break, the volume editors realized that while there is significant discussion on how Communism and national particularities influenced Holocaust memory, there is little research that openly addresses the impact of the Cold War on Holocaust memory. This conversation sparked the idea of holding a joint conference on the topic. This conference “Remembering across the Iron Curtain: The Emergence of Holocaust Memory during the Cold War Era” took place a year later at the Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past (IPUB), University of York, in cooperation with the project “The Inclusion of the Jewish Population into the Postwar Czechoslovak and Polish Societies,” based at the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences (ÚSD). We would like to thank the IPUP and in particular Geoffrey Cubitt for hosting us in the fall of 2018 and Kateřina Čapková, who supported the conference beyond her role as project manager at the ÚSD. The conference was made possible thanks to generous funding from the European Association for Jewish Studies, the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah, the Strategy AV21 program of the Czech Academy of Sciences, the Czech Science Foundation (grant no. 16-01775Y), and the University of York. David Shneer (z”l) generously encouraged and supported us in organizing the conference, and the memories of his brilliant performance of Yiddish antifascist songs will remain etched into our minds. In many ways, this book has been inspired by his transnational approach to Jewish Holocaust memory, and we are saddened that he will not see it in print.

We thank Kirsten Bönker for her invitation to publish this volume in the book series *Rethinking the Cold War* and the editorial team at De Gruyter, in particular Verena Deutsch, Elise Wintz, and Rabea Rittgerodt, for providing helpful guidance and advice. Tomasz Frydel deserves special thanks for his careful reading and editing of this manuscript, and we are grateful that the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah provided a publication grant that made additional language editing possible. We would also like to thank University College London for funding the costs of making the publication open access.

Anna Koch, London
Stephan Stach, Berlin
May 2024

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. (cc) BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-202

Contents

Acknowledgments —— V

Anna Koch, Stephan Stach
Introduction —— 1

Elisabeth Gallas
The New York *Black Book* of 1946: A United Jewish Response to Nazi Crimes —— 23

Boaz Cohen
Israeli Holocaust Memory and the Cold War —— 51

Simon Perego
“The Communist Schism in Jewish Life”: Transnational Politics and Holocaust Commemorations among Parisian Jews during the Cold War —— 73

Arkadi Zeltser, Yad Vashem
The Cold War and Holocaust Memorialization in Soviet Publications of the 1960s —— 93

Anna Koch, Stephan Stach
Writing Holocaust History across the Iron Curtain: Alberto Nirenstein’s *A Tower from the Enemy / Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek* —— 119

Nadège Ragaru
East-West Encounters at the Adolf-Heinz Beckerle Trial (1967–1968): How Holocaust Knowledge and Remembrance Went Global —— 147

Vanessa Voisin
Accountability and the Cold War: The Eichmann Trial and Holocaust Representation in the Soviet Union —— 173

Máté Zombory
Moral Universalism in the East: Anti-Fascist Humanism and the Memory of the Holocaust in Zoltán Fábri’s Film *Late Season* (1967) —— 201

Irina Tcherneva
A Tableau of a Crime Taking Shape under the Viewer's Gaze: The Trajectories of Yosef Kuzkovski's *The Last Way* (1944–1970) —— 223

Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska
The West German View of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union: The Case of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, 1955–1960 —— 255

Anna Pollmann
"The Second Death": Günther Anders' Travels to Postwar Berlin —— 275

Jonathan Kaplan
Fighting Nazis and Confronting the Past: The German Democratic Republic and the National Committee against Nazis in the United States —— 293

Contributor Biographies —— 315

Index —— 319

Anna Koch, Stephan Stach

Introduction

Holocaust Memory and the Cold War: Remembering across the Iron Curtain

Even before the end of the Second World War, Europeans across the continent, among them some of the few surviving Jews, began to chronicle events, write memoirs and histories, and create narratives about the war and genocide. They did not do so in isolation. When individuals turn their recollections into a story, they rely on and draw from existing narratives, knowledge, and belief systems.[1] One of the most crucial frameworks into which memories were inserted, one that shaped peoples' recollections of World War II perhaps more than any other, was the Cold War. In the aftermath of the Second World War and following Germany's failed attempt to establish a new world order through extreme violence, the Cold War emerged as a dominant structure politicizing everyday life and shaping relationships between ideologies, states, and societies.

A few years after the end of the war, the former allies of the anti-Hitler coalition had become bitter enemies, dividing the world into two antagonistic blocs, led by the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively. Both these "superpowers" sought to secure and expand their spheres of influence. At its core, the Cold War was an ideological conflict between two different economic, political, and social systems: the liberal-democratic capitalism of the US versus the communism of the USSR; two worldviews that entailed different visions of the future and contrasting understandings of the past. The resulting arms race, the mutual spying and threats as well as proxy wars fought in non-European areas created an atmosphere of insecurity and fear of another major war in Europe, on both sides of the so-called Iron Curtain.

On either side, individuals faced pressure to commit themselves to the ideological foundations of the dominant camp. In the mid-1950s, when Stalinism and the most severe manifestations of anti-Communism faded, this pressure eased noticeably, though it never disappeared. The Cold War proved a persistent framework. It influenced how people, societies, and states dealt with and understood the war, the Holocaust, and its aftereffects. Foregrounding its essential role, this

1 Aleida Assmann, "Transformations between History and Memory," *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008): 49–72; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Mary Fulbrook, "History-Writing and Collective Memory," in *Writing the History of Memory*, ed. Stefan Berger and William John Niven (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 65–88.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-001

book highlights how the Cold War affected research, legal proceedings, and collective as well as individual memories of the murder of European Jews, and how the geographical and political location of historians and other actors of remembrance influenced the reception and categorization of their work. While the memory and historiography of the Holocaust changed significantly after 1990, in many ways perceptions shaped by the Cold War survived its end.

The understanding of the West as the democratic Free World and the East as totalitarian and repressive has continued to impact how scholars have evaluated efforts to commemorate the Holocaust in East and West after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Yet historians tend to neglect the role the block confrontation played in shaping narratives in Western Europe, the US, and Israel.[2] At the same time, treatments of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union oscillate between suggesting a complete suppression of Holocaust memory[3] and pointing to ideological control and manipulations, depicting Eastern memory as inauthentic.[4] The Cold War paradigm led to a dismissal of narratives that see the murder of European Jews through an anti-fascist lens presenting anti-fascism as a mere tool for suppressing Holocaust memory, without considering the possibility that it could also serve as a vehicle for expressing recollections of anti-Jewish violence.[5] This book joins re-

2 At a conference dedicated to Raul Hilberg's contribution to Holocaust historiography organized by the *Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschungen* in October 2017, no paper addressed the Cold War context of his pivotal book *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961) and its reception, while virtually every other aspect of his personality and oeuvre was illuminated. For the program, see: https://zzf-potsdam.de/en/veranstaltungen/raul-hilberg-die-holocaust-historiographie-eine-tagung-aus-anlass-seines-10, accessed May 27, 2024. This is also the case in the volume that emerged from the conference, see: René Schott, ed., *Raul Hilberg und die Holocaust-Historiographie* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag 2019).

3 For example, see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 821–822; William Korey, "In History's 'Memory Hole': The Soviet Treatment of the Holocaust," in *Contemporary Views on the Holocaust,* ed. Randolf L. Braham (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1983), 143–156; Randolph L. Braham, "Hungary: The Assault on the Historical Memory of the Holocaust," in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*, ed. Randolph L. Braham and András Kovács (Budapest: CEU Press, 2016), 261–310.

4 Thomas C. Fox, "The Holocaust under Communism," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 421; Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

5 See, for instance, Dan Diner, "On the Ideology of Antifascism," *New German Critique* 67 (Winter 1996): 130; Anson Rabinbach, "Antifascism," in *Staging the Third Reich: Essays in Cultural and Intellectual History*, ed. Anson Rabinbach, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Dagmar Herzog (London: Routledge, 2020), 189–197; Antonia Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus: Ein deutscher Mythos* (Reinbeck: Rowohlt Verlag, 1993); Peter Monteath, "Holocaust Remembrance in the German Democratic Republic – and Beyond," *in Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Post-*

cent research that has challenged the notion that remembrance of the Holocaust was not possible or only possible in a contrived, inauthentic form in the states of the Eastern bloc and provides a more complex picture of how the Nazi genocide was remembered in East and West.[6] The contributions to this volume examine how political interests influenced commemoration in *both* East and West and at the same time show how individual actors carved out a space to remember the Holocaust in ways that modified dominant Cold War narratives and at times even stood at odds with them. This book also reveals networks across the Iron Curtain on which these actors relied to share knowledge about the Holocaust, engage in debates over its interpretation, and clash over its meaning.

The "Free World" and the "Totalitarian East"

In March 1946, Winston Churchill, Britain's wartime prime minister, declared that "from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has de-

communist Europe, ed. John-Paul Himka and Joanna B. Michlic (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 223–260.

6 A number of recent works reconsider Holocaust memory in socialist Eastern Europe: See Kata Bohus, Peter Hallama, and Stephan Stach, ed., *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in State-Socialist Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022); Peter Hallama, *Nationale Helden und jüdische Opfer. Tschechische Repräsentationen des Holocaust* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); David Shneer, "An Alternative World: Jews in the German Democratic Republic, Their Transnational Networks, and a Global Jewish Communist Community," in *Jewish Lives under Communism: New Perspectives,* ed. Kateřina Čapková and Kamil Kijek (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022); Philipp Graf, "Taking Up the Cause of the Jewish Collective in Berlin's Soviet Sector during the "Interregnum" from 1945 To 1950," in *Our Courage – Jews in Europe 1945–48,* ed. Kata Bohus, Atina Grossmann, Werner Hanak, and Mirjam Wenzel (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020); Bill Niven, "Remembering Nazi Anti-Semitism in the GDR," in *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*, ed. Bill Niven and Chloe Paver (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Manuela Gerlof, *Tonspuren. Erinnerungen an den Holocaust im Hörspiel der DDR (1945–1989)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010); Alexander Walther, "Keine Erinnerung, nirgends? Die Shoah und die DDR," in *Deutschland Archiv*, August 6, 2019, https://www.bpb.de/293937, accessed May 27, 2024; Anna Koch, *Home after Fascism: Italian and German Jews after the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023); Hannah Maischein, *Augenzeugenschaft, Visualität Politik. Polnische Erinnerung an die deutsche Judenvernichtung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); Imke Hansen, *"Nie wieder Auschwitz!" Die Entstehung eines Symbols und der Alltag einer Gedenkstätte* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015); Regina Fritz, *Nach Krieg und Judenmord. Ungarns Geschichtspolitik seit 1944* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012).

scended across the [European] continent."[7] Churchill's speech resonated far beyond the small American college town where he delivered it. His call for Western Europe and the United States to stand together to defy the Soviet threat would soon become Cold War orthodoxy. The Cold War had divided Europe (as well as much of the world) into two hostile camps. These two camps told different stories about the war. Narrating the past soon became a signifier to assert belonging to one or the other camp, often relying on the same sources for opposite narrations. The effort to align narratives about the past along the ideological divide may be clearest in the case of Germany. While the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) looked back at a shared past, the two states created distinct official narratives about the war, carefully placing themselves either within the "democratic free world" or the "anti-fascist and socialist collective."

With the end of the war, the anti-Hitler coalition's shared commitment to anti-fascism fractured. The Eastern narrative celebrated the Red Army for its glorious victory over fascist barbarism, and the Soviet Union and the communist bloc used the dichotomy of fascism versus anti-fascism to divide the postwar world into friend and foe.[8] In this view, fascism represented the most aggressive expression of the "bourgeois" political movement, whose main objective was to enshrine capitalism as the dominating system. Consequently, all states of the Western bloc could be declared as potentially fascist.[9]

In the West, anti-fascism soon gained the stigma of being little more than a smokescreen for communist ideology.[10] Western academic Sovietology dominated by the totalitarian model underlined the similarities between communism and Nazism, leading to a more or less open equation of both systems – a way of thinking that became prevalent also, and perhaps even more so, outside these aca-

---

7 Winston Churchill at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, March 5, 1946, https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/cold-war-on-file/iron-curtain-speech/, accessed April 9, 2024.

8 Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta, Xavier Tabet, and Cristina Clímaco, "Introduction: Beyond Revisionism: Rethinking Antifascism in the Twenty-First Century," in *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present*, ed. Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta, Xavier Tabet, and Cristina Clímaco (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 1–18, here 2.

9 Michael Seidman, *Transatlantic Antifascisms: From the Spanish Civil War to the End of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Bohus, Hallama, and Stach, "Introduction," in *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism*, 1–18, here 3.

10 García, Yusta, Tabet, and Clímaco, "Introduction," 2–4; with a view on Holocaust memory: Bohus, Hallama, and Stach, "Introduction."

demic circles.[11] Although some early proponents of totalitarianism, above all Hannah Arendt, did not perceive post-Stalinist communism as totalitarian, a totalitarian lens remained crucial for many Western observers.[12] With fluctuating intensity and depending on political opportunism, both sides declared the other to be the ideological successor to Nazi Germany.

Pressure on individuals, including Jews in East and West, to conform to the dominant ideology increased in the early years of the Cold War, albeit to different degrees and with different consequences depending on the location. Distrust and mutual insinuations characterized the initial phase of the Cold War and spectacular trials based on alleged or actual espionage charges in which Jews played a central role, dominated the postwar years. After the break between the former Allied powers, a phase of isolation began in the Soviet-dominated bloc and in the Soviet Union itself. Contacts with the West were generally regarded with suspicion. Cooperation between Soviet and American Jews established by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC) broke down.[13] The JAC had served the Soviet Union well during the war in acquiring support and financial resources in the fight against Nazi Germany. After the war, the committee's self-confident appearance vis-à-vis Soviet institutions and its numerous contacts in non-socialist countries caused problems, as did its attempt to present documentation of the Holocaust in the form of a Black Book.[14] In her chapter in this volume, Elisabeth Gallas examines the joint American and Soviet effort to produce such a Black Book detailing Nazi atrocities, highlighting the challenges of this unlikely cooperation. In 1948, Soviet authorities arrested 15 leading figures of the JAC, five of them Yiddish writers, who had played a crucial role in building trust and gaining the support of American Jews. In a secret trial held in 1952, all but two were sentenced to death for espionage and subsequently executed.[15]

---

11 Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. and Erik P. Hoffmann, "Communist Studies and Political Science: Cold War and Peaceful Coexistnance," in *Post-Communist Studies and Political Science: Methodology and Empirical Theory in Sovietology*, ed. Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. and Erik P. Hoffmann (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 3–26.

12 See: "Stalinism in Retrospect: Hannah Arendt," edited with notes by Peter Baehr, *History and Theory* 54, no. 3 (October 2015): 353–366; Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966).

13 The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC) was founded in the USSR in 1941.

14 Diana Dimitru, "From Friends to Enemies? The Soviet State and Its Jews after the Holocaust," in *Jewish Lives under Communism*, 71–90.

15 Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, "Introduction," in *Stalin's Secret Pogrom. The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee,* ed. Joshua Rubenstein, and Vladimir P. Naumov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 1–63; Arno Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews: The*

The Slánský Trial in Prague held in November of the same year, by contrast, was publicly staged. Rudolf Slánský, a former leading figure of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and several other, mostly Jewish, defendants faced allegations of espionage and "Trotskyite-Titoist-Zionist" conspiracy in the service of American imperialism.[16] The trial was broadcast over the radio and excerpts were shown on newsreels.[17] Similar cases were held or prepared in other states of the Soviet-dominated bloc and in Moscow the Ministry of State exposed the alleged conspiracy of nine prominent, mainly Jewish, doctors who supposedly planned to murder Soviet leaders.[18] Soviet press reports on the "Doctors' Plot" accused the physicians of being terrorists and agents of the Zionist American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint), which was depicted as a branch office of American intelligence.[19] The Joint had indeed close ties to American intelligence circles; Moses Beckelman, a high-ranking Joint official in Europe and from 1951 its general director, had worked for the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of the CIA, during the war. In the paranoid atmosphere of late Stalinism, however, accusations needed no factual basis.

The Joint, as well as Zionist organizations, were part of a list of foreign entities in whose service the alleged traitors and spies supposedly stood. Most Jews in postwar Europe had received support from the Joint in one way or another and its aid packages at times even reached the Soviet Union. Attacks on prominent Jews and high-ranking Jewish officials as alleged Zionists and agents of the Joint made the Jewish population in the states of the Soviet-dominated bloc realize that they could all potentially be faced with such accusations. This was bound to cause fear even among convinced Jewish communists. In the course of "uncovering" the doctors'

Red Book: The Tragedy of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Soviet Jews (New York: Enigma, 2003), 221–247.

16 Karel Kaplan, *Report on the Murder of the General Secretary* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 1990); Jan Gerber, *Ein Prozess in Prag. Das Volk gegen Rudolf Slánský und Genossen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

17 The recordings of the trial, which were thought to have been lost, were found again in 2018. There are more than sixty hours of audio and several hours of film material. See: Stephan Stach, "Prager Giftfund. Ein Schauprozess im Bild," *Frankfurter Allgemeines Zeitung*, no. 3, January 8, 2019.

18 Jeffrey Herf, "East German Communists and the Jewish Question: The Case of P. M.," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (October 1994): 627–661; Wolfgang Kießling, *Partner im "Narrenparadies." Der Freundeskreis um Noel Field und Paul Merker* (Berlin: Dietz, 1994).

19 *Pravda*, January 13, 1953. On the Doctors' Plot, see: Jonathan Brent and Vladimir Naumov, *Stalin's Last Crime: The Plot against Jewish Doctors, 1948–1953*; on its long-term impact on Soviet Jews, see: Anna Shternshis, "I Was Not Like Everybody Else": Soviet Jewish Doctors Remember the Doctors' Plot," in *Jewish Lives under Communism*, 91–110.

conspiracy, the press also reported on the doctors' links to the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. The JAC members, previously useful to the Soviet rulers, were now labeled Zionist-nationalist agents and the Black Book could not be published.[20] The repressive nature of late Stalinism restricted open discussions, publications, and commemoration of the Nazi mass murder of Jews in Eastern Europe.

Democracies in Western Europe and North America, if to a lesser degree and by different means, also tried to influence or silence recollections that did not fit within a narrative shaped by anti-communism. In the United States, narratives of antifascist unity that had been popular during the war were no longer welcome. Communist Jews as well as "fellow travelers" faced increasing political repression with the spread of McCarthyism and its inquisitorial atmosphere. Communist immigrants of Jewish origin felt they could not remain in the United States, and some, prominently among them Gerhart Eisler, were arrested.[21] In the letters to her husband, Hilde Eisler, who had recently learned about the murder of her mother and sister in Nazi-occupied Europe, linked her current experience of anti-communist persecution in the United States to memories of persecution under Nazism in Germany.[22] Her letters speak to the concern among Jewish communists, who perceived the crackdown on communism in light of a continuous threat of fascism. The oppressive atmosphere of the McCarthy era reminded communist and left-wing German-Jewish immigrants in the USA of their experience of anti-communist and antisemitic persecution in Nazi Germany in the early 1930s and made a return to the Soviet occupation zone and later the GDR seem the best or even the only option.[23] After all, the leadership of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) had not only shown greater interest in the return of emigrants than the West German political elite, the "better" Germany

---

20 Frank Grüner, *Patrioten und Kosmopoliten. Juden im Sowjetstaat 1941–1953* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), 111–113, 121–128; Gennady Estraikh, "The Life, Death, and Afterlife of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee," *East European Jewish Affairs* 48, no. 2 (2018): 144.

21 See, for instance, Phillip Deery, "A Blot upon Liberty": McCarthyism, Dr. Barsky and the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee," *American Communist History* 8, no. 2 (2009): 167–196; Elizabeth Wenger, "Speak, Memory? War Narratives and Censorship in the GDR," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 96, no. 4 (October 2018): 642–671; Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 124–128. On the witch hunt atmosphere, see also Alfred Kantorowicz, *Deutsches Tagebuch* (Munich: Kindler, 1964), 98; Ingeborg Rapoport, *Meine ersten drei Leben: Erinnerungen* (Berlin: NORA, 2002). Gerhart Eisler was sentenced to jail for misrepresenting his party affiliation on his immigration application. When released on bail, he managed to flee the United States on a Polish ship.

22 Letters from Brunhilde Eisler to Gerhart Eisler, February 26, 1947, and March 19, 1947, Federal Archives in Berlin (Bundesarchiv Berlin), NY 4117/61.

23 See, for example, Rapoport, *Meine ersten drei Leben,* 211–212, 270–280; Kantorowicz, *Deutsches Tagebuch*, 96–98; John Borneman and Jeffrey M. Peck, *Sojourners*: *The Return of German Jews and the Question of Identity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 81–101.

was also more consistent in removing former Nazis from the state apparatus than West Germany. Several prominent Jewish emigrants, among them the writers Anna Seghers and Arnold Zweig, the composer Hanns Eisler, and the literary scholars Hans Mayer and Alfred Kantorowicz, returned to the GDR and became part of the state's cultural and political elite. Some of these remigrants including Kantorowicz later left the GDR disillusioned, but remaining in the US had seemed impossible to most communists.[24]

Fear of political persecution spread among American Jews who were disproportionally targeted under McCarthyism. During the 1930s and 1940s, the American Communist Party, as well as other leftwing parties like the Bund and left-wing Zionists, had gained support among American Jews, especially among immigrants from Eastern Europe. In the 1950s, this made them suspect of being involved in "un-American activities." A commitment to the United States was no longer possible without pledging anti-communism, causing heated debates within the Jewish community.[25] The arrest, trial, and subsequent execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg exacerbated existing concerns. The accusations of spying for the Soviet Union against the communist Jewish couple pressured leftist and liberal Jews and Jewish organizations to distance themselves from communism. The couple's death sentence in 1951 and their execution in 1953, which took place despite the numerous and sometimes prominent appeals for clemency, brought back memories of the war years.[26] Communist Jews in France, for instance, looked at Jews condemned by McCarthyism, in particular Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, as victims of antisemitism, connecting American anti-communism and the Nazi persecution of Jews.[27]

24 See Hendrik Niether, *Leipziger Juden und die DDR. Eine Existenzerfahrung im Kalten Krieg* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 41–43; Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 124–128; Mary Fulbrook, *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 357; Koch, *Home after Fascism*, 105, 106, 135; Karin Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt. Die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), 195.

25 Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 15, 39–41; Susan A. Glenn, *The Jewish Cold War: Anxiety and Identity in the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, David W. Belin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs. Belin Lecture Series, Vol. 24 (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2014), https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/5999n585k, accessed May 28, 2024; Leonard I. Beerman, *The Eternal Dissident: Rabbi Leonard I. Beerman and the Radical Imperative to Think and Act*, ed. David N. Myers (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018); Aviva Weingarten, *Jewish Organizations' Response to Communism and to Senator McCarthy* (London: Vallentine Mitchell; in association with the European Jewish Publication Society, 2008).

26 Deborah Dash Moore, "Reconsidering the Rosenbergs: A Symbol and Substance in Second Generation American Jewish Consciousness," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 21–37, here 28–29.

27 See Simon Perego's chapter in this volume.

Communists and leftists in the West frequently challenged the dominant anti-communist narrative. They highlighted the role of the Soviet army in the liberation of the camps and the role of the communist resistance across Europe during the war, which did not comfortably fit the totalitarian framework. Such an emphasis on the Soviet role in rescuing Jews during the Holocaust was often accompanied by the propagation of a narrative depicting the Soviet Union as a force for peace that opposed Western imperialism.[28] Boaz Cohen's chapter in this volume sheds light on the role memories of Soviet liberators played in Israeli discourse.

Stalin's death in 1953 and the decline of McCarthyism in the mid-1950s noticeably eased the ideological pressure on both sides of the Iron Curtain, broadening the scope to reconsider the war and the Holocaust. In the East, this meant turning away from the teleological utopianism of the Stalin era, which saw the achievement of communism as the inevitable goal of history. The relationship between the party and society changed, enabling criticisms from below, albeit within narrow limits.[29]

Nazi perpetrator trials, held on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and the debates that accompanied them played an important role in generating discussions of and interest in the Holocaust. Some of these trials, like the GDR's trials of the West German federal minister Theodor Oberländer (1960) and Hans Globke, the closest associate of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (1963), were staged and took place in the absence of the defendants.[30] These trials formed part of the GDR's propaganda campaign pointing to the presence of former Nazis in the West German government.[31]

Other trials, of which the 1961 Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt (1963–1965) are the best-known examples, also became a venue

---

28 On the Soviet-dominated peace initiatives of the late 1940s and early 1950s, see: Melissa Feinberg, *Curtain of Lies: The Battle over Truth in Stalinist Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 31–59; Petra Goedde, The Politics of Peace. A Global Cold War History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 39–66.

29 Pavel Kolař, *Der Poststalinismus. Ideologie und Utopie einer Epoche* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2016).

30 Kai Struve, "Theodor Oberländer and the Nachtigall Battalion in 1959/60 – an Entangled History of Propaganda, Politics, and Memory in East and West," *Slavic Review* 81, no. 3 (Fall 2022): 677–700; Jasmin Söhner and Máté Zombory, "Accusing Hans Globke, 1960–1963: Agency and the Iron Curtain," in *Seeking Accountability*, 351–386; Lawrence Douglas, *The Memory of Judgment: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

31 Such accusations were not unfounded. The West German government integrated former Nazis, though the East German leadership, if to a lesser extent, also accepted compromised individuals as long as they proved useful and willing to serve the new regime. Mary Fulbrook, "Complicity and the Holocaust in Eastern Europe," *Jewish Historical Studies* 53 (2021): 115–35.

of confrontation between both blocs – whether in the form of media coverage, or adaptations in literature, movies, radio plays, and art.[32] In this volume, Vanessa Voisin analyzes the understudied effect of the Eichmann trial on Soviet narratives of the war and the Holocaust.

The legal, scholarly, and cultural examination of the Holocaust in the late 1950s and 1960s also led to an intensification of its appropriation in the East-West confrontation. From the mid-1950s, Holocaust memory became a subject of political fights within the bipolar confrontation. Such political confrontations took on different proportions. The conflict manifested itself in the open exploitation of Holocaust memory, for example, when West German politicians and commentators compared the Berlin Wall to the wall around the Warsaw Ghetto[33] or when GDR functionaries

---

32 On such trials in Central and Eastern Europe and their effect on the public visibility of the Holocaust and social mobilization, see: Eric Le Bourhis, Irina Tcherneva, and Vanessa Voisin, ed., *Seeking Accountability for Nazi and War Crimes in East and Central Europe: A People's Justice?* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2022). The radio, which had a wide range that easily crossed the Iron Curtain, played an important role, see: Gerlof, *Tonspuren*; René Wolf, *The Undivided Sky: The Holocaust on East and West German Radio in the 1960* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), esp. 46–145. Numerous contemporaries discussed the Eichmann trial. Among them Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963); Friedrich Karl Kaul, *Der Fall Eichmann* (Berlin: Verlag Das Neue Berlin, 1964). There are also, numerous academic studies on the trial, for instance: Deborah E. Lipstadt, *The Eichmann Trial* (New York: Schocken, 2011); Peter Krause, *Der Eichmann-Prozess in der deutschen Presse* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002); Kata Bohus, "Not a Jewish Question? The Holocaust in Hungary in the Press and Propaganda of the Kádár Regime during the Trial of Adolf Eichmann," *Hungarian Historical Review* 4, no. 3 (2015): 737–72. In the Auschwitz trial, Friedrich Karl Kaul represented several victims living in the GDR as joint plaintiffs and used this and other trials against Nazi criminals as a stage for to prove the superiority of the GDR. On Kaul, see: Annette Rosskopf, "Strafverteidigung als ideologische Offensive. Das Leben des Rechtsanwalts Friedrich Karl Kaul (1906–1981)," *forum historiae iuris* (August 8, 1998), accessed April 28, 2023; Ralph Dobrawa, *Der Auschwitzprozess. Ein Lehrstück deutscher Geschichte* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2013); Irmtrud Wojak, *"Gerichtstag halten über uns selbst . . .": Geschichte und Wirkung des ersten Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozess* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2001); Devin O. Pendas, *The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, 1963–1965: Genocide, History, and the Limits of the Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

33 So did, for instance, the German weekly *Die Zeit* on the occasion of the first anniversary of the building of the Berlin Wall under the title: "Die Mauer: Rote Nazis" (August 31, 1962). The writer Wolfdietrich Schnurre also used this comparison in his book: *Berlin: Eine Stadt wird geteilt* (Olten: Walther, 1962), 10. See also: Stephan Stach, "Holocaust und Kalter Krieg im deutsch-polnisch-jüdischen Kontext – Das Jüdische Historische Institut in Warschau und die beiden deutschen Staaten," *Historie. Jahrbuch des Zentrums für Historische Forschung Berlin der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 2 (2008/2009): 57–81.

used Holocaust memory to denounce connections between Nazi Germany, the FRG, and NATO.[34]

While both sides eagerly accused the other of continuities with the Nazi regime, the Cold War from its onset hindered the prosecution of Nazi criminals. Once communism replaced Nazism as the main threat in the eyes of the Western Allies, pressure for denazification decreased and former Nazis were rehabilitated.[35] The Cold War also allowed for the exculpation of the Germans by shifting the blame, as Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska shows in her chapter on Hans Scholz's novel *Through the Night* (originally *Am grünen Strand der Spree*) and its radio and film adaptations. This early West German attempt to depict the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union obfuscated German responsibility by suggesting Eastern European complicity and making subtle references to Soviet culpability. Decades later, in the mid-1980s, conservative West German historians pointed to Soviet violence as a way of relativizing Nazi war crimes and the Holocaust in the *Historikerstreit.* In what has been termed "the last grand debate of the Cold War," both conservative historians as well as their liberal interlocutors paid little attention to the East European victims of Nazi atrocities and ultimately flattened Soviet history.[36] Jürgen Habermas famously pointed to the singularity of the Holocaust and rejected attempts to exculpate the Germans, refuting the notion that Bolshevism was the main culprit of unleashing unprecedented violence in Europe. He also emphasized the crucial importance of "the unreserved opening of the Federal Republic to the political culture of the West" and thus remained within a Cold War framework.[37]

Narratives about the Holocaust and interest in its commemoration changed and shifted in the decades following the end of the war. The extent to which the memory of the Holocaust was used as ammunition in the bloc confrontation depended on the cycles of public interest and, especially east of the Iron Curtain, on whether the topic fit the current political agenda. Whether and to what extent the

---

34 For instance, Grete Wittkowski, vice-director of the East German Planning Commission, used her review of Ber Mark's study on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising to denounce West German and NATO imperialism: "Der Aufstand im Warschauer Ghetto 1943: Zum Erscheinen des ersten umfassenden Berichts von Bernard Mark,“ *Neues Deutschland*, April 19, 1957. See also Stach: "The Jewish Diaries," 288–292. On the impact of the Eichmann trial on public debate of the Holocaust in Hungary, see Bohus, "Not a Jewish Question?"

35 Fulbrook, "Complicity and the Holocaust in Eastern Europe," 124.

36 "The *Historikerstreit* Twenty Years On," *German History* 24, no. 4 (October 2006): 587–607, here 594.

37 Jürgen Habermas, "A Kind of Settlement of Damages (Apologetic Tendencies)," *New German Critique* 44 (1988): 25–39.

Holocaust could be debated changed over time and varied greatly within the respective states of the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries.

Fractured and Entangled Memories

Historians of memory have challenged the notion of a single, stable, unified collective memory and highlighted the multiplicity of perceptions of the past. Recent research, following Michael Rothberg's concept of *multidirectional* memory, has also shown that distinct narratives and memories not only vied for power but also influenced one another.[38] The chapters within this book highlight the entangled, rather than monolithic, nature of memory narratives. As Simon Perego's examination of the divisions and contrasting narratives within the Paris Jewish community shows, memory of the war and the persecution of Jews was never homogenous – not even within one community. This, as well as the other chapters in this book, also refutes long-held assumptions that the world remained silent about the murder of European Jews in the aftermath of the war. While the so-called myth of silence has been challenged by ample documentation that highlights how survivors as well as Jewish communities and institutions gathered evidence, gave testimonies, established archives, recounted, and wrote about the Holocaust, it seems to hold power over the perception of Eastern European memory culture.[39]

---

38 Stefan Berger and Bill Niven, eds., *Writing the History of Memory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

39 For European Jews' efforts to witness and testify, see Margarete Myers Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945–1957* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, *After the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 2012); Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Renee Poznanski, "French Apprehensions, Jewish Expectations: From a Social Imaginary to a Political Practice," in *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin after WWII,* ed. David Bankier (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 25–57; Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Daniella Doron, *Jewish Youth and Identity in Postwar France: Rebuilding Family and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Mark L. Smith, *The Yiddish Historians and the Struggle for a Jewish History of the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019); Rebecca Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

In the aftermath of the war, Jews in East and West told the story of their persecution in myriad different ways. Some pointed to the specificity of Jewish suffering, while others depicted the Jewish fate as merged with other victims of Nazism. Outside the Jewish community, the tendency to see the murder of European Jews as one of many Nazi war crimes was commonplace in the first postwar decade, and there was limited interest in the stories of survivors and early historians of the Holocaust. Holocaust narratives did not easily fit into the postwar spirit of reconstruction, emphasizing the need to look forward and leave the past behind.[40]

New threats likewise overshadowed memories of the past. Fears of a nuclear apocalypse, which rose after Hiroshima and Nagasaki and remained present due to the arms race between the USA and the Soviet Union, may have contributed to the declining interest of a broader non-Jewish public in the German mass murder of Jews during the late 1940s and early 1950s.[41] At the same time, such fears of future atrocities also led to multidirectionality, in which discourses around present threats and past catastrophes merged. The philosopher Günter Anders saw a structural connection between the industrialized mass murder of the German extermination camps and the atomic bombs dropped by the Americans on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which Anna Pollmann examines in her chapter. As Máté Zombory shows in his contribution, the Hungarian director Zoltán Fábri also picked up on this thread in his film *Late Season* (1967), in which he narrated the memory of the Holocaust and questions about the individual guilt of non-Jewish actors in connection with the nuclear threat. In the debates on the arms race, Holocaust survivors such as Elie Wiesel also linked the nuclear threat to the Holocaust.[42]

Despite this lack of interest in their stories and facing numerous challenges, not least the difficulty of finding publishers, survivors in East and West wrote memoirs and historians and literati published preserved diaries of Holocaust victims and

---

40 Frank Biess, "Introduction: Histories of the Aftermath," in *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, ed. Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 1–4.

41 Jan Gerber, Philipp Graf, and Anna Pollmann, "Introduction," in *Geschichtsoptimismus und Katastrophenbewusstsein. Europa nach dem Holocaust*, ed. Jan Gerber, Philipp Graf, and Anna Pollmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022), 23–35.

42 "The Day After," Discussion Panel, ABC News Viewpoint, November 20, 1983, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzXcQ2Lr-40, min. 24:26–26:16, accessed April 29, 2024. The connection between the nuclear threat and the Holocaust has also been the subject of study in the field of psychology, see Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Markusen, *The Genocidal Mentality: Nazi Holocaust and Nuclear Thread* (New York: Basic Books, 1990). On the nuclear disarmament movements, see: Stephanie L. Freeman, *Dreams for a Decade: International Nuclear Abolitionism and the End of the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023).

other documents to keep memory alive. Such testimonies frequently inspired further literary and artistic engagement. Jewish writers, whether professional authors or "ordinary" survivor-memoirists, produced narratives which were at odds with and even challenged official narratives propagated by political elites.[43]

In the communist bloc, it was often appropriations of official narratives that opened up a discursive space – albeit a limited one – for questions on how to remember the war and the genocide of Europe's Jews. Under the umbrella of the anti-fascist struggle, Holocaust memory could find its place. Arkadi Zeltser's chapter in this volume shows, how the use of Holocaust memory as a weapon of Cold War propaganda allowed individuals in the Soviet Union to publicly discuss and commemorate the murder of European Jews. Irina Tcherneva's chapter provides another example, examining the representation of the genocide in Yosef Kuzkovski's painting *The Last Way* (1944–1948). While the possibilities for the publication of academic works were restricted, testimonies, diaries, and memoirs, as well as literary and artistic adaptations, enjoyed greater leeway, and numerous publications appeared from the 1950s onwards.[44] In Poland, the Jewish Historical Institute published books on the German mass murder of Jews and the Jewish uprisings in the Ghettos of Warsaw and Białystok, which had to adhere to the Stalinist narratives of World War II, but still described the Holocaust as an anti-Jewish crime.[45] Even a Yiddish publishing house existed which published memoirs from the ghettos and camps, albeit with critical passages shortened. The best-known example

---

43 See, for instance, Helen Finch, *German-Jewish Life Writing in the Aftermath of the Holocaust: Beyond Testimony* (Rochester, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2023); Koch, *Home after Fascism*.

44 Editions of Anne Frank's diary appeared in the late 1950s in Poland (1957), Hungary (1958), the GDR (1957), and the Soviet Union (1960). Other diaries of Holocaust survivors appeared in East European countries: in Poland the diaries of Dawid Rubinowicz and Dawid Sierakowiak (1960) were published and later translated into German and other languages. The collection of Polish Holocaust diaries, *Im Feuer vergangen*, appeared in 1958 in several editions in the GDR. Masha Rolnikaitė's memoirs appeared in the Soviet Union in 1965. Regarding diaries, see Stephan Stach, "'The Jewish Diaries . . . Undergo One Edition after the Other': Early Polish Holocaust Documentation, East German Antifascism, and the Emergence of Holocaust Memory in Socialism," in *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism*, 275–277. On fictional works, see: Elisa-Maria Hiemer, Jiří Holý, Agata Firlej, and Hana Nichtburgerová, ed., *The Handbook of Polish, Czech, and Slovak Holocaust Fiction: Works and Contexts* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021); Marek Haltoff, *Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001.

45 Stephan Stach, "The Prospects and Perils of Holocaust Research in Communist Poland: The First Twenty Years of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw," *East European Jewish Affairs* 52, no. 2–3 (2022): 137–164.

was Emanuel Ringelblum's "Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto."[46] In the 1980s, East European dissident movements exposed blank spaces in the official Holocaust memory and used counternarratives to question the historical and moral legitimacy of the Communist governments.[47]

Beyond the Nation-State and across the "Iron Curtain"

The chapters in this book examine narratives spun below national narratives of the past, highlighting individual and communal perceptions, but also move above the national level by examining cultural transfers and transnational networks that crossed the Iron Curtain. Efforts to depict and make sense of the past, to track down perpetrators, and to commemorate, mourn, and remember those murdered often transcended politically bounded territories. This volume thus contributes to recent efforts to reveal transnational networks and exchanges bridging the Iron Curtain.[48]

With few exceptions, attempts to re-evaluate Holocaust memory rarely transcend national borders and the former bloc division.[49] Yet the Iron Curtain never

---

46 Katarzyna Person and Agnieszka Żółkiewska, "Edition of Documents from the Ringelblum Archive (the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto) in Stalinist Poland," in *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism*, 21–37.

47 See: Bohus, Hallama, and Stach, "Introduction," 17–19; Peter Hallama and Stephan Stach, *Gegengeschichte. Zweiter Weltkrieg und Holocaust im ostmitteleuropäischen Dissens* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2015); Kata Bohus, "The Opposition of the Opposition: New Jewish Identities in Illegal Underground Public Sphere in Late Communist Hungary," in *Jewish Lives under Communism*, 236–252.

48 See, for instance, Ivan Boldyrev and Olessia Kirtchik, "On (Im)permeabilities: Social and Human Sciences on Both Sides of the 'Iron Curtain,'" *History of the Human Sciences* 29, no. 4–5 (2016): 3–12; Shneer, "An Alternative World," 153–173; Philippe Vonnard, Nicola Sbetti, and Grégory Quin, *Beyond Boycotts: Sport during the Cold War in Europe* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018). Research on the cultural history of the Cold War has shown that cooperation across the Iron Curtain took place even in such sensitive sectors as science and technology, see for instance: Manfred Sapper, Volker Weichsel, Klaus Gestwa, and Stefan Rohdewald, eds., *Kooperation trotz Konfrontation. Wissenschaft und Technik im Kalten Krieg* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2009), special edition of *Osteuropa* 59, no. 10. For a German-Polish case study on the knowledge transfer between conflict and cooperation, see Stach, "Holocaust und Kalter Krieg."

49 A rare example for a comparative work across the Iron Curtain is Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

sealed off a part of the world: art, stories, books, histories, people, and their memories traveled back and forth, and we can understand neither Western nor Eastern memory culture without taking into account both confrontation and collaboration between the two sides. Books provide an excellent example not merely of knowledge transfers but also of efforts to insert stories within the respective ideological frameworks. Perhaps the best-known Holocaust testimony, the diary of Anne Frank, moved across the Iron Curtain, adapted to suit different audiences and memorial discourses. The diary underwent several changes, starting with Otto Frank's editing of his daughter's text. Subsequent stage and Hollywood film adaptations further changed Anne's writings, omitting references to her Jewishness and turning her into a universally accessible symbol of the innocent victim. Hollywood depicted the Jewish victim, whose life was tragically and brutally cut short, as an American teenager who spread a message of hope, despite all difficulties. In Eastern Europe, the book could be published only after the thaw. The author Ilya Ehrenburg wrote the preface to the 1960 Russian edition of *Anne Frank's Diary*. Ehrenburg highlighted the immensity of Jewish suffering during the war but also used the text to launch anti-Western denunciations and point to continuities between postwar West Germany and the Nazi state. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the text was also incorporated into an anti-fascist narrative, which did not stop readers from interpreting it individually.[50]

However, the travel of books and documents across the Iron Curtain was not one-directional, as Jacob Sloan's 1958 translation of Emanuel Ringelblum's *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* exemplifies. Based on its Yiddish version published by the Jewish Historical Institute in 1952, Sloan's translation was published in numerous editions and served as a template for subsequent translations into all other languages, except for Polish.[51] The Warsaw Ghetto and in particular the uprising in spring 1943 held and still holds a central place in Jewish memory of the Holocaust. In the aftermath of the war, in both East and West, narratives of heroic resistance trumped stories of suffering, and the uprising provided a counternar-

50 On the reception of Anne Frank's diary and its numerous adaptions in different contexts, see: Sylke Kirschnick, *Anne Frank und die DDR. Politische Deutungen und persönliche Lesarten des berümten Tagebuchs* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2009); Katja Heimsath, "Trotz allem glaube ich an das Gute im Menschen". *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank und seine Rezeption in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2013); Ralph Melnick, *The Stolen Legacy of Anne Frank: Meyer Levin, Lillian Hellman, and the Staging of the Diary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Kata Bohus, "Anne and Eva: Two Diaries, Two Holocaust Memories in Communist Hungary," *Remembrance and Solidarity Studies* 5 (2016): 97–114; Griselda Pollock, "Stilled Life: Traumatic Knowing, Political Violence, and the Dying of Anna Frank," *Mortality* 12, no. 2 (2007): 124–141. For the Soviet reception, see Arkadi Zeltser's chapter in this book.
51 Stach, "The Prospects and Perils," 146.

rative to accusations of Jewish passivity.[52] The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising became *the* symbol of Jewish resistance, but chroniclers disagreed on who they perceived as its main heroes. In Poland in particular, memories of the uprising were highly contested.[53] Sloan's reading differed from the version put forward by Alberto Nirenstein, an early historian of the Holocaust who moved back and forth between East and West. Nirenstein researched at the Warsaw Jewish Historical Institute between 1951 and 1954, before returning to his family in Italy. Upon his return he published his annotated source edition *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek* which Anna Koch and Stephan Stach examine in their contribution to this volume.

Recent research also points to cultural diplomacy and the resulting artistic and personal contacts, which created exchange, entanglement and interconnection between actors on both sides.[54] Communist and leftist Jewish artists and intellectuals on both sides of the Iron Curtain, retained old and built new networks after the war. The GDR, and in particular East Berlin, provided a space for exchanges, inviting Communist Jewish performers from East and West. Some of these performances commemorated anti-Jewish persecution and racial violence, albeit within an anti-fascist framework.[55]

Cooperation across the Iron Curtain played an important role in the tracing and prosecution of Nazi criminal. During the 1960s, East German officials, as part of their effort to highlight continuities between the Nazi state and the FRG, contacted Jewish public figures and organizations in the West hoping that they would assist in uncovering Nazi criminals in West Germany, as Jonathan Kaplan shows in his contribution. Efforts to gather evidence also relied on transnational cooperation. West German trials since at least the 1960s included documentary evidence and expert witnesses from Communist states in their assessment, as for instance in the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial or the Bielefeld Bialystok Trial.[56] Nadège Rargaru's

---

52 See Avinoam Patt, *The Jewish Heroes of Warsaw* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2021).

53 In the 45 years of communist Poland's existence, numerous clashes arose over the interpretation and significance of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising between various Jewish groups, between Jewish and non-Jewish actors, between the liberal and nationalist wings of the communist Polish United Workers' Party, and between the party and government apparatus and the Solidarność movement, see: Renata Kobylarz, *Walka o pamięć. Polityczne aspekty obchodów rocznicy powstania w getcie warszawskim 1944–1989* (Warsaw: IPN, 2009).

54 Simo Mikkonen, Giles Scott-Smith, and Jari Parkkinen, eds., *Entangled East and West: Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction during the Cold War* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).

55 Shneer, "An Alternative World."

56 Katrin Stoll, *Die Herstellung der Wahrheit: Strafverfahren gegen ehemalige Angehörige der Sicherheitspolizei für den Bezirk Bialystok* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), esp. 309–330.

contribution in this volume takes the Frankfurt trial against Adolf Beckerle as a starting point to demonstrate the importance of connections between Eastern, Western, and non-aligned states for the prosecution of Nazi criminals. The transnational web of publications, actors, and networks playing a role in the documentation, remembrance and legal assessment of the Holocaust underscores that the history of the Cold War needs to be understood as more than a confrontation of two superpowers causing the isolation of Eastern Europe; what emerges is also a history of exchanges and communication, albeit amidst challenging circumstances.

Contributions to this Book

The authors of this volume shed light on three areas in which the Cold War and Holocaust memory became entangled: firstly, contributions highlight the impact of the bloc confrontation on the interpretation and remembrance of the Holocaust in the East *and* West. Secondly, the authors emphasize that neither in the East nor in the West these official narrations determined people's understanding of the Holocaust, highlighting the multiplicity of memories. Finally, they reveal how Jewish and non-Jewish actors from different countries cooperated to promote research and memory of the genocide of Europe's Jewish population.

In her chapter, Elisabeth Gallas sheds light on the collaborative endeavor to document Nazi crimes in the 1946 Black Book, highlighting both the ideological tensions between the two Allies and the grassroots efforts to sidestep Cold War antagonism. From the outset, the book was a transnational project relying on the collaboration between four organizations spanning continents – the World Jewish Congress (WJC), the Jewish National Council in Palestine Va'ad Leumi (Va'ad Leumi), the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), and the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists, Inc. (Writers Committee). Gallas's research reveals the challenges these various organizations and representatives faced due to ideological and political divisions, as well as logistical and practical difficulties. It also highlights their determination to work together and create Jewish unity in the face of persecution, across political factions and national borders.

Ideological factions did not merely divide Jews from East and West, but also ran through national communities, as the two following contributions to the volume show. Boaz Cohen examines how the East-West divide and the emerging Cold War informed Israeli discussions of how to commemorate the Holocaust. In the formative years of the Israeli state Holocaust memory shaped issues of legislation, government formation, and foreign policy, and was tightly linked to the

question of the newly founded state's present and future, including its relationship with the two Germanies and its alignment within the Cold War division.

As Simon Perego's chapter shows, the Cold War also shaped the discussion of how to commemorate the Holocaust in the Parisian community. Commemorations played a key role in staging conflicts linked to ideological division within this highly politicized community, divided by what the French Jewish writer Arnold Mandel labeled in 1956 "the Communist Schism." Perego illuminates the political function of commemorative practices by examining how the gatherings organized by Jewish-Communist, Bundist, and Zionist associations served as a transnational ideological battlefield, notwithstanding the willingness of some actors to organize united Holocaust commemorations. While in postwar Paris Holocaust commemorations were supposed to appease political conflicts out of respect for the dead, they nevertheless contributed to expressing and even exacerbating ideological tensions among Parisian Jews.

Moving from the West to the East, Arkadi Zeltser examines how the Cold War framework made the public discussion of the Holocaust in the USSR possible, even though the Soviet narrative of "the Great Patriotic War" marginalized particular memories of Jewish suffering. Discussing the Holocaust became a means of criticizing the West, and in particular West Germany for its role in hiding Nazi war criminals, making publications such as the Russian translation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *I Must Tell You* by Masha Rolnikaitė possible.

In the following chapter, Anna Koch and Stephan Stach discuss the life and work of the Polish-Jewish historian Alberto Nirenstein, who published one of the first source collections on the Holocaust in Italian, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek.* The book was translated into English and published in the US, thus both the book and its author moved across several national boundaries. While Nirenstein's work does not fit neatly within the Cold War frontlines, American reviewers primarily perceived it as a biased ideological work, condemning it as communist, thus highlighting the impact of the Cold War on its reception.

Nadège Ragaru's contribution also considers transnational dimensions and transfers, focusing on the trial of Adolf Heinz Beckerle at the District Court of Hesse in Frankfurt (FRG) in 1967–1968. She reveals how knowledge about the Holocaust emerged via a complex entanglement between national, regional, and international scales. The chapter highlights how global connections between West Germany, the United States, Israel, Bulgaria, the USSR, Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Austria were instrumental in the prosecution of Beckerle's war crimes and shows how knowledge about the Holocaust spread through these connections.

War crimes also play a dominant role in Vanessa Voisin's chapter, which focuses on a Soviet documentary produced in 1963–1964, titled *In the Name of the Living*. The documentary, directed by Leon Mazrukho, covers a war crimes trial

held in Krasnodar in October 1963. The nine defendants were former auxiliaries of *Sonderkommando* 10A, responsible for the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity perpetrated in southern Russia. Her analysis of the film highlights how Cold War propaganda intermingles with the author's artistic project.

Film also plays a dominant role in Máté Zombory's contribution, which examines Zoltán Fábri's 1967 film, *Late Season*. Challenging the notion of the exclusively Western origins of Holocaust memory, the article discusses how anti-fascist humanism, exemplified by the oeuvre of the director and particularly his 1967 film, universalized the moral significance of Auschwitz. Situating the film both within the context of de-Stalinized Hungary and developments in European cinematography while highlighting cross-cultural influences, Zombory's work adds another dimension to understanding transnational aspects of Holocaust memory.

Irina Tcherneva's chapter brings us from film to painting. Her contribution examines *The Last Way* (1944–1948) by the Jewish Ukrainian artist, Yosef Kuzkovski which depicts the extermination of Jews in Babi Yar in Nazi-occupied Ukraine. In the 1970s the Israeli Knesset purchased the painting. The history of the painting sheds light on the representation of the genocide that unfolded between the public and private spheres. An analysis of individual and collective uses of this artwork illuminates a widening gap between the Soviet political and judicial powers and local groups, acting as alternative purveyors of a narrative around the Holocaust.

Likewise, Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska focuses on a detailed study of a work of art and thus allows us to see how the changing Cold War contexts shaped cultural productions. She examines the 1955 novel *Through the Night* by the West German writer Hans Scholz, which depicts the execution of Jews near the Belarussian city of Orsha in 1941. Radio and television adaptations that included the massacre scene in full length soon followed. Saryusz-Wolska traces the changes in each version, especially those related to the representations of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Her layered reading of *Through the Night* sheds light on the construction of West German cultural memory in the Cold War framework.

The specific case of West Germany, as a close ally of the US and a Nazi successor state, also functions as the backdrop of Anna Pollmann's discussion of two visits of the German-Jewish writer and philosopher Günther Anders to Berlin in the 1950s. Anders, who was one of the first philosophers to provide a comprehensive analysis of the atomic bomb, became an icon of the West German anti-nuclear protest movement. Pollmann shows how both in Anders' work and within the wider protest movement links were made between the threat of nuclear destruction and the traumas of the war.

Jonathan Kaplan's chapter brings us from West to East Germany. He examines international efforts and diplomatic strategies of the East German Ministry

of Foreign Affairs (MfAA) directed against the Federal Republic and in particular against National Socialists and war criminals in West Germany. As part of the ministry's campaign titled *Aktion Nazidiplomaten*, its officials aimed to propagate and expand the circulation of incriminating material on West German Nazi diplomats. Apart from official diplomacy, the GDR foreign ministry relied on contacts with western Jewish and Jewish-oriented organizations that dedicated themselves to uncovering and hunting down former Nazis and war criminals; one of them was Rabbi Samuel Burr Yampol of Chicago, head of the "National Committee to Combat Nazism in the USA." Investigating the complex and complicated relationship between GDR officials and their American Jewish collaborator, Kaplan highlights transnational efforts to bring Nazi war criminals to justice.

***

An edited volume such as this can only provide a starting point for thinking through the various commonalities, differences, and entanglements between Eastern and Western memory of the Holocaust. Still, the contributions to this volume offer insight into how Cold War thinking shaped Holocaust memory in East and West. Examining Holocaust memory from various disciplinary perspectives and focusing on different parts of the world, from the Soviet Union to the US, from Hungary to France, the authors highlight the various ways in which scholars, writers, artists, and survivors both countered and contributed to dominant narratives shaped by oppositional ideological stances. While such distinct ideological positions often mattered greatly, at other times a shared interest in bringing perpetrators to justice, commemorating victims, or providing testimony to the atrocities committed against Europe's Jews, led to cooperation and transfers across the Iron Curtain.

Elisabeth Gallas

The New York *Black Book* of 1946: A United Jewish Response to Nazi Crimes

While Day 92 of the International Military Tribunal against leading Nazi criminals was being held by the Allies in the Nuremberg Palace of Justice, some 10 to 15,000 people gathered in New York's Madison Square Garden to "demand justice for six million Jewish dead."[1] This rally, which assembled numerous politicians, intellectuals, artists, and leading representatives of Jewish organizations in the United States, as well as a broad press contingent, was dedicated to the publication of a unique volume: a *Black Book* on Nazi atrocities.[2] The edition contained over 500 pages of "documented indictment by World Jewry of the Nazis for their monstrous crimes against the Jewish people,"[3] and was the result of an unlikely cooperation between four organizations spanning continents: the World Jewish Congress (WJC), the Jewish National Council in Palestine Va'ad Leumi (Va'ad Leumi), the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), and the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists, Inc. (Writers Committee). In 1944, they had formed an edito-

1 "Demand Justice for Six Million Dead," Invitation Letter to the Mass Rally at Madison Square Garden on March 27, 1946, signed by Shlomo Almazov (Executive Director of the Black Book Committee) and Joseph Brainin (Writers Committee), undated, Cornell University Library, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, International Workers Order, Records #5276 (IWO Records), Box 42, Folder 2.

2 *The Black Book: The Nazi Crimes against the Jewish People*, ed. Jewish Black Book Committee (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946). For the rally, see a contemporary report: "Einstein Says Nations of the World could have halted Massacre of the Jews; Pleads for Palestine," May 28, 1946, https://www.jta.org/1946/03/28/archive/einstein-says-nations-of-world-could-have-halted-massacre-of-jews-pleads-for-palestine, accessed May 29, 2024; and a brief historical account: Arno Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews: The Red Book: The Tragedy of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Soviet Jews*, trans. Mary Beth Friedrich and Todd Bluedeau (New York: Enigma Books, 2003), 163f.; B. Z. Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union: An Analysis and a Solution* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1961), 66.

3 "Demand Justice for Six Million Dead."

Note: I warmly thank Arthur Kiron and Bruce Nielsen from the Library at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, who made it possible for me to access the full estate of B. Z. Goldberg, which is part of the library's special collections, and supported me in finding relevant material. Furthermore, my best thanks go to Dana Herman (American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati), Juliane Weiss, and Jakob Stürmann (Dubnow Institute, Leipzig) for providing me with invaluable archival and reference material at a time when it was hard to reach due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-002

rial board that oversaw the preparation of the volume in New York. Madison Square Garden, which had already hosted major rallies against Nazi Germany in the 1930s, was predestined for an event celebrating one of the first comprehensive collections of eyewitness accounts, German documents, and press reports on the Holocaust.

The event was not only meant to generate wide public attention for the book. Its aim was to underscore a sense of unity among the Jews of the world in response to Nazi crimes. Ben Zion Goldberg, one of the most prominent Yiddish-language journalists and publicists in New York at the time, and the driving force behind the *Black Book* project, articulated this goal unequivocally: "Hitler made a total war upon the Jews, every Jew in the world. Therefore, every Jew in the world [. . .] must participate in this [Black] book, which should be issued to the world in the name of all the Jews in the world."[4] This idea of unity found expression in a diverse group of editors and was also guiding the decision to organize the meeting in New York, which sought to host a wide range of Jewish and non-Jewish representatives dedicated to the cause. The WJC, as co-host, was represented by the Polish-born Reform Rabbi, Maurice Perlzweig, and the honorary president of the American Jewish Congress, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. The mayor of New York, William O. Dwyer, spoke as well as several others representing various political factions from communist, staunchly pro-Soviet to liberal, even conservative ones. In addition, over forty cantors from the Yishuv and the US sang mourning prayers for the murdered. A speech by Albert Einstein, in his capacity as founding and honorary member of the Black Book Committee, was to mark the highlight of the ceremony.[5] Most of Einstein's lines read at the event stemmed from a preface written for the *Black Book* some months before the meeting, which had been excluded from the published version after its vehement rejection by the Soviet partners. Einstein's plea for a restriction of state sovereignty and a withdrawal from an international politics of non-interference as well as his support for the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine seemed not to harmonize

---

4 B. Z. Goldberg, "Address on behalf of the Committee for Jewish Writers and Artists to the members of the Detroit Committee for the Jewish Black Book," undated [end of 1945, beginning of 1946], Detroit Synagogue, Library of the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, Manuscript Collection (Katz Center Library), Ben Zion Goldberg Papers (Goldberg Papers), ARC MS1, Box 64.

5 Press reports referred to Einstein's speech, not all of them mentioning the fact that he was not present himself: "Einstein Calls Fate of the Jews Warning to All: Tells 'Black Book' Rally in the Garden that Humanity Can't Live without Law," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 28, 1946, 8; "Shield Minorities, Dr. Einstein Pleads," *New York Times*, March 28, 1946, 26; "N.Y. Garden Buildup for Black Book," *Variety* 162, no. 4, April 3, 1946, https://archive.org/stream/variety162-1946-04/variety162-1946-04_djvu.txt, accessed May 30, 2024.

with the official line of the Communist Party in the USSR.[6] The fact that the organizers of the rally decided to make Einstein's demands heard showed that they were not ready to accept all Soviet requirements unquestioningly, as they were often accused of doing by anti-Soviet voices in the American-Jewish community.[7]

As this disagreement already indicates, the creation of the American version of the *Black Book* was by no means a harmonious endeavor – to the contrary. Cooperation between these very different organizations – as much as it was acclaimed as the "first permanent bridge thrown across the gulf which separates Soviet from other Jewries nearly twenty-five years"[8] – proved an immense challenge that was in danger of failing several times. The efforts made against all political, but also logistical and practical, odds were driven by the strong will of the protagonists from all sides to stand united in the face of the catastrophe that was the Holocaust. Just as the "Big Three" – Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union – were allied to fight Nazi Germany and build an almost implausible and highly fragile coalition, likewise the Jews, usually politically divided, overcame all differences and strove for concerted action in reaction to the Nazis' ultimate genocide. Yet the editors of the *Black Book* were walking on thin ice when trying to reach a consensus and were highly affected by the growing ideological tensions surrounding them. This made their project a remarkable example of transnational political activity in the period of transition from a "hot" to a "cold war": from a conscious, but always suspicious American-Soviet partnership in the phase of Allied coalition, to distrust, hysteria, and open resentment that characterized this relationship soon after. Still, the American version of the *Black Book*

6 The German original of Einstein's text is published in: Wassili Grossman and Ilja Ehrenburg, *Das Schwarzbuch. Der Genozid and den sowjetischen Juden*, ed. Arno Lustiger (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995), 1013–1014. The English version, *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry*, trans. and ed. by David Patterson (New York: Routledge, 2002), does not contain Einstein's text. Arno Lustiger published an English translation in his study *Stalin and the Jews*, 167–169. For the disagreement about the preface, see Simon Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 103; Ilja Altman, "Das Schicksal des 'Schwarzbuchs,'" in *Das Schwarzbuch*, ed. Grossman and Ehrenburg, 1063–1084, here 1074f.

7 In particular, the Jewish Labor Bund and many social democratic Jews criticized the alliance built here by the Writers Committee for its uncritical embrace of the USSR. See Daniel Soyer, "Executed Bundists, Soviet Delegates and the Wartime Jewish Popular Front in New York," *American Communist History* 15 (2016), no. 3: 293–332.

8 Telegram, "Jewish World News: Publication Black Book," March 28, 1946, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (USHMM), WJC Collection, H-series, subseries 1, H335, File 12: USSR: Jewish Antifascist Committee, 1942–1949, 1972.

shows how cooperation continued below the radar on an individual level – despite the ideological battlefield it found itself in.

This project of early Holocaust documentation and the Jewish call for justice that took such a promising start at Madison Square Garden was soon forgotten. As a product of the short-lived East-West alliance, the *Black Book*'s momentum was over before it ever saw the light of day.[9] Even though, for example, Eleanor Roosevelt had praised the undertaking, it can be assumed that the many official recipients of the book neglected it, because it paid too much respect to the Soviet Union.[10] This suspicion was combined with a quite thorough critique of many reviewers, who pointed to its historical errors and inaccuracies, as well as flaws in structure and narrative. Therefore, the volume never made it into the ranks of standard collections documenting the Nazi crimes against European Jews.[11] But its later omission from historical research was – so I assume – mostly fueled by the tragic and today much more widely remembered story of the fate of its Russian counterpart, and worse, that of its Soviet editors. In autumn 1947, the publication of a Russian *Black Book*, which had been prepared in parallel with the American edition, was forcefully stopped in its tracks by Soviet censors. Most of the members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow were pushed into a secret trial in May 1952. Accused of treason and Jewish nationalism, all but one of the defendants were sentenced to death and executed on August 12, 1952 – later remembered as the "night of the murdered poets." Their cooperation with Jews in the West had become part of their doom.[12] The Russian version was finally printed in Israel in 1980, in Kiev in 1991, in Vilnius in 1993, and from then on in

9 There was extensive press coverage in 1946, see for example Luitpold Wallach, "The Black Book: The Nazi Crime against the Jewish People," *Jewish Education* 18, no. 3 (1947): 55; Abraham G. Duker, "Before Nuremberg, Book of the Week: The Black Book," unidentifiable and undated press clipping, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 69, Folder: Jewish Writers Committee; Frederic Ewen, "Review: The Black Book: The Nazi Crime against the Jewish People," *Science and Society* 11, no. 4 (1947): 391–394. Ewen was a member of the editorial team of the *New Currents* journal, edited by the Writers Committee, so he presented an inside view.

10 "Black Book of Nazi Crimes Due Soon," quoting Eleanor Roosevelt, *Daily Worker*, January 22, 1945, 10.

11 The New York edition of the *Black Book* is mentioned in many studies on the JAC, but is hardly noticed in Holocaust historiography. Introductory information is provided by Harvey Asher, "The Black Book and the Holocaust," *Journal of Genocide Research* 1, no. 3 (1999): 401–416; and Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, 157–168.

12 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: Yale University Press, 2001); Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*; Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*; Gennady Estraikh, "The Life, Death, and Afterlife of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee," *East European Jewish Affairs* 48, no. 2 (2018): 139–148.

several editions and languages.[13] Researchers dealing with the history of the *Black Book* since the 1990s almost exclusively paid attention to the Russian version, considering the American publication a less important offshoot.

Challenging this reading and breaking through the many ideological layers obscuring this volume from the inside and outside, I want to reconstruct its story anew. First, I place it within the long Jewish tradition of dealing with atrocities by creating documentary books that assembled evidence and testimony. Second, I draw attention to the unique collaboration at stake here, based on an internationalist vision of the postwar period and a shared dedication to the fight for retribution and the memory of the murdered European Jews. This dedication was eventually shattered by its own ideals and by the moment in time in which it was situated. My concern is to understand a project whose product may have contained flaws, but whose constellation of participants and aims provide us with new insights into the scope and nature of transnational Jewish agency in the aftermath of World War II.

Times of War, Times of Unity

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and with the growing awareness of the brutal crimes German units committed against Jewish civilians, more and more American Jews had turned their attention towards Eastern Europe and strove to support the Soviet combatants fighting against Germany. This responsiveness had grown tremendously in August 1941 after a radiobroadcast from Jews in the Soviet Union, who would shortly after establish the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), was transmitted to the US and called for a united Jewish front against Hitler.[14] Bodies such as the Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scien-

---

13 Mordechai Altshuler and Sima Ycikas state that the Russian version appeared in Jerusalem in 1980 under the title “Chernaia Kniga”; the first English edition in 1981, edited by John Glad and James S. Levine (published by the Holocaust Library in New York); in Yiddish in 1984; and Hebrew in 1991, see Mordechai Altshuler and Sima Ycikas, “Were There Two Black Books about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union?” in *Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* 17, (1992): 37–55, here fn. 1 and 2. A first complete version was published in Russian in 1993 (Vilnius) and German in 1995; an extended version (with material from the JAC Archive found in the State Archive of the Russian Federation) was published in Russian in 1993: *Njeiswjestnaja Tschornaja Knige* [The unknown Black Book], ed. Yitzhak Arad et al., (Jerusalem/Moscow: Yad Vashem/Text, 1993). This was translated into English in 2008: *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories,* ed. Joshua Rubenstein and Ilya Altman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

14 Ilya Altman, “The History and Fate of *The Black Book* and *The Unknown Black Book*,” in *The Unknow Black Book*, xix–xxxix, here xxi.

tists, Inc., as well as the Jewish Council for Russian War Relief, were created in response as decidedly non-partisan activist groups. For some time, they were able to mobilize Jews from a broad political spectrum, building what Daniel Soyer aptly described as a "Wartime Jewish Popular Front in New York," standing in solidarity with threatened Soviet civilians and Red Army soldiers.[15] The density of renowned public intellectuals who took up the cause was helpful to its publicity: next to Albert Einstein and B. Z. Goldberg, among them were such writers as Shalom Asch, Lion Feuchtwanger, and Waldo Frank.

The JAC in Moscow was formed as one of five officially established anti-fascist associations and pursued a twofold objective: mainly a propaganda organ of the Soviet Union abroad to raise funds for the military, though it soon developed into a semi-official representative of Soviet Jewry. It was headed by an illustrious group of scholars, writers, poets, publicists, artists, and journalists, some of them fighting in the ranks of the Red Army.[16] The American Writers Committee followed this model, forming an intellectual defense and public relations group.[17] By the beginning of 1942, telegrams were sent from the US to the Soviet Union asking for collaboration. Apparently, it was Albert Einstein who came up with the plan to invite members of the JAC to the United States and to launch a *Black Book* together with them.[18] The Soviet administration responded favorably and chose Itzik Fefer, a famous author of Yiddish poetry in the Soviet Union, and Solomon Mikhoels, a well-known actor and head of the Moscow Jewish Theater (both in leading positions of the JAC) to travel to the US. Their mission was to enhance visibility, establish contacts, and organize support from American Jewry for the Russian war effort.[19] The Writers Committee, and here especially B. Z. Goldberg, who as a Russian-born Jew

---

15 Soyer, "Executed Bundists." See also Frank Grüner, *Patrioten und Kosmopoliten. Juden im Sowjetstaat 1941–1951* (Köln: Böhlau, 2008), here 65–68; Estraikh, "The Life, Death, and Afterlife," 141. For the Jewish Council for Russian War Relief in the US, see "Some Questions on Aid to Russia, Interview with James N. Rosenberg," *New Currents* 1, no. 3 (June 1943), 20–21, 30; Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 73.

16 Grüner, *Patrioten und Kosmopoliten*, 55–58, and 63; Estraikh, "The Life, Death, and Afterlife"; Lutz Fiedler, "Drei Geschichten einer Desillusionierung. Wassili Grossman, Ilja Ehrenburg und das Jüdische Antifaschistische Komitee," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 15 (2016): 511–531.

17 B. Z. Goldberg described this partnership poignantly in *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 46.

18 One of the first telegrams sent from New York to Moscow proposed an exclusive work on a "Black Book reporting Nazi atrocities on Jews [in] occupied Russia." Chaim Zhitlovsky [head of the Writers Committee] to JAC, February 14, 1943, YVA, GARF Collection, P-8114.1, folder 847; Estraikh, "The Life, Death and Afterlife," 141f.; Grüner, *Patrioten und Kosmopoliten*, 70; Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 96.

19 Soyer and Estraikh convincingly argue that this trip was also supported by the Soviet administration to distract the American public from the death (through enforced suicide and execution)

with astute knowledge of the Soviet Union and son-in-law of the celebrated Russian-Yiddish poet Sholem Aleichem, was predestined as the host. They organized Fefer and Mikhoel's American part of their tour starting in June 1943, which brought the two Soviet emissaries across the US, then to Canada, Mexico, and Great Britain.[20] One of the highlights of their journey was a mass meeting organized by the Writers Committee at the Polo Grounds in New York on July 8, 1943, with over 45,000 attendees and a group of eminent speakers from among politicians, artists, and journalists.[21] Off stage, representatives of the WJC and the Writers Committee met with Mikhoels and Fefer, and – among other things – started to make plans for their *Black Book*.

The effort was driven by the desire to build a united Jewish front and to "investigate the Nazi crimes against the Jewish population."[22] At first, the parties agreed that the book should focus on German crimes committed on Soviet territory. To speak in *one* Jewish voice to the world, they decided to find a partner from the Yishuv in Palestine. The president of the WJC, Nahum Goldmann, zealously supported the cooperation with the JAC to foster WJC's weak relations with Soviet Jewry and reached out to the Jewish National Council (Va'ad Leumi) to join, quickly receiving a positive reply.[23] An editorial team was set up in New York and started to work in spring 1944 after a dispute over the final composition of the editorial group had been resolved, which centered around the role of the Writers Committee. With its character as an individual lobby group, it seemed not to belong to the ranks of the representative bodies.[24] After fierce negotiations, the members agreed

---

of two Polish-Jewish Bundists, Viktor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich, accused by the NKVD of espionage for the Nazis in 1942.

20 Soyer, "Executed Bundists," 314–326; Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941–1948* (Boulder: East European Quarterly, 1982), 115–125; B. Z. Goldberg, "Uniting Ten Million Jews: The Recent Soviet-Jewish Delegation to America. Its Friends and Enemies," *New Currents* 2, no.1 (1944): 10–11. For a comprehensive study of the tour of the Soviet delegates see Jakob Stürmann, *Mission "Eynikayt" Die Welttournee des Jüdischen Antifaschistischen Komittees 1943* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2024).

21 Soyer, "Executed Bundists," 318–322. Statements of participants are collected in: YVA, GARF Collection, p-8114.1, folder 829.

22 Telegram from Nahum Goldmann and Arieh Tartakover to Va'ad Leumi, Palestine, November 9, 1943, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

23 See several telegrams from November 1943 and January 1944 for invitation and confirmation of the participation in: AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6. For the WJC's problems in reaching out to Soviet Jewry during the war, see Zohar Segev, *The World Jewish Congress during the Holocaust: Between Activism and Restraint* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 143.

24 Nahum Goldmann to B. Z. Goldberg, January 16, 1944, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, ARC MS1, Box 1 (unsorted material).

to have the Writers Committee represent the JAC in New York.[25] The discussion gives a foretaste of the potential for conflict in the group. Eventually, a Black Book Executive Committee was formed acting on behalf of the four partners. Two refugee scholars, Polish-Jewish historian Raphael Mahler and WJC's legal expert Henri Sinder from France, were chosen to supervise the editing in New York, while B. Z. Goldberg and Maurice Perlzweig were to care for the communication between all partners, for the public promotion and fundraising of the project.

Conceptualizing a Black Book

In the context of the JAC in Moscow, initiatives to document the German atrocities had already been discussed since its establishment. Red Army soldiers, Jewish escapees, and war reporters "flooded the JAFC [JAC] with materials relating to the fate of the Jews under Nazi occupation."[26] Eyewitness accounts had been pouring into its office or had been addressed to the famous Soviet-Jewish writer and journalist Ilya Ehrenburg, who headed the literary commission of the JAC. Another important body of material was collected by the Soviet State Commission for Investigating Nazi Crimes, founded in November 1942 under the chairmanship of Nikolay M. Shvernik. It maintained several local branches and eventually gathered some 250,000 reports on Nazi crimes committed against civilians on Soviet territory. This material was meant for the envisioned postwar tribunal of the Nazi perpetrators, which the Soviets called for early on.[27] The JAC exchanged documents with the State Commission, the latter using parts of it as evidence in the Nuremberg trials. Some of the official material of the State Commission eventually made it into the *Black Book.*

For all four parties involved, the idea of the publication of an accusatory document collection, a *Black Book*, served similar purposes in the process of dealing with the unprecedented dimensions of mass murder. "Color books" that assemble

---

25 The agreement was conveyed by Nahum Goldmann to Solomon Mikhoels, March 27, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6. Telegrams indicating the dissonant opinions about the group's composition are also collected in the folder.

26 Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 95.

27 The full name was: The Extraordinary State Commission for Ascertaining and Investigating Crimes Perpetrated by the German-Fascist Invaders and their Accomplices and the Damage They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms, Public Organizations, State Enterprises and Institutions of the USSR (ChGK). It was established on November 2, 1942, and dissolved by the end of 1945. On the role and importance of the Soviets for the postwar Nazi prosecution, see: Francine Hirsch, "The Road to Nuremberg," in *Soviet Judgement at Nuremberg: A New History of the International Military Tribunal after World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 17–131.

and present proof of crimes targeted at a specific group or in a specific political-ideological setting were by then an established instrument of defense, used by Jewish as well as non-Jewish actors and interest groups.[28] Especially in the course of the long history of violence against Jews in Europe, documentary volumes were repeatedly produced to record atrocities.[29] These volumes had manifold aims, but most urgent was certainly the goal to gain a voice and to inform the public.[30] Therefore it is not surprising that B. Z. Goldberg and his compatriots chose this form of presentation for their cause. Besides the participation in the Allied armies or partisan groups, publicizing the crimes offered one of the only available ways of confronting the genocidal German war. The editors were aware of the shortcomings of this approach, as becomes apparent in a personal letter of Solomon Mikhoels to B. Z. Goldberg from November 1944, where he reflected on the boundaries and limitations of the process:

> Everything here would be good if not the horrifying news and images of the liberated cities and shtetls, if not for the image of the ghastly holocaust [sic] that the German, may his

28 Alexandra Garbarini, "Document Volumes and the Status of Victim Testimony in the Era of the First World War and Its Aftermath," *Etudes arméniennes contemporaines* 5 (2015), 113–138, here 134. See also the exploration of a similar, though different sort of "color book" presenting offenses to international criminal law around the First World War: Christopher Gevers, "'The Africa Blue Books' at Versailles: The First World War, Narrative, and Unthinkable Histories of International Criminal Law," in *New Histories of International Criminal Law: Retrials*, ed. Immi Tallgren and Thomas Skouteris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 145–166.

29 See for context: David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), and more specifically: Laura Jockusch, "Chroniclers of Catastrophe: History Writing as a Jewish Response to Persecution Before and After the Holocaust," in *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergences, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements*, ed. David Bankier and Dan Michman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008), 135–166. Direct forerunners of the postwar *Black Book* were the volumes organized by the Comité des Délégations Juives and its head, Leo Motzkin, in Paris: *Das Schwarzbuch. Tatsachen und Dokumente. Die Lage der Juden in Deutschland 1933* (Paris: Comité, 1934) and Jacob Apenszlak, *The Black Book of Polish Jewry: An Account of the Martyrdom of Polish Jewry under the Nazi Occupation* (New York: Roy, 1943), as well as the volume *El Libro Negro del Terror Nazi en Europa* (Mexico City: El libro libre, 1943). An important reference might have been the "Brown Book" published by German authors in French exile (many of them Jewish) in response to the burning of the Reichstag in 1933: *Livre Brun sur l'incendie du Reichstag et le terreur hitlérienne*, ed. by Willi Münzenberg et al., (Paris: Edition Carrefour, 1933).

30 See, for example, Polly Zavadikver, "Reconstructing a Lost Archive: Simon Dubnow and 'The Black Book' of Imperial Russian Jewry. Materials for a History of the War, 1914–1915," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 12 (2013): 419–442, here 427.

> name be erased, brought upon our people. Words, descriptions, stories, and eyewitness testimony pale against that which was lost and against what happened in reality.[31]

Still, in acknowledgement of this incommensurability between representation and the event itself, the overall value of such a document volume was emphatically proclaimed from all sides involved. Mikhoels called the envisioned book "a powerful political weapon in the hands of the Jewish people demanding just punishment for the perpetrators" and was seconded by the Black Book Committee in New York, which stated that the collection will bring "the thundering voice of five million murdered Jews to the peace table."[32] In contrast to the widespread production of commemorative books by Jewish survivors after the war, the so-called *Yisker-Bikher*, which were conceived as a form of gravestone and memorial for the dead of specific areas and communities,[33] the *Black Book* was directed at the outside world, not necessarily a Jewish audience: passing a verdict on the German perpetrators stands at its center. The book's production was an important means to overcome the feeling of passivity and create a sense of meaningful action despite the doom emanating from the killing sites in Europe.

In the course of 1944, the appointed researchers working in New York began their painstaking search for material. They used all available collections of Jewish institutions, relied on the WJC's channels into Europe, got hold of German official documentation (decrees and law enforcement) and combed the Jewish and non-Jewish press for news and coverage of Nazi atrocities. The same happened in Moscow, with a focus on first-hand testimonies from survivors and eyewitnesses. Ilya Ehrenburg at first planned two collections: one documentary-archival, the

---

31 Cited in Rubenstein and Naumov, *Stalin's Secret Pogrom*, 22. For the situation of Soviet Jews during World War II, see: Zvi Gitelman, "The Holocaust," in *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 115–143, and "The Black Years and the Gray, 1948–1967," 144–173; Michael David-Fox et al., eds., *The Holocaust in the East: Local Perpetrators and Soviet Responses* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014); Harriet Murav and Gennady Estraikh, eds., *Soviet Jews in World War II: Fighting, Witnessing, Remembering* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014).

32 Book Launch Brochure with statements of Mikhoels and others, p. 4, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6; Fundraising Brochure "Let the World Know . . . that the World May Judge," Section "What is the purpose of the Black Book?" [unpaginated], USHMM library holdings.

33 For the *Yisker-Bikher*, see Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, eds., *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), Eliyana R. Adler, "Mapping a Lost World, Postwar Jews and (Re)creating the Past in Memorial Books," in *Reconstructing the Old Country*, ed. Eliyana R. Adler and Sheila E. Jelen (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 68–86; Gali Drucker Bar-Am, "'Record and Lament:' Yizker Bikher as History and Literature Conflated," in *Yad Vashem Studies* 51, no. 2 (2023): 101–128.

other with "real life reports [showing] the full extent of the tragedy" written by acclaimed Jewish authors and war correspondents.[34] In April 1944, Ehrenburg published the first portion of reports in Yiddish in a small volume under the somewhat quirky title, *Murderers of People: Material about the Murders by the German Occupiers in the Temporarily Occupied Soviet Territories*, with the publishing house Der Emes (the Truth).[35] In Ehrenburg's introduction, the nature of the contributions and the volume's intention are made explicit: "I have collected here documents telling of the annihilation of defenseless Jews by the Nazi invaders. Here is no literature. These are genuine, candid stories, letters to relatives, diaries [. . .] Let all know that defenseless Jews died manfully with words of contempt and revenge. [. . .] Let this book burn like fire. Let it call for retribution."[36] The conjunction between commemorative and legal spheres, which is highlighted here, forms a central criterion of the genre. A "Black Book" combined a general call for justice with the documentation of individual experience of victims. In the case of the New York volume, the commemorative dimension remained in the background, while the legal was privileged.

Striving for a Common Language

The editors in New York were eager to receive all kinds of documents from the collected lot in Moscow and constantly pressed their JAC partners to send materials.[37] Their transfer was delicate on several levels. It can be assumed that both American and Soviet authorities monitored all events; the suspicion of espionage or dissemination of secret information was ever present. The Sovinformburo (Soviet Information Bureau, a news agency collecting and spreading information in and outside the USSR, especially about the war, in operation from 1941 to 1961), which supervised JAC's activities, had to approve all the allotted material to be sent to the US. Transferring huge amounts of documents was logistically difficult during wartime and shortly after, therefore the assistance of the consulate was

34 Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, 159. According to Lustiger, the JAC archive contained material from over 4,000 authors, reporters, and witnesses, Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, 157. For the two different versions planned in Moscow, see Altschuler and Ycikas, "Were There Two Black Books"; Asher, "The Black Book and the Holocaust."

35 Altschuler and Ycikas, "Were There Two Black Books," 40; Harvey Asher, "The Soviet Union, the Holocaust, and Auschwitz," in *The Holocaust in the East*, 29–50, here 46f.

36 Quoted in: Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 66.

37 For example, Joseph Brainin to Salomon Mikhoels, September 14, 1944, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), GARF Collection, f. 8114, d. 801, 42–47.

needed. Moreover, there was disagreement among JAC members, especially articulated by Ilya Ehrenburg, regarding the decision about what kind of material should be used outside the Soviet Union. When in September 1944 the Black Book Committee still had not received the material, WJC president Nahum Goldmann agreed to visit and urge Soviet ambassador to the United States, Andrei Andrejewitsch Gromyko, to help.[38] One month later, the WJC finally got the news that the documents were dispatched by the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs in Moscow and should be arriving in New York within a week.[39]

The American *Black Book* had become an official act prepared in full knowledge and support of the Soviet administration. About 520 pages were sent to the United States, among them "affidavits, statements of Nazi prisoners, eyewitness accounts of the manner in which Jews were killed in the Soviet Union."[40] Shortly after, Goldberg got notice that an entire manuscript with reports and testimonies compiled by Ilya Ehrenburg had arrived in the US for English translation and publication as an additional volume. An unnamed American publisher had rejected the manuscript because of its "archival form," and the recipient, the translator Helen Black, handed the material over to the Black Book Committee. Among this collection were reports of acclaimed Jewish authors such as Abraham Sutzkever and Vasilii Grossman. Ehrenburg was apparently furious to hear that the material reached the Committee and that he thereby lost control over the way it was presented; Goldberg simply assumed that Fefer and Mikhoels would agree to have portions of it published and went ahead with the planning without further approval.[41]

Meanwhile, a profound disagreement had emerged among the editorial staff in New York regarding the adequate structure and character of the *Black Book*. Mahler and Sinder had resigned from their posts, because they were unable to establish a common line. B. Z. Goldberg began to assume more responsibility. The paper trail of the WJC shows that among its leadership there were great doubts

38 Minutes of Office Committee Meeting, September 12, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

39 Léon Kubowitzki informed the Office Committee of the WJC accordingly on October 26, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

40 "A Statement Concerning the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists, Inc.," undated [probably early 1945], AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6. For the transfer, see: Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 100f.

41 The story is told in a letter from B. Z. Goldberg and Joseph Brainin to Itzik Fefer and Solomon Mikhoels, March 27, 1945, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 69, Folder: Letters to Fefer. After the affair, Ehrenburg left the Literary Commission of the JAC, while Vasilii Grossman took over responsibility. See Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 100; Joshua Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties: The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 216.

regarding the volume and its expected pro-Soviet political bias. In particular, WJC's think tank, the Institute of Jewish Affairs, and here most explicitly its director Jacob Robinson, repeatedly expressed skepticism about the value and scientific credibility of the planned volume.[42] But the WJC could not withdraw from the project, because its leadership was determined to maintain contact with the JAC in Moscow, hoping it would open a communication channel into the Soviet Union.[43] The WJC was dependent on the information coming from JAC members or their networks. Several lists with names of victims and survivors, as well as reports on the scale of destruction reached the US, which certainly served the WJC in better understanding what was going on. Moreover, the disturbing articles from Vasilii Grossman and other war correspondents, which found their way to the West were important keys for the accumulation of knowledge among a (Yiddish-speaking) American audience.[44] In a memo of July 1944 written by Perlzweig to WJC's Office Committee, we find intriguing testimony on how the reports dispatched from Moscow impacted American contemporaries. He quoted here from an article of David Shub that was prepared for the American socialist journal *New Leader* based on the reports of Grossman. The latter had traveled to Ukraine and Belarus and recorded that the Jewish communities had "been completely wiped out and no longer exist." Perlzweig's memo expresses the horror and incomprehensibility of the information Grossman conveyed, and showed the way in which such information led to a transition in the perception and drew the WJC members closer to what was going on. In his letter, he concluded:

> That Jewish life has disappeared from these broad lands and historic places after so many centuries is a hard fact which we have not yet grasped in all its implications. There was a general feeling that most of the Jews had escaped in time, but it appears that not more than a third were able to get out, and they are now scattered over the rest of the vast area of the Soviet Union.[45]

---

42 For instance, Perlzweig raised objections in a memo to the Office Committee, October 4, 1944, and in a "strictly confidential" report from February 23, 1945, both in: AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6. Robinson's critique is mentioned several times, especially in a WJC Office Committee Meeting, October 13, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

43 Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism*, 125.

44 Vasili Grosman, "Ukraina on Yidn" [Ukraine without Jews], *Eynikayt*, November 25 and December 2, 1943. The text was meant to be published in Russian, but the army newspaper, *Krasnaja Swesda*, rejected it. A full English translation only appeared in 2011, prepared by Polly Zavadivker in *Jewish Quaterly* 58 (2011), 12–18. For Grossman's impact on American perceptions, see: Dan Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 29–63.

45 Memo of Maurice Perlzweig to WJC Office Committee, July 20, 1944, USHMM, WJC Papers, H-Series, 335, Folder 12. David Shub's article was published on July 15, 1944, in *The New Leader.*

The accounts from JAC members were eye-opening. American Jews received pieces of information, which made them slowly aware of the fact that millions of their brethren were being killed and that the majority surviving would be those who had escaped or were deported to the Soviet Union.[46] This fact surely added to the willingness to support the Soviets in their tremendous war effort.

Still, this alliance asked a lot of all partners involved. In their communication, we see many misunderstandings and ideological rifts. The JAC, hardly surprising, followed the Communist Party rules in rhetoric and activities quite strictly and tried hard to reconcile between Soviet and specific Jewish interests. The WJC, on the other hand, acknowledged the incredible price the Red Army and Soviet civilians needed to pay in the war, but more or less paid lip service when sending enthusiastic congratulatory addresses on the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, saluting the comrades, and rejoicing in Soviet propaganda fanfare about the war and the Soviet's people's unity.[47] A sincere communication between the two groups at the time was hardly possible: all telegrams were subject to strict censorship; discussions about collaboration with the Germans in the overrun Eastern European territories or antisemitism in the Soviet Union itself were prohibited by the administration; and even though the articulation of a particular Jewish identity may have been fostered for strategic reasons during the war, it remained a delicate issue.[48] The Writers Committee had to function as a bridge between these rather polarized positions of the WJC and JAC, threatening more than once to go off the rails. In a letter to the JAC, Goldberg and his colleague, the journalist and writer Joseph Brainin, complained:

> It required almost superhuman patience to be constantly on guard not to allow ourselves to be provoked into breaking with the World Jewish Congress. The enemies of the Soviet

---

46 Jewish survival in the Soviet Union has only recently attracted interest, see for example: Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, "Paradise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union," in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 373–399, Markus Nesselrodt, *Dem Holocaust entkommen. Polnische Juden in der Sowjetunion, 1939–1946* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019); Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Atina Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017); Eliyana R. Adler, *Survival on the Margins: Polish Jewish Refugees in the Wartime Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020); Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt, eds., *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939–1959): History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021).

47 See telegrams and internal debates in the related folders of WJC at the USHMM and AJA cited above and Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism*, 125–133.

48 For Jewish nationalism and collective identity in the Soviet Union during the war and the postwar period, see among others Grüner, *Patrioten und Kosmopoliten*; Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism*.

> Union in the WJC did everything they could to sabotage the work on the Black Book and to cause a break between us [. . .]

But they also admitted in the same letter that "it was the hope of the World Jewish Congress that the Black Book is only the first step in a series of united efforts between the Jews of the World and the Soviet Union."[49] Goldberg constantly had to act as a bridge between the different partners. The Writers Committee members themselves entertained a warm relationship with their Soviet comrades and felt much more attached to the Soviet Union. Therefore, they were willing to ignore the totalitarian nature of Stalin's policies and the rising antisemitism for quite some time. It is not easy to position the Committee and especially B. Z. Goldberg politically, as the label "communist" might blur a more complex situation here. Goldberg never called himself a communist and his writings in the 1940s mostly show a personal attachment to Soviet Jews, a strong urge to support them and Jewish (mostly Yiddish) culture and life in the Soviet Union, a deep understanding (and gratitude) of the role of the Red Army in liberating Europe from Nazism, and a political leaning towards a romanticized idea of the Soviet experiment of equality. Therefore, he (and his compatriots from the Committee) seem to have been willing to defend the Soviet Union against growing American hostility – also coming up in the ranks of the WJC – for quite some time into the postwar period.

Drafting a Manuscript

The differences in political outlook and strategy between the Writers Committee and the WJC made it very difficult to come up with a conception of the *Black Book* which suited all. A "Draft Outline" that was circulating among the editors in the second half of 1944 only minimally resembles the version realized later.[50] At that point, the editors had opted for a broad geographical scope: the book was to cover all Nazi-occupied regions of Europe, not only the Soviet Union. The outline also foresaw "subsequent volumes" that would present documents and reports on a whole range of topics, such as the prewar situation of the Jews in countries later annexed by the Germans, the economic and cultural destruction of European Jews and their assets as a prelude to annihilation, and a volume entitled

49 B. Z. Goldberg/J. Brainin to Fefer/Mikhoels, March 27, 1945, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 69, Folder: Letters to Fefer.
50 "Draft Outline," undated [c. Oct. 1944], AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

"Jewish Heroism" that was to focus on Jewish resistance.[51] What exactly led to the rejection of the planned structure of the volume cannot be reconstructed on the basis of the available files. It can be assumed that the focus on Nazi crimes set against a more general condemnation of fascism in Europe that the editors initially had in mind was one of the demands of the WJC. We also see different traditions colliding when it comes to the question of the style and presentation of the book.

B. Z. Goldberg, in what could perhaps be called a more American approach, hoped to attract attention for the volume by integrating famous personalities as authors. Further, he hoped to make the book more accessible by providing comments and explanations contextualizing the reproduced sources, rather than presenting the bare reports and accounts as such. WJC members – and here we can safely assume a shared opinion with the Soviet partners – pushed for the opposite: a strictly documentary volume, presenting original material and witness voices that could stand and speak for themselves. This concept clearly referred to an Eastern European Jewish historiographical tradition and documentary projects realized by the WJC predecessor, the Comité des Delegations Juives, informed by the historian Simon Dubnow and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in Vilna and Warsaw. They had established a sociological approach towards the collection and use of source materials and witness voices in order to reconstruct (traumatic) historical events.[52] Next to these content-related quarrels, the project constantly also suffered from a lack of personnel and funding.[53]

A new structure of the volume evolved after the Soviet material had arrived in New York. B. Z. Goldberg cautiously complained to the JAC that the necessary data about authors, eyewitnesses, interviewers, and collectors of the material was missing. And he wondered in a telegram of December 1944 whether the Russian version of the *Black Book* prepared by the JAC differed from the one planned collaboratively. He urged the partners to indicate in the press that these were not competing endeavors, but that the Russian version should be regarded "as gen-

51 WJC members, especially Jacob Robinson, objected to the plan for several volumes, see Minutes of Office Committee Meeting, August 21 and August 28, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

52 For this tradition and postwar Jewish initiatives referring to it, see for example: Laura Jockusch, "'Become Historians Yourselves! Record, Take It Down, and Collect!' Jewish Historiography in Times of Persecution," *Iggud: Selected Essays in Jewish Studies* 2 (2005), 77–95; Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History: Rediscovering a Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

53 Most of the support came from a vast number of "Black Book Committees" in several American, Canadian, and English cities that collected money: B. Z. Goldberg to Maurice Perlzweig, August 4, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6; see also Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, 162.

eral archives," while the American should be read as the bill of "indictment of [the] Nazis [. . .] and be issued in several languages."[54] This underscores the mentioned differentiation between a more Eastern European and American approach. Goldberg's vision gained ground: the American *Black Book* drew away from the original plan of a purely documentary nature. In February 1945, Goldberg presented to Perlzweig a new design of the volume with a reduced and more focused scope: "It is understood that the book is not to be an archive, but a political document to influence public opinion. As such it should not contain more than about 5–600 pages, should be written in a popular style, and appear very soon, if possible before summer."[55] Now he foresaw the following parts: an introduction by Albert Einstein, a chapter on the history of the Jews in Europe and their longstanding contributions to its fabric and culture, a chapter on the catastrophe of the Nazi onslaught against the Jews, and a set of charges against the Nazi perpetrators that were in turn to form separate chapters. The project was to be rounded off with the reactions of the outside world to what was happening in Europe and with legal demands from "united Jewry."

The WJC, especially Jacob Robinson, strongly disapproved of the idea and called for a reduced narration and an emphasis on documents, which should be selected by the Institute of Jewish Affairs, not the Writers Committee, which he denounced as amateurish.[56] But he could not prevail. Goldberg and Brainin seem to have made the most of the editorial decisions and the book's outlook in the end resembled their vision much more than the WJC's. Contrary to expectations, it took another year until the book could finally be published. One of the main reasons for the delay was the hesitant attitude of the JAC. The emphasis on a particular Jewish fate under German rule was increasingly questioned by Soviet authorities, who constantly blurred the contours of the specific Jewish experience in a concept of general Soviet victimhood. After the war's end, this tendency grew ever stronger and led to uncertainties among JAC members about the right focus and perspective of the project, which in turn caused a strong reluctance to release the book for publication.

54 B. Z. Goldberg to JAC, December 11, 1944, YVA, GARF Collection, f. 8114, d. 799, 24–27. English, Yiddish, Spanish, and Hebrew versions were planned: B. Z. Goldberg to Itzik Fefer and Solomon Mikhoels, February 16, 1945, YVA, GARF Collection, P-8114, F. 839.

55 B. Z. Goldberg to Maurice Perlzweig, February 12, 1945, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

56 The whole quarrel is summarized by Maurice Perlzweig in his confidential report to the Office Committee, February 23, 1945, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6 (fn 45).

The Jewish Voice in the Punishment of Nazis

Shortly after the war's end in Europe, Maurice Perlzweig announced to the WJC's Office Committee that the volume was "nearing completion." He reported that the Writers Committee had assigned authors to put the documents together and provide context in a narrative form, that the material sent from the Soviet Union had been revised, that documents from the American Jewish Committee and the US administration had been added, and that the introduction and conclusion of the book had been drafted.[57] Perlzweig did not name them in his report, but the authors signing as responsible for putting the last version together were four women: Frances McClernan, Anne L. Bloch, Gitel (Gertrude) Poznanski, and Patricia Lowe-Fox. All of them are hardly known today, the archives consulted do not reveal any information about them. It seems most likely that they were connected with the Writers Committee or personal acquaintances of B. Z. Goldberg. Poznanski (from 1947 Poznanski-Steed) later became an anthropologist at Columbia University; all others worked as translators, journalists, editors, or writers. The group was supervised by Ursula Wasserstein, called by Goldberg the "assistant editor" of the volume, herself a journalist, later accredited to the UN.[58] How the decision was made to work with them or in what way they influenced the content of the final product could not be established on the basis of the available sources. What becomes abundantly clear, however, is that the public presentation and representation of the project was reserved for men, while the actual work of text production was done by women who remain largely invisible.[59]

Another interesting side note of Perlzweig's memorandum referred to an intervention by the Canadian Jewish Congress. Its head, Saul Hayes, had expressed doubts about the necessity of the book after the facts about the crimes had already become public with the liberation. This prompted Perlzweig to underline unequivocally the aim of the book again:

> I have pointed out that our purpose was not really to publicize the facts of the situation but to secure public support for the adoption of the principles embodied in the Declaration on the Punishment of War Criminals adopted at our Atlantic City Conference. It would be disas-

---

57 Memo Maurice Perlzweig to Office Committee, June 15, 1945, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

58 B. Z. Goldberg telegram to the Writers Committee, March 27, 1946, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 10 (unsorted material).

59 For the broader context, see: Immi Tallgren, "Absent or Invisible? 'Women' Intellectuals and Professionals," in: *The Dawn of a Discipline: International Criminal Justice and Its Early Exponents*, ed. Frédéric Mégret and Immi Tallgren (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 381–413.

> trous if criminals are punished, as has already occasionally happened, but no reference is made in the indictments to the crimes against the Jewish people. I made it clear to Mr. Hayes that our principal purpose is to see that the conspiracy is publicly established and appropriately condemned and punished.[60]

Here, the partners seem to have found common ground. It had become clear that the purpose of the book was to integrate the Jewish voice into the ongoing debate on the possibilities of legal persecution of Nazi crimes. This was mirrored in the final structure of the volume as well as in all statements accompanying its publication, externally and internally. The WJC had publicly proclaimed its intention to take part in the prosecution of the German war criminals; delegates were sent to the London based War Crimes Commission of the Allies and worked closely with the American prosecution team preparing a postwar military tribunal, and presented the Jewish demands there.[61] Maurice Perlzweig had been involved in these initiatives by coordinating them from New York. At the same time, members of the JAC were supporting Soviet preparations for this tribunal against the leading Nazis. Soviet-Jewish lawyer Aron Trainin, a member of the JAC, played a significant role in setting up the charges; the Committee was busy preparing documents and testimonies for the Soviet State Commission; and was also asked to help choose Jewish witnesses for the Soviet prosecution team in Nuremberg.[62]

To substantiate the wish to participate in the conversation about the indictment of the perpetrators, B. Z. Goldberg pressed for a publication date of the *Black Book* in connection with the Nuremberg trials. And he got a recognized legal scholar from the University of California, Max Radin, to write the opening

60 Memo of Maurice Perlzweig to Office Committee, June 15, 1945 (fn 61). For the War Emergency Conference held in Atlantic City in November 1944, Jewish delegates from 40 countries had engaged in systematic postwar planning regarding relief work for survivors, refugees and displaced persons, the possibilities of rebuilding communities in Europe, prospects for Jewish statehood in Palestine, and questions of retributive and restorative justice. See "Summary of Proceedings 'War Emergency Conference. World Jewish Congress,' November 26–30, 1944, Atlantic City," issued by the American Jewish Congress.

61 See Marc Lewis, *The Birth of New Justice: The Internationalization of Crime and Punishment, 1919–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 165–167; Laura Jockusch, "Justice at Nuremberg? Jewish Responses to Nazi War-Crime Trials in Allied-Occupied Germany," *Jewish Social Studies* 19, no. 1 (2012): 107–147; Kerstin von Lingen, *"Crimes against Humanity". Eine Ideengeschichte der Zivilisierung von Kriegsgewalt 1864–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schönigh Verlag, 2018), 211–236.

62 Hirsch, "The Road to Nuremberg," 17–131, fn. 28; Michelle Penn, "Genocide is Fascism in Action: Aron Trainin and Soviet Portrayals of Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 22, no. 1 (2020): 1–18.

chapter entitled "Indictment," which set the general tone and idea of the book.[63] Radin's introduction focused on the guilt and prosecution of the Germans. It is noteworthy that they were explicitly accused here as a collective group – "Germans as a whole" – and not as single individuals as in the Nuremberg Tribunal.[64] The charge is presented in a confident voice, articulated in the name of the entire Jewish people, and in representation of the murdered: "As the formal accusers of the German people before the bar of the civilized world, it may properly be demanded of the Jews that they prepare such a bill of indictment."[65] The main charge was that the Germans "willfully and without provocation [. . .] attempted the murder of a whole people and in pursuance of this design did actually murder millions of individuals."[66] Radin argued that during the Nazi period there was a systematic conspiracy at work, a "completely thought-out plan" to "abolish" the Jewish people.[67] This charge resonated with the main argument put forward by Jacob Robinson, the WJC, and others in preparations for the Nuremberg trial and with Raphael Lemkin's concept of genocide, which he tried to introduce into international law as a new criminal offense.[68] The introduction closes with a plea for justice and a full conviction of the crimes, so as to "prevent the recurrence of fascism anywhere."[69]

One fact that may have reinforced the impression of a specific political outlook of the volume was the continuous use of the term "fascism" to describe the Nazi political system throughout its chapters. By placing Itzik Fefer's statement, "The globe is too small to hold both mankind and fascism," as the motto for the

---

63 The first published volume does not indicate individual authors of each chapter, subsequent volumes do. See for the decision: Maurice Perlzweig to Nahum Goldmann and David Remez (Va'ad Leumi), March 11, 1946, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6. Max Radin closely followed the Nuremberg Trials: Max Radin, "Justice in Nuremberg," *Foreign Affairs* 24, no. 3 (1946): 369–384. For an introduction, see: Eugene R. Sheppard, "The Day of Reckoning: Max Radin and the Rule of Law in International War Crimes," in *Swimming against the Current: Reimagining Jewish Tradition in the Twenty-First Century. Essays in Honor of Chaim Seidler-Feller*, ed. Shaul Seidler-Feller and David N. Myers (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020), 243–253.

64 *Black Book*, 5.

65 *Black Book*, 3.

66 *Black Book*, 5.

67 *Black Book*, 6.

68 Robinson is remembered as having said to Justice Jackson: "The Jewish causalities are not a pure incident of the war or its preparatory stage, but the result of a well-conceived, deliberately plotted and meticulously carried out conspiracy." See Lingen, *Crimes against Humanity*, 299. For Lemkin in Nuremberg, see for example Hilary Earl, "Prosecuting Genocide before the Genocide Convention: Raphael Lemkin and the Nuremberg Trials, 1945–1949," *Journal of Genocide Research* 15 (2013): 317–337.

69 *Black Book*, 10.

entire book, the term and with it a whole set of social semantics that distorts the specifics of Nazi policy and ideology was emphasized.[70] Whether an agreement between WJC, Va'ad Leumi, and the Writers Committee to use the term "fascism" was reached or B. Z. Goldberg and the authors used it without consensus is hard to tell. Undoubtedly, it must have been a huge concession for the members of the Institute of Jewish Affairs, who were among the first in the US to develop a distinct understanding of the different and new forms of totalitarian dictatorship and genocidal politics of the Nazi regime.[71] The placement of the term was an accommodation to an international, but also Soviet antifascist doctrine and struggle, which had grown strong during the war and included many fractions beyond communist or socialist ones.[72] In its initial phase, the JAC had seen this project in line with the Soviet administration (represented in the Sovinformbureau), which had supported the idea of using a *Black Book* in the ideological battle against "fascism." But it would be wrong to read this decision only as a strategic one in order to allow for Soviet appreciation. Rather, it was meant to remind readers of a vanishing broader international alliance in a mutual global fight. But it was exactly this that opened the door to problems of reception. The book's ambiguity and indecisiveness regarding its political outlook led to much of the criticism in the West and eventually to dramatic consequences for the Soviet constituents.

The opening indictment of Radin is followed by four chapters, which were to provide the evidence and explanation of the main charges: 1) the German conspiracy against the Jews on the level of ideology and politics, 2) laws and decrees used in order to degrade and exclude, later expel and murder the Jews; 3) strategies of decimation such as slave labor and starvation; and finally 4) the processes and methods of annihilation. All but the last chapter adhere to the form Goldberg had suggested: they are geographically ordered by the countries under Nazi rule and introduce reprints of original material with contextual and explanatory texts. In each chapter, this pattern of composition was broken in the section on the Soviet Union and Poland where eyewitness accounts and other materials were presented without a metacommentary. Among these, we find several testimonies of Soviet prisoners of war, Red Army soldiers, and those collected by the Soviet State

70 *Black Book*: slogan on the first page; Fefer's statement was already published by the Writers Committee in his text: "We have gained Courage," *New Currents* 2, no. 5, 7 (1944).

71 See Elisabeth Gallas, "Frühe Holocaustforschung in Amerika. Dokumentation, Zeugenschaft und Begriffsbildung," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 15 (2016): 535–569.

72 For an instructive discussion about the impact of Allied "antifascism" on Soviet policies towards the Jews during the war, see Michael Seidman, "Antifascisms United: 1941–1944," in *Transatlantic Antifascisms: From the Spanish Civil War to the End of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 160–181.

Commission – describing roundups, camp structures, killing methods, and killing centers.[73] Integrated into this section, we find some of today's most famous reports, which stem from Ilya Ehrenburg's collection mentioned above: Vasilii Grossman on Treblinka, Ehrenburg himself on Sobibor, and Abraham Sutzkever on Vilna, the Ghetto, the resistance, and German SS personnel – experiences Sutzkever would also report about as one of the only three Jewish witnesses at the Nuremberg trials.[74] It is evident that the editors sensed that these were the most powerful testimonies, because they chose Grossman's and some of Sutzkever's accounts to be published in a pre-circulated brochure entitled "Memo from the Dead."[75] In this brochure, the reports were still accompanied by some lines of introduction by Albert Einstein, which were not to appear in the final book.

Even though we see serious editorial problems in the presentation of these materials in the *Black Book* (it is often not clear who is speaking; sources are printed with too little information on their place and date of origin or their authors), the reports presented provided an early and exceptional perspective on the details of the Holocaust, long before they became established knowledge in the West. They offer the first descriptions of the "Holocaust by bullets" or the Operation Reinhard (*Aktion Reinhard*) killing centers. The facts may have been presented in questionable format, but they nonetheless brought details of the events to the fore that were buried afterwards and needed a long time to be integrated into historical knowledge. The same goes for the Polish and Soviet survivors' voices assembled here; many of them would be out of reach during the entire Cold War period.

The last chapter of the book built around documents is called "Resistance." Like the preceding ones, it is arranged chronologically and according to geographical areas. But the chapter's character differs from the others, as the presentation of armed and spiritual resistance against the Nazis obviously did not fit in as a charge against Germany. It followed other considerations. Especially the part on Poland and the Soviet Union, which again used the JAC's and Ehrenburg's material, including many outstanding first-hand accounts, among them another re-

---

73 *Black Book*, 304–413.

74 *Black Book*, 320–324; 398–413, 373–377; Abraham Sutzkever, *From the Vilna Ghetto to Nuremberg: Memoir and Testimony*, ed. and trans. Justin D. Cammy (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021).

75 "Memo from the Dead. Excerpts from the Jewish Black Book to be published soon by the World Jewish Congress, Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, USSR, Va'ad Leumi, Palestine, American Committee on Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists," undated [probably beg. 1946], AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

port by Abraham Sutzkever on Jewish resistance fighters in the Vilna Ghetto.[76] It seems likely that the editors followed an impulse to refute the accusation of passivity on the part of the victims, which was frequently heard at that time, in and outside the Soviet Union. Plus, they did not want to end their volume with the documentation of mass murder, but with the depiction of the numerous, however often hopeless, moments of agency. Just as is known from the early Zionist reading of events, here too, the depiction of World War II and the mass extermination was based on tropes of opposition and defense – a mode that allowed for the filling of the void created by the ultimate irrationality of the Holocaust and made narrations and representations possible.[77] The chapter particularly emphasizes the cooperation between Soviet partisans and Jewish resistance groups, in other words, the united struggle that became the central element in the creation of the collective memory on the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union.[78]

Before the *Black Book* ends with a rather extensive appendix of Nazi German decrees, jurisdiction, and press documents, B. Z. Goldberg added a three-and-a-half-page section called "Justice," in which he articulated what he considered the main Jewish demands for the criminal persecution and a peaceful future. Here, he called for a

> speedy trial for every German, or other national, who has had a hand in the colossal murder of the Jews in Europe, a murder that could not have been perpetrated without the active aid of thousands of willing accessories. [. . .] Speaking on behalf of murdered Jews, we demand that their murderers be tried [. . .] No matter how many other counts there may be against him [the Nazi], the count of his murder of Jews must be conspicuous among them.[79]

Moving beyond the confines of the Nuremberg trials, Goldberg demanded more than the trying of a selected group of major war criminals. What is noteworthy here is his direct reference to collaboration – a topic highly contested in the Soviet Union, at least when it came to the countries of the later Warsaw pact. Goldberg did not shy away from addressing such issues. And he combined his demands for

---

76 *Black Book*, 444–447. Ilya Ehrenburg was the first to make Sutzkever's partisan activity prominent in the Soviet Union in an article about him in *Pravda* on April 29, 1944, entitled "Triumph of a Man."

77 For the resistance narrative dominant in Israel after the war, see as an example: Israel Gutman, *The Holocaust and Resistance: An Outline of Jewish History in Nazi Occupied Europe, 1933–1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1972). For a discussion: Dina Porat, *The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust, 1939–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

78 For an overview of the debate, see Robert Rozett, "Jewish Resistance," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 341–361.

79 *Black Book*, 466–467.

comprehensive trials with a specific one regarding the Jewish survivors of the catastrophe:

> [W]e must make the demand that full justice be done to them. It is not enough that their former legal rights be formally restored. [. . .] Equality of economic opportunity is no less essential than equality under the law. [. . .] The Jew [. . .] must be given the possibility of returning to his native city. [. . .] He should find his home, a home indeed, with a full sense of belonging–socially, economically and politically. His house, his place of business, his job, or his property must be restored to him.[80]

This call for the restoration of rights and property was most certainly informed by the influx of news coming from Eastern Europe at the time that Jews could or would not return to their former homes due to the waves of antisemitic resentment that awaited them in their native cities and towns. Ever larger numbers of Jewish displaced persons emerged after the end of the war, stateless people with uncertain futures. Goldberg did not articulate a call for the opening of Palestine, but presented different visions of a Jewish future after the Holocaust, asking for a more universal and abstract "solution to the so-called Jewish problem, which is also that of the non-Jew."[81] Most importantly, he called for an international outlawing of antisemitism altogether, a project that was of central concern for the collaborators of the *Black Book*, with several letters mentioning the idea of fostering an international convention to make antisemitism a criminal offense.[82] This rather general ending provoked criticism, especially in combination with the fact that Einstein's introduction, which was to emphasize the need for Jewish statehood in Palestine, was not published. Still, also here, a closer reading of Goldberg's closing passages reveals an important understanding of the Jewish needs at the time: the protection by the law, after an experience of total loss of any legal status; the restitution of property, which so many survivors regarded as essential for a new beginning after the Holocaust; and, last but not least, the recognition of the fundamental right to belong to a polity.

80 *Black Book*, 467.

81 *Black Book*, 467.

82 See, for example, Goldberg, Brainin, and Saltzman to Fefer and Mikhoels, March 27, 1945: "Other possible joint acts which will help the unity effort might be a general movement sponsored by our four organizations for an international law against anti-Semitism." Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 69, Folder: Letters to Fefer.

The Fate of Books, the Fate of Humans

The members of the JAC took a long time to accept the presented version of the *Black Book* and to approve it for publication. The growing unease of the situation becomes apparent in the communication between all partners in the course of 1945. The Soviet administration had fostered Jewish transatlantic networks and an evolution of a distinct Soviet-Jewish consciousness only for a short period of time. After the war's end, it gave way to a growing rejection of any Jewish particularity in the self-understanding of Soviet citizens. Mikhoels, Fefer, and their fellows in Moscow were torn between their loyalties to the regime and their desire for cooperation and partnership with their American friends.[83] From January to May 1946, B. Z. Goldberg made a trip to the Soviet Union, and he was one of the first and very few who was allowed in. In his censored letters and telegrams of the time, he praised the friendly atmosphere and his close relations with JAC members.[84] Despite signs indicating political change, new plans were made for collaborative projects. Goldberg and the JAC members resumed the idea of another publication on "Jewish Heroes in the Struggle against Fascism"; they thought about a literary journal in Yiddish that would be published simultaneously in Moscow, New York, and Tel Aviv "as an indication of Jewish national unity,"[85] and Goldberg tried to invite Mikhoels and Fefer again to the US to do a theater production with them. But nothing came of these plans.

In hindsight, he discussed this journey differently when writing his 1961 (autobiographical) study on Jewish life in the Soviet Union: "The situation of the Jewish community in the Soviet Union [in 1946] was much darker, and the rays of hope fewer. I found emaciated, ragged, crumbled Jewry, almost no longer a people, just stray individuals, harried and gloomy, haunted by shadows of death and hate and abuse."[86] And he remarked on a turn in perspective that he apparently had witnessed during his stay: "On the basis of Soviet sources alone, one might think that the Nazis were only a little bit harder on Jews, that the Jews were merely another people exposed to the Nazi scourge. The facts of course were to the contrary."[87] The American *Black Book* had presented the Jewish fate as unique, something that was problematic in the eyes of the Soviet regime, which

83 See Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 44–64.

84 See itinerary, letters, and telegrams of Goldberg's travel in: Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 70.

85 Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 64.

86 Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 49. For Goldberg's trip to the Soviet Union, see also: Rubenstein and Naumov, *Stalin's Secret Pogrom*, 27.

87 Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 54.

insisted on a narrative of shared victimhood of all Soviet people. This marked the beginning of the end of the unity conjured up between the partners.

When the publication was finally approved in 1946 and preparations for the book launch were made in Madison Square Garden, the JAC members were already subject to growing internal pressure. It became obvious that the planned Russian publication—neither in the format Ehrenburg had aimed for, nor in the "archive format" of the JAC or a combination of both—could not be realized in the Soviet Union. Against this background, it is not surprising that its members no longer had the capacity to deal with the volume in New York. Worse yet, the cooperation in the Black Book project became a serious threat for the JAC poets and writers. Growing anti-Soviet sentiment in the US also made it increasingly difficult for the Writers Committee to pursue its goals and to keep close ties with the Soviet Union.[88] The WJC made a final attempt to invite the members of JAC to join the important plenary session of the Congress planned in Montreux, Switzerland, in 1948. But their attendance was cancelled by USSR representatives. This time, Nahum Goldmann's intervention on behalf of the JAC with ambassador Gromyko proved useless. Responding to Goldmann's invitation, Gromyko replied that it was unnecessary for the JAC to participate in the WJC's meeting, because problems of discrimination were nonexistent in the Soviet Union.[89]

Solomon Mikhoels was murdered in a staged car accident in January 1948. One of the last public signs of the close ties between the Writers Committee and the JAC was the memorial meeting held for Mikhoels in February of the same year in New York, which was attended by 2,000 people.[90] By 1948, the *Black Book* in the US already seemed like a matter of the past. Not least, the harsh criticism of the Institute of Jewish Affairs as well as the Va'ad Leumi that followed its publication had discredited any further work on subsequent projects. But on the side of the JAC in Moscow, the book had a fateful presence. After Mikhoels' death, most of the rest of those involved were convicted and tried, among them Solomon Lozovsky, leader of the Sovinformbureau. The transfer of documents to the US, collaboration and treason, and a too particular Jewish view represented in the volume were among the central charges against the defendants.[91]

88 A very telling account on the situation in the US is given in a letter by B. Z. Goldberg to Solomon Mikhoels and Itzik Fefer on October 25, 1946, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 69, Folder: JAC. Attempts of the Committee to maintain contact and continue with collaboration are explained in Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 93–114.

89 Andrej Gromyko to Nahum Goldmann, December 16, 1947, USHMM, WJC Papers, H-Series, Box 335, Folder 12.

90 Joseph Brainin to JAC, February 20, 1948, YVA, GARF Collection, P-8114.1, d.830.

91 See Rubenstein and Naumov, *Stalin's Secret Pogrom*.

A project meant to unite the Jewish world in its fight against the Nazis became a lethal weapon against those involved. Paradoxically, while the book was branded as pro-Soviet to Western audiences and therefore marked as non-historical and unreliable, its adversaries claimed the opposite in the USSR. The book was trapped in its time. But it stands as a sad memorial to the committed initiative of its editors, who, against all odds, tried to maintain close ties in an ever ideologically polarized world that would draw them apart. Begun at a time when the four Allied powers still sought to find a common ground in their attempts to prosecute German perpetrators, an allied Jewish voice was to call for justice, to at least be present in the courtroom of history.

Boaz Cohen

Israeli Holocaust Memory and the Cold War

On the 18th of May 1953, the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, debated a new law calling for the establishment of Yad Vashem – The National Holocaust and Martyrdom Remembrance Authority. What was supposed to be a celebratory event quickly turned into a discussion of Israeli policy vis-à-vis Germany and the alignment of Israel in the East-West divide of the Cold War – two discussions that were, as will be shown, closely connected in Israel.

But it is important to first set out the political makeup of the young Israeli state (established in 1948) and to introduce the main protagonists in the political scene. Most of the parties and movements involved existed in the pre-state years and the ideological disagreements and feuds went back for decades.[1] During the War of Independence, on January 25, 1949, the country held its first elections to the Knesset. The winning party was Mapai (Mifleget Poalei Eretz Israel, Workers' Party of the Land of Israel). It was guided by a Socialist Zionist ideology and was led by David Ben-Gurion, who became Israel's first prime minister. The party had the largest number of seats in the Knesset, 46 out of 120, but that was not enough to rule. It needed to establish a coalition. What were its options? If we see the party as standing in the center (and to the left) on the political spectrum, it will be easier to place the other parties. To Mapai's left was Mapam (Mifleget Poalim Meuchedet, United Workers Party), Socialist Zionist as well, but more radical. It was composed of two movements: 1) Hashomer Hatzair (Young Guard) and its Kibbutz movement Hakibbutz Hartzi (National Kibbutz) and 2) Achdut Ha'avoda (United Labor) and its kibbutz movement Hakkibutz Hameuchad (United Kibbutz).[2] Staunchly Zionist and, with 19 out of 120 members of Knesset (MKs), the second largest party in the first Knesset. Left of Mapam lay its Left Faction, which broke away from it in 1953 and in 1954 joined Maki (the Israeli Communist Party), the non-Zionist extreme left on the Israeli political spectrum. To the right of Mapai stood the liberal middle-class parties and the United Religious Front

1 See: Yechiam Weitz, "1948 as a Turning Point on the Israeli Political Map," *Israel Studies* 24, no. 3 (2019): 157–179.

2 On Mapam and the Israeli labor movement, see: Tal Elmaliach, *Hakibbutz Ha'artzi, Mapam, and the Demise of the Israeli Labor Movement* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2020); Eli Tzur, *Landscapes of Illusion: Mapam 1948–1954* (Jerusalem, Ben Gurion University Press, 1998). [in Hebrew]

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-003

(which included both Religious Zionists and non-Zionist ultra-Orthodox parties). The Herut (Liberty), the Zionist right-wing party, led by Menachem Begin, was at the right tip of the political spectrum.[3]

In establishing his government, Ben-Gurion did not choose his "natural allies," the left-wing Zionist parties, but chose rather to work with the religious and liberal middle-class ones. This inevitably led to much animosity between the left-wing Zionist parties and the government, with much of it centering on the East-West Cold War divide and the place of the state of Israel in it. Though in future years the left-wing Zionists would join the government, they would remain in disagreement with Ben-Gurion on issues related to the Cold War. As we shall see in this chapter, the issue of Holocaust memory and the Cold War was a major point of controversy. In the aforementioned Knesset debate on the establishment of Yad Vashem, the attack on the government came mainly from the parties to left of the government. Yaakov Hazan, MK for Mapam, claimed that commemorating the Holocaust would be a travesty as long as the Israeli government supported the West German government. This support was implicit in the reparations agreement signed between the two countries the previous year. Several issues stood out: West Germany, Hazan claimed, was a continuation of both pre-Nazi and Nazi Germany and, as such, would continue endangering the lives of Jews in the diaspora. "We must remember," he said, "that whatever happened there can happen today and always. As long as the Jewish diaspora exists and the regime that gave birth to Nazism exists as well."[4] Hazan did not explain what that "regime that gave birth to Nazism" was, but the context makes it clear that he was talking about capitalism in general and German capitalism in particular. "Yad Vashem should remind us that for us, Jewish socialists, Nazism is the arch enemy, and we have a holy obligation to work towards vanquishing the regime that gave birth to this horror," Hazan argued. Hinting at the reparations agreement that was seen by the Israeli left as legitimizing West Germany, he stated that "there is no bigger sin to our people than giving a helping hand to the whitewashing of Nazism in the eyes of the world and to its resurrection." The planned Yad Vashem, he

3 On Israeli Politics of the time, see: Peter Y. Medding, *The Founding of Israeli Democracy, 1948–1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). On the liberal parties at the time, see: Amir Goldstein. "'We Have a Rendezvous with Destiny'" – The Rise and Fall of the Liberal Alternative," *Israel Studies* 16, no. 1 (2011): 26–52.

4 For the entire discussion see: Knesset Plenary Records, Knesset session 229–230. The quotes from Yaakov Hazan, Adolf Berman, and Esther Wilenska in this and the following paragraphs are from pages 1331–1339. All plenary records of the Knesset can be found online, https://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/plenum/Pages/Sessions.aspx, accessed March 17, 2022. All translations from the Hebrew in the chapter are those of the author.

claimed, “should remind us that as Jews we should contribute to the unrelenting war against it.”

As in many debates of the period, the specter of a third world war “constantly threatening humanity” loomed over the discussion. “For our people it ominously bears the threat of destruction [. . .] the murder of millions of our brothers in the Diaspora [. . .] and the destruction of our land and our young state.” Hazan thus claimed that “we must stand in the forefront of the fighters for peace” (i.e., on the Soviet side; the phrase “fighters for peace” usually signaled the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, while those in the West depicted themselves as “fighters for freedom”).

Hazan’s words were just the opening salvo in a fervent attack on government policies by the parties further to the left. Adolf Berman of the Left Faction[5] used current Soviet terminology to link the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 directly to the East-West politics of the time. Berman had been active in rescuing Jews from the ghetto and had been involved in the revolt, although he had not fought in it. He claimed that the ghetto uprising had been led by young socialist Jews who “saw their struggle for the national honor as a link in the general anti-fascist struggle of humanity.” They had not taken up “the flag of the revolt, to have the Israeli government sign an agreement with the neo-Nazis [. . .] we have an obligation to fight, together with all the forces of peace in the world against the resurrection of the German-Nazi army by American imperialism.”[6] Regarding Israel’s place in the East-West alignment, he stated that “while many of the Ghetto fighters died while dreaming of Eretz Israel they did not dream of an Israel linked to imperialism, to the black forces of international reaction, to war mongers and to Foster Dulleses [in the plural].”[7] Instead, they saw their struggle for national honor as a link in the general anti-fascist struggle and dreamt of Israel as a “bastion of progress, social justice, national revival, and peace and friendship with all nations.” There was no question as to which side the Jews and Israel should pick, the answer lay in the lessons of the Holocaust. The Western governments “deserted and left the Jews to their fate,” claimed Berman, “but no fury of hate or the

5 The Left Faction broke off from Mapam due to the latter’s stronger identification with the USSR.

6 While the new German army, the *Bundeswehr*, was only established in 1955, the early 1950s were a period of open discussion on the establishment of such a force within Germany and between West Germany and the Allies. See: Thomas C. Schwartz, “The ‘Skeleton Key.’ American Foreign Policy, European Unity, and German Rearmament, 1949–54,” *Central European History* 19, no 4. (December 1986): 369–385.

7 John Foster Dulles, 1888–1959, US Secretary of State (1953–1959) under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, architect of major US policies during the Cold War, including the re-armament of Germany and attempts to establish a pro-Western Middle East pact.

cracking whip of reactionary propaganda will make the Jewish masses forget that if any Jews survived the Holocaust it was thanks to the Soviet Union, to the Red Army, the Army of Stalingrad!"

Further on the Israeli left was the Israeli Communist Party (Maki). Its representative, MK Esther Wilenska, followed up on several of the issues raised by Hazan and Berman, but with even more vehemence and with direct reference to Cold War policies and disputes. "Israel should fight against the re-awakening of the Nazi beast, against the establishment of the fascist military force of West Germany that is to be the striking force of the Third World War." Wilenska also claimed that Jewish survivors, deserted by the West, owed their lives to the Red Army. She juxtaposed East and West in this context: "Our experience has shown that the flag of Anti-Semitism, anti-Communism, and Fascism is the flag of Hitler and Mussolini, murderers of millions of our people." She further maintained that the war experience also revealed that the Jewish people's fate is intertwined with that of the Soviet Union and the anti-fascist camp, and that today therefore "the place of the Jewish people is with the Soviet Union and the international peace camp against the Imperialist warmongers, Hitler's present-day heirs." She asked how Jews could take seriously the government's statements on the commemoration of Holocaust victims when it refused to protest the release of captive Nazi war criminals by the Americans and British, thus aiding US preparations for a Third World War. "Against our people's interest, against the legacy of the victims, this government supports the preparation of an [anti-Soviet] block in the Middle East by Foster Dulles and the interests of American billionaires." Wilenska called to establish "a Yad Vashem against the reestablishment of the Nazi Army, against preparations for a Third World War, against a Middle Eastern anti-Soviet block [. . .] for Peace in the world and the Middle East."[8]

The reactions in the Knesset to these attacks were quite low-key since, as will be shown, this was far from the first time that pro-Soviet and anti-Western sentiments had been aired in the Knesset during Holocaust-related debates. Responses from speakers of the government coalition block and of the right ranged from mentions of antisemitism in Soviet partisan units during the war to references to current manifestations of it, such as the "Doctors' plot." Generally, they attempted to wrest the discussion away from political or sectarian lines and back to a focus on Holocaust commemoration. Yet, this debate shows how, for some Israelis, especially those who could relate to the socialist-Zionist and communist parties to the left of the (Zionist-socialist) government, the memory of the Holocaust and its lessons were intertwined with the current Cold War debates.

8 Knesset Plenary Records, 1344–1345.

Indeed, as this chapter shows, Holocaust-related discussions in the young Israeli state were permeated with Cold War concerns and cannot be fully understood without taking them into consideration. The Holocaust was a national and personal catastrophe on a massive scale. Most Israeli families of European origins (and they constituted the majority, certainly of the leadership and elites at the time) experienced Holocaust-related losses. The destruction of most European Jews was a searing trauma, and the debates it engendered were forceful and divisive even without bringing in the Cold War. Yet in the postwar years, debates on the Holocaust took place with the alignment of the world along an East-West axis and with apprehensions of an impending Third World War. Questions of reparations from Germany, diplomatic relations, arms sales and purchases to and from West Germany interconnected the Holocaust and its memory, on the one hand, and Cold War issues, on the other. While there is extensive literature on Israel and the Cold War, most works on Israeli Holocaust memory do not address this issue. The aim of this chapter is to bring together these two strands of research and to provide a fuller understanding of Israeli Holocaust memory in its Cold War context. In order to understand the interconnection of Holocaust memory and Cold War politics in Israel, two core issues need first be explored: 1) Israeli state policies vis-à-vis the evolving Cold War and an emerging West Germany and 2) the complicated relationship between the Israeli Zionist left and the Soviet Union.

Where to in the East-West Divide?

The question of Israel's position on the East-West divide and the Cold War was debated by Zionist institutions from 1945 onward. The UN resolution of November 29, 1947, which called for the establishment of a Jewish and an Arab state in Palestine, supported by the US and the USSR, gave hope that the new Jewish state would be spared the need to take sides and would be able to commit to a policy of non-alignment.[9] There were reasons to believe that the new state could garner support from both blocks. The Soviet Union, for example, allowed Czechoslovakia to sell weapons to Israel during the 1948 war at a time when Western powers officially adhered to a weapons embargo. Some Jews in the Eastern Bloc countries were al-

9 See Uri Bialer, *Between East and West: Israel's Foreign Policy Orientation 1948–1956* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

lowed to immigrate to Israel, though Soviet Jews were not.[10] The Western bloc housed the vibrant Jewish communities that supported and donated money to Israel, and these communities could offer the young state a viable future either on their own or by lobbying their respective governments. The goodwill of the two blocs gave rise to the hope that in the future Israel would be able to gain the support of both sides. "International support requires non-alignment," claimed Israel's Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett in 1950; "We can't forgo the support of either bloc." This was not only for the sake of the state of Israel's future, but also for the wellbeing, future, and identity of the large communities of diaspora Jews. Choosing a side would endanger the future of Jews on the other side and harm their chances of immigrating to Israel. Since Jewish communities tend to identify with their states, claimed Sharret, it was obvious that if Israel chose to fully identify with the West against the Soviet Union, "they (Soviet Jews) will feel that we've forsaken them."[11]

The issue of Soviet Jews and their future made courting the goodwill of the Soviet Union a priority. Zionist leaders, themselves mostly from Eastern Europe, saw Soviet Jews, with a population of about two million, as the last great reservoir of likely immigrants to the Jewish state. The immigration of Soviet Jews was critical to the future of the Jewish state as no one expected large-scale Aliyah from Western countries. There was also a feeling of responsibility for the future of these Jews. It was obvious that decades of communist education and oppression in the USSR would cause a loss of Jewish identity through assimilation and extinction. The escalating anti-Jewish policies of the Stalinist regime led to anxiety over the physical future of Soviet Jewry. Historian Joseph Heller claims that such sensibilities, albeit naïve, informed the Israeli foreign policy of non-alignment. Israeli representatives repeatedly raised the issue of the free immigration of Soviet Jewry in talks with their Soviet counterparts, all to no avail.[12] The USSR was willing, at times, to allow for an exodus of Jews from the countries in its sphere of

---

10 G. Gorodetsky, J. Freundlich, D. Yaroshevky, Y. Ro'I, Stegny et.al., *Documents on Israeli-Soviet Relations, 1941–1953*, 2 vols. (London: Cass, 2000).

11 Moshe Sharett, "The State of Israel between East and West. Seminar lecture delivered on April 22, 1950," in *Speaking Out: The Collected Speeches of Israel's First Foreign Minister 1950*, ed. Yaakov and Rina Sharett (Tel Aviv: Moshe Sharett Heritage Society, 2016[in Hebrew]), 349–395, 363.

12 Joseph Heller, *The United States, the Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948–67: Superpower Rivalry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 33–46. On Israeli naiveté, he writes: "From a historical perspective, Israel was naive to believe it could separate the question of immigration of Eastern bloc Jews from that of Israel's joining a regional defense organization. It can be argued that, even without the issue of immigration, the Kremlin would not have regarded Israel as a friendly country. In effect, Israel's unavoidable economic and military dependence on the West placed it squarely in the bloc hostile to the Soviet Union" (17).

influence, but feared that an Israel-oriented Zionist approach might spark a Jewish nationalist awakening in the Soviet Union. It therefore refused to engage in any discussion on the immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel. The escalating Cold War, the competition among superpowers for influence in the Middle East, the pro-Western choices made by the Israeli government, Soviet anti-Zionism and antisemitism borne out by anti-Jewish policies, the Slánský Trials (or Prague Trials, as they were called in Israel), and the "Doctors' plot," all made for a growing rift between the USSR and Israel – a rift that was being played out in the Holocaust discourse in Israel. Moreover, since Zionism was banned in the Eastern bloc, the Zionist movement became seen as "a Western organization."[13] While this helped raise Western support for Israel, it also drew fire from the Eastern bloc.

Israel's ruling party, Mapai, led by Ben-Gurion, was a Socialist party committed to the Zionist idea of establishing a Jewish state. It balanced the two ideals under the motto "*Mi'maamad Le'am*" (from a class to a nation). Like many Western Social Democratic parties, it had a clear non-communist, even anti-communist stance. In the Israeli case, therefore, non-alignment was actually pro-Western: financial support came from the US, where very active Jewish communities were based, and the country identified with the ideals of freedom and democracy as they were understood in the West.[14] Yet it was the Korean War that served as the tipping point that forced Israel to choose sides openly.[15] Israel supported the UN, and Ben-Gurion even wanted to send a contingent of Israeli troops to participate in the war as a part of the UN Forces. It was important to the US that the war was seen not as an American imperialist venture but rather as an international effort against aggression. By sending troops, Israel could thus gain credit from the US administration and public. Foreign Minister Sharett objected fiercely because this marked a total break with the Soviet Union and would provoke a "fire" in the IDF. It would have been very hard to explain to the Israeli public, predominantly socialist, and just beginning to recuperate after the Holocaust and the War of Independence why its conscripted youth are sent to fight in Korea.[16] He suggested sending a group of

---

13 Moshe Sharett, "The State of Israel between Left and Right," seminar lecture delivered on April 22, 1950, in *Speaking Out: The Collected Speeches of Israel's First Foreign Minister 1950*, ed. Yaakov and Rina Sharett (Tel Aviv: Moshe Sharett Heritage Society, 2016), 349–395. [in Hebrew]

14 In 1949, a loan of one million dollars was granted by the US to Israel. Bialer, *Between East and West*, 208.

15 Gangzheng She, "Ben-Gurion, the Korean War, and the Change in Israeli Foreign Policy," *Israelis* 7 (2015): 205–214.

16 Yoseph Heller, *Israel and the Cold War*, 49.

medical personnel instead.[17] This idea was accepted by the government, but Ben-Gurion kept sending unofficial messages to the US and other Western countries stating Israel's support of the West: "Although in times of peace we try to maintain political independence [non-alignment], in the event of a world war we stand one hundred percent with the West."[18]

By early 1952, the government was more outspoken on the issue, which was becoming a clear dividing line between Mapai and the parties on its left. On January 3, 1952, in the middle of a Knesset session on the reparations agreement, Sharett addressed an ideological forum of the Ahdut Ha'avoda Movement, one of the parties comprising Mapam. Israel had to make a choice, he said, and it had chosen the West: "As a result of the universal ideological struggle, which also affects us and which is a battle for the soul of our youth and the mind of the nation itself, neutrality has become impossible; non-alignment is out of the question."[19] Considering American financial aid that was crucial to Israel (and the lack of such aid from the USSR), he claimed that "our attachment to the USA is literally a question of life and death for the state of Israel and for its population."

It is important to note that as far as security and diplomacy were concerned, Israel's support of the Western bloc was a story of unrequited love. The Western powers were not forthcoming to Israeli requests to join NATO and certainly not any Middle Eastern equivalent, such as SACME (Supreme Allied Command, Middle East) or other initiatives.[20] Israel was a liability in attempts to gain the support of the Arab states for a pro-Western alliance. The US State Department saw Israeli intransigence regarding the return of Palestinian refugees as an unwanted impediment to its Middle East policies. Offers by Israel to enable the US to use Israel for stockpiling strategic supplies were rejected, as were requests to purchase arms from both the US and Britain.[21] The Western powers wanted Israel to publicly commit itself to the Western camp, something that Israel was reluctant to do due to its aforementioned policies towards the USSR. Even West Germany, with whom Israel signed the reparations agreement, refused Israel's request for diplomatic ties until 1964, as it saw it as detrimental to its efforts to get the backing and recognition of Arab states.

---

17 Gabriel Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett: Biography of a Political Moderate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 549.

18 Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett*, 557.

19 Bialer, *Between East and West,* 47.

20 Bialer, *Between East and West*, 226.

21 For Israeli attempts to navigate the Cold War in the Middle East, see: Howard A. Patten, *Israel and the Cold War: Diplomacy, Strategy and the Policy of the Periphery at the United Nations* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

"Mother Russia"

For decades, the USSR was viewed with admiration by left-leaning Israelis. Trepidation caused by the Soviet Union's anti-Zionist stance and, later on, anti-Jewish policies was offset by the major role accorded to the Red Army in the victory over Nazi Germany and subsequently the USSR's vote for the establishment of a Jewish state in the UN. While it was obvious that Maki's policies would be pro-USSR, Mapam's policies are of special interest here. The latter was looking for a policy that would reconcile its Zionist ideology with support and admiration of the Soviet Union and a commitment to Holocaust memory.

The Ahdut Ha'avoda/Hakkibutz Hameuchad (United Labor/United Kibbutz) and Hakibbutz Haartzi/Hashomer Hatzair (National Kibbutz/Young Guard) movements that established Mapam had their roots in the revolutionary leftist movements of Tsarist Russia. After the October Revolution of 1917 and its opposition to Jewish nationalism and Zionism, their focus moved to other Eastern European countries and to the building of the Jewish national home in *Eretz Israel*. These were radical activist Zionist-socialist movements, leading the way to the establishment of kibbutzim and the formation of Jewish defense organizations.

Both movements strongly identified with the USSR and its ideals. The latter was, in the words of Yaakov Hazan, their "Second Homeland, the Socialist one."[22] They saw it as a "worker's paradise" and the Eastern bloc as the "Peace Camp." They shared the USSR's commitment to socialism and distributive justice, and even outdid its commitment to a communal lifestyle in the kibbutzim that they established. But they also remembered the repression of both their movements and their members in the USSR and the areas it occupied. The 1952 Prague show trials, which accused the leaders of the Czech Communist Party of espionage for the West and of a Zionist conspiracy, challenged the basic pro-Soviet stance of Mapam. The antisemitic/anti-Zionist sentiment that infused the trial and the indictment of a senior Mapam party member, Mordechai Oren, as a Western spy, further distanced the party from the Soviet Union, though not from its ideals. The trials caused an ideological and political earthquake in the party with the leaders of the party standing by its left Zionist agenda (while not disavowing the USSR) and the pro-USSR Left Faction splitting from the party, as mentioned above.

---

22 The Knesset Plenary Records, vol. 1 (1949), Knesset session 12, March 10, 1949.

Everyone Has His "Other Germany"

At the nexus of Holocaust memory and the early Cold War lay the question of Germany. Of all the causes and problems explaining the Cold War, "[n]one was more central or pervasive than the German problem. It was central to the outbreak of the Cold War, central to its continuation and central to its decline," wrote Avi Shlaim.[23] Germany (or Germanies) and relations with it were naturally central to the interplay between Israeli and Jewish Holocaust memory as well as Israeli diplomacy and politics. As shall be seen here, generally, Ben-Gurion and Mapai were willing to accept West Germany, while the parties to their left rejected it and saw a future in relations with East Germany.

In 1959, following a government crisis and breakup caused by opposition to Israeli arms sales to Germany, Ben-Gurion described West Germany as "the other Germany," one that was different from Nazi Germany.[24] After his first summit in 1960 and meeting with German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer he reiterated his position: "I said in the Knesset, the parliament of Israel, last summer, that the Germany of today is not the Germany of yesterday. After having met the chancellor, I am sure that my judgment was correct."[25] Some years of reparations and normalization in Israeli-German relations had to pass for such a statement to be heard, wrote Yehiam Weitz: "In 1952 [the time of the reparations debate], no one would have dared describe Germany this way."[26]

Actually, the term had been used much earlier. In 1950, a Communist Israeli paper announced to its reader that "the other Germany has risen."[27] Following the elections in East Germany, the paper called for "joy and satisfaction" that should be felt "by every progressive, anti-fascist, and peace lover, and especially every Jew who remembers what is the significance of an imperialist war-mongering Germany to the Jewish people." East Germany, it claimed, stood in sharp contrast to "the Nazi state" established in West Germany by "Wall Street supporters." Of course, the paper explained to its readers, thanks were due to the Soviet Union, which brought about the transformation of East Germany into a peace-loving state that no longer

---

23 Avi Shlaim, "The Partition of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War," *Review of International Studies* 11, no. 2 (1985): 123–137.

24 Roni Stauber, "Realpolitik and the Burden of the Past: Israeli Diplomacy and the 'Other Germany'," *Israel Studies* 8, no. 3 (2003): 100–122.

25 *Davar*, March 14, 1960.

26 Yehiam Weitz, "A Review of Idith Zartal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, Hebrew edition 2002," *Iunim B'itkumat Israel* 13 (2003): 443–448.

27 Yaakov Zilber, "The Other Germany Has Risen," *Kol Haam* (The People's Voice) no. 4, October 4, 1950.

threatened the Jews. The transformation of Germany had been a victory for the "Peace Camp that is the camp of life to our people." It is obvious that in internal Israeli discussions, both camps had a "Germany of today." This "other Germany," however, was either the East or the West one, based on one's politics.

Mapam held a staunch, uncompromising position on any rapprochement with Germany, but that meant only West Germany. Its delegates, in fact, attended socialist international events in East Germany. In 1952, for example, its central committee debated the participation of the Israeli Peace Committee – of which it was a founding body – in the World Peace Council Congress.[28] This happened right after Mapam was notified that the Congress had been moved from Helsinki to Berlin. It was obvious that the organization would attend this event, but there was some unease about attending an event in Germany, which led to the suggestion that only its secretary and not members of its leadership be sent "because of our attitude towards Germany." There was a brief discussion, and the consensus reached was that members of the presidium should attend. "I welcome the decision to hold the peace congress in Berlin," said Yaacov Riftin, "Berlin is a symbol of opposition to world war; the historical front of the Jewish people is that of preventing war."[29]

The issue of East Germany was further debated at the following meeting.[30] According to Mapam, thanks to Soviet policy there was no danger of East German rearmament since that policy aimed at "an independent, democratic, united and peace-loving Germany." Unlike West Germany, East Germany "should be given credit" for going in that direction. From the discussion within the Mapam leadership, we learn that there was also a functional internal political reason for attending the Berlin conference: the power play between the Israeli left and the Soviet Union and its international organizations. Who really represented the Israeli "progressive," pro-USSR public – the anti-Zionist communist party or the Zionist

28 The World Peace Movement was organized by Moscow as an international movement calling for disarmament and world peace and was one of the propaganda tools used by the Soviets during the Cold War. The general nature of the organization (and its downplaying of Soviet leadership) made it acceptable to many public figures and organizations in the West. See R. F. Laird and Erik P. Hoffmann, *Soviet Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (New York: Aldine, 1986); J.A.V. Vermaat, "Moscow Fronts and the European Peace Movement," *Problems of Communism* 31, no. 6 (1982): 43–56. On the Israeli case, see Tamar Herman, "The Rise and Decline of the Israeli Peace Committee – 1950–1956," *Zionism* 17 (Winter 1993). [in Hebrew]

29 Meeting of the Mapam Executive Committee, June 9, 1952, Yad Yaari Archives, 64.90, p. 51.

30 The various proposals for a party "declaration on Germany" are not given in the protocol, which includes only the discussions about them.

Mapam? “We can’t have someone else (the communists) representing Israel there.”[31]

It must be said that the pro-East German policies of the Hashomer Hatzair faction of Mapam were not acceptable to their party partners in Ahdut Ha’avoda and its leader, Yitzhak Tabenkin, who refused to compromise with either Germany. Tabenkin was against any alignment with one of the big blocs, claiming that it would cause mistrust of Israel among emerging countries. Ahdut Ha’avoda fiercely opposed any participation in the Berlin event and publicly condemned it. The issue led to rising tensions within the party and contributed to its eventual breakup.[32]

The ability of the Israeli left to maintain an active, positive approach to and relations with East Germany, while attacking West Germany with Holocaust-related rhetoric, naturally drew fire from the government coalition. “We just heard that a delegation of *Mapam* is going to Berlin to attend the Communist International. And they will go to Berlin and not to Bonn – to the city in which sat Hitler, Himmler and the other murderers, the city from which emanated the extermination decree against the Jewish people,” argued MK Yohanan Kese of Mapai during the Knesset reparations debate.

> Is it permissible to visit the Germans in the East? Are their hands not full of Jewish blood? Is it because Stalin authorized this [made it “kosher,” in the original Hebrew] that these Germans are better?
>
> For us [the government camp] there is no difference between the Germans of the west and the east – but you gentlemen, I very much suspect – because you attack us so much and claim we’re willing to compromise with Nazis – that you will run to compromise with the German people if they are in the Soviet sphere of influence.[33]

The question of the “other Germany” was indicative of the Cold War divide within the Israeli public and Israeli politics. More than a question of the reality in Germany, it was one of political expediency of Cold War politics and the survival of the Israeli state in a world divided along its lines.[34] The issue was also played out in the reparations debate.

---

31 Meeting of the Mapam Executive Committee, June 9, 1952, Yad Yaari Archives, 64.90, p. 55.

32 The issue was debated during an emergency meeting called by Ahdut Ha‘avoda, see “The Inner Strife in Mapam,” *Shearim,* December 10, 1951.

33 The Knesset Plenary Records, Knesset sessions 14–15, November 4, 1951, 951.

34 For the way the Cold War influenced discourse of the Holocaust in the two Germanies, see: Kobi (Yaakov) Kabalek, “The Rescue of Jews and the Memory of Nazism in Germany, from the Third Reich to the Present” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2013).

The Reparations Debate

In a way, the Knesset debate over Yad Vashem with which this paper opened was a replay of several such vehement discussions of the preceding years, most notably that over the reparations agreement with Germany.[35] On March 12, 1951, Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett notified the Knesset of Israel's demands from West Germany and that talks on a reparations agreement were being conducted between the two governments. The resulting agreement was debated and accepted by the Knesset in January 1952. The debates were fierce and spilled over into the streets through demonstrations, mass rallies, and a riot outside the Knesset during the actual vote.

Opposition to both the reparations agreement and relations with Germany cut across party lines and communities and was not necessarily Cold War-related. Opposition in the Knesset came also from the center and the right and not only from the pro-USSR left. Menachem Begin, head of the Herut Party that lay on the right of the Israeli political spectrum, led an active campaign against the reparations agreement, which culminated in his followers rioting outside the Knesset building during the debate. Even Mapai, the ruling party, allowed a group of Holocaust survivors to voice their opposition to the agreement during the party leadership's debate on the issue. While they found some support in the party's leadership, Ben-Gurion was adamant that the survival of Israel entailed accepting reparations that were rightly due. The public debates over the agreement are well-documented and researched. Our interest here lies in the Cold War angle.

The government was frank about the Cold War context of the reparations agreement and explained to the Knesset that Germany was on its way to political and military rehabilitation that would not be contingent on compensation of the Jewish people. "Both the Russians and the West are courting Germany like a young bride," said MK Meir Argov, head of the Foreign Affairs and Security Knesset Committee. "They are offering her everything [. . .] weapons, an army, unification, you think that if we would not agree to reparations there would be no rehabilitation of Germany? [. . .] this is a childish claim," he continued.[36]

For the parties on the Israeli left, the Cold War implications of the agreement were apparent. Yaakov Riftin of Mapam criticized all those people who refused to

---

35 On the negotiations, see Nana Sagi, *German Reparations: A History of the Negotiations* (New York: St. Martin's Press; Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1986). For documents on the Israeli deliberations of the reparations agreement, see: Yaakov Sharett, ed., *The Reparations Controversy: The Jewish State and German Money in the Shadow of the Holocaust 1951–1952* (Göttingen: De Gruyter, 2011).

36 The Knesset Plenary Records, Knesset session 77, May 6, 1952.

understand “that the inclusion of West Germany in a European army and NATO is a danger to world peace, to humanity and to the Jewish people.” The other option, of course, was the Soviet stance that called for “a united Germany that will not join any military alliance.”

The communists were, as always, the most radical and blunt. MK Shmuel Mikonis suggested that the Knesset reject “any negotiation with the Neo-Nazi Bonn government that is rebuilding the Nazi Army with the Hitlerite Generals and frees war criminals [. . .] in order to prepare a new act of aggression that will endanger Jews and others [. . .]. The Jewish people will never be in the same camp with the Nazis.” It was obvious to him that signing such an agreement would seal Israel’s (and West Germany’s) place in the Western bloc:

> Since the Ben-Gurion government is willing to bring the State of Israel, its strategic positions, and its economic and military potential to the service of the Atlantic pact in order to prepare a new world war against the peace-loving nations headed by the Soviet Union, since it agrees to bring Israel into an aggressive Middle East pact, since [. . .] it accepts the establishment of the Nazi army by the aggressor Atlantic pact [. . .] putting it in the same camp as the Nazis, we suggest a vote of no confidence.[37]

The reparations debate challenged the pro-East German position of the left opposition. West Germany accepted its responsibility for Nazi crimes and, in the reparations agreement, showed its commitment to the survivors/victims of Nazi Germany. The East German regime, on the other hand, refused to discuss reparations since it denied any continuity between itself and the Nazi regime. This, of course, led to much criticism in Israel and abroad.[38] Mapam leaders debated whether they should call on it to pay reparations. Some Mapam leaders thought so, even if only to mollify opposition at home. Others objected, saying this would fuel Ben-Gurion’s criticism of East Germany and their contact with it. They did, however, suggest working on the issue with the East Germans behind the scenes. The question of reparations thus became ancillary to the Cold War debate.[39]

---

37 The Knesset Plenary Records, Knesset session 14–15, November 4–5, 1951.

38 See: Angelika Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany: Moral Obligations and Pragmatic Policy* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1997).

39 See: Lorena De Vita, “Overlapping Rivalries: The Two Germanys, Israel and the Cold War,” *Cold War History* 17, no. 4 (2017): 351–366. As De Vita shows, for the two Germanies, the reparations agreement was a Cold War issue as they were both vying for recognition from the Arab world. East Germany used the reparations agreement in its propaganda to the Arab world to show that West Germany was pro-Israeli and the large number of ex-Nazis in the West German administration in its propaganda to the Israeli public.

Weapons Sales and Purchases – the German Connection

The issue of German military aid to Israel and Israeli arms sales to Germany was a political "hot potato" in early Israeli politics that twice brought about the fall of the Israeli government. At the time, Israel was facing a security predicament. Western countries, except France, were not willing to sell weapons to Israel as they perceived that this might turn the Arab countries of the Middle East towards the Soviet bloc and engender Soviet involvement in the region. Moreover, since Middle Eastern oil was crucial to the Western economy, Western powers did not want to antagonize Arab countries against the West. Israeli retaliation raids across the border and the Suez War of 1956 further alienated the United States government to Israeli requests for military aid. Since Soviet bloc countries were providing weapons to Egypt and other Arab states, Ben-Gurion decided to approach the West German government on the matter.

The West Germans, in turn, were rebuilding their army and were interested in buying Israeli-produced weapons. The Germans were also interested in information about the tactics used by Israel during the Suez Crisis, especially in terms of tank force and air cooperation, as well as the Soviet weapons captured by the Israeli army.[40] It is apparent that "besides continuing to feel some responsibility towards the Jewish state, [the German government] also had a political interest in its survival and was prepared to aid it" beyond the reparations agreement.[41] The first talks on the matter were held clandestinely in 1954. Although at the time Germany was not yet allowed to produce armaments, it built two patrol boats for Israel in 1955.[42] In 1959, the Germans started providing Israel with military equipment, which, by 1961, amounted to 20 million DM.[43]

A major scandal over weapons sales erupted in June 1959, when the West German daily, *Der Spiegel*, published an exposé claiming that Israel was selling weapons to Germany – specifically mortar shells and Uzi submachine guns.[44] The Knesset had previously declared its stance on German rearmament in a resolu-

---

40 George Lavy, *Germany and Israel: Moral Debt and National Interest* (London: Frank Cass, 1996).

41 Lavy, *Germany and Israel*, 50.

42 For more on this issue, see Peter F. Müller and Michael Mueller, *Gegen Freund und Feind. Der BND: Geheime Politik und schmutzige Geschäfte* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2002), 485–504.

43 Inge Deutschkron, *Israel und die Deutschen: Das schwierige Verhältnis* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1983).

44 For a description of these two scandals, see Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2000), 302–305, 311–320.

tion, passed on November 16, 1954, opposing the rearmament of both Germanies, and now, when the arms sales became public, there was wide opposition in the Knesset itself and in the press.[45] Ahdut Ha'avoda, which was now in the government coalition, led the opposition to the sale of arms to Germany, which led to Ben-Gurion's dissolution of the government. Ahdut Ha'avoda was joined by the other opposition parties during the Knesset discussion.[46] The uproar occurred over the sale of weapons to Germany – an exchange with greater visibility and symbolic potency – and not over Israel's reception of German weapons. The latter was a guarded state secret, and probably one of which Knesset members and some of the government ministers remained unaware. Several of the Knesset members saw the selling of weapons by the Jewish state to West Germany as a moral travesty. MK Yigal Alon, for example, one of the leading commanders in the War of Independence, voiced his opposition to the deal tying together the Holocaust and present-day politics:

> Arming German soldiers with Israeli weapons is an abomination to our national honor, to our Jewish sensitivities. It harms us politically and is adventurous security wise. It is too early to differentiate between the Germany of the past and that of today. Did the generation of murderers pass away? [. . .] the same officers, all too real, with their ranks and titles, who fought in the Nazi army in World War II, are the ones building the German army of today. [. . .] The murderers will be armed with weapons created by Jews![47]

Others saw it as an act of legitimization for Germany. Israeli submachineguns and grenades would not make the new German army invincible and the Germans knew it too, but the fact that the Jews who were the target of the "Final Solution" were now selling arms to the Germans would give West Germany a legitimization that it did not deserve. "The West German followers of Hitler want this deal," claimed MK Samuel Mikonis of the Communist party, "because these are weapons made by Jews in a Jewish state. It gives them political legitimization."[48]

---

45 "The Knesset declares its deep anxiety of the rearmament of West and East Germany [. . .]. The Knesset decides that Israeli arms sales to Germany will stop and no more Israeli arms will be sold to Germany." See: The Knesset Plenary Records, Knesset session 16, November, 1954.

46 It is said that their staunch opposition was due to their leader Tabenkin's admiration and sense of responsibility to the Ghetto fighters Antek Zuckerman and Zivia Luvatkin. Tabenkin saw them as exemplary heroes and even tried to bring them in as political figures and members of Knesset. Therefore, he felt obligated to follow their uncompromising stand against any contact with Germany and the Germans. Uri Izhar, *Between Vision and Power: The History of Ahdut-Ha'avoda Poalei-Zion Party* (Tel Aviv: Yad Tabenkin, 2002), 262. [in Hebrew]

47 Knesset Plenary session 661, June 30, 1959.

48 Knesset Plenary session 660, June 29, 1959.

The Cold War in Holocaust Commemoration

The Cold War was also very apparent in Holocaust commemorations. In the early 1950s, these ceremonies served as "memory sites" that articulated the very fresh memory of the Holocaust and its legacy as it was seen at the time. Since Yad Vashem was not yet established and there were no state organized ceremonies, the focus was on the memorial ceremonies organized by the Zionist left. Among these, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was at the forefront. It is meaningful that the two main ceremonies were held in kibbutzim – one at the Yad Mordechai Kibbutz (named after Mordechai Anielewicz, commander of the Jewish Fighting Organization during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising) and the other at a kibbutz whose name spoke for itself: the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz. Politically, these kibbutzim were affiliated with the two movements – now in the opposition – that comprised the Mapam party.

The major Holocaust commemoration event since 1951 took place at the Ghetto Fighters House, established by the members of the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz. This group of young survivors led by Ghetto Uprising leaders Zvi "Antek" Zuckerman and Zivia Lubetkin committed itself to Holocaust commemoration and established a small museum and venue for holding its events. The kibbutz was affiliated with the Kibbutz Hameuchad – the United Kibbutz and its political party Ahdut Ha'avoda. The Holocaust memorial events in the kibbutz were an opportunity to lay down the party's agenda on the East-West divide and the Israeli-German relationship.

"Nazism did not come down from the misty clouds, it was born out of an exploitative system," claimed MK Israel Galili, one of the leaders of Ahdut Ha'avoda. "We can't trust bourgeoisie humanism and democracy in a society of oppression," he added. Galili started off with the Holocaust and the Second World War: "We will always remember the mighty army of the Soviet Union that saw Nazism as the enemy of its homeland," he said, but then moved on to current affairs: "We must understand that somewhere, Nazism is brought back to life and it might, once again, attack the world [. . .]. If we will not destroy the satanic proponents and arms of Fascism they might destroy humanity."[49]

Other speakers attacked West Germany directly. Stefan Grajek, who fought in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, claimed that "we will not forget or forgive Nazi and barbaric Germany. Today, six years after World War Two, Hitlerism appears in its new form." A full overview of the Cold War agenda and its relation to the Holocaust was provided by Dr. Olgierd Górka, the Polish Consul in Jerusalem. "We

49 All quotes from this event are from the Ghetto Fighters House Archive (GFHA), 2276.

can't honor the eighth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising without underscoring that on the ghetto's side stood all the progressive elements of the Polish people [. . .] we can sadly say that the reactionary elements of the Anglo-Saxon world did not want to show the real faces of those reactionary Nazis whom they saw, already during the war, as potential allies," he stated. Górka juxtaposed the lenience shown to the Nazis in West Germany with East Germany's far harsher attitude towards them: "It is symbolic that on the same day that twenty Nazis were freed from (West) German jails, six Nazis were hanged by East Germany." As he explained, "[w]e did not hesitate to reach an agreement with the Democratic Germany of Wilhelm Pieck (East Germany's first president) that did not espouse the Nazi (West German) system of no justice and no responsibility." Górka also raised the issue of (West) German rearmament and spoke against "attempts to conceal the aspirations for the remilitarization of Germany and the reestablishment of its army." He saw this issue as directly connected to the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz of today: "Out of the hearts of Poles and Jews, one cry is coming out: we don't want a new Nazi army [. . .]. There is no better time or place for a protest against the reestablishment of the Nazi army than this day of memorial and respect for the heroes of the ghetto!"

The commemoration ceremonies at the Ghetto Fighters House remained a site of constant attack on the Israeli government's alignment with both the West and West Germany during the Cold War, which resulted in the absence of government ministers from the ceremonies. In an op-ed protesting this after a ceremony at the Ghetto Fighters' House in 1953, Tuvia Buzikowski, one of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters, took the government and those of its ministers who had ignored the ceremony as well as other memorial events to task.[50] It seems that he was quite blind to the discomfort from which they had saved themselves by not participating.

Holocaust commemoration ceremonies organized by the other branch of Mapam, Hashomer Hatzair, also served as a platform for Cold War politics. "The Ghetto fighters commanded us not to forgive and not to forget [. . .]. Our people's tragedy came from the hands of the opponents of humanity, progress and socialism," declared Yaakov Amit in 1952 during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemoration ceremony at Kibbutz Yad Mordechai: "There can be no reconciliation with the keepers of the flame of Fascism [. . .] as long as there exists that regime, sharpening its sword and training the Nazi beast for a new attack – we are in danger."[51]

50 Tuvia Buzikovski, "Holocaust Memory and the Israeli Government," *Mishmar*, April 27, 1953.
51 Yaakov Amit, "No Compromise and No Reconciliation with the Heirs of the Murderers," *Mishmar*, April 23, 1952.

While commemoration events in Israel stressed the specific nature of the Holocaust and resistance, they were not unique in using commemorations as a platform for Cold War politics. As shown by Pieter Lagrou, the commemoration of Nazi crimes became a major battleground between Eastern and Western blocs as well as in internal left-right politics in Western European countries. Initiatives to compare the Soviet Gulag system to the Nazi concentration camp system were countered by others stressing the fascist nature of the West German government and the nascent NATO. Commemoration events in Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and other camps served as a platform for attacking the West to the detriment of non-communist delegations. Likewise, rival survivor organizations such as the Warsaw-based International Federation of Resistance Fighters (Fédération Internationale des Résistants, FIR) and the National Union of Associations for Deportees, Internees and Families of the Disappeared (Union Nationale des Associations de Déportés, Internés et Familles de Disparus, UNADIF) aligned themselves according to the East-West divide.[52] The debates in Israel and the acrimonious Holocaust commemoration ceremonies should also be seen in this context.

Conclusion: Discord and Memory

What was the reason behind the interconnectedness of the agendas of Holocaust memory and the Cold War? The answer, it seems, lay in the existential realities of Israelis and their young state. The Israelis of the 1950s were living through monumental times. They had won the 1948 war, established a state, and more than doubled their number through the immigration of Holocaust survivors from Europe and Jews coming in from Muslim countries. But they had not yet reached peace and quiet. The country was regularly threatened with a "second round" by its neighbors, a war that this time around would be won by the Arabs. In addition, Egypt and Jordan enabled terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians from their borders, resulting in hundreds of Israeli casualties, mostly civilian, in these years.[53] The massive immigration strained the young state both financially and socially. Looming over all this was the Holocaust. Its scars were raw and ran deep, manifesting themselves in personal and public consciousness. As we have shown, they also permeated public discourse and decision making.

---

52 Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
53 See the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "1948–1967: Major Terror Attacks:" https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/1948-1967-major-terror-attacks, accessed March 30, 2024.

Simultaneously, Israelis, like most citizens of the globe, also lived through the tensions and tribulation of the early Cold War and the threat, as it was then seen, of a Third World War. Today it is hard to understand the stress of those years, but it was palpable to those living during that time. Choices had to be made and, at times, they clashed with emotions and long-held beliefs. Reality brought together discussions on Holocaust memory and the Cold War, not those on theoretical issues, but rather those on very tangible ones. Ideological and political leaders and the public had to reconcile the two, and it was not easy. At the heart of the discussion was the question: what is in Israel's best interest?

The reparations debate is a good example. Both supporters and opponents of the reparations agreement knew that it would enable West Germany to show that it had made up for past crimes and would open its way into the United Nations, the Western bloc, and eventually NATO. Yet for Ben-Gurion and his government, it was obvious that the Western powers would rehabilitate West Germany anyway and then Israel would have no leverage at all. It was imperative for it to act now to receive reparations that were crucial to the state's survival. Receiving military material from the Germans at a time when Israel was threatened on all fronts was no less crucial, especially since the major Western powers were reluctant to sell weapons to Israel. The discussion was couched in terms of honor and dignity within the context of the Holocaust on the side of the opponents across the political spectrum, but it was also about the identity of the young state and its best interests in a Cold War world.[54] Accepting reparations would cement Israel's affiliation with the Western bloc, as already conveyed by its stand on the Korean War. This was ideologically abhorrent to the left, since it could not envisage Israel as a part of a capitalist and "war-mongering" bloc. Moreover, they saw the government's attraction to the Western bloc as endangering the future of the young state, since it was obvious to them that in a confrontation between the blocs, the "peace camp" and the USSR would win and the Red Army would arrive in the Middle East.

These tensions were more vehemently debated, as I have shown, on the Israeli left, which intuitively saw itself as belonging to the socialist/communist camp, as it had long held a staunch pro-USSR position. This inherent affiliation with the communist camp explains its representatives' overt weaponization of the Holocaust in the political arena. By using the Holocaust, they brought to the debate the most potent argument possible and pushed through their arguments. Evoking martyrdom and resistance, they aimed to score points for the movements

54 Neima Barzel, "Dignity, Hatred and Memory: Reparations from Germany: The Debates in the 1950s," *Yad Vashem Studies* 24 (1994): 247–280.

that saw past resistance to the Nazis as proof of the rightness of their cause. Those on the far left were losing the political debate as Israel leaned more and more to the West, on the one hand, and the USSR adopted an active anti-Israeli policy, on the other. This is not to say that it was manipulative propaganda on their side. They were certainly sincere in making the connection between resistance to the Nazis, Holocaust memory, reparations from Germany and its rearmament, and other Cold War issues, but the Israeli public and most political leaders were much less enthusiastic about such statements. By continuously using the Holocaust and resistance card in the political debate they alienated the government and alienated themselves from most Israelis, who supported the government policies on the issues discussed here and who wanted to connect to a Holocaust commemoration free of partisan appropriation.[55]

55 I teach a course on Israeli Holocaust memory and have discussed these issues for many years with young Israeli students. Together, we read the Knesset protocols mentioned in this paper and the students simply cannot understand what "all this politics" is doing in a Holocaust-related debate. The Holocaust remains potent in the 2020s, but the Cold War is so distant that even adults no longer see any connection. It is for this reason that I have written this chapter.

Simon Perego

“The Communist Schism in Jewish Life”: Transnational Politics and Holocaust Commemorations among Parisian Jews during the Cold War

Introduction

In the aftermath of the liberation of Paris (August 19–25, 1944), many Jewish organizations based in the French capital sought to publicly preserve the memory of the tragic experience suffered by Jews in France and other European countries during the Second World War.[1] With this in mind, they planned frequent commemorations, a term with multiple meanings that here refers to public gatherings aimed at recalling an event or a figure from the past and that “tend to bring together a community on the anniversary of this event or figure.”[2] Some of these ceremonies commemorated the participation of Jews in key moments of the armed struggle against Nazi Germany: the military combat of 1940, the resistance under the occupation, the liberation of the French capital city, and the final victory over the Wehrmacht. Others addressed antisemitic persecution and extermination. Large annual gatherings were devoted to the memory of all the Jewish victims or commemorated specific events such as the imprisonment of foreign Jews in internment camps after their arrest in Paris on May 14, 1941; the Vel’ d’Hiv’ roundup perpetrated in the same city and its suburbs on July 16–17, 1942; the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April–May 1943; or the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps two years later. These ceremonies left a deep mark on the Jewish year during the two decades following the Second World War. In doing so, they placed the memory of the Holocaust at the center of Jewish life long before

1 This chapter is based on: Simon Perego, “Conflictualité politique, identités partisanes et commémorations de la Shoah dans le monde juif parisien, 1944–1967,” in *Résurgences conflictuelles: Le travail de la mémoire entre arts et histoire*, ed. Renaud Bouchet et al. (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2021), 195–209. I would like to thank Rennes University Press (PUR) for allowing me to use a translation of the previously published chapter as a point of departure for this chapter, as well as Arby Gharibian, who translated the French article into English, and the research group LabEx EHNE (“Écrire une histoire nouvelle de l’Europe”) for its financial support.

2 Robert Frank, “La mémoire empoisonnée,” in *La France des années noires, tome 2: De l’Occupation à la Libération*, ed. Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida (Paris: Seuil, 2000 [1st ed. 1993]), vol. 2, 560.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-004

the Six-Day War (June 5–10, 1967), which has often – and too hastily – been seen as prompting in France the sudden emergence of a "Jewish memory" of the Holocaust in reaction to the existential risks facing the Israeli population in the event of its army's defeat.[3]

By seeing commemorations as "immediately recognizable carriers of memory [. . .] that by definition express explicit and voluntarist representations of the past,"[4] the historians who have taken an interest in Jewish commemorative ceremonies in postwar France have primarily sought to analyze the discourses that these gatherings conveyed regarding the Holocaust. For Annette Wieviorka, for instance, the distinctive feature of the fate suffered by the Jews was not fully perceived by the Jewish organizations, whose commemorations in the immediate postwar period were not really able to grasp the radical novelty of the violence inflicted by the Nazis on the Jews of Europe.[5] This interpretation has subsequently been debated, notably by François Azouvi, who has endeavored to deconstruct what he calls the "myth of the great silence" regarding the Holocaust in postwar France.[6] While his work firstly focuses on the cultural and intellectual production devoted to the genocide and its reception on the French national scale, he has also taken an interest in certain Jewish commemorations and showed that these rituals did not help to silence what distinguished the Holocaust from other Nazi crimes.[7]

The exploration of commemorative practices, grasped in their full social thickness, nevertheless calls for moving beyond – though without losing sight of – the exclusive study of representations of the past. It is therefore important to point out, as Paul Connerton has done, that commemorations are part of a

3 On the Six-Day War as a turning point in the emergence of Holocaust memory among French Jews, see for example: Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1990 [1st ed. 1987]), 155. For a reappraisal of this idea, see: Simon Perego, ed., *Archives juives: Revue d'histoire des Juifs de France* 51, no. 2 (2018), special issue, "Première(s) mémoire(s): Les Juifs de France et la Shoah, de la Libération à la guerre des Six Jours."

4 Henry Rousso, "La mémoire n'est plus ce qu'elle était," in *Écrire l'histoire du temps présent: En hommage à François Bédarida*, ed. Institut d'histoire du temps présent (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1993), 108.

5 Annette Wieviorka, *Déportation et génocide: Entre la mémoire et l'oubli* (Paris: Hachette, 2003 [1st ed. 1992]), 391–411. See also: Rebecca Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25–70.

6 François Azouvi, *Le mythe du grand silence: Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire* (Paris: Fayard, 2012). See also: Renée Poznanski, *Propagandes et persécution: La Résistance et le "problème juif", 1940–1944* (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 551–592; Samuel Moyn, *A Holocaust Controversy: The Treblinka Affair in Postwar France* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2005); Philip G. Nord, *After the Deportation: Memory Battles in Postwar France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

7 Azouvi, *Le mythe du grand silence*, 65–75. See also: Simon Perego, *Pleurons-les: Les Juifs de Paris et la commémoration de la Shoah, 1944–1967* (Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2020), 169–203.

"broader phenomenon, that of ritual action."[8] The gatherings studied in this article are indeed similar to sociopolitical rituals in their own right, with ritual at a minimum being defined by Emmanuel Fureix as "an ordered sequence of symbolic, codified, and repetitive words and gestures organizing the relations between individuals and groups."[9] And in a Parisian Jewish community sharply divided in terms of ideology, against the backdrop of the Cold War to boot, the relations "organized" by ceremonies were of an eminently political and agonistic nature. By analyzing the ways in which politics intruded during ceremonies – in the rituals observed, actors mobilized, and discourse pronounced – as well as during the moments preceding and succeeding the gatherings, the focus here will therefore be on studying the political conflict at work within commemorative activity in the context of the bipolar confrontation and its implications on "the Jewish street" from the end of World War Two until the end of the 1960s. Apart from their historiographical consistency in terms of the recent reevaluation of Holocaust memory's chronology,[10] it is during these two and half decades that the political confrontation was the most intense among Jewish organizations in France. In this respect, the Six-Day War of 1967 constitutes an important turning point,[11] which simultaneously boosted Zionist commitment, caused a drastic drop in Communist influence exacerbated by the "anti-Zionist" campaign in Poland in 1968, and weakened the Bundist agenda.

To explore this period and address the political functions of Jewish commemorative rituals in postwar France, this article begins with a discussion of the politicization of the Jewish community of Paris in the aftermath of the Second World War. This will help to identify the ways in which commemorations were a favored medium for political conflict, enabling the commemorating groups to strengthen their own partisan identities. Consequently, the approach to rituals as practices that produce solidarity within a community will here be linked with a

8 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 [1st ed. 1989]), 42.

9 Emmanuel Fureix, *La France des larmes: Deuils politiques à l'âge romantique, 1814–1840* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2009), 18.

10 Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence*, ed. David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist (London: Routledge, 2012); *Before the Holocaust Had Its Name: Early Confrontations with the Nazi Mass Murder of the Jews*, ed. Regina Fritz, Éva Kovács, and Béla Rásky (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016).

11 Samuel Ghiles-Meilhac, "Les Juifs de France et la guerre des Six Jours: Solidarité avec Israël et affirmation d'une identité politique collective," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, no. 96 (2009), 12–15.

consideration of the conflicts that ritual action can – over time and in connected fashion – exacerbate among different groups.

The Politicization of Parisian Jewry

Jewish institutions faced a number of challenges at the time of France's liberation.[12] They had to obtain compensation for the damages suffered, assist those in need – beginning with the rare deportees who returned from the camps – locate the children hidden by non-Jewish organizations and individuals, and, more broadly, proceed with the reorganization of Jewish life in their country.[13] Between 90,000 and 100,000 French Jews died during the war, a great many in deportations, representing approximately a third of the Jewish population from 1939.[14] As terrible as these numbers are, the toll was comparatively "lighter" than in other European countries. The Jews who survived thus served as the foundation on which the Jewish population of France rebuilt itself, with its numbers growing from 170,000 in 1945 to 450,000 in 1966,[15] an increase due largely to the arrival of Jews from the Maghreb

---

12 On the postwar situation of French Jewry, see: David H. Weinberg, "The Reconstruction of the French Jewish Community after World War II," in *She'erit Hapletah, 1944–1948: Rehabilitation and Political Struggle. Proceedings of the Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem 1985*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990), 168–186; Annette Wieviorka, "Les Juifs en France au lendemain de la guerre: État des lieux," *Archives juives: Revue d'histoire des Juifs de France* 28, no. 1 (1995), 4–22; Anne Grynberg, "Après la tourmente," in *Les Juifs de France: De la Révolution française à nos jours*, ed. Jean-Jacques Becker and Annette Wieviorka (Paris: Liana Levi, 1998), 249–286; Maud S. Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

13 Katy Hazan, *Les orphelins de la Shoah: Les maisons de l'espoir, 1944–1960* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000); Daniella Doron, *Jewish Youth and Identity in Postwar France: Rebuilding Family and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Shannon Fogg, *Stealing Home: Looting, Restitution, and Reconstructing Jewish Lives in France, 1942–1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

14 Serge Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz: Le rôle de Vichy dans la solution finale de la question juive* (Paris: Fayard, 1985), vol. 2, 180; Doris Bensimon and Sergio Della Pergola, *La population juive de France: Socio-démographie et identité* (Paris: CNRS and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986 [1st. ed 1984]), 35. According to the most recent calculations, only 3,943 of the 74,000 Jews deported from France between 1942 and 1944 survived the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question." Alexandre Doulut, Sandrine Labeau, and Serge Klarsfeld, *1945: Mémorial des 3 943 rescapés juifs de France* (Paris: The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, FFDJF, and Après l'Oubli, 2018), 15.

15 *American Jewish Year Book – 1945–1946* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1945), 635; *American Jewish Year Book – 1967* (New York: The American Jewish Committee and The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967), 462.

in Metropolitan France. From a material point of view, the early postwar years were marked by major difficulties, with many Jewish families having to count on the assistance of Jewish welfare organizations. Jewish organizations themselves benefited largely from Jewish assistance from America, as well as from German "reparations" from the 1950s onward.[16] These difficulties were nevertheless temporary and the general situation improved in the favorable climate of the *Trente Glorieuses* ("the Glorious Thirty," i.e., the three decades of postwar reconstruction and economic growth between 1945 and 1975). Finally, the return of Republican rule of law and the relatively low level of antisemitism – or at least of its public expression – in postwar French society[17] kept the vast majority of French Jews from immigrating to Israel or other countries. In this context, a particularly rich Jewish life was able to develop in Paris. The capital and its suburbs accounted for a considerable portion of demographic growth: 125,000 Jews lived in Paris in the early 1950s and 300,000 in the late 1960s.[18] International and foreign Jewish organizations, both American and Israeli, had their European and North African offices there, as did the major national Jewish institutions and the Jewish press published in the country. However, Paris was also home to many organizations whose activity took place on a local scale, which had different ways of expressing Jewish identity and were active in various domains (culture, education, religion, political life, social action, etc.).

While the years between 1944 and 1967 saw the confluence of factors favorable to the reconstitution and development of a dynamic Jewish life in Paris, the Jews of the capital did not travel hand in hand down the path of reconstruction. On the contrary, they divided into more or less hermetic microcosms, which stood out from one another through their different geographic origins, each with a history and a specific series of religious, cultural, political, and socioeconomic

---

16 Ronald W. Zweig, *German Reparations and the Jewish World: A History of the Claims Conference* (London: Frank Cass, 2014 [1st ed. 1987]); Constance Pâris de Bollardière, "La pérennité de notre peuple." Une aide socialiste juive américaine dans la diaspora yiddish: le Jewish Labor Committee en France (1944–1948)" (PhD diss., School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences [EHESS], 2017); Laura Hobson Faure, *A "Jewish Marshall Plan": The American Jewish Presence in Post-Holocaust France* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022 [1st ed. 2013]).

17 Anne Grynberg, "Des signes de résurgence de l'antisémitisme dans la France de l'après-guerre (1945–1953)?", *Les Cahiers de la Shoah* 1, no. 5 (2001), 171–223; Emmanuel Debono, ed., *Archives juives: Revue d'histoire des Juifs de France* 49, no. 2 (2016), special issue, "L'antisémitisme en France au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale."

18 Roger Berg, "Où va le judaïsme français ?", *Journal de la Communauté*, no. 51, April 11, 1952, 1; *American Jewish Year Book – 1967*, 466.

characteristics.[19] In the capital, those who are today referred to as Ashkenazim and Sephardim lived alongside one another, but without forming two homogeneous communities. The first group included both Jews, who had been French for generations (from Alsace or Lorraine) – those who were referred to as *"israélites"*[20] – and Jews of foreign background, who had come from Eastern Europe and often spoke Yiddish. The Sephardim included other Jews, who had settled in France for generations and were initially located in the Southwest, in addition to Jews from the former Ottoman Empire (Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, etc.), Egypt, and the Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia). Given this diversity, did the Jews of the capital form, in the words of Nancy Green, "a Parisian Jewish melting pot?"[21] With regard to postwar Paris, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of a Parisian Jewish "archipelago," as this notion, taken from geography, emphasizes the importance of the links between what were at first glance isolated elements as well as the autonomy they continued to enjoy from one another.

This division in terms of origins was accompanied by a fracture of an ideological nature, under the effect of what the writer Arnold Mandel has called the "Communist schism in Jewish life."[22] Since the arrival of the first Eastern European Jewish migrants in the late nineteenth century, the political tensions imported from their countries of origin were part of the daily fate of immigrant Jewish circles in Paris, which were notably divided between Bundists, Communists, and Zionists.[23] The imperative of fighting the Germans and the Vichy regime won out for a time over these ideological oppositions and led to the creation of a unified organization of resistance, the General Jewish Defense Committee (*le Comité général de défense des Juifs*, CGD)[24] and later the Representative Council of the Jews of France (Conseil représentatif des Juifs de France, CRIF), which connected immigrant Jews with the Israelite Central Consistory of France (Consistoire cen-

19 Michel Roblin, *Les juifs de Paris: Démographie. Économie. Culture* (Paris: A. et J. Picard et Cie, 1952); Perego, *Pleurons-les*, 31–59.

20 Muriel Pichon, *Les Français juifs, 1914–1950: Récit d'un désenchantement* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2009).

21 Nancy L. Green, "Jewish Migrations to France in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Community or Communities?", *Studia Rosenthaliana* 23 (supplement), no. 2 (1989), 135.

22 Arnold Mandel, "France," in *European Jewry Ten Years after the War: An Account of the Development and Present Status of the Decimated Jewish Communities of Europe*, ed. Nehemiah Robinson (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1956), 208.

23 Nancy L. Green, *The Pletzl of Paris: Jewish Immigrant Workers in the Belle Epoch* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986); David H. Weinberg, *A Community on Trial: The Jews of Paris in the 1930s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977 [1st ed. 1974]).

24 Adam Rayski, "Le Comité juif de défense, son rôle dans la résistance juive en France," *Le Monde juif*, no. 51 (1968), 32–37.

tral des israélites de France), the institution that represented the French-born Jews since the Napoleonic era.[25] The specific context of the war's aftermath was also favorable to the unification of forces – or at least to the muting of ideological disputes – for during the first months and years following liberation, Jewish organizations had to attend to the highly urgent tasks mentioned earlier.

This unified environment did not survive the incredibly tense political and geopolitical context of the early Cold War. The confrontation between the Eastern and the Western blocs involved questions to which Jews were particularly sensitive, beginning with the future of the Jews in Eastern Europe and Palestine (and in Israel from 1948 onward) – questions that caused polemics within the Jewish community of Paris. This was especially true for its Eastern European fringe, which saw confrontation among the Communist Jewish Union for Resistance and Mutual Aid (*Union des Juifs pour la Résistance et l'entraide*, UJRE), the Bund – which alongside the Workmen's Circle (*Arbeter Ring*) defended a Jewish socialism linked to Yiddish culture and language – and the Zionist-leaning Federation of Jewish Societies of France (*Fédération des sociétés juives de France*, FSJF). The upheaval triggered by the Slánský trial in Czechoslovakia in late 1952 and the supposed “Doctors' Plot” in the USSR in early 1953 – two affairs that revealed the scope of Stalinist antisemitism – spasmodically heightened this tendency toward division already begun in the late 1940s. The shockwave profoundly disrupted Jewish life, leading to divisions and the constitution of two blocs within the community: one Communist and highly homogeneous, recruiting among Jewish immigrants of Yiddish language and culture, the other marked by a certain internal diversity in terms of both origins (immigrants and “natives,” Sephardim and Ashkenazim) and political or religious orientation, but united in their visceral opposition to the Communists.

The Constitution of Rival Commemorative Blocs

As Yael Zerubavel has argued, “the commemoration of historical events is not only a powerful means of reinforcing social solidarity but also an arena of struggle over power and control.”[26] That is why political conflict – which reflected a struggle for influence among the components of the Jewish archipelago of Paris – expressed itself on the commemorative stage in particular. In this respect, the first years fol-

25 Samuel Ghiles-Meilhac, *Le CRIF: De la Résistance juive à la tentation du lobby* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2011), 18–39.

26 Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), xix.

lowing liberation until the late 1940s unfolded beneath a contrasting light. This brief moment of unanimity, which was rooted in the experience of persecution and the management of its consequences, saw several joint commemorative ceremonies organized – under the auspices of the CGD and the CRIF – by Jewish groups opposed on the political level. However, this half-decade was not spared the tensions that would deeply fracture the Parisian Jewish community during the 1950s. Conscious of the fragility of the union forged during these initial gatherings, the organizers sought to propose a ritual that was as consensual as possible by equitably distributing speaking time among the representatives of the participating organizations, which included artists or artistic groups inspired by different political sensibilities, as was the case of the commemorations of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising organized by the CGD on April 19, 1945, and April 20, 1946.[27]

This irenicism did not last long. The outbreak of the Cold War soon had an effect on Jewish commemorative activity, whose fragmentation from 1948 onward led to the formation of rival commemorative blocs. That year, the growing condemnation of Soviet policy in Eastern Europe by the Bundists translated into their withdrawal from the joint commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the organization of their own ceremony on April 16, 1948.[28] The following year, worsening relations between the USSR and Israel, together with the adoption of a pro-Arab policy by the Soviets, led to a deterioration in relations between Parisian Zionists and Communists and the end of their commemorative collaboration, with the UJRE commemorating the uprising alone on April 17, 1949.[29] The following year, Communists, Zionists, and Bundists organized for the first time three distinct commemorations of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.[30] The polemics sparked by the Slánský trial and the “Doctors’ Plot” heightened the opposition in the commemorative domain between “progressives” – as Jewish Communists referred to themselves at the time – and their detractors, leading to an almost systematic doubling of all major

27 “Di troyer-akademye tsum 2tn yortog fun geto-oyfshtand,” *Undzer Shtime*, April 28, 1945, 6; “Di haskore-fayerung funem kamf in varshever geto,” *Undzer Vort*, April 27, 1945, 1; “Di fayerlekhe ondenk-akademye in Pleyel tsum 3tn yortog fun varshever geto-oyfshtand,” *Naye Prese*, April 23, 1946, 1; “Impozante fayerung tsum 3tn yortog fun varshever geto-oyfshtand,” *Undzer Shtime*, April 27, 1946, 1; “Groyse fayerung tsum 3tn yortog fun varshever geto-oyfshtand”, *Undzer Vort*, April 26, 1946, 3.

28 “Grandyeze yisker-fayerung,” *Undzer Shtime*, April 18–19, 1948, 1.

29 “Dos yidishe Pariz hot virdik baert di heldn fun varshever geto,” *Naye Prese*, April 19, 1949, 1–3.

30 “Di impozante akademye tsum ondenk fun oyfshtand in varshever geto,” *Naye Prese*, April 20, 1950, 3; “Impozanter ondenk-ovnt lekoved dem 7tn yortog fun heldishn geto-oyfshtand in Varshe,” *Undzer Shtime*, April 21, 1950, 3–4; “Nouvelles de France,” *Journal de la Communauté*, no. 4, April 28, 1950, 5.

Parisian ceremonies. While the holding of multiple commemorations of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, sometimes simultaneously, represented the most striking feature of this fragmentation, the commemoration of other events – such as the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup or the execution of approximately fifty Jewish hostages at Mont-Valérien on December 15, 1941 – also gave rise to concurrent ceremonies, driven especially by the anti-Communist Jewish deportee and veterans' groups created in 1952 and 1953, in the wake of polemics on antisemitism in the USSR and popular democracies.

An important part of the opposition between the commemorative blocs played out in the numerous efforts their leaders made to attract the largest number of people to their gatherings, or at least more than their opponents. In a competitive commemorative environment, audience size demonstrated the success of the commemoration and thereby, it was believed, the degree of conviction behind the political positions defended by its organizers. In advance of ceremonies, competing organizers used different strategies to ensure the presence of a large audience. Since the promotion of a commemorative gathering required spreading word among the target audience, organizers placed more and more announcements in the Jewish press, notably in Yiddish-language dailies, in both the front and middle pages. These announcements sought not only to inform the target audience about the date, time, location, and purpose of the ceremony, but to also encourage them to attend by presenting participation at the gathering as a moral obligation.[31] This was also done by emphasizing its capacity to unite and the support garnered by its organizers,[32] as well as by developing programs with attractive content. The campaign involved the presence of renowned public figures, the participation of distinguished artists, and even the projection of films.[33] Yet the promotion of the commemorations was not limited to the period before the event, as it was also important to its organizers that it be the subject of laudatory articles afterwards. Once finished, commemorative gatherings began a "second

---

31 For instance: "Zuntik veln ale yidn fun Pariz opgebn koved di 48 dershosene orevnikes oyf Mon Valeryen," *Undzer Vort*, December 18, 1954, 1; "Morgn ale tsum Vel d'Hiv," *Undzer Vort*, July 15, 1958, 3.

32 For example: "Liste fun sosyetes, velkhe hobn gegebn zeyer onshlus in der morgndiker geto-akademye un rufn zeyere mitglider in ir onteyltsunemen," *Naye Prese*, April 18–19, 1964, 1; "Yidishe folks-organizatsyes rufn parizer yidn zikh tsu bateylikn in der geto-fayerung montik ovnt in groysn zal fun 'Mityalite'," *Undzer Vort*, April 18, 1964, 7.

33 Among many examples, see: untitled announcement, *Undzer Shtime*, April 14, 1948, 1 (Yehudit Moretzka presented as a "well-known singer"); untitled announcement, *Naye Prese,* April 18, 1952, 1 (the movie *Undzere Kinder* shown "for the first time in Paris"); untitled announcement, *Undzer Vort*, April 19, 1966, 3 (Gideon Hausner introduced as the "attorney general for the Eichmann trial").

life" in the top stories of the Jewish press, with the media representing a parallel scene to commemorative activity[34] – to the point where the commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1965 included "a special desk [. . .] for the members of the press"[35] installed on the main stage of the ceremony.

Finally, in this competitive context, actors were not simply content with presenting their gatherings in the best light possible, but also directly attacked their opponents. Non-Communist Jewish organizations constantly accused "progressive" organizations of using their commemoratives gatherings for purely political purposes. The annual commemoration of all victims of the Holocaust, organized at Bagneux cemetery by the Union of Jewish Societies of France (*Union des sociétés juives de France*, USJF) – a Communist-leaning organization bringing together mutual aid societies for Jewish immigrants – was, for instance, the target of frequent denunciations of this type. In September 1953, the Yiddish daily of Zionist persuasion *Undzer Vort* (Our Word) – the sworn enemy of its Communist counterpart *Naye Prese* (New Press) – saluted the refusal of multiple Jewish groups to "participate in the Communist plot, that horrible blasphemy of Communists for whom even a cemetery is a favorable place for garnering political and demagogical capital."[36] Communist Jewish organizations often reproached their opponents for working against the unity appropriate to paying tribute to the dead, a unity that they also claimed to desire. "Are the ashes of a burned Communist of a different color than those of a Zionist?" asked a speaker on September 17, 1961, during a USJF ceremony in Bagneux.[37] Anti-Communist organizations endeavored to return this accusation of division, denouncing their opponents as promoters of a fictitious unity, and presenting themselves as the true protectors of Jewish cohesion with respect to both memory and the shared challenges of the present and future. In July 1952, while explaining in the press why the Independent Association of Former Jewish Deportees and Inmates (*Association indépendante des anciens déportés et internés juifs*, AIADIJ) – an anti-Communist group created in February 1952[38] – did not want to commemorate the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup together with the Association of Former Jewish Deportees (*Amicale des anciens déportés juifs*, AADJF), which was close to the UJRE, one of its

---

34 François Lustman, *Entre Shoah, communisme et sionisme: Les Juifs yiddish de Paris et leur presse au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012).

35 "Iber 3 000 parizer yidn hobn virdik baert di heldn fun varshever geto-oyfshtand," *Undzer Vort*, April 28, 1965, 1.

36 "Toyznter yidn oyfn beys-oylem Banye," *Undzer Vort*, September 14, 1953, 3.

37 "Toyznter yidn fun farshidene shatirungen hobn baert virdik di umgekumene," *Naye Prese*, September 21, 1961, 4.

38 "Gegrindet a nayem fareyn fun gev. deportirte un internirte," *Undzer Vort*, January 14, 1952, 3.

leaders indicated his group's refusal to "suffer blackmail under the pretext of the word unity."[39]

Numerous observers of Jewish commemorative activity strongly criticized this state of almost permanent conflict, believing that the commemoration of the Holocaust and the Second World War should suspend rather than exacerbate conflict: "Jews, good Jews, wonder why we cannot organize a joint commemoration in Paris for our martyrs. The Nazis did not ask what party one belonged to or what ideology one supported when they dragged the victims from their beds,"[40] wrote the journalist Nathan Silberberg in July 1961 on the occasion of the commemoration of the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup, which had split once again into two concurrent ceremonies. Attempts in Paris to forge the unity of Jewish groups, at least for the duration of a commemoration, nevertheless yielded limited results, with the exception of occasional joint events such as the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising on April 21, 1963.[41] This was all the more true as the actors seeking to lead these initiatives actually leaned in favor of the anti-Communist camp,[42] whether it was the Consistoire, which claimed the neutrality conferred by its religious mission, the CRIF, which emphasized its function as an apolitical umbrella organization representative on the national scale, or the Memorial of the Unknown Jewish Martyr (*Mémorial du martyr juif inconnu*, MMJI), a monument inaugurated on October 30, 1956, which sought the following year, and not without difficulty, to assert itself as the central space within the commemorative Jewish landscape in the French capital.[43]

The Affirmation of Partisan Identities

Thus, while some communal activists believed that paying tribute to the dead should avoid partisan disputes, others considered the commemoration of the Holocaust as such a crucial and sacred mission that it was impossible to make com-

39 "Eynheyt, yo! Ober mit vemen?," *Undzer Vort*, July 3, 1952, 3.

40 "Tseremonye lekoved di yidishe martirer fun 16tn yuli 1942," *Undzer Vort*, July 17, 1961, 3.

41 "Cérémonie grandiose à la mémoire du 20e anniversaire de la révolte du ghetto de Varsovie," *Le Monde juif*, no. 32–33, January-June 1963, 105–112.

42 Perego, *Pleurons-les*, 96–134.

43 On the MMJI, see: Annette Wieviorka, "Un lieu de mémoire et d'histoire: Le mémorial du martyr juif inconnu," *Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles*, no.1–2 (1987), 107–132; Simon Perego, "Les commémorations de la destruction des Juifs d'Europe au Mémorial du martyr juif inconnu du milieu des années 1950 à la fin des années 1960," *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah* 2, no. 193 (2010), 471–507.

promise on its behalf. Therefore, commemorative ceremonies became one of the most propitious places for the expression and exacerbation of political conflicts. Yet in doing so, the commemorations organized by Jewish groups on the basis of partisan belonging also helped to reinforce them and to thereby harden the opposition to their opponents. As the Bundist, Communist, and Zionist organizers of ceremonies were openly engaged politically, their ceremonies also proved to be highly politicized, with various markers bringing them closer to the register of the political meeting. First, the identity of speakers contributed to the politicization of commemorations, as it was always Bundist, Communist, and Zionist leaders who spoke, along with public figures supporting their cause from near or far.[44] For example, the commemorations of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising organized by the UJRE movement saw intellectuals close to the French Communist Party (*Parti communiste français*, PCF) express themselves, such as the poet Paul Éluard.[45] This was also true of politicians who were party members, like Maurice Kriegel-Valrimont,[46] as well as official or non-official representatives from Communist countries, such as the ambassador of Poland on many occasions[47] or the former resistance fighter and deportee, now an East German citizen, Willy Heun, in 1956.[48]

The artistic program that ended some commemorations did not escape this politicization process either. For example, support for Zionism was evoked during the artistic section of FSJF commemorations through the use of texts composed in Hebrew, such as the Israeli hymn *Hatikva* (The Hope), the poems of Hannah Szenes who was the heroine of the Yishuv (the Jewish community of Palestine before the creation of Israel), and the songs of the Palmach, one of the Jewish paramilitary forces in Mandatory Palestine.[49] Finally, even the location and decorum of ceremonies were marked by the political identity of their organizers, with many Communist gatherings organized in the Père Lachaise cemetery – an im-

---

44 Simon Perego, "Commemorating the Holocaust during the First Postwar Decade: Jewish Initiatives and non-Jewish Actors in France," in *Before the Holocaust Had Its Name*, ed. Fritz, Kovács, and Rásky, 223–239.

45 "3 000 yidn oyf der akademye tsum ondenk fun di oyfshtand fun varshever geto," *Naye Prese*, April 22, 1952, 3.

46 "Dos yidishe Pariz hot virdik baert di umshterblekhe heldishe kemfers," *Naye Prese*, April 22, 1960, 1.

47 For instance: "Grandyeze geto-akademye in Alhambra bay onveznheyt fun iber dray toyznt yidn," *Naye Prese*, April 22, 1958, 1.

48 "Paris commémore l'insurrection du ghetto de Varsovie," *Naye Prese*, April 28–29, 1956, 8.

49 For example: "Impozante troyer-akademye tsum 12tn yortog fun varshever geto-oyfshtand," *Undzer Vort*, April 21, 1955, 3.

portant *lieu de mémoire* of the French Left[50] – and with Bundist commemorations of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising never taking place without the presence of the red flags of the Bund and the *Arbeter Ring*, as well as portraits of their most famous activists who perished during the uprising, as pointed out by the summaries published in the Yiddish-language Bundist daily *Undzer Shtime* (Our Voice).[51]

For the Bundists, the Communists, and the Zionists, ceremonies in memory of the Jews that took part in the resistance in Warsaw were an occasion to celebrate the most important feat of arms of the Jewish resistance against Nazism, but also an important part of their own history, with the three political movements being represented among the ghetto's insurgents. This commemoration thus provided speakers with an opportunity to point out the exploits of their own side, which was a source of political legitimacy during the postwar period, all while reaffirming the partisan belonging and memory that they laid claim to. Bundist speakers welcomed the Bund's active role in the preparation and unfolding of the revolt, as well as the activities of this party in Eastern Europe even before the Second World War among the Jewish population, preparing it for the revolt by shaping it politically. On April 19, 1962, the anniversary of the uprising, the New York Bundist Alexander Erlich, who had been invited by his Parisian colleagues, declared: "April 19 [the first day of the revolt] was in large measure the result of the decades of education and transformation of Jewish life by the Bund, which had influenced other movements by setting a new tone, a tone of fighting."[52] For the Zionists, the ghetto uprising represented the beginnings of the national struggle of Jews for the independence of their state. For example, on April 15, 1950, FSJF Vice President Reuven Grinberg "emphasized how much this glorious page in Jewish history was connected to the one written by the combatants of Israel," and the rabbi representing the French section of the World Jewish Congress (WJC), René Kapel, followed suit by presenting the uprising as "one of the sacrifices that

---

50 Madeleine Rébérioux, "Le Mur des Fédérés. Rouge, 'sang craché'," in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 2003 [1st ed. 1984–1992]), vol. 2, 535–558; Danielle Tartakowsky, *Nous irons chanter sur vos tombes: Le Père-Lachaise, XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris: Aubier, 1999). A famous battle took place in May 1871 during the Commune's repression – known as the "semaine sanglante" ("Bloody Week") – in this cemetery, with many "Communards" shot in front of a wall that was later named the "Mur des Fédérés" (Communards' Wall) and became a rallying point for Leftist groups.

51 For instance: "Dos parizer yidntum fayert oyf a virdikn oyfn dem 11tn yortsayt fun oyfshtand in varshever geto," *Undzer Shtime*, April 20, 1954, 1.

52 "Di ondenk-manifestatsye tsum 19tn yortog fun oyfshtand in varshever geto," *Undzer Shtime*, April 24, 1962, 4.

enabled the Jewish people to revive a Jewish homeland."[53] For the Communists, mentioning the revolt allowed them to emphasize the USSR and the Red Army, by establishing a connection between the outbreak of the uprising and the victory of the Soviets at Stalingrad a few months earlier. On April 19, 1951, UJRE representative Albert Youdine asserted with regard to the insurgents that "their fate was connected to that of all freedom fighters throughout the world, chief among them the Soviet army, whose victories prompted the Jews of the ghetto to take up arms."[54]

The ceremonies' organizers were aware of one another's narratives, with the various accounts of this revolt serving as the source of intense polemics. The Zionists and Bundists especially reproached the Communists for remaining silent about the participation of non-Communist Jewish resistance members in the uprising and for overemphasizing the assistance provided to the insurgents by the Polish Communist resistance. "Today's falsifiers of history 'know' with certainty that there were no Zionists among the combatants of the ghetto, only Communists, and that the Polish and the Russian army greatly helped the rebels of the ghetto," wrote an *Undzer Vort* journalist with irony in his summary of the FSJF commemoration of April 16, 1953.[55] Yet opposition to Communist accounts did not only involve factual elements. The debate was also about the interpretation of the uprising and the meaning ascribed to the heroism and sacrifice of the rebels. During this same commemoration, the Zionist leader Marc Jarblum denounced "the terrible profanation of God's name that the falsifiers of history – the Communists – have committed with regard to the sacred memory of these heroes, many of whom died with *Shema Israel* on their lips, and their thoughts directed toward our country Israel."[56] He also reproached the "progressives" for understanding the revolt solely in light of their anti-fascist and pro-Soviet frame of reference, denying the religious and Zionist aspirations of Jewish resistance members.

Speakers affirmed their support for a political cause on the commemorative stage directly as well, not just through evocations of the past. The figures who spoke at Communist gatherings were always sure to mention the major structural topics of the PCF's political discourse. For instance, on July 15, 1951, Marcel Paul, the president of the National Federation of Resistant and Patriotic Deportees and Internees (Fédération nationale des déportés et internés résistants patriotes,

53 "Les Juifs de Paris commémorent le 7e anniversaire du soulèvement du ghetto de Varsovie," *La Terre retrouvée*¸ no. 14 (274), April 15, 1950, 11.

54 "Di mentshheyt vet zign! Rede fun A. Yudin," *Naye Prese*, April 21–22, 1951, 2.

55 "Der yisker ovnt in 'Mutualite'," *Undzer Vort*, April 20, 1953, 3.

56 "Der yisker ovnt in 'Mutualite'," *Undzer Vort*, April 20, 1953, 3. *Shema Israel* ("Hear, O Israel" in Hebrew) is the Jewish believer's profession of individual faith.

FNDIRP) close to the Communist party, mentioned before the Vélodrome d'Hiver "the atrocities in Korea committed against women and children, which are a repetition of Nazi atrocities, and should be strongly condemned by all honorable men regardless of their opinion regarding the causes of the Korean conflict," before proceeding with a broader denunciation of American foreign policy in Southeast Asia.[57] Parisian Bundists offered speech-length praise to the Social Democrat and anti-Communist left, as well as criticism of the Soviet bloc. On April 18, 1953, the New Yorker Borekh Shefner, who had been invited by Parisian Bundists to their commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, asked his audience to lead "the struggle against dictatorship in all its forms, the struggle against slavery, the hatred of peoples and the jingoism that is the cause of wars," and celebrated "the love of justice and equity, of a free and socially honest world."[58] Unsurprisingly, the Zionists concentrated on the systematic defense of the state of Israel and the accusation of its enemies and detractors. On April 17, 1951, during the FSJF's commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, its president Israel Jefroykin solemnly declared: "After honoring the sacred memory of our martyrs, let us raise our heads to the East, toward Israel, the glory of the Jewish people."[59]

In the context of the Cold War, antisemitism was also a divisive matter of concern frequently addressed by speakers during commemorations.[60] While Jewish Communists and their guests praised all the Communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, their opponents repeatedly criticized the Jews' fate in the Soviet bloc, arguing that honoring the memory of the Holocaust should lead to fighting the perpetuation of antisemitism wherever it existed. In their ceremonies, Parisian Bundist militants frequently paid homage to their comrades Henryk Ehrlich and Wiktor Alter, who had died at the hands of the NKVD during World War Two.[61] In the meantime, Zionists focused their criticisms on the current situation of Jews in the Soviet bloc. In 1962, for instance, during a Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemoration, the writer Mendel Mann declared that their complete isolation

---

57 "Dos yidishe Pariz hot oyf a geeyniktn un virdikn oyfn baert baym Velodrom d'Hiver zayne 30 toyznt martirer," *Naye Prese*, July 16, 1951, 4.

58 "Virdiker farloyf fun der groyser troyer-akademye fun Bund un Arbeter-ring tsum 10tn yortog fun varshever geto-oyfshtand," *Undzer Shtime*, April 20, 1953, 3.

59 "Ayndruksfule troyer-akademye tsum 8tn yortog fun geto-oyfshtand in Varshe," *Undzer Vort*, April 19, 1951, 3.

60 Johannes Heuman, "'Comme les Juifs sous l'Occupation': La mémoire de la Shoah dans la lutte antiraciste en France, 1944–1967," *Archives juives: Revue d'histoire des Juifs de France* 51, no. 2 (2018), 39–58.

61 For instance: "Impozante fayerung lekoved dem 12tn yortsayt fun oyfshtand fun varshever geto," *Undzer Shtime*, April 21, 1955, 2. Ehrlich committed suicide in his jail cell in 1942 and Alter was executed by firing squad in 1943.

had a goal: "the liquidation of Jews as a people, their spiritual destruction."[62] Moreover, in the Zionist leaders' minds, such manifestations of antisemitism continued through the Soviet policy in the Near East and its support to Arab countries whose leaders – beginning with Nasser – were often described as Hitler's followers. The denunciation of antisemitism behind the Iron Curtain was constant but reached several peaks in intensity in relation to events such as the Prague Trial in 1952; the "Doctors' Plot" in 1953; the revelation of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee's liquidation in 1956; the publication in 1964 of an antisemitic brochure in Kiev under the auspices of the Ukrainian Science Academy; and the Six-Day War in 1967. In 1956, for example, Perets Guterman, a local Bundist leader, evoked "the Stalinist murderer of Jewish writers and of Jewish Culture" during a ceremony in memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.[63] But in the year in question, exceptionally in the context of de-Stalinization, the Communist commemoration dedicated to the same event yielded the floor to a Leftist Zionist speaker who said: "The recent news of Jewish writers' liquidation in the Soviet Union has left us in a state of astonishment and mourning. We would like to be reassured regarding the possibility for Jewish culture in the future to freely develop and flourish in the USSR."[64]

In response to the recurrent criticisms of the Soviet Union, Communist Jews used to explicitly defend the USSR by underlining what this country had done for the Jews, and they did so constantly from the second half of the 1940s until the end of the 1960s. For instance, during the first Communist commemoration dedicated to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1949, Albert Youdine affirmed: "the Jewish people knows and nobody could make us forget [. . .] that without Stalingrad we would not have been here today, that without Stalingrad we would not have had the State of Israel."[65] Another strategy consisted of pointing out manifestations of antisemitism in the Western bloc, especially in the United States. In 1948, while giving a speech at a commemoration dedicated to the first shooting of Jewish hostages by the Germans in Paris in 1941, Yidl Korman, a speaker representing the first organization of former Jewish camp survivors under Communist leadership created after the war (soon to become the AADJF), declared: "Anti-Communism, anti-Sovietism

62 CDJC, Claude Kelman's files, MDIII-82, Mendel Mann, *La révolte héroïque du ghetto de Varsovie* (Paris: FSJF, 1962), unpaginated.
63 "Der troyer un dermonung-ovnt tsum 13tn yortsayt fun varshever geto-oyfshtand," *Undzer Shtime*, April 21, 1956, 2.
64 "Après la 'déstalinisation', les milieux juifs d'extrême-gauche à Paris 'bougent' eux aussi," *Journal des Communautés*, no. 149, May 11, 1956, 9.
65 "Dos yidishe Pariz hot virdik baert di heldn fun varshever geto," *Naye Prese*, April 19, 1949, 3.

always pair with Anti-Semitism, racism and bloody extermination of the Jews.”[66] At the beginning of the 1950s, the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg was addressed by representatives of Jewish Communist organizations with the same argument. In September 1953, a few months after the Rosenbergs’ execution, the president of the USJF declared during the commemorative ceremony in memory of all the victims of the Holocaust in the Bagneux cemetery: “How could we, us common people and leaders of mutual-aid societies [. . .] who do not forget the terrible years of Hitlerism, not recall the memory of the two new victims of modern Anti-Semitism, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, the proud democrats and peace fighters?”[67]

Jewish Communists sometimes also denounced other forms of racism, mostly when their protest allowed them to criticize the United States and its allies. In 1951, for example, a Jewish Communist activist and former prisoner of Auschwitz, Nahum Fansten, took part in a commemoration of the first massive arrest of Parisian foreign Jews and of their transfer to French internment camps. During his speech, he denounced “the racial condemnation of the negro Willie Mac Gee in the State of Mississippi,” referring to the thirty-six-year-old black truck driver, who was arrested in 1945, accused of raping a white woman, condemned by an all-white jury in less than a day, and executed in 1951 following two additional trials.[68] The same year, in another commemoration, Alfred Grant, yet another Jewish Communist militant, targeted the United States by affirming that “those who armed the Nazi bandits tolerate anti-Semitism at home and yearn for racial discrimination.”[69] For their part, while denouncing racism in general, Zionists and Bundists mostly focused, as previously said, on antisemitism, especially its manifestations beyond the Iron Curtain. Even the denunciation of acts of racial hatred or discourse was influenced on both sides by the Cold War.

---

66 “Ayndruksfule troyer-akademye tsum 7tn yortog fun di 48 dershosene orevnikes oyf Mon-Valeryen,” *Naye Prese*, December 17, 1948, 2.

67 “Iber 15 000 parizer yidn baern dem ondenk fun di martirer un heldn,” *Naye Prese*, September 14, 1953, 1.

68 “Le pèlerinage des Israélites à leur ancien camp d’internement de Pithiviers,” *La République du Centre*, May 15, 1951, 3.

69 “15 toyznt yidn baern dem ondenk fun zeyere noente un fun ale kdoyshim,” *Naye Prese*, October 8, 1951, 3.

Conclusion

From 1944 to the late 1960s, commemorations of the Holocaust were a ritual deeply rooted in a divided and politicized Parisian Jewish community in the context of the Cold War, especially among immigrants from Eastern Europe. While often sharing the same way of conducting and ritualizing ceremonies, a number of their groups turned the commemorative stage into a political resource – a space for consolidating partisan identities and for expressing ideological conflicts – thereby contributing to the politicization of memory in relation to polemical topics such as Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East and Israel, the conditions for Jewish life in the USSR and in its allied countries, the rearmament of West Germany, or more broadly the opposition between the Eastern and the Western blocs. A moment of mourning and remembrance, the commemoration could also serve as a platform for actors who made no distinction between their Jewish identity, ideological convictions, and their involvement in the bipolar confrontation. Therefore, in the years following liberation and at least until the end of the 1960s, commemorations were not only a means for the reconstruction of Jewish life, but also a space for expressing political belonging within a fragmented community.

In the following decades, the commemoration of the Holocaust remained a polemical matter in France. However, the subject of controversy and the actors involved gradually changed. While polemics of the early postwar period only concerned the Jews (with few exceptions) – their commitment or opposition to Communism and their involvement in transnational politics regarding the Cold War – the 1970s and 1980s saw a nationalization of the debate, with increasing denunciations of the attacks perpetrated by the Vichy regime against the Jews between 1940 and 1944.[70] A new generation of Jewish activists, represented by the outstanding figure of Serge Klarsfeld, began to claim public recognition of the Vichy crimes against the Jewish population in France. Commemoration became a useful tool for such multi-faceted public campaigns, which contributed to making the Holocaust more visible within the French public sphere. The climax was reached in Paris in July 1992, when part of the audience booed the French president François Mitterrand during the commemoration of the Vel' d'Hiv' roundup, demanding an official gesture of acknowledgment of France's responsibility in the Holocaust.[71]

At this point, the Soviet Union had ceased to exist only a few months earlier, marking the formal end of the Cold War. These two parallel events, even though

70 Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy*, 155–194.
71 Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust*, 108–140.

not comparable in scope, reveal the transformation of the political and memorial configuration in France regarding the commemoration of the Holocaust by the early 1990s. Having already lost its relevance for several years, the Cold War framework for Holocaust memory had now "officially" disappeared among Parisian Jews. For most of them, postwar quarrels between Zionists, Communists, and Bundists, and their impact on the memorialization of Jewish wartime experiences, had fallen into oblivion.

Arkadi Zeltser, Yad Vashem

The Cold War and Holocaust Memorialization in Soviet Publications of the 1960s

In 1961, Masha Rolnik (Maria Rol'nikaitė), a survivor of the Vilna Ghetto and the Stutthof concentration camp, submitted her manuscript to the Lithuanian Publishing House of Political and Scientific Literature. It was a diary she had written in the ghetto and subsequently reconstructed from memory. Rol'nikaitė translated the original Yiddish text into Lithuanian herself. The publishing house sent the manuscript titled *Turio papasakoti* (I Must Tell) for review to the Institute of Party History of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Lithuania. The reviewing process took almost a year.[1] The verdict ultimately given by the Lithuanian party historian was a typical product of its time: it linked the past with the present, yoking the Holocaust to the ongoing confrontation between the USSR and the West. In the reviewer's opinion, Rol'nikaitė's book was "a powerful indictment of fascism, which is currently experiencing a resurgence in the USA and West Germany, being openly supported by the ruling circles in these countries."[2] Such formulations clearly indicated that the likelihood of publishing materials about the Holocaust largely depended on the aims of Soviet foreign propaganda. Following the publication of its Lithuanian edition in Vilnius, Rol'nikaitė's book came out in Russian in Vilnius and Moscow, and in Yiddish in Warsaw.[3]

Several distinct categories of Soviet citizens were involved in the ideological clashes of the Cold War. One group sincerely believed in the reality of the com-

1 Mariia Rol'nikaite, *I vse eto pravda* (St. Petersburg: Zolotoi vek, 2002), 499, 523. On Masha Rol'nikaitė's book, see: Anja Tippner, "The Writings of a Soviet Anne Frank? Masha Rol'nikaite's Holocaust Memoir *I Have to Tell* and Its Place in Soviet Literature," in *Representation of the Holocaust in Soviet Literature and Film, Search and Research*, ed. Arkadi Zeltser 19 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2013), 59–80; Gennady Estraikh, *Jews in the Soviet Union: A History. Volume 5: After Stalin 1953–1967* (New York: New York University Press, 2023), 242–249.

2 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), 2006.436.3.B4-F4 (Masha Rolnikaite papers). I would like to thank Vadim Altskan for sending me a copy of this letter.

3 Mariia Rol'nikaite, *Ia dolzhna rasskazat'* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1965); Mariia Rol'nikaite, *Ia dolzhna rasskazat'* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1965); Mashe Rolnik, *Ikh muz dertseyln* (Warsaw: Yiddish bukh; Moscow: Agentstvo pechati "Novosti," 1965).

Note: I would like to thank Michael Sigal for translating the article into English and Shlomit Shulhani for her valuable comments.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-005

munist-capitalist contradictions. Others were mere opportunists who engaged in these activities to advance their careers, without bothering to go into the actual historical events. There was also another group of Soviet opportunists: people who partook of the official Soviet discourse, while simultaneously promoting their own vision of history. Therefore, when reading Soviet publications, it is sometimes hard to decide whether their authors really believed in the immutable Soviet values. It is only on the basis of scattered hints that we can reconstruct the authors' intentions, provided that the authors really intended to say more than they could let on.

A segment of the liberal-minded Soviet intelligentsia grasped the rules of this political game and exploited the Cold War situation to bypass the censors. In March 1965, Boris Riurikov, editor-in-chief of the *Inostrannaia literatura* journal, wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, expressing his displeasure at the censors' decision to ban Arthur Miller's play *Incident at Vichy*, which touched upon the Holocaust. Riurikov knew the system inside out: back in 1955–1958, he had held the important post of deputy head of the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. His reasoning nicely encapsulates the mechanism of pressuring the authorities into making the desired decision. In his letter, Riurikov uses Cold War-era arguments: "We thought that, nowadays, amid mounting racial tensions in the US and the rehabilitation of war criminals in West Germany, the work of a prominent playwright who attacks Nazi ideology and politics from a humanist standpoint could be published in our journal."[4] Remarkably, his appeal worked: Miller's play was published and staged at a Moscow theater as early as 1967.

These facts clearly show that the likelihood of a book on Jewish matters being published in the USSR at the time was unpredictable. Whereas Rol'nikaitė learned the rules while preparing the book for publication, the experienced Riurikov knew how to build his case to achieve the desired result. In both instances—whether by accident or through conscious manipulation—the outcome was determined by Soviet foreign policy considerations.

The very fact that reports transgressing the ideological boundaries were occasionally able to pass the censors reflects the existence of some additional opportunities, of which the authors did not always take full advantage. Thus, there were references in the Russian-language press to six million individuals killed "by the Nazis during the war solely because of their Jewishness,"[5] or statements to the

4 S. D. Tavanets et al., eds., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura 1965–1972: Dokumenty 1965–1972* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009), 16–17.

5 G. Mukhraneli, "Serdtse ne mozhet prostit'," *Zaria Vostoka*, March 15, 1964.

effect that the Treblinka camp was built "for the express purpose of exterminating the Jewish population."[6] Such instances—which are rather atypical of Soviet discourse—indicate that there were no hard and fast rules about the presentation of the Holocaust in the USSR. They also suggest that, throughout almost the entire Soviet period, the practice of Holocaust memorialization constituted a kind of "grey area" lacking clear boundaries. This was true of texts and films, as well as of the mass grassroots activity by Soviet Jews, who erected monuments and held memorial services.[7] This raises some crucial questions: to what extent did the willingness of the intelligentsia (both Jewish and non-Jewish alike) to exploit this grey area contribute to the representation of the Holocaust in the public space, including within the context of the Cold War? Are we to analyze the attitude of the Soviet authorities toward the Holocaust in the 1960s as a specifically "Jewish" policy or as a reflection of broader processes unfolding in the country? This seems all the more important since that period saw an active conflict between the "liberal" and the "conservative" factions of the intelligentsia, including employees of Party and governmental ideological bodies, with each of these factions advocating a different model for the future development of the USSR.

Several important books and articles have been written about the attitude of the Soviet authorities to the subject of the Holocaust in the 1960s, and the representation of this subject in texts and on the screen.[8] Some of these works, especially those written in the West and Israel during the Cold War period, tend to concentrate on the restrictions, official propaganda efforts, and the differences

---

6 A. Burlak, "Taina osobniaka na Frei Gaspar (soobshchaet correspondent APN)," *Leningradskaia pravda*, March 25, 1967.

7 Olga Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013); Arkadi Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2018). This article does not attempt to analyze Yiddish- and Polish-language texts. However, they reflect the same general trends as do the Russian-language media.

8 Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948–1967: A Documented Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 90–125; Lukasz Hirszowicz, "The Holocaust in the Soviet Mirror," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupies Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 29–59; 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; Leona Toker, "The Holocaust in Russian Literature," in *The Literature of the Holocaust*, ed. Alan Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 118–130; Annie Epelboin and Assia Kovriguina, *La Littérature des Ravins: Écrire sur la Shoah en URSS* (Paris: Robert Laffonte, 2013); Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust;* Nati Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions to the Eichmann Trial: A Preliminary Investigation 1960–1965," *Yad Vashem Studies* 35, no. 2 (2007): 103–141; Estraikh, *After Stalin*, 223–275.

between the Soviet image of the Holocaust and the actual historical events. Others, particularly those produced during the last decades, focus more on the efforts of the intelligentsia to overcome those official restrictions. Much has also been written about the clashes between liberal and conservative Soviet circles in the 1960s in general.[9] The goal of this article is to analyze the influence of Soviet foreign and domestic policy on texts about the Holocaust during this period.

This volume clearly demonstrates that similar attitudes toward Holocaust representation developed in various countries of the Eastern Bloc. At the same time, each country had its own history of the Holocaust, with different possibilities for public discussion of the Jewish topic. Not surprisingly, the case of the Soviet Union, which regarded itself as the key player in the ideological battles, is particularly ambivalent. Given this general historical context, the article will examine the following issues: 1) the significance of the Holocaust to the conflict between the liberal and the conservative segments of the Soviet intelligentsia, 2) the impact of the ideological confrontation with the West on the nature and number of publications dealing with the Holocaust, and 3) the relations with other countries in the Eastern Bloc, and their influence on Holocaust-themed publications in the Soviet Union.[10]

The "Lightly-Laid" Russocentrism and the Atmosphere of the 1960s

World War II had a very strong impact on all segments of Soviet society: the ruling class, the intelligentsia, and the general population. Virtually every family had lost some of its members: civilians murdered in the Soviet territories occupied by the Nazis and their allies, Red Army soldiers killed in action, or POWs

---

9 See, for example, Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: Dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR 1953–1985* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2002); Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Viacheslav Ogryzko, *Okhraniteli i liberaly*: *v zatianuvshemsia poiske kompromissa*, vol. 1–2 (Moscow: Literaturnaia Rossiia, 2015).

10 One question that lies outside the scope of this article is the Soviet coverage of the participation of the local population in the Holocaust, especially when it came to prominent Nazi collaborators, who had moved to the West in the postwar period. The Cold War seems to have served as a catalyst for depicting this aspect of the Holocaust as well. Articles and books published in the 1960s brought up the same arguments that were used when discussing the issue of German Nazis living in the West.

dying in enemy captivity.[11] Thousands of people arrested during the war by the Soviet security services were shot or imprisoned in the Gulag.[12]

The mobilizing Russocentric idea, which crystallized in the years of the war, did not lose its relevance in the postwar period. At the same time, the authorities rehabilitated the class-based approach, which had been completely discarded during the war. The idea that class distinctions mattered more than ethnic differences, which had its heyday in the USSR of the 1920–1930s, was once again turned into an all-encompassing dogma in the Cold War years. The 1960s also saw the emergence of the "Myth of the War," which transformed the victory of 1945 into the second most important event in Soviet history (after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917).[13]

In light of this ideological framework, the party reviewer accused Masha Rol'nikaitė of adhering to the "single stream" theory—which, in her case, referred to the absence of a purely negative, "class-based" depiction of the members of the Judenrat and the Jewish police. Another notable feature of the Soviet censorship apparatus was its insistence that creators not only remove unacceptable facts and storylines, but also add new content that would impart the "correct" ideological message to their works.[14] Conversely, Riurikov's letter to the authorities conveyed his understanding of the need to combine a class-based approach with a Soviet "universal" one, by equating the Holocaust with other forms of brutality by the Nazi regime.[15]

The process of de-Stalinization during the "Khrushchev Thaw" had a considerable impact on the official narrative of the war. However, the loosening of the Party dogmas of the late 1940s–early 1950s was a rather slow process, and Soviet society was keenly aware of the dearth of new data on virtually any subject. As Iurii Levada correctly put it, "information remained a 'deficit good', just like high-quality foodstuffs and imported merchandise."[16] Thus, any information that ex-

11 Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of World War II: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

12 Oleg Budnitski, "The Great Terror of 1941: Toward a History of Wartime Stalinist Criminal Justice," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 20, no. 3 (2019): 447–480.

13 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 126–129; David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity 1931–1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 183–196.

14 USHMM, 2006.436.3.B4-F4; Rol'nikaite, *I vse eto pravda*, 523–537, 541–552.

15 Tavanets et al., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura*, 16–17.

16 Iurii Levada, *Vremia peremen: Predmet i pozitsiia issledovatelia* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2016), 362.

ceeded the established boundaries was likely to achieve significant popular resonance, especially among the intelligentsia.

This fully applied to the Holocaust, which had all but vanished from the official discourse after 1948. The first substantive references to the subject in literature and the press date to the late 1950s, when the ideas of de-Stalinization began to be applied to a broader range of issues and public interest in the subject of World War II (more accurately, the Soviet-German war of 1941–1945 or the Great Patriotic War, according to Soviet terminology) was rekindled. In large measure, this delay was caused by the negative attitude of the conservatives, who wished to avoid an "excessive" focus on the Jewish theme in literature about World War II. In this way, recent Jewish history, including the Holocaust, became an important component of a broader conflict, which occasionally spilled over into the public sphere.

During the first half of the 1960s, the most notable manifestation of this conflict was the controversy surrounding Evgeny Evtushenko's poem "Babi Yar," which appeared in print in one of the central Soviet newspapers, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, in September 1961 (the poem aroused intense debate in society, with official publications denouncing the poet's position, on the one hand, and hundreds of letters of support mailed to Evtushenko, on the other); and Ilya Ehrenburg's memoirs *People, Years, Life*, which were published over the 1960–1964 period and influenced several generations of Soviet citizens, including Jews.[17] For both Ehrenburg and Evtushenko, the subjects of the Holocaust and of contemporary antisemitism (both in the Soviet Union and abroad) were inseparable. In Evtushenko's poem, the Holocaust is treated as an important manifestation of antisemitism, but by no means as the only one. In Ehrenburg's case, mid-level functionaries of the Party Central Committee emphasized his references to anti-Jewish persecution on both sides of the Soviet-German frontline. They expressed their views, writing that, according to Ehrenburg, "they [the Jews] were brutally murdered by the Fascists in the occupied territories [. . .], they were mistreated in the Soviet rear: the writers were de-

17 Pinkus, *The Soviet Government*, 90–125; Joshua Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties: The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 334–370; Vitalii Afiani et al., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura 1958–1964: Dokumenty* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005), 555–566, 621–623; Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, 187–191; Gennadii Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Khrushcheva: Vlast', intelligentsiia, evreiskii vopros* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2012), 351–397; Evgenii Evtushenko, *Ia prishel k tebe Babii Iar: Istoriia samoi znamenitoi simfonii XX veka* (Moscow: Tekst; Knizhniki, 2012), 45; Gennady Estraikh, "Yevgeny Evtushenko's 'Baby Yar': A Russian Poet's Page in Post-Holocaust History," in *Distrust, Animosity, and Solidarity: Jews and Non-Jews during the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Christoph Dieckmann and Arkadi Zeltser (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2021), 331–370; Marat Grinberg, *The Soviet Jewish Bookshelf: Jewish Culture and Identity between the Lines* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2023).

nounced in the press, while the journalists and diplomats were looked down upon by their colleagues."[18]

The "equalizing" Soviet approach—a legacy of the Stalinist era—was espoused by significant segments of the Party bureaucracy and the conservative intelligentsia. According to this view, the Jews had been targeted not out of racist and antisemitic motives, but simply for being citizens of a socialist state.[19] Furthermore, the Holocaust would often be described as a mere "prelude" to the planned extermination of the Slavs. This obligatory interpretation was upheld not only by pro-Stalinist conservatives but even by those who, in all other respects, ought to be classified as liberals. Thus, Lev Ginzburg—a prominent Soviet Jewish journalist and translator of classical German poetry, who was chairman of the Translators' Section of the Moscow branch of the Union of Soviet Writers—wrote:

> By striking at the Jews, they wished to test the "resilience" of the human "material" and determine the "capacity" of the gas vans and gas chambers. Following Hitler's decision to exterminate the Russian nation, the developers of *Generalplan Ost* drew on the "experience" gained during the "solution of the Jewish Question."[20]

Any deviation from this view was seen as a distortion of the correct historical approach.

At the same time, there was no clear linear relationship between the various spheres of politics and ideology: the denunciation of Stalinist repressions did not result in the full rehabilitation of all victims, or even of all ethnic groups; the cessation of the Stalinist antisemitic policy of 1948–1953 was not accompanied by the lifting of all anti-Jewish restrictions in the professional sphere; the revision of Stalin's role in the war did not lead to a thorough reevaluation of the Soviet approach to the war, including the Holocaust. Under such conditions, important (non-scholarly) books on the Holocaust were published in the USSR when the wave of exposures of Stalinist crimes had begun to recede. As one contemporary later recalled: "Many things that we could not even dream of back in 1959 or 1960

18 Tat'iana Goriaeva, ed., *Istoriia sovetskoi politicheskoi tsenzury: Dokumenty i kommentarii* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1997), 139.

19 Gitelman, "Politics and the Historiography," 17–18.

20 Lev Ginzburg, *Tsena pepla: Nemetskie zametki* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1962), 136. A similar idea—that the Slavs would have been "next in line" when the Nazis had eliminated the Jews — was expressed in Lev Bezymenskii's article, "Esli by ne Sovetskaia Armiia," *Novyi mir*, no. 6, 1961, 201. On Lev Ginzburg, see Maxim D. Shrayer, "Lev Ginzburg, Soviet Translator: The Story of a Jewish Germanophile who became a Soviet Investigator of Nazi Crimes," *Tablet*, https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/273095/lev-ginzburg-soviet-translator, accessed February 28, 2024.

became possible in 1962–63."[21] In the mid- (and even late) 1960s, one could publish materials that would have been unpublishable at the beginning of the decade, despite the greater overall liberalism of the earlier period. Thus, the books *Babi Yar* by Anatolii Kuznetsov, *I Must Tell* by Masha Rol'nikaitė, and *Nich'ia dlitsia mgnoven'e* (A Stalemate Lasts but a Moment) by Icchokas Meras were published in 1966–1967 (all three titles with significant print runs, ranging from 100,000 to 280,000 copies).

However, notwithstanding this uncertainty—which was caused by the haphazard attempts of the Soviet leadership to chart a course between the liberal and the conservative factions—the first half of the 1960s saw a clear shift in favor of conservative values, and this also held true for the subject of the Jews. A significant part of the Soviet leadership refused to regard the "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign as a manifestation of state antisemitism, trying to exclude this episode from the category of Stalinist repressions. In practice, non-Jews were also targeted by this official campaign of 1948–1949 against the members of the intelligentsia who were suspected of pro-Western sympathies and disloyalty to the Soviet values. However, both the Jews and many non-Jews were clearly aware that the campaign was motivated primarily by the anti-Jewish sentiments of the authorities and a part of the literary and artistic groups.[22] Such disregard for the Jewish theme was bound to affect the depiction of the Holocaust, pushing it to the margins of public debate. In this respect, the Stalinist conservatives were supported by the advocates of Russian nationalism, whose movement was crystallizing in those years.[23] Khrushchev himself seems to have been aware of the position of the conservative literati vis-à-vis the Jews. According to Ilya Ehrenburg, the Soviet leader was socially close to this segment of the intelligentsia.[24] Khrushchev clearly articulated his own view of the Holocaust at a March 1963 meeting with writers and artists, where, as part of an attack on the liberal intelligentsia, he touched on Evtushenko's "Babi Yar": "The poem presents the matter as though only the Jewish population fell victim to Fascist crimes, whereas many Russians, Ukrainians, and Soviet people of other nationalities died there at the hands of the Hitlerite executioners."[25]

21 Benedikt Sarnov, *Sluchai Erenburga* (Moscow: Tekst, 2004), 145.

22 Pinkus, *The Soviet Government;* Yehoshua A. Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry, 1939–1953* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971); Gennadii Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2001); Gennadii Kostyrchenko, *Stalin i kosmopolitizm 1945–1953: Dokumenty* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 2005).

23 Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 178–179.

24 Sarnov, *Sluchai Erenburga*, 159.

25 Pinkus, *The Soviet Government*, 74.

However, even this critical statement by Khrushchev did not lead to a blanket ban on the subject of the Holocaust. The situation did not change radically in the early years of Brezhnev's rule (from October 1964 until the middle of 1967), despite some "revanchist" statements by senior Party functionaries and public accusations of "besmirching" the Soviet past, which were aimed at the intelligentsia. This relatively liberal policy was reversed only after two landmark events: the Sinyavsky–Daniel trial of 1966—which was accompanied by a shrill propaganda campaign and resulted in major restrictions on the freedom of speech and action of liberal intellectuals—and the response within the USSR to the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968. In the Jewish context, an additional factor was the severing of diplomatic ties with Israel in June 1967, which was followed by the mass exodus of Jews from the early 1970s on. The depiction of the Holocaust was further influenced by the tightening of state control over the forms of commemoration of World War II, which became apparent after 1965, in the wake of the countrywide celebration of the 20th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany.[26]

Michael Rothberg suggested the concept of "multidirectional memory" for analyzing the mutual influence of different memories, which may be either supportive or competitive. According to him, "multidirectional memory considers a series of interventions through which social actors bring multiple traumatic pasts into a heterogeneous and changing post-World War II present."[27] In other words, one kind of memory may serve as "a platform to articulate a vision" of the other one, using the past in order to construct the present.[28] The memory of some events could drive people to analyze others.

In accordance with such a trend of evaluating the recent past through the prism of current events, the liberal intellectuals interpreted the national and international situation as part of the confrontation between fascism and antifascism (they regarded fascism primarily as an ideology that contradicted the principle of liberty); they wished to combat the simplicity and triviality of the former by exalting culture, which they regarded as the highest form of anti-fascist activity.[29] Such an approach naturally lent itself to exposing the similarities between the Nazi and the Soviet past and present, and the intellectuals frequently resorted to such analogies throughout the 1960s.

This dichotomous view of the situation regarding the Holocaust was likely encouraged by the tendency of Cold War-era propaganda to denounce the flaws of

26 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 133.

27 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 4.

28 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 3, 5.

29 Lidiia Chukovskaia, *Dnevnik—bol'shoe podspor'e (1938–1994)* (Moscow: Vremia, 2015), 152.

the rival Western system by comparing it to its Soviet counterpart. The very idea of "comparing" in addition to highlighting of the differences inevitably led to an exposure of the underlying similarities as well. A segment of the intelligentsia began to play this game in earnest and the history of World War II (i.e., the juxtaposition of the Nazi and the Stalinist modes of governance and population control) turned out to be a fruitful field for such analogies. The Soviet bureaucracy understood these transparent hints and it banned many works that might "lead the reader to draw inappropriate parallels and analogies."[30] In the early 1960s, many Soviet intellectuals, even of the liberal stripe, were still psychologically unprepared for a direct comparison of the two regimes or a comparison between antisemitism in the USSR and abroad: these themes featured not only in Vasilii Grossman's novel *Life and Fate*, which was confiscated in February 1961, but also in Ehrenburg's memoirs. Both of these questions were painful even for Alexander Tvardovsky, editor-in-chief of the *Novyi mir* journal, who is commonly regarded as a paragon of liberalism.[31] The negative response on the part of members of the conservative intelligentsia (including the bureaucracy) is more understandable still, since they naturally tended to regard all such analogies as liberal "pranks."

The dichotomy between the two sides was sharpened by the fact that the parallels between the Nazi and the Soviet systems (including when it came to Jews) were easily discernible to Soviet readers, who were well versed in the "Aesopean" language of subtle hints used by literary writers and political essayists – demonstrated possibility and readiness to read between the lines.[32] Conversely, any references to the presence of the subject of the Holocaust in Western discourse served to underscore the limited ability to represent it in the USSR itself. Such a view of the situation can be deduced from an article by Liudmila Chernaia published in *Novyi mir* in 1964. It discussed *The Deputy*, a drama by the West German playwright Rolf Hochhuth that explicitly dealt with the reluctance of Pope Pius XII to denounce the Nazi extermination of the Jews:

> This theme—the persecution of the Jews by the Hitlerites—has become a "staple" (if such a term can be applied to so dreadful a subject) of Western literature. The West German literati, wracked by a deep sense of guilt over the millions of people—who were persecuted, slandered, and then physically exterminated by the fascists for racist reasons—are constantly harking back to this topic.[33]

30 Tavanets at al., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura*, 524.

31 Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, 168, 176.

32 Lev Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopean Language in Modern Russian Literature* (München: Verlag Otto Sagner in Kommission, 1984); Grinberg, *The Soviet Jewish Bookshelf*, 9.

33 Liudmila Chernaia, "Literatura 'dnia—nol' (Zametki o literature FRG)," *Novyi mir*, no. 7, 1964, 203.

During this period, the dominant Soviet propaganda technique—which involved making a comparison between communism and capitalism, and ruling in favor of the former system—would often backfire, leading people to draw the opposite conclusion. Some of them already had little faith in the reliability of Soviet information, even in cases where that information was true. The people continued to make the comparison, but with a great deal of skepticism regarding the alleged Soviet moral and social superiority. As a result, within the framework of the prevailing "culture of comparison," any description of negative events in the West would inevitably lead to the question: "And what about us?" The implied answer did not paint the Soviet Union in a favorable light.

The censors, too, had no trouble "getting" all the hints. The rules of Soviet ideological censorship were somewhat amorphous and this indeterminacy enabled some controversial works to make it into print. The decentralization of authority—which was the fundamental idea of Khrushchev's regime—also applied to the censorship apparatus, which delegated some of its functions to other Party and state organs.[34] This, in turn, paved the way to additional publications on the topic. The many levels of control over the print media served only to exacerbate the unpredictability of the situation. Furthermore, decisions would often be taken in an *ad hoc* fashion—depending on the topicality of the subject matter and the prevailing mood among the bureaucracy.[35] The likelihood of any given work being published depended not only on the author's willingness to engage in self-censorship (or even to use circumlocutions), but also on the administration of the publishing house, the courage of the editors, and the views of the particular censor or Central Committee official. Nevertheless, the very fact that many works of this unwelcomed type did manage to see print in the 1960s must be connected not only to the relative inconsistency of Soviet policy, but also to the exigencies of the Cold War. This situation made the regime willing to exploit some "risqué" subjects (including that of the Holocaust) for propaganda gain.

34 Samantha Sherry, *Discourses of Regulation and Resistance: Censoring Translation in the Stalin and Khrushchev Era Soviet Union* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 47–48. On the transformation of the censorship apparatus in those years, see: Tat'iana Goriaeva, *Politicheskaia tsenzura v SSSR 1917–1991* gg. (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009), 31–35.

35 See, for instance, the following study of a closely related topic, the censoring of translated literature: Sherry, *Discourses of Regulation and Resistance*, especially the definitions on 6–9, 45–64.

The Holocaust as a Weapon in the Cold War

The subject of the Holocaust was far from prominent in the numerous Soviet publications dealing with West Germany. Nevertheless, it would be invoked whenever it fit the general narrative of anti-Western propaganda. Many war-related Soviet texts that mentioned the Holocaust would accuse the West of failing to prosecute Nazi criminals. Obviously, such texts were meant to serve Soviet propaganda goals, and the generalizations contained in them were often inaccurate. Nevertheless, it is true that relatively few former Nazis residing in the Federal Republic of Germany were convicted of crimes committed during World War II (including the murder of Jews): from the end of the war until January 1992, a total of 974 persons were found guilty, with 472 of them being convicted of killing Jews. Numerous criminal investigations of former Nazis launched by West German authorities came to naught.[36] Thus, it is hardly surprising that the 1960s saw a flurry of Soviet denunciations: hundreds of anti-Western texts that touched, to varying degrees, on the subjects of Nazi antisemitism and the persecution and murder of Jews by the Nazis and their local collaborators.[37]

Another factor that favored the publication of Holocaust-related materials in the USSR was the considerable effort made by the authorities to make these materials accessible to Western audiences. One indication of this is the simultaneous publication of foreign-language editions of some of the books. In particularly prominent cases, they would be reissued by European publishing houses, occasionally even arousing a response in Western societies. Thus, the publication of Lev Ginzburg's *Bezdna* (Abyss) (subtitled *A Narrative Based on Documents*) in West Germany led to a surge in local interest in the investigation launched by the Munich prosecutor's office against Kurt Christmann, who had served as commander of Einsatzkommando 10a in Krasnodar, Russia.[38]

To mobilize the Soviet population within the framework of the "confrontation between two systems"—the primary ideological narrative of the Cold War—the USSR had to present itself, and the other countries of the Eastern Bloc, as the only

36 Jürgen Matthäus, "'No Ordinary Criminal': Georg Heuser, Other Mass Murderers, and West German Justice," in *Atrocities on Trial: Historical Perspectives on the Politics of Prosecuting War Crimes*, ed. Patricia Heberer and Jürgen Matthäus (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 193.

37 On publications about the Holocaust in the USSR, see: Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, 421–454. Many Holocaust-related newspaper and magazine pieces dating from 1960–1967, which have been used in this article, may be found in the multivolume collection, *Evrei i evreiskii narod: Sbornik materialov iz sovetskoi pechati*, edited and published in Jerusalem.

38 Lev Ginzburg, *Bezdna: Povestvovanie, osnovannoe na dokumentakh* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1966); Ginzburg, *Potustoronnie vstrechi*, 179–196.

consistent opponents of the contemporary legacy of Nazism. The primary thrust of Soviet journalism lay in repeated (and largely justified) allegations concerning the prominence of former Nazis in the political and intellectual elites of Western countries. Many publications exploited the contradiction between the principle of historical justice, which was propounded by the Soviet press and taken as a given by many Soviet people, and the strict rationalism of the West German justice system, which insisted on convicting only those individuals whose direct involvement in the killings could be demonstrated.[39]

Numerous publications informed Soviet readers about the comfortable lives of former Nazi functionaries in the Federal Republic. Notably, it was emphasized that the pension paid to former Hitlerite officials and military officers was more than four times higher than the sum paid to anti-Nazi resistance fighters, who had been held in jails and concentration camps.[40]

One event that affected the number of Holocaust-related publications was the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Dozens of articles on the subject, with a plethora of details about the extermination of European Jewry, were published in the USSR in 1960–1962,[41] although the "tried and true" principle of equating the Jews with other victims of Nazism remained in force. All in all, the Eichmann trial was not a turning point for the Soviet people, the way it was for Israelis (and other Westerners), since the former tended to focus on events taking place within the USSR. Still, whenever Eichmann's name was mentioned, it would inevitably bring the Holocaust and antisemitism to mind.

At first, the attention of Soviet correspondents was drawn to the very fact of Eichmann's capture, which had caused a stir; the deterioration of Israeli–Argentinian relations following his kidnapping from the territory of a foreign state, and the insistence of the Israelis on having him tried in their own country, despite the suggestion that he be extradited to Germany.[42] However, almost immediately the subject was moved from the newsreels to the traditional propaganda channels. The Soviets were particularly eager to see whether the trial would bring to light the involvement of some West German politicians in the Holocaust. The most prominent of these was Hans Globke, who had served as Under Secretary of State and Chief of Staff of the West German Chancellery since 1953 and was one of the most influential officials in Konrad Adenauer's government. Globke had been one

---

39 Ginzburg, *Potustoronnie vstrechi*, 185; Ginzburg, *Tsena pepla*, 146–147.

40 Lev Ginzburg, *Dudka krysolova: Zametki pisatelia 1956–1959* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1960), 74.

41 A detailed analysis of these articles may be found in: Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions to the Eichmann Trial," 103–141.

42 "V sovete bezopasnosti OON," *Pravda*, June 24, 1960.

of the authors of the 1935 race laws and later (according to Soviet sources) he not only monitored the progress of the Holocaust in his capacity as councilor at the German Ministry of the Interior, but was also directly involved in the deportation of Austrian and Slovak Jews.[43] The Soviet media provided a fairly detailed biography of Globke, which was supplemented by an account of Nazi anti-Jewish persecution. Several articles published both at the time of the Eichmann trial and afterward (especially during Globke's trial, which was held *in absentia* in East Germany in July 1963, and at which he was sentenced to life imprisonment) invariably referred to Globke as the promulgator of "antisemitic race laws," a "Hitlerite ideologue of antisemitism," and an "erstwhile pogromist and executioner, an emissary and advisor of Himmler himself."[44] Interest in the subject was heightened by the fact that the Eichmann trial took place in a period when the number of Soviet publications dealing with the war in general, and the Holocaust in particular, had begun to grow exponentially. Thus, the detailed examination of the mass murder of the Jews during the trial should be seen as part of the general trend of transforming the Holocaust into an important weapon in the Eastern Bloc propaganda arsenal. Within the context of the trial, Israel was discussed in the Communist press primarily in terms of its relationship to West Germany. For example, Soviet newspapers accused David Ben-Gurion of colluding with Adenauer, who had allegedly promised to pay the Israelis continued reparations in exchange for their silence on Globke's role in the Holocaust.[45]

Since the West was very skeptical of any evidence on the Holocaust and the war provided by the USSR and its allies,[46] the Soviet side became obsessed with

---

43 V. Vavilov, "Ubiitsa s chistoi sovest'iu," *Komsomol'skoe znamia*, April 2, 1961. On Globke, see: Erik Lommatzsch, *Hans Globke (1898–1973): Beamter im Dritten Reich und Staatssekretär Adenauers* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2009).

44 V. Kuznetsov, "Globke—na skam'iu podsudimykh," *Pravda*, July 29, 1960; B. Gurnov, "Rassadnik zarazy—Bonn," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, June 7, 1960; A. Grigor'iants, "Seroe preosviashchenstvo," *Trud*, August 9, 1960; "Globke—pod sud," *Izvestiia*, June 24, 1961; Ervin Martinson, "Bonnskii Eikhman," *Sovetskaia Estoniia*, July 7, 1963; Iozef Shtrait (General'nyi prokuror GDR), "O sudebnom protsesse po delu Globke," *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, no. 11, 1963, 101–107.

45 Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions to the Eichmann Trial," 111–119. About these accusations, see, for example, Lommatzsch, *Hans Globke (1898–1973)*, 231, 340. On relations between Israel and West Germany during the Eichmann trial, see Roni Stauber, *Diplomatia betzel shel hazikaron: Israel veGermania hama'aravit 1953–1965* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar; Yad Vashem, 2022), 331–435.

46 See for example, David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 164–167; David Shneer, *Grief: The Biography of a Holocaust Photograph* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 163–164; Jeremy Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938–1946* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 188–195.

producing and citing archival documents to substantiate their allegations. This desire to cite authentic documents was so strong that some references to the Holocaust looked rather forced. A good example of this trend is the media offensive against Friedrich Foertsch, who had been appointed Inspector General of the Bundeswehr in 1961. An article tellingly titled "New Materials on Foertsch's Crimes," which was published in *Novoe vremia*, reproduced one of the most iconic images of the Holocaust in the USSR: a map detailing the massacres of Jews carried out by Einsatzgruppe A from October 16, 1941, until January 31, 1942. The map listed the numbers of victims next to images of coffins. The map of Estonia included the figure "963" (the number of murdered Estonian Jews), with the word "Judenfrei" appearing below it. The German-language legend on the map also estimated the number of surviving Jews by early February 1942 (the inscription contained the German word "Jude," which was well-known to Soviet readers). This image was accompanied by an utterly neutral Soviet-style caption referring to "the extermination of the civilian population in the temporarily occupied territories of the Soviet Union." In accordance with the policy of Soviet "equalization," the article also gave statistical data on the murder of Communists, partisans, and mentally ill persons—in addition to Jews. Neither the map nor the data had any direct connection to Foertsch, who had been appointed Chief of Staff of the 18th Army (which operated in the area of Leningrad, Pskov, and Novgorod) in 1943, by which point virtually all Jews in the region had been annihilated. The only reason for bringing the subject up was the fact that Einsatzgruppe A had earlier been active in the same area.[47] The authors and editors of *Novoe vremia*, many of whose foreign correspondents were employed by the Soviet intelligence services, seem to have been well aware of the nature of the materials they were publishing. These examples serve to illustrate how the Soviet intelligentsia, which was busy disseminating Soviet propaganda, would also try to introduce new sensational materials (including Holocaust-related ones) into the public discourse, while simultaneously blurring the Party directives. Lev Ginzburg's essay about the Eichmann trial can be seen as yet another attempt to inject little-known facts about the Holocaust into the public consciousness. The text touched on some issues that had nothing to do with the trial itself or with anti-Western propaganda, but which were of deep interest to Soviet Jewry. Taking advantage of his license

47 "Novye materialy o prestuplenii Fercha," *Novoe vremia*, no. 40, 1961, 30–31. This map was later republished in *Prestupnye tseli—prestupnye sredstva: Dokumenty ob okkupatsionnoi politike fashistskoi Germanii na territorii SSSR* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963), 85. This was the only Holocaust-related document in that book, and it explicitly referred to the Jewishness of the victims—after all, the collection of documents was supposed to be a scholarly publication.

to talk about the Holocaust in connection with the Eichmann trial, Ginzburg presented a Russian version of Hirsch Glick's "Partisan Song" (in all likelihood, it was Ginzburg's own translation). The lyrics were accompanied by the following perplexing remark: "I overheard this song in democratic Berlin, in the street. It was sung by soldiers of the German People's Army."[48] Ginzburg used this story to justify the publication of the song.

As for direct information about the Holocaust, it was most likely to appear in articles dealing with less prominent figures—judges, journalists, diplomats, prosecutors, businessmen, police officers, etc.—who had either directly participated in the killing of Jews during the war, or else had held posts in the Nazi administration and propaganda apparatus.[49] Such publications would often give the person's exact address. Thus, for all their trenchant criticism of Western society, the Soviets tried to pressure those governments by manipulating Western public opinion.

Another issue tangentially related to the Cold War was the Nazi fugitives living in South America, who had been thrust into the international spotlight by the Eichmann trial. The Soviet texts dealing with them clearly articulated the second ideologeme of that time period: appealing to the "progressive international community" to extradite those criminals, who still walked free. This motif can be heard in the 1967 article by V. Rozen about Franz Stangl, the commandant of Treblinka.[50] The latter piece was phrased carefully, so as to enable experienced readers to deduce that it discussed the Holocaust. Thus, there were explicit references to the Wannsee Conference and to the directive about the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" that had been adopted there. Unlike Auschwitz (which was commonly referred to by the nearby Polish city of Oświęcim in Soviet publications), Treblinka was relatively unknown to Soviet readers. The only source of information about it may have been Vasilii Grossman's essay "The Hell of Treblinka," which had been published in Russian and Yiddish in 1945 and which was mentioned in the 1967 article.[51] The very next sentence in Rozen's article – "Trains carrying 300,000 doomed civilians were sent to Treblinka from Warsaw alone" – left no doubt as to the true

48 Ginzburg, *Tsena pepla,* 124. This song was published under the title "Jüdisches Partisanenlied" (Song of the Jewish partisans) in *Soldaten singen. Liederbuch der Nationalen Volksarmee* (Berlin: Verlag des Ministeriums für Nationale Verteidigung, 1957), 86–87. I would like to thank Stephan Stach for drawing my attention to this East German publication of this song.

49 "Teper' on v Stokgol'me," *Novoe vremia*, no. 31, 1964, 25–26; V. Ivanov, "Mul'timillioner—ubiitsa," *Kommunist*, May 19, 1963.

50 V. Rozen, "Shtangl'—palach Treblinki," *Novoe vremia*, no. 20, 1967, 30–31.

51 Vasilii Grossman, *Treblinskii ad* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Narodnogo komissariata oborony, 1945); Vasili Grosman, *Treblinker genem* (Moscow: Der emes, 1945).

subject matter of the entire piece (i.e., the Holocaust). This fundamental truth shone through the Soviet obligatory "equalizing" context, which was provided by a technically true statement to the effect that, after January 20, 1942 (the date of the Wannsee Conference), Hitler had also begun "the forceful extermination of the Gypsies and the 'subhuman' Slavs."[52] Such "disclaimers," which reflected the real historical situation, nevertheless, probably were inserted by the author mainly in order to marginalize the Jewish topic and ensure conformity with the regime's ideological goals.

As part of the general highlighting of the Holocaust, the Soviet press ran regular reports (frequently citing the TASS agency) about the arrests and trials, in various West German cities, of Nazi criminals who had been directly involved in the deportation and killing of Jews.[53] In all likelihood, given the general climate of anti-Western propaganda, Soviet readers were supposed to interpret these actions as a reluctant response by the West German authorities to the pressure exerted by the Soviet regime and its satellites (the German Democratic Republic, in particular). Conversely, the Soviet media were just as eager to give updates on various odious individuals from the Nazi past who were never brought to trial (or worse, had been acquitted by the West German courts). Thus, in 1965 the *Iskusstvo kino* magazine ran a lengthy article on the German director Veit Harlan in connection with the 25th anniversary of his notorious antisemitic movie, *Jud Süß* (Süss the Jew). The article recounts how, back in 1950, the seemingly ironclad legal case against Harlan fell apart and he was acquitted, because the court had failed to establish a connection between the film and direct antisemitic actions.[54]

The numerous articles—some of which were written in adherence to the exacting standards of Cold War propaganda—enabled curious Soviet readers to easily deduce that the predicament of Jews during the war had been qualitatively different from that of other citizens, and that a Jew's chances of survival under Nazi rule had been slim indeed.

52 Rozen, "Shtangl'—palach Treblinki," 30.

53 "Ubiitsa arestovan," *Pravda Ukrainy*, January 31, 1961; "Arestovan eshche odin gitlerovskii palach," *Krasnaia zvezda*, February 9, 1961; Lev Ginzburg, "Dusheguby,"*Novoe vremia*, no. 52, 1962, 26–27; B. Rodionov, "Teni Eikhmana," *Izvestiia*, May 19, 1964. On the problem of the trials held in West Germany in the 1960s, see, e.g., the following articles: Matthäus, "'No Ordinary Criminal'," 187–209; Rebecca Wittmann, "Tainted Law: The West German Judiciary and the Prosecution of Nazi War Criminals," in *Atrocities on Trial*, 211–229.

54 V. Dmitriev, V. Mikhalkovich, "Chernyi iubilei," *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 3, 1965, 110–112.

The Treatment of the Holocaust in the Eastern Bloc's Countries and its Impact on the Soviet Situation

On November 15, 1965, Mikhail Romm's documentary *Obyknovennyi fashizm* (Common Fascism, known as *Triumph over Violence* in the United States) was screened in Moscow at a festival of the Mosfilm studio.[55] Although the heads of the studio had instructed the filmmakers not to emphasize the killing of Jews by the Nazis, the subject was prominent in the documentary. Furthermore, viewers were struck by the similarity between the Stalinist and the Nazi regimes—in other words, the film partook of the intellectual "game of allusions," mentioned above. Olga Gershenson would later use Romm's work to demonstrate "the ability of cultural producers to play some elements of the system against each other."[56] Following the advice of liberal-minded and well-educated individuals from the "Department of Socialist Countries" of the Central Committee, Romm contacted the East German director Konrad Wolf, who managed to convince the local Party bosses to screen his documentary at the *International Leipzig Documentary and Short Film Week*. After *Obyknovennyi fashizm* had won a special award at the festival, the leadership in Moscow had no choice but to approve the film for screening in Soviet cinemas without any changes. This atypical episode is nevertheless indicative of the importance of relations within the Eastern Bloc for any discussion of the subject of the Holocaust within the USSR itself.

The denunciation of Western countries for their alleged sympathy with Nazi policies, including the Holocaust, can clearly be heard in the title of an article from 1957, "The Past That Has Not Become History," which was dedicated to the performance of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in a New York City theater.[57] The idea was stated even more explicitly when, that same year, the Iskusstvo publishing house in Moscow published the Russian translation of Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett's play *The Diary of Anne Frank*. It was staged in several theaters of the USSR.[58] In August 1959, two movies about Anne Frank were screened at the 1st Moscow International Film Festival. The first of these was *The Diary of Anne Frank*, an American movie directed by the famous cinematographer George Stevens. The film was based on a script by Goodrich and Hackett. The inclusion of an

55 Aleksandr Deriabin, ed., *Letopis' rossiiskogo kino 1946–1965* (Moscow: Kanon-plus, 2010), 680.
56 Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust*, 68.
57 V.Z., "Proshloe, ne stavshee istoriei," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 9, 1957, 4. My gratitude to Alexander Frenkel who informed me regarding Soviet publications on Anne Frank in the 1950s.
58 Estraikh, *After Stalin*, 236–237

American film in the festival became possible due to Soviet interest in strengthening its position in the West. For the sake of propaganda, the authorities wished to exhibit Soviet films in Western countries; for this reason, they screened, and even bought, a relatively large number of Western movies in these years.[59] Presenting a work by a well-known American director at the festival seemed worth the risk of some members of the Moscow intellectual elite watching a Holocaust-themed film.

Still, in order to neutralize this ideological retreat, the Soviet press published several critical articles.[60] In his review in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, Lazar Lazarev (a liberal literary critic of Jewish origin) gave high praise to the artistry of the film and mentioned the Jewishness of the main character, albeit only once. However, he also evaluated the film from the point of view of the official Soviet narrative of the war. Lazarev condemned Stevens' brand of humanism and rejected the very idea of human life as the highest value.[61] The critic stressed Soviet values, which prioritized people's courage and social optimism. At the same time, Lazarev's article made readers clearly aware that an alternative, non-Soviet approach to the Holocaust was possible.

The second film, less surprising in the context of the festival, was *Ein Tagebuch für Anne Frank* (A Diary for Anne Frank), a production of the East German DEFA film studio, directed by Günther Diecke.[62] To gauge the official attitude toward the Jewish theme at the time, we may look at an article by the Hungarian film critic Peter Reni, which was published in *Pravda* and covered both movies.[63]

Although Reni adhered to a seemingly cardinal rule of Soviet propaganda —Jews (or the word "ghetto") must not be mentioned more than once per text[64]—his article in *Pravda*, and the film festival, had the effect of opening the floodgates of Holocaust-themed publications. The year 1960 saw the appearance of an essay by Lev Ginzburg, which was titled almost identically to the East German

59 Afiani at al., eds., *Ideologicheskie komissii TsK KPSS 1958–1964*, 186–187, 258, 264.

60 For example, Lazar' Lazarev, "Melkoe i krupnoe," *Literaturaia gazeta*, August 8, 1959, 3; Ia. Varshavskii, "Vstrechaiutsia liudi, vstrechaiytsia fil'my," *Trud*, August 12, 1959, 3; Grigorii Roshal', "Itogi radostny," *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, August 18, 1959, 3.

61 Lazarev, "Melkoe i krupnoe."

62 On the film *A Diary for Anne Frank*, see David Shneer, "Yiddish Music and East German Antifascism: Lin Jaldati, Post-Holocaust Jewish Culture, and the Cold War," in *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 60, no. 1 (2015): 218–221. In October 1960, this film was shown to the wider public in Soviet cinemas (*Sovetskii ekran*, no. 17, 1960, 19).

63 Peter Reni, "Bol'shaia tema moskovskogo kinofestivalia," *Pravda*, August 12, 1959; Estraikh, *After Stalin*, 238.

64 Rol'nikaite, *I vse eto pravda*, 561. Lazarev's article, "Melkoe i krupnoe," also adhered to this rule.

film "A Diary for Anne" and contained similar attacks on West Germany. However, it was also the first Soviet publication with extensive factual information about Anne Frank's fate.[65] Finally, a Russian edition of the diary itself (in Rita Rait-Kovaleva's translation) came out in the same year.[66]

The greater freedom to talk about the Holocaust in the other countries of the Soviet Bloc was bound to affect the situation in the USSR. An important milestone in this respect was a collection of documents titled *SS v deistvii* (The SS in Action), which came out in East Germany in 1958 and was reissued in Russian in Moscow in 1960.[67] It was published several months before Anne Frank's diary by the same Inostrannaia literatura publishing house, which specialized in translated works by foreign authors. Both Russian books were supplied with specially written prefaces: The *SS v deistvii* was prefaced with an essay by the famous jurist Mark Raginskii, who had assisted the Chief Soviet Prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials the preface to *Anne Frank's Diary* was written by Ilya Ehrenburg. Both texts contained anti-Western denunciations and discussed, in greater or lesser detail, the support offered to former Nazis in the Federal Republic of Germany. Whereas the Jewish theme is present in Raginskii's text only implicitly—there are references to the "physical extermination of entire ethnicities" and to the sites of mass shootings of Soviet Jews (Babyn Yar and the Kerch anti-tank trench)—Ehrenburg explicitly mentions the figure of six million murdered Jews, which he wrote about in *Pravda* back in 1944.[68] The terseness of Raginskii's introduction with regard to the Jews was more than compensated by the contents of the collection, which included an entire section titled "Documents and Reports about the Persecution and Murder of the Jews." The introduction to the German edition, which was reproduced in the Russian version, stated that "the SS carried out a mass extermination of the Jewish population of Germany and the occupied countries, killing a total of six million persons."[69] The documents themselves gave some indication as to the key stages of the policy of persecution and extermination of Jews—thus, the book included data on the Wannsee Conference and provided a statistical breakdown of the Jewish victims (within the pre-World War II borders). Much of the collection's content was lifted wholesale from Léon Poliakov and Joseph

65 Ginzburg, *Dudka krysolova,* 65–76.

66 *Dnevnik Anny Frank* (Moscow: Inostrannaia literatura, 1960); *After Stalin*, 235–242.

67 Mark Raginskii, ed., *SS v deistvii* (Moscow: Inostrannaia literatura, 1960).

68 Mark Raginskii, "Predislovie k russkomu izdaniiu," in *SS v deistvii*, ed. Mark Raginskii (Moscow: Inostrannaia literatura, 1960), 6, 9; Il'ia Erenburg, "Predislovie," in *Dnevnik Anny Frank* (Moscow: Inostrannaia literatura, 1960), 5; Joshua Rubenstein, "Il'ia Ehrenburg and the Holocaust in the Soviet Press," in *Soviet Jews in World War II: Fighting Witnessing, Remembering*, ed. Harriet Murav and Gennady Estraikh (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 36–56.

69 Raginskii, *SS v deistvii*, 18.

Wulf's book *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden*, which had been published in West Berlin in 1955. Thus, titles issued in other countries of the Eastern Bloc became one of the major conduits supplying information from Western media to the Soviet readership. Still, the selection of materials for inclusion in *SS v deistvii* was clearly influenced by political considerations. The final section made this hidden agenda obvious, being devoted to the current standoff between the two Germanys, with a particular emphasis on present-day antisemitism in the Federal Republic. The importance of the book lay in its making of Holocaust-related historical documents part of Soviet discourse (in the second edition, published in 1968, the Jewish theme was even more pronounced, and the new version of Raginskii's introduction openly mentioned the killing of Jews and the Warsaw Ghetto), as well as in the legitimization it gave to the very idea of discussing the Holocaust. The impact of this collection is palpable in contemporary Soviet publications.[70]

As soon as Holocaust-related publications had become acceptable, reports from other countries (both socialist and non-socialist ones) became relatively common. As early as May–June 1960, there were articles about the discovery of diaries written by East European Jewish teenagers—Dawid Rubinowicz from the Polish town of Bodzentyn[71] and Dawid Sierakowiak from Łódź[72]—who were meant to serve as Eastern Bloc "analogues" of the "Western" Anne Frank. In June 1961, the *Inostrannaia literatura* journal published an illustration by Bronisław Lemke, informing the readers that "many of his watercolors have a sublime tragic quality—e.g., his *El mole rachmim*, which depicts a praying Jew over the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto."[73] Information about Holocaust-related films and books released or published in the Eastern Bloc (and, occasionally, in Western countries) appeared regularly in the Soviet press throughout the 1960s.[74]

Relations within the Socialist Bloc did not guarantee the publication of books on the Holocaust. The negative attitude toward this subject can be seen in the abortive attempt to publish a Russian-language edition of Bernard Ber Mark's monograph *Der oyfshtand in varshever geto* (The Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto).[75] The book was slated for publication by Inostrannaia literatura publishing house in 1960. However,

70 See, for instance: Bezymenskii, "Esli by ne Sovetskaia Armiia," 202–203.

71 Iu. Gavrilov, "Piat' uchenicheskikh tetradei," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 31, 1960.

72 "Novyi dnevnik Anny Frank," *Molodezh' mira*, no. 3, 1960, 3–4.

73 M. Silich, "Kamni krichat (izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo za rubezhom)," *Inostrannaia literatura*, no. 6, 1961, 242–245.

74 For example, Wolfgang Luderer's film *Lenebde Ware* (Live Commodities), which dealt with the Holocaust in Hungary, see: *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 4, 1966, 133. A letter of Zalman Gradowski of the *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz was published in A. Lopatenok, kandidat meditsinskikh nauk, "Pis'mo iz lageria smerti," *Neva*, no. 4, 1962, 220–221.

75 Ber Mark, *Der oyfshtand in varshever geto* (Warsaw: Yidish bukh, 1955).

the project led to a clash between the liberals and the conservatives. The official censorship organ, Glavlit (the General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press), was adamantly opposed to the book's publication and would not be swayed by the arguments of the project's advocates, including the Deputy Minister of Culture, who claimed that a ban would lead to a negative response in the West. In the end, the question was put before the Presidium of the Central Committee, which ruled in favor of Glavlit and its allies in the Propaganda Department, who deemed the publication of Mark's book in the USSR to be undesirable. Unsurprisingly, a second attempt to petition the authorities two years later once again met with failure. The resolution issued by the Propaganda Department in November 1962 was even harsher: Mark's monograph was characterized as a "Zionist" (nationalist) work. Ironically, the person in the Central Committee Propaganda Department who rejected Mark's book for publication was Alexander Yakovlev, the future high-level proponent of Gorbachev's perestroika.[76] Such a response was predictable. Although at the time Mark served as head of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, his book, which despite adhering to the obligatory communist approach, was written from a markedly "Jewish" point of view and this clearly made it unsuitable for the Soviet canon of the war and the Holocaust.[77] It, too, to use the words of a "liberal" censor, "had an obvious uncontrollable [Jewish] subtext," which could not be completely erased.[78] Thus, this book was destined to be disseminated through the Jewish samizdat.[79] This case only confirmed the difference between the Soviet situation and that of the other countries of the Eastern Bloc. Stephan Stach shows in his article that, in East Germany, Mark's book was translated from Polish, updated by the author in light of the current demands, and published with the approval of the Socialist Party leadership.[80] However, all of Mark's attempts to replicate the German success in the USSR met with failure.[81]

---

76 Semen Charnyi, "Sovetskii gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm v tsenzure nachala 1960-kh godov," *Vestnik evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve*, 2 (15), 1997, 76–81.

77 Charnyi, "Sovetskii gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm v tsenzure nachala 1960-kh godov," 80; Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 132–133.

78 Liudmila Chernaia, *Kosoi dozhd'* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015), 529.

79 The Jewish samizdat contained uncensored materials dealing with Jewish history, Jewish problems in the USSR, and Israel; it was disseminated mainly among Jews. See Benyamin Pinkus, *Thiya vetkuma le'umit: Hatziyonut vehatnu'ah hatziyonit bivrit hamo'atzot* (Kiriyat sde boker: Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 1993), 408–417, on Ber Mark's book, 410.

80 Stephan Stach, "'The Jewish Diaries . . . Undergo One Edition after the Other': Early Polish Holocaust Documentation, East German Antifascism, and the Emergence of Holocaust Memory in Socialism," in *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in State-Socialist Eastern Europe*, ed. Kata Bohus, Peter Hallama, and Stephan Stach (Budapest: CEU Press, 2022), 281–282.

81 Charnyi, "Sovetskii gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm v tsenzure nachala 1960-kh godov," 79.

However, the ban on Mark's book did not mean that the very subject of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was taboo.[82] April 1963 marked the 20th anniversary of this event. In the USSR, it was a difficult time: only recently, Khrushchev had fired a public broadside at the liberal intelligentsia, including Evtushenko and Ehrenburg, to the cheers of the conservative faction. Thus, many contemporary texts, especially those published in the central press organs, reflected the ambiguity of the situation. *Komsomol'skaia pravda* did run a translation of an article by Jerzy Rakowski, which informed readers that the Jews had been placed on the lowest rung of the Nazi racial hierarchy, lower than the Poles or the Russians, and that the Hitlerites had "subjected them to a policy of physical extermination." By and large, the article adhered to the "politically correct" line; at the same time, it provided information on the major stages in the history of the ghetto and the uprising.[83] However, even in this ideologically sanitized form, Polish journalism turned out to be freer than its Soviet counterpart. Unsurprisingly, Rakowski's article was prefaced with an editorial that downplayed the "bold" remarks of his Polish colleague and upheld the "equalizing" interpretation of the Nazi policy of extermination.

Many among the Soviet public were capable of sifting through the information, separating the wheat from the chaff. This was especially true of the Jews themselves, with their heightened sensitivity to the subject and their persistent tendency to compare the contemporary situation to the Holocaust and to late Stalinist antisemitism. As part of this mindset, they interpreted even the quotidian concept of "antisemite" as synonymous with "fascist." At the same time, every positive newspaper article or TV broadcast devoted to the Holocaust would be taken as a hopeful omen of their future in the USSR.[84] This attitude was influenced by a broader tendency among many Soviet citizens, who would pore over newspapers, hoping to detect some positive trend in the country's politics. In such an environment, any references to the Holocaust would be imbued with special significance as a sign of possible further changes, steering the Soviet state in a more liberal direction; for the Jews, such references seemed to herald a new Jewish policy. Therefore, the key publications on the subject, both in the 1960s and in the 1970s, would be actively discussed by the citizenry.[85] Given the limited print runs of many of these materials, copies of them would often be circulated among friends and acquaintances.

82 See Estraikh, *After Stalin*, 230–235.
83 "Liudi, bud'te bditel'ny!" *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, April 19, 1963.
84 Rol'nikaite, *I vse eto pravda*, 564.
85 Zvi Gitelman, "Politics and the Historiography," 27.

Conclusion

In the USSR, the 1960s were marked by an open confrontation between two camps—the liberals and the conservatives—which involved both the intelligentsia and the Party bureaucracy. All the issues symbolizing the rejection of the ideas that used to dominate the Stalinist era—such as mass repressions, the cult of the leader, Party censorship, pomposity, the obligatory social optimism, the reluctance to discuss the victims of the war, and antisemitism became bones of contention between these factions. The Jewish theme, including the Holocaust, served as one of the indicators of this schism, and the issue of the Nazi policy toward Jews was inextricably bound up with the discussion of the Stalinist policy—and especially postwar antisemitism, which had manifested itself in many ways, including the struggle against "rootless cosmopolitanism." Despite the partial overhaul of the system during the "Khrushchev Thaw," many aspects of the earlier Stalinist policy remained in force and the equalizing Soviet approach to the Holocaust was maintained.

The Cold War served as a catalyst for abandoning the policy of ignoring the Holocaust in the USSR. The requirements of anti-Western propaganda, the need to denounce Western governments for their tolerance of former Nazis, the assertion that the Soviet Union and the countries in the Eastern Bloc were the only true fighters against the legacy of Nazism—all this helped keep the subject alive in the Soviet press, literature, theater, and cinema.

Thanks to the new information about the Holocaust that was filtering in from abroad under Cold War conditions, new Holocaust-related symbols and concepts gained a foothold in the Soviet public discourse. This situation enabled the authors of articles and books to develop indirect ways of tackling the subject, bypassing the censorship restrictions. In those years, the Holocaust could be evoked without explicit reference to the Nazi policy of exterminating the Jews, but—simply by bringing up Adolf Eichmann, Hans Globke, the Wannsee Conference, or Anne Frank (not to mention more blatant terms, such as "the Final Solution" or "ghetto"). In this way, readers could correctly guess the true subject matter, even though concepts related to the Holocaust (e.g., the Treblinka and Sobibór extermination camps) had to be stripped of their "Jewish" context, in accordance with the Soviet policy of "equalization." The use of "Aesopean" language became one of the hallmarks of the time. The liberal intelligentsia transformed this guessing game into yet another way of resisting the system. Meanwhile, the publications themselves—even the explicitly anti-Western ones—became one of the few channels for supplying information about the Holocaust to Soviet readers.

Knowledge about the Holocaust in the USSR, both in the 1960s and afterward, was very limited, even compared to other countries in the Eastern Bloc. Nevertheless, there were hundreds of publications touching on the Holocaust, either directly

or indirectly, and these allowed perceptive Soviet readers, Jews and non-Jews alike, to deduce the existence of a special Nazi policy vis-à-vis the Jews, which had left the latter virtually no chances of survival under Nazi rule. This insight contradicted the official Communist Party line, according to which Nazism had posed an equal threat to all ethnic groups. We may also assume that the impact of the Cold War on Holocaust-related publications in the USSR was very strong even in those cases when the relevant book or article had no direct bearing on the international confrontation. When weighing the pros and cons of publishing such works, the authorities would inevitably consider both the international and the domestic contexts, strengthening the general anti-fascist or anti-conservative (anti-Stalinist) narrative.

There were many things that the liberal literary and artistic elite did not know about the Western world. Only some of those literati could sporadically read or watch Western intellectual products about the Holocaust or receive information on Western attitudes on the topic; fewer still could occasionally visit the Western countries. Nevertheless, it was these individuals who became the channels for conveying some Western ideas to the Soviet people, sometimes in a highly censored, or even distorted, form. Still, the very denunciation of Western views served to show that an alternative approach existed and Soviet liberal intellectuals could easily interpret these allegorical statements. Soviet citizens were experienced in separating the "wheat" of relevant and important information from the "chaff" of propaganda verbiage. For the great mass of Soviet people, including Jews, such texts or films served as a goad to thinking about alternative conceptions of history and memory. At the same time, within the framework of the ideological clash, the Soviets made a lot of effort to promote their own materials in Western countries. Much was published in the USSR, especially on the subject of former Nazis and local collaborators, in order to influence Western public opinion. Many such texts became accessible within the USSR itself, strongly affecting Soviet readers. These processes did not always play out the way the authorities had intended.

All such publications served to legitimize the very subject of the Holocaust in the USSR and this directly affected other aspects of the memorialization of the mass killing of Jews by the Nazis and their local collaborators—namely, the grassroots memorial activities of Soviet Jews, which resulted in the creation of hundreds of monuments and the observance of numerous memorial ceremonies.

Anna Koch, Stephan Stach

Writing Holocaust History across the Iron Curtain: Alberto Nirenstein's *A Tower from the Enemy / Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek*

Like many Jews of his generation, the historian Alberto Nirenstein lived a life shaped by migration and return, moving frequently across national borders.[1] His life, and his work, highlight the limitations of a national perspective on the history of Jewish memory and Holocaust historiography. People and their ideas, documents, and memoirs moved between countries and languages, and crossed the "Iron Curtain," which was not as impermeable as Cold Warriors liked to pretend. Nirenstein aimed to make sense of the genocide of European Jews while moving between East and West and thus relied on and responded to different frameworks in his efforts to understand the past. In the reception of Nirenstein's source collection, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek* (translated as *A Tower from the Enemy*), we can see the importance of the diverse communities with which he engaged. Published in 1958, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek* was one of the first history books in Italian on the Holocaust. A year after its publication, the book was translated into English. The work, which was highly praised in Italy, including by Italian Jews, was condemned as ideologically biased by Polish-Jewish exiles in the United States. These different communities of memory evaluated the book and its author differently and their alignment within the Cold War divide influenced their perception.

Albert(o) (Aaron) Nirenstein

According to his handwritten CV from his file at the Jewish Historical Institute (JHI), Aaron (Alberto) Nirenstein[2] was born into a petty bourgeois family in the shtetl of Baranów, northwest of Lublin, in 1915. His father was a shopkeeper, his

1 Several variations in the spelling of his last name can be found across documents and publications, depending on their language and national context, ranging from Nirenstein, Nirensztein, Nirensztajn to Nirenstajn.

2 He used "Aaron" in Yiddish and Hebrew, "Albert" in English and Polish, and "Alberto" in Italian.

Note: We would like to thank the Fondazione di Studi Storici "Filippo Turati" as well as the Nirenstein family for granting us access to the letters exchanged between Alberto and Wanda Nirenstein.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. (cc) BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-006

mother died when he was still a small child. After finishing primary school in Baranów, he attended a state high school (*gimnazjum*) in Lublin, which he had to discontinue, however, due to financial problems. From 1932 to 1935, he received training at a seminary for teachers in Warsaw. During this time, he became involved with the Socialist-Zionist Hashomer Hatzair youth movement. In 1936, he emigrated to Palestine, where he took up studies at Hebrew University, which, however, he soon quit, again due to financial difficulties. From 1937 to 1942, he worked as a teacher in different rural schools in Palestine. During this time, he became involved with the Communist Party of Palestine.[3] In 1942 he joined the Jewish Brigade, a section of the British army and participated in battles in the North Africa campaign. While in the army, Nirenstein, according to his CV, continued his Communist political activity forming and leading anti-fascist groups among the soldiers.[4] In 1943, he landed with the Allied armies in Salerno, Italy, moving up the Italian peninsula. He joined other Brigade soldiers in their efforts to engage with the local Jewish communities and encourage illegal immigration to Palestine.[5]

While stationed in Italy, Nirenstein met his future wife, Wanda Lattes, a Jewish woman from a middle-class family who had been a member of *Giustizia e Libertà* (Justice and Freedom), a non-Communist partisan group during the war. They married in March 1945. After the war, Wanda Lattes worked as a journalist for the leftist paper *Il Nuovo Corriere* (The New Courier) and after his demobilization Nirenstein likewise pursued a career as a journalist and correspondent for Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew newspapers. From 1948–1950, he worked for the Polish embassy in Rome.

Nirenstein's sisters had left for Palestine before the war, however, his father and other relatives who remained in Poland were deported to Sobibór and did not survive. Nirenstein returned to Poland in the early 1950s, according to most accounts, to gather material for a history of the Warsaw and other ghettoes in occupied Poland. His family's autobiographical work, *Come le cinque dita di una*

---

3 Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego, AŻIH) signature 47, Personal file of Albert Nirensztein, folio (f.) 3 of the personal survey form (*ankieta personalna*).

4 AŻIH signature 47, Personal file of Albert Nirensztein, f. 3. Surely, Nirenstein emphasized his dedication to the Communist cause in the CV he wrote for the JHI. Regarding autobiographical writing in Soviet regimes, see Jochen Hellbeck, "Galaxy of Black Stars: The Power of Soviet Biography," *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (2009): 615–624.

5 On the Jewish Brigade in Italy, see Dina Porat, "One Side of a Jewish Triangle in Italy: The Encounter of Italian Jews with Holocaust Survivors and with Hebrew Soldiers and Zionist Representatives in Italy, 1944–1946," *Italia Judaica* 4 (1993): 487–513.

mano (Like the five fingers of the hand), states that he returned to Poland to “find impossible traces” and remained to study documents about the extermination of Polish Jews.[6]

It seems surprising that as a Jew he decided to return to Poland at a point in time when many Polish Jews tried to leave the country, in particular since he had Polish but not Italian citizenship and left a young family behind in Florence – his daughter Fiamma was born in 1945, and not much later the couple had two more children. Nirenstein’s return to Poland may have been linked to his employment with the Polish embassy. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, extensive purges took place in the Polish Foreign Ministry and diplomatic service. Numerous employees of foreign missions were first ordered back to headquarters in Warsaw and then dismissed. Among the reasons listed in the documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were demonstrative Zionism and political unreliability.[7] Nirenstein’s immigration to Palestine, his membership in the Jewish Brigade of the British Army, and his activity as a correspondent for Yiddish and Hebrew newspapers would have provided more than enough evidence to justify such accusations from the point of view of the Polish Communist authorities, though no record indicates that Nirenstein was asked to return.

Once in Poland, however, Nirenstein’s Zionist background must have played a role in why the state authorities did not let him return to Italy until after Stalin’s death. Despite the long separation, Wanda and Alberto remained close, exchanging frequent letters and phone calls, comforting one another, and grappling with the uncertainty of the situation. The letters primarily focus on family life, Alberto’s loneliness in Poland, and his initial efforts to settle and find work. Awareness of postal censorship may have prevented them from discussing other topics.[8] Leftist ideas and concerns play a part in their exchange. At one point Wanda, for instance, evokes the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci to remind her husband to keep studying and read histories of the workers’ movement. Later she encour-

---

6 Alberto Nirenstajn, *Come le cinque dita di una mano: Storie di una famiglia di ebrei da Firenze a Gerusalemme* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998), 11.

7 On the purges in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its justifications, see: Zbigniew Girzyński, “Czystki polityczne w Ministerstwie Spraw Zagranicznych w latach 1947–1956,” *Czasy Nowożytne – periodyk poświęcony dziejom polskim i europejskim od XV do XX wieku* 4 (1999): 27–36, esp. 29–32.

8 See Corrispondenza inviata da Wanda Lattes a Alberto Nirenstein, sottoserie 1946–1953 and Corrispondenza inviata da Alberto Nirenstein a Wanda Lattes, sottoserie 1945–1953, Fondazione di Studi Storici “Filippo Turati,” Florence, Italy.

ages him by reminding him of the importance of their common struggle, using the Polish phrase “Walka o pokój” (struggle for peace).[9]

As Nirenstein’s records at the JHI show, he took up a position at the Wrocław branch of the Central Textile Office (*Centrala Tekstylna*), the state wholesale trade from December 1950 to mid-February 1951, before joining the Jewish Historical Institute (JHI) in Warsaw as a researcher.[10] The JHI was a formally independent Jewish institution, however, funded by the state. Its director, Ber Mark, was a Jewish Communist, journalist, and historian who had been in trouble several times with the Communist authorities in the Soviet Union during World War II and later in postwar Poland because of his decidedly Jewish perspective. Yet his political skills enabled him to overcome these difficulties. As director of the JHI, he used his position to support other Jewish scholars and activists in Poland who had run into comparable problems.[11]

Little is known about the exact circumstances under which Nirenstein was able to leave Poland in 1954. He had become stateless after his return to Italy, indicating that he had to give up his Polish citizenship to leave the country, which was common for emigrants. Poles leaving the country lost their citizenship and passport and were supplied with a “travel document,” which stated their identity and stateless status.[12] Even though he spent the rest of his life in Italy, Nirenstein never became an Italian citizen. He had applied for Italian citizenship at one point, but his application was rejected, possibly because of his Communist sympathies. While changes to the Italian citizenship legislation would have most likely made a later application successful, he did not reapply. Obituaries published after his death speculate that on some level Nirenstzein never felt that he entirely belonged and that, in the end, he preferred to remain stateless.[13] After his return to Italy, Nirenstein continued to write and publish in Italian, Hebrew, and Yiddish. In 1958 he published his book on the Holocaust, titled *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek* (Remember what Amalek did to you), later translated into English as *A Tower from the Enemy: Contributions to a History of Jewish Resistance in Poland.*

---

9 See Wanda Lattes to Alberto Nirenstein, October 18, 1950, and December 28, 1950, corrispondenza inviata da Wanda Lattes a Alberto Nirenstein, sottoserie 1946–1953, I.1.4,1950, Fondazione di Studi Storici “Filippo Turati,” Florence.

10 AŻIH signature 47, Personal file of Albert Nirensztein, f. 5, 12.

11 On the JHI, see Stephan Stach, “The Prospects and Perils of Holocaust Research in Communist Poland: The First Twenty Years of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 52, no. 2–3 (2022): 137–164.

12 See Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949–1989* (Warsaw: IPN, 2010), 39.

13 Ernesto Galli della Loggia, “L’ebreo che volle farsi apolide,” *Corriere della Sera*, September 3, 2007; Leonardo Tirabassi, “Con Alberto Nirenstein è andato via un pezzo di storia,” *Il Giornale della Toscana*, September 4, 2007.

Publications at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw

Nirenstein joined the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw at a moment when its transformation from a research institution rooted in the academic tradition of YIVO and Emanuel Ringelblum's *historiker krayz* into an institute that studied the history of Polish Jews from a Marxist-Leninist perspective was – at least formally – completed. The JHI emerged in 1947 from the Central Jewish Historical Commission, which historian Philip Friedman had directed from 1944 until his emigration in 1946. His successors Nachman Blumental and Józef Kermisz (Joseph Kermish) transformed the commission into a Jewish research institute during a brief period when autonomous Jewish life in postwar Poland appeared possible.[14] Mark, in turn, brought the Institute ideologically on the course set by the Communist leadership, while he preserved its distinctly Jewish character. As he explained in a text published in the Institute's Yiddish Bulletin in 1949, such an alignment entailed that the situation in the ghettos had to be analyzed from the perspective of class struggle, while the German mass murder of Jews had to be understood as a consequence of the capitalist order in its imperialist manifestation.[15]

Even as Stalinism tightened its grip on Poland, research on the Holocaust remained possible, albeit as a marginal topic that had to be approached from a Marxist-Leninist perspective.[16] Historians had to use appropriate, often artificial, terminology, drawing a clear distinction between "progressive" and "reactionary" elements in history, and frequently citing the works of Stalin and Lenin.[17] The historian Shmuel Krakowski, who later worked at Yad Vashem, explained how this translated into practice: "until 1956 there was a quite strict interference of the

---

14 Stephan Stach, "'The Spirit of the Time Left Its Stamp on These Works': Writing the History of the Shoah at the Jewish Historical Institute in Stalinist Poland," *Remembrance and Solidarity: Studies in 20th Century European History,* no. 5 (2016): 185–211, esp. 186–188.

15 "Undzere tsil," in *Yedies: Byuletin fun yidisher historisher institut in poyln*. November 1949, 1.

16 Artur Eisenbach, for instance, another JHI staff member, received his doctorate (1953) and habilitation (1955) at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences with work related to the Holocaust, see Artur Eisenbach, *Hitlerowska polityka eksterminacji Żydów w latach 1939–1945 jako jedan z przejawów imperializmu niemieckiego* [Hitler's policy of extermination of the Jews between 1939 and 1945 as one of the manifestations of German imperialism] (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1953); Eisenbach, *Pertraktacje anglo-amerykańskie z Niemcami a los ludności żydowskiej podczas II wojny światowej* [Anglo-American negotiations with Germany and the fate of the Jewish people during World War II] (Warsaw: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 1955).

17 Rafał Stobiecki, *Historiografia PRL. Ani dobra, ani mądra, ani piękna . . . ale skomplikowana* (Warsaw: Trio, 2007), 58–59.

Party and others and the course this took is called Stalinist. So, it is natural that tight boundaries were imposed on Jewish – and not only Jewish – historians [. . .], which one was not allowed to exceed, also a certain language and method. [. . .] Another method was to simply force historians to falsify history and accept certain non-existent facts, in order to exaggerate the importance of the communists."[18] Accordingly, the articles Nirenstein published while working at the Jewish Historical Institute had to comply with the state's Communist perspective on the past though they did not downplay or marginalize the persecution of Jews during the war.

In his piece "Ruch oporu Żydów w Krakowie pod okupacją hitlerowską" (The Jewish resistance movement in Krakow under Hitlerite occupation) published in *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* in January 1952, Nirenstein presents the Jewish resistance in Krakow as a movement which mainly consisted of two groups: 1) the Communists, who gathered around the activists of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR), together with their armed organization, the People's Guard (*Gwardia Ludowa* – GW), and 2) the Akiba group, consisting of members of Zionist, Bundist, and even orthodox youth organizations.[19] In his lengthy article, he narrates the development and activity chronologically, supplementing the narrative with thematic subchapters at the end. Nirenstein situates the resistance against the background of the non-Jewish Polish resistance movement, which, according to the article, was composed of different groups: antisemitic and nationalist bandits that attacked Jews; passive Socialists, who were indifferent towards the fate of the Jews; and Communists, who showed full solidarity and support for the Jewish resistance.

In his article, Nirenstein claims that the Communists' political and factual leadership was accepted without opposition in the Jewish resistance movement from which the Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB) emerged. He also underscores Jewish Communists' experience in clandestine work and their close contacts with the non-Jewish Communist resistance outside the Warsaw Ghetto. At the same time, he points to the presumed lack of both these assets among Akiba. More generally, he describes the Jewish resistance as part of the anti-fascist national front, which fought along with Communist Poles against the Nazis. Besides the political framing of Communists as the leaders of the resistance, he describes the contribution of both, Akiba and Communists, to the resistance in detail. He also points to

18 Interview with Stefan [Shmuel] Krakowski, Oral History Archives of the Oral History Department of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University Jerusalem [OHD] (0050)0031, page 7.

19 Albert Nirensztein, "Ruch oporu Żydów w Krakowie pod okupacją hitlerowską," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, no. 3 (1952): 126–186. The article was also published in Yiddish, see A. Nirensztein, "Vidershtand fun yidn in kroke bes der hitlerisher okupatsye," *Bleter far geszichte* vol. 5, no. 1–2 (1952): 226–263.

passive segments of Jewish society in the ghetto and Płaszów camp as well as those he perceived as traitors – the Jewish police (*Ordnungsdienst*) and Jewish Gestapo-collaborators.

The narrative presentation in the article follows the above outlined Marxist-Leninist historiography in its assessment of the respective groups in the Polish and Jewish resistance and also in the Jewish community as a whole. Through their leadership, the Communists succeed in persuading passive groups – the socialists in the Polish resistance and the non-Communist members of the resistance in the Jewish community – to act. In the Jewish context, the role of reactionary forces falls to the Jewish councils (*Judenräte*) and the Jewish police, while in the Polish resistance, ultimately, all groups beyond the Communists and socialists are considered as such. This kind of piecemeal division of society undoubtedly distorts the much more complex historical reality in which Polish and Jewish actors operated in occupied Poland. The Polish underground was dominated not by the Communists, but by the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa* – AK), whose allegiance was to the Polish government-in-exile in London. The armed resistance also included Socialist groups. The Home Army's relationship with the Jewish population was marked by major regional differences and depended heavily on local structures, but it was by no means generally anti-Jewish, and, if only occasionally, included Jewish fighters in its ranks.[20] Yet given the Home Army's decidedly anti-Communist stance, some of whose units also resisted the Red Army, made it impossible to portray the organization in a positive light. In contrast to the Home Army, the National Armed Forces (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*, NSZ), which were politically to the right, were openly antisemitic.[21]

In the Jewish resistance, Communists played a more prominent role, relying on existing organizational structures. Communist and leftist youth movements had been strong among Polish Jews before the war. However, Nirenstein's narration of the Communists' indisputable leadership among the Jewish resistance in Krakow remains questionable. In the volume *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach* [The underground movement in ghettos and camps], published in 1946 in a series issued by the Krakow branch of the Jewish Historical Commission, the editor Betti Ajzensztajn presents the situation differently. Citing members of the Jewish

20 Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: C.H.Beck, 2010), 210–216. In the area surrounding the town of Miechów, located almost 40 km north of Kraków, was a unit of the Home Army under the command of the Jewish socialist Michał Borwicz, who would head the Kraków branch of the Jewish Historical Commission immediately after the war. See Klaus Kempter, *Joseph Wulf. Ein Historikerschicksal in Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 78.

21 Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens,* 210–216.

underground, she described the relationship between Akiba and the Communists thus: "Although ideologically distant from each other (which quite often caused friction and dissonance), the mentioned organizations cooperated in a number of anti-German actions."[22]

The portrayal of the Jewish resistance within the framework enforced by the Communist party led to some distortions in Nirenstein's work, such as the exaggerated role given to the Communists as well as the schematic representation of social groups in occupied Poland, which ultimately serves to portray the historical situation in a pattern of class struggle.[23] In the contemporary Polish historiography, however, such framing was a condition for being able to publish scholarly works. Nirenstein's later writings in Italian show his ability to depict the role of the separate groups within the resistance in a more nuanced way. Other aspects which from today's perspective appear biased or problematic, like his depiction of the Jewish councils and the Jewish police, are not necessarily due to political pressure. A critical perspective on "Jewish traitors" was widespread among surviving Jews, not merely among those on the far left or those within Communist Europe.

Nirenstein wrote another article while working at the Jewish Historical Institute, which treats the situation of the Jews in Upper Silesia, especially in the Dąbrowa Coal Basin, a highly industrialized region in Poland's southwest, which had been annexed to the German Reich in 1939. The article, however, remained unpublished until Nirenstein left Poland in 1954. A heavily abridged version of the text was published in 2001 in the *Jewish History Quarterly*, the journal of the JHI.[24]

The lengthy manuscript begins with an introductory section titled "general background." There Nirenstein frames the Jewish resistance in the region as an integral part of the general Polish resistance, which he – in accordance with the Stalinist historical narrative – describes as an exclusive effort of Communist and left-wing socialist actors.[25] His description of the prewar Jewish communities of Sosnowiec and Katowice as dominated by "cosmopolitan, wealthy bourgeoisie," which he contrasts with the predominantly working-class Jewish community in

22 Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w ghettach i obozach, Materiały i dokumenty* (Kraków: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna w Polsce, 1946), 82.

23 Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens*, 210–216.

24 Albert Nirensztain, "Ruch oporu Żydów Zagłębiu Dąbrowskim pod okupacją hiterowską," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów / Jewish History Quarterly*, no. 200 (2001): 587–606.

25 The original manuscript does not have an archival signature but is located in AŻIH as: Alberto Nirensztein, "Ruch Oporu Żydów na Śląsku pod okupacją niemiecką." It is 119 typewritten pages in length. The part on the general background comprises pages 1–5.

Będzin, serves as an example of his Marxist approach.[26] Nirenstein's reference to the fate of the resistance fighter Jadzia Szpigelman towards the end of the article is a telling example of the need to emphasize the positive role of the Soviet Union and at the same time underlines the limits of what could be said, or written, under Stalinism. Referring to her report recorded in the JHI, he writes about Szpigelman's successful escape via Slovakia to Moscow in 1944 thanks to the support of Soviet partisans.[27] He fails to mention that soon after her arrival she was imprisoned on charges of espionage in the notorious Lubyanka prison, where she remained until her deportation to Poland in early 1948.[28]

However, in the sections on Jewish youth organizations, whose members had formed the Jewish Fighting Organization, Nirenstein hardly mentions Communists but focuses almost entirely on Zionist groups like Hashomer Hatzair or Dror. He tried to circumvent this ideologically delicate problem by pointing out that the groups involved in the Jewish resistance movement "did not concern themselves with the obsolete and irrelevant issues of their Zionist ideology at the time" but "treated the current issues in a realistic way."[29] Nevertheless, it seemed important to him to mention the names of the organizations in his article instead of concealing their Zionist orientation with nebulous words.

The article also extensively treats the role of the Jewish councils, highlighting that they bore part of the responsibility for the deportations. The Nazis established these administrative institutions in the ghettos of occupied Eastern Europe to assist in implementing their orders and directives, to supply forced labor, and eventually to cooperate in the deportations. Since the Jewish councils had to play the role of middlemen between the Germans and the Jewish populations, the ghetto inhabitants directed much of their frustration and anger at the *Judenräte* as well as the Jewish police, and many Eastern European Jewish ghetto writers and chroniclers as well as postwar memoirists depicted the Jewish police and *Judenräte* leaders as collaborators and villains.[30] While a negative perception or even condemnation of the *Judenrat* was common among members of the underground as well as among survivors, Nirenstein's writing situates the *Judenrat* within a Marxist understanding of class conflict between impoverished Jewish

---

26 Nirensztein, "Ruch Oporu Żydów na Śląsku," 36.

27 Nirensztein, "Ruch Oporu Żydów na Śląsku," 102–104.

28 AŻIH, signature 301/3536, Testimony of Jadzia Szpigelman, Feburary 6, 1948, f. 4.

29 Nirenstein, "Ruch Oporu Żydów na Śląsku," 39.

30 See Avinoam Patt, "Jewish Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto," in *Jewish Resistance against the Nazis*, ed. Patrick Henry (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 393–425; Katarzyna Person, *Warsaw Ghetto Police: The Jewish Order Service during the Nazi Occupation*, trans. Zygmunt Nowak-Soliński (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021).

masses on the one side, and wealthy Jews, the *Judenrat*, and Jewish police on the other. According to this essay, the resistance was an uprising against the "Oligarchy of the Judenrat."

Nirenstein's, as well as other publications produced at the Jewish Historical Institute during this period, contain sometimes crude ideological concessions to Stalinist propaganda and exaggerate the role of Communists in the Jewish resistance. These concessions resulted from general political pressure to adopt a narrative shaped according to the political line, as well as concrete fears of antisemitic repression. During the Slánský trial in Prague, for instance, the government received a letter denouncing the institute's employees as "Jewish nationalists."[31] At the same time, the JHI researchers often were Communists or had a Marxist background and understood the Holocaust from this perspective. All these factors influenced the character of the articles published by JHI researchers to varying degrees.

Nevertheless, the texts published in Stalinist Poland contained quotations and information from sources that were not accessible in the West and thus provided crucial information for Western historians of the Holocaust. Nirenstein was aware of the limited exposure to Eastern European sources in Western scholarship, a point which he highlighted in a review of the London-based *Wiener Library Bulletin* (WLB). Beyond accusing the WLB of pretending to be "progressive," while failing to unmask the "true sources and forces of the neo-Nazism in West Germany," Nirenstein also claimed that the journal disregarded literature from outside the Western hemisphere.[32] The WLB editors ignored the ideological attack, but staunchly rejected the accusation that they were ignoring literature from the Communist part of Europe.[33] The dispute soon turned into a friendly exchange of letters. The Wiener Library took the first step with a letter, proposing an exchange of publications between the two institutions, an offer the JHI happily accepted.[34] Thus, even before his return to Italy, Nirenstein had been aware of the need to make sources and literature from the eastern side of the Iron Curtain available to Western audiences, which he did with the publication of his source collection.

---

31 Stach, "The Prospects and Perils of Holocaust Research," 146.

32 A. Nirensytein, "Vegn viner leybreri byuletin," *Bleter far geszichte* 5, no. 4 (1952): 169–175.

33 "Criticism from the East," *Wiener Library Bulletin* 7, no. 3–4 (May-August 1953), 16; "The *Wiener Library Bulletin* under Fire: Strictures in a Warsaw Learned Journal," *Wiener Library Bulletin* 7, no. 3–4 (May-August 1953), 27.

34 AŻIH, signature 310/296, Letter of Alfred Wiener to B. Mark, May 5, 1953; Letter of B. Mark to Alfred Wiener, May 21, 1953.

Early Publications in Italian

Upon his return from Poland, Nirenstein published several articles in the Florentine leftist journal *Il ponte: rivista mensile di politica e letteratura fondata da Piero Calamandrei*. Piero Calamandrei was one of the founders of the *Partito d'Azione*, an anti-fascist leftist party founded by members of the *Giustizia e Libertà* resistance group to which Wanda Lattes, Nirenstein's wife, had also belonged. Nirenstein wrote about Polish politics as well as book reviews, including a review of the autobiography of Hjalmar Schacht, the former Reichsbank president and defendant before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. In 1954 he published a short essay on the Holocaust, titled, "Appunti sul grande sterminio," (Notes on the great extermination). The article provides an overview of Nazi plans to exterminate European Jews, setting the genocide within the context of World War II. Nirenstein highlights, as in his earlier work, the role of the *Judenrat*, blaming it for "becoming a tool that the Nazis used so comfortably in the implementation of their horrible policy towards the Jewish masses."[35] His analysis of the relations within the camps also here emphasizes class, distinguishing between the elite (*Judenrat*) and the Jewish masses.

At the beginning of the essay, Nirenstein highlights the role of the German *Wehrmacht* in the extermination of Polish Jews. In a review of the article, the Italian Jewish scholar Dante Lattes, likewise, emphasizes the links between the war and the genocidal persecution. We can see this emphasis on the *Wehrmacht*'s role in the murder of European Jews within the contemporary debate around West German rearmament, which Nirenstein, as many other European Jews, vehemently opposed. In a letter to Ber Mark from December 1954, Nirenstein writes that he had been glad to have read that Mark would be among the participants of a Jewish conference protesting German rearmament and indicates that he would have liked to join the protest in Paris, though his lack of citizenship and difficulty in obtaining a visa made travel difficult.

Nirenstein's opposition to German rearmament needs little explanation, though his reasons for highlighting his position in the letter to Mark appear to go beyond simple solidarity. At the time of writing this letter, Nirenstein had begun work on his book and secured a contract with the Italian publishing house Einaudi. He wanted Mark to send him a specific photograph that he intended to use in the book but had not received any response to his previous requests. Nirenstein writes,

---

35 Alberto Nirenstajn, "Appunti sul grande sterminio," Il Ponte: Rivista di politica, economia e cultura fondata da Piero Calamandrei (Florence, 1954), no. 6, 887–898.

> you may not realize that the book [. . .] serves the same purpose in terms of Germany's rearmament as the conference I read about today. Why don't you want to contribute to this area as well? Italy has a population of about 50 million, isn't that enough to make it important enough to show them in photographs (in Italy, photographs mean more than text) what German militarism did to the Jews."[36]

Mark responds somewhat coolly that he does not know which particular photographs Nirenstein hopes to receive and that he published all the most important photographs in his book, inviting Nirenstein to take the photographs he needed from there. While Nirenstein may not have received these particular photographs, four years later his book – *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek*, a collection of sources dedicated to the Holocaust in Poland – primarily included diaries and documents that Nirenstein had gathered at the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland.

Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek (1958)

With over 400 pages in length, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek* is a substantial book containing a variety of sources, most of which focus on the Jewish resistance in the ghettos and camps. Nirenstein provides an introduction to the volume as well as shorter introductions to the various texts. The "Jewish Resistance" is the book's dominant topic, and indeed its working title was "History of the Jewish Resistance." The editors at Einaudi, one of Italy's most prestigious publishers, received Nirenstein's book proposal favorably. While they suggested that the book "does not add much to what has already been said in synthesis by Poliakov," it was of "extreme interest. The interest comes above all from the immediate contact of the reader with the documents."[37] The editors considered the sources on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as particularly important. In Italy, the memory of the *Resistenza*, the Italian resistance against Nazi Germans and the Fascist Republicans, formed a cornerstone of postwar reconstruction and memory. Nirenstein's book, while not focusing on the *Resistenza*, provided its readership with a different story of resistance against Nazism which the publisher assumed would be of great interest.

The documents that Nirenstein had compiled for his book had mostly appeared in previous document editions and scholarly journals in Poland in Polish

36 Nirenstein to Mark, Florence, December 10, 1954, AŻIH, signature 310/311, f. 34, 35.
37 Tommaso Munari, *I verbali del mercoledì: Riunioni editoriali Einaudi 1953–1963* (Turin: Einaudi, 2013), 104, 182.

or Yiddish. These mainly included publications of the JHI, but also the Bulletin of the Chief Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes against the Polish Nation and others. While most of these publications had been accessible outside Poland and the Eastern Bloc and had reached a readership in the Eastern European Jewish diaspora, primarily in the United States, France, and Israel, they remained inaccessible to those who did not have the necessary language skills. Through translation, Nirenstein made them accessible first to an Italian and later to an English-speaking readership.

The Italian edition focused on documents that explicitly reflected Jewish perspectives. These included excerpts of numerous materials from Emanuel Ringelblum's underground archive of the Warsaw Ghetto, both parts of which were discovered in 1946 and 1950 and have been held in the JHI archive to this day. Nirenstein's selection includes, among others, Jehoshua Perle's "Khurbn Varshe," a disturbing account of the large-scale deportation actions from the Warsaw Ghetto in the summer of 1942.[38] Perle accuses the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police of assisting the Germans in the murder of their own people and blames the victims for failing to resist their extermination. Its first publication in *Bleter far geszichte* had caused outrage in the American Yiddish-language press and led to speculations that it was a forgery by the "Yevsek historians" of the JHI.[39] Also included were excerpts from Ringelblum's notes from the Warsaw Ghetto,[40] which were published by the JHI in 1952.[41] As in the other documents from the Ringelblum Archive published during the Stalinist period, the institute's editors "removed passages which they found 'controversial,' 'shameful,' or ideologically unsound."[42] The Yiddish edition from 1952 published by Idisz Buch served as the

38 Jehoshua Perle was a Yiddish writer born in Poland in 1888. During the war, he was involved in the Warsaw ghetto underground cultural organization Yizkor. He was deported to Auschwitz and murdered in 1943.

39 See Alberto Nirenstajn, Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek, 58–95; first published as: *** [Jehoshua Perle], "Khurbn Varshe," Bleter far geshikhte 4, no. 3 (1951): 101–140. At the time of its first publication, the author was not yet identified, which further fueled speculation as to whether it was a forgery, see: Sven-Erik Rose, "The Oyneg Shabes Archive and the Cold War: The Case of Yehoshue Perle's Khurbn Varshe," *New German Critique* 38, no. 1 (2011): 181–215; Stach, "The Spirit of the Time," 193–194.

40 See Nirenstajn, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek*, 26–57.

41 Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notitsn fun varshever geto*, (Varshe: Idisz Buch, 1952). The Yiddish edition of Ringelblum's notes was positively received, although Joseph Kermish and Nachman Blumental pointed out numerous distortions. See Stach, "The Prospects and Perils of Holocaust Research," 144–146.

42 Katarzyna Person and Agnieszka Żółkiewska, "Edition of Documents from the Ringelblum Archive (the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto) in Stalinist Poland," in *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in State-Socialist Eastern Europe,* ed. Kata

basis for the translated fragments included in Nirenstein's book as well as for Jacob Sloan's unlicensed English translation of 1958.[43]

The section on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising contains, among other texts, excerpts from the diary of Ludwik Landau, a Polish-Jewish economist who observed the uprising outside the ghetto from the so-called Aryan side.[44] It also contains perpetrator sources, such as excerpts from SS General Jürgen Stroop's report on the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,[45] as well as excerpts from the minutes of the 1951 Warsaw trial against Stroop and Franz Konrad.[46] Nirenstein also included material on the resistance in other ghettos and camps, as for instance excerpts from Gusta Draeger's memoirs, written before her execution by the Germans in November 1943. The text had been originally published by the Krakow branch of the Central Jewish Historical Commission under the title "Justyna's Diary" in 1946.[47] Nirenstein also included Alexander Pechersky's account of the uprising in Sobibór extermination camp.[48] Pechersky had been a Jewish Red Army soldier and leader of the uprising. Published originally in Russian in 1945, the initial version omitted that it was almost exclusively Jews who had been murdered in Sobibór,[49] in contrast to the 1946 Yiddish version, published by the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee's publishing house *Der Emes*.[50] Nirenstein's translation was either based on this Yiddish version or its Polish translation published

Bohus, Peter Hallama, and Stephan Stach (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022), 21–37, quote 37.

43 Emmanuel [sic] Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel [sic] Ringelblum*, ed. and trans. Jacob Sloan (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1958).

44 Nirenstajn, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek*, 181–188. Ber Mark had published these excerpts in a collection of Yiddish sources on the tenth anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising: Tsum tsentn yortog fun oyfshtand in varshever geto. Dokumentn un materialn. Gezamlt un mit a forvort un bamerkungen fun B. Mark (Warsaw: Idisz buch, 1953), 251–266.

45 See Nirenstajn, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek*, 173–210. Probably taken from: Stanisław Piotrowski, ed., Sprawozdanie Juergena Stroopa o zniszczeniu getta warszawskiego (Warsaw: Książka, 1948).

46 See Nirenstajn, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek*, 267–271. Probably taken from: "Stenogram fun protses kegn jirgen stroop un frants konrad," Bleter far geszichte 6, no. 1–2 (1953): passim.

47 See Nirenstajn, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek*, 278–292. First published as: G. Draenger, Pamiętnik Justyny (Kraków: Wojewódzka Żydowska Komisja Historyczna, 1946).

48 See Nirenstajn, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek*, 364–402. "Justyna" had been her code name in the Krakow Jewish resistance, where she was active as a member of Akiba.

49 Alexander Pechersky, *Vosstanye v Sobiburovskom lagere* (Rostov: Rostizdat, 1945).

50 A. Petshorski, *Der oyfshtand in sobibur* (Moskve: Der emes, 1946).

in the Bulletin of the JHI in 1952.[51] Nirenstein's book does not contain bibliographical information and does not indicate that the majority of the printed documents had already been published in Communist Poland.

Nirenstein's proposal for *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek* came at a time of renewed interest in publications on the murder of European Jews in Italy. In the immediate aftermath of the war, several memoirs of survivors had been published, but after these initial publications the topic had garnered little interest for about a decade. Einaudi started to acquire books on Nazi camps in the mid-1950s, beginning with the translation of Anne Frank's diary, Robert Antelme's *The Human Race,* and Léon Poliakov's history of anti-Jewish persecution, *Bréviaire de la haine: Le IIIe Reich et les juifs.* Einaudi also published a new edition of Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* in 1958 after it had initially rejected the book in 1947. *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek* fit neatly within this trajectory.[52]

The book begins with a preface in which Nirenstein introduces the Polish-Jewish world of his origin to his Italian audience and emphasizes the extent of its destruction. He highlights the rich culture and the central role Jews had played in prewar Poland, stressing that 3.5 million Jews had lived there before the Nazi occupation,

> and all of them perished in the great extermination. They formed one of the most flourishing, authentic, and important groups among the world's Jewish population. Moreover, they were the custodians of its oldest traditions, and the heirs of its distinctive culture.[53]

Pride in past achievements, as well as pain and grief for a lost world, are reflected in these pages:

> The *sofer,* the mothers who lit the candles on the Sabbath eve for family prayers, the fathers who blessed their sons with the 4,000-year-old rite of the Patriarch Isaac, the rabbis who every Sabbath from the pulpits of countless synagogues, interpreted the books of the Old Testament – all were destroyed by the enemy. The pulpits were desecrated, the synagogues burned, the cemeteries ploughed up, the tombstones used to pave the roads to the luxurious villas of the new rulers.[54]

---

51 A. Peczorski, "Powstanie w Sobiborze," Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego, no. 3 (1952): 3–45. On the history of the different versions of Pechersky's account, see Ingrid Damerow, "Einführung," in *Bericht über den Aufstand in Sobibor*, ed. Aleksandr Petscherski (Berlin: Metropol, 2018), 9–26, esp. 17–20.

52 Anna Baldini, "Primo Levi and the Italian Memory of the Shoah," *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC*, no. 7 (July 2014): 156–177.

53 Albert Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy: Contributions to a History of Jewish Resistance in Poland* (New York: Orion, 1959), vii. Quotations stem from the English version unless the English edition differs from the original Italian version.

54 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, vii.

Nirenstein, writing not even two decades after the end of the war, grapples with the immense loss, repeating over and over again the totality of the destruction: "Nothing remains of all that. In three years, the enemy destroyed a millennial culture, the moral and material creation of hundreds of generations."[55]

In his preface, Nirenstein stresses his wish to bring this destroyed world closer to his Italian audience, writing, "this book aims to make Italian men and women, so rightly proud of their nation, of their traditions and national and social sentiments, aware of the experiences of another ancient and proud people."[56] Nothing in his writing points to Italy's past as a Fascist country, in sync with the dominant Italian postwar narrative, which largely obfuscated the country's Fascist past and depicted Italians as essentially good and honorable people, who had opposed both Fascism and the persecution of Jews.[57] At the end of the war, leading Christian Democrats as well as Communists and Socialists aimed at spreading the narrative of an Italy unified in a patriotic war of liberation in order to boost their legitimacy, improve Italy's position in the postwar order, and define themselves in opposition to the Fascist regime.[58] Italian Jewish postwar discourse

55 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, vii.

56 Nirenstajn, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek*, viii.

57 The image of the "good Italian" emerged toward the end of the war. After the war, Italy's postwar government and political elites more broadly, including both the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats, aimed to portray Italians as rescuers of Jews, while obfuscating war crimes to strengthen Italy's position in the peace negotiations. The Italian press widely propagated the myth of the Italian people as innocent victims who had been horrified by antisemitic persecution, and most Italians across the political spectrum embraced this version of the past. As historians such as Filippo Focardi and Angelo Del Boca have shown, the myth of the good Italian played a crucial role in forming the Italian postwar national identity. There is substantial literature on the myth of the good Italian. See for instance Filippo Focardi, *L'immagine del cattivo tedesco e il mito del bravo italiano* (Padua: Rinoceronte, 2005); Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *A Lesser Evil? Italian Fascism in/and the Totalitarian Equation* (London: Routledge, 2005); Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente? Un mito duro a morire*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Beat, 2021); David Bidussa, *Il mito del bravo italiano* (Milan: Saggiatore, 1994); Filippo Focardi and Lutz Klinkhammer, "The Question of Fascist Italy's War Crimes: The Construction of a Self-Acquitting Myth (1943–1948)," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9, no. 3 (2007): 330–348; Claudio Fogu, "Italiani brava gente: The Legacy of Fascist Historical Culture on Italian Politics of Memory," in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu (New York: Duke University Press, 2006), 147–176.

58 There is vast literature on the narrative of an Italy unified in its resistance against the German occupier. See for example Jonathan Dunnage, "Making Better Italians: Issues of National Identity in the Italian Social Republic and the Resistance," in *The Politics of Italian National Identity: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Gino Bedani and B. A. Haddock (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 191–212; Paolo Pezzino, "The Italian Resistance between History and Memory," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 4 (2006): 396–412; Filippo Focardi, *La guerra della*

aimed at merging the persecution of Jews with this narrative of Italian resistance against the German occupiers.[59] Nirenstein's book aligned closely with the dominant Italian Jewish postwar discourse, which framed Jewish war experiences within a narrative of a unified anti-fascist resistance. The concluding sentence of the preface, for instance, highlights anti-fascist unity against Nazism:

> "The Avengers of the Ghetto," the partisan brigade formed by the survivors of the struggle who escaped through the sewers of the Warsaw Ghetto, formed the link which wedded the cause of the Polish Jews to the struggle for freedom of all the peoples oppressed by Nazism.[60]

While Nirenstein does not reflect on Italy's history of Fascism and perpetration, he engages with the question of German guilt, if briefly. As suggested in his letter to Mark, Nirenstein raises the question of German rearmament, but his stated intentions for the book go beyond this particular issue. He writes,

> The fact that thousands of truckloads of children were torn from their parents by force to be brutally slaughtered or asphyxiated by Zyklon B poses not merely the problem of Germany or German rearmament, but the problem of the limits of a people's humanity [. . .]. On reading these pages, written by men, women and children confronting certain death, the sensitive reader cannot fail to ask himself: How was it possible?[61]

Yet Nirenstein never tries to provide a definite answer to the question.

The book's preface, the other introductory texts, and the chosen sources largely do not concern themselves with why the Nazis committed the genocide. He discusses the camps as a way to understand human nature, but the actions of the Nazi perpetrators play a marginal role – perhaps, in his view, they lie beyond what can be understood. His focus remains on the conduct of the Jewish victims. The records he publishes, Nirenstein argues, "allow us to present an accurate and comprehensive study of the behaviour of millions of people faced with imminent death."[62] While in the past decades, Holocaust scholars have highlighted the vic-

---

memoria: La Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 a oggi (Bari: Laterza, 2020); Illara Poggiolini and Jan-Werner Muller, "Translating Memories of War and Co-Belligerency into Politics: The Italian Post-War Experience," in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 223–243.

59 Guri Schwarz, "On Myth Making and Nation Building: The Genesis of the 'Myth of the Good Italian,' 1943–1947," *Yad Vashem Studies* 36, no.1 (2008), 112. See also Anna Koch, *Home after Fascism: Italian and German Jews after the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023).

60 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, ix.

61 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, viii.

62 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, viii.

tims' "choiceless choices" and limitations of agency,[63] Nirenstein, as many of his contemporaries, did not refrain from judging what he considered a "weakness of human nature." He scrutinizes those Jews who, in his view, betrayed other Jews: "Where in their actions does the typical behaviour inspired by the instinct of self-preservation end, and where does the phenomenon of degeneration and brutalization to which the weak and egotistical abandon themselves in critical situations begin?"[64]

Nirenstein, as in his earlier articles, divides Jews into two groups: the victimized Jewish masses and a Jewish elite, comprised of the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police who collaborated with the Nazi perpetrators:

> What can we say of the limits of human solidarity, of national unity and human compassion, when we think of the luxurious life led by the leaders, the opportunists, the wealthy black marketeers and Gestapo agents, among the heaps of corpses of children and beggars, among thousands of starving, typhoid-ridden, barefooted human beings?[65]

He returns to condemning those he perceives as collaborators and profiteers at different points within the volume, while at the same time making clear that the actions of this "privileged elite" did not reflect the conduct of Jews more broadly. He writes for instance in his introduction to the Warsaw Ghetto diary by Joshua Perle,

> the collaboration of the Judenrat and the treason of the Jewish Police at the service of the Germans do not in any way involve the people nor the Ghetto as such. Elsewhere, these people of the Ghetto have shown us examples of the greatest heroism and spirit of sacrifice.[66]

It is on this sacrifice – namely that of the resistance – that Nirenstein's book primarily focuses, and it is his depiction of the Jewish resistance that reveals his political views most clearly. The book centers on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (April 19, 1943 – May 16, 1943), which, as the first and the largest mass uprising of Jews against the Nazis, held and still holds a central place in Jewish memory. Emphasizing Jewish resistance rather than Jewish victimhood played a crucial role in the early commemoration of the Holocaust in Italy as elsewhere in Europe, as

63 Lawrence L. Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps," *Centerpoint: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 53–58. See also Primo Levi's discussion of the "grey zone," in *The Drowned and the Saved,* trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Michael Joseph, 1988), 22–51; Christopher Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 297. On the Jewish police, see Person, *Warsaw Ghetto Police.*

64 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, viii.

65 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, ix.

66 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, 7.

Jews responded to an emerging hierarchy that placed fighters against Nazism above its victims.

While Nirenstein's book primarily relates the history of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and other uprisings via primary sources, his various introductory texts provide the reader with his interpretation. Nirenstein suggests that the uprising began once people in the ghetto became aware of the Germans' true intentions and consequently stopped obeying the *Judenrat*. While resistance in many forms existed before the uprising, the armed resistance indeed started when the plans for the Nazi genocide of the Jews were fully realized.[67] Nirenstein gives a central role to the leftist Zionists as well as the Communists in initiating and organizing a united struggle. Above all, he praises the *Chalutzim*, the Zionist youth pioneers, to whom he had been close before leaving Poland:

> The *Chalutzim* soon became responsible for the fate of the Jewish community in the widest sense of the word. They became the repository of the conscience of the Jewish people. An understanding of this phenomenon makes it evident why the *Chalutzim* were the principal organizers of the struggle in the most difficult and desperate period in the history of the Jews.[68]

Indeed, Zionist youth leaders played a crucial role in organizing armed resistance, and Nirenstein is also correct in maintaining that the Bund initially rejected a proposal by He-Halutz, the umbrella organization of Zionist youth groups, to create a united front, though there is less grounds for his judgmental suggestion that the Bund,

> suffered from a complex of exasperated class hatred. Its leaders could not assess the specific situation in the ghettos nor the prospect of extermination. For a considerable time the Bund continued to uphold the absurd theory that Jewish resistance should depend strictly on that of the Poles and excluded the possibility of common action with the Jewish bourgeoisie.[69]

Next to the left Zionists, Nirenstein depicts the Communists as "among the principal organizers of the revolt" and he argues that the impetus for fighting came with a "general awakening of the European resistance in the spring of 1942."[70] He writes further that the Jewish Communists within the ghetto formed an anti-fascist front with the left Zionists, referring to the Anti-Fascist Bloc, which was formed by the Left Poalei Zion in alliance with the Polish Workers' Party (PPR), and joined by

67 Patt, "Jewish Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto," 409.
68 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, 82.
69 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, 83. According to Patt, the Bund "felt it was premature to organize a unified fighting organization," Patt, "Jewish Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto," 409.
70 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, 85.

Hashomer Hatzair. This Anti-Fascist Bloc was, however, short-lived. Nirenstein refers to political infighting between the groups, but writes that "the divergences and the political hues of the various factions disappeared almost completely a little later when the great deportations to the gas ovens of 85 per cent of the population of the Warsaw Ghetto took place in the summer of 1942." Indeed once the news of the liquidation of the ghetto became known, the left-wing and centrist Zionist youth movements, the Communists as well as the Bund, formed the Jewish National Committee and thus joined forces to fight against the deportation actions. Nirenstein's account highlights the unifying spirit of the resistance: "these heroic fighters opened their minds and their hearts to all the forces of resistance outside the walls of the Ghetto, in Poland and in the whole of Europe."[71]

The one group Nirenstein depicts as remaining outside this united Jewish front were the "bourgeois parties and circles in the Ghetto, Zionist and non-Zionist," whom he depicts as "to a large extent opportunist and pusillanimous."[72] Indeed, the Revisionist Zionists and Betar did not join the Jewish National Committee, however, Nirenstein mentions merely in passing that they formed a separate armed organization. Yet he does acknowledge, if only in a footnote, that the Revisionists took the "lead in the fight against all oppressors of the Jewish people and they fought side by side with the other fighters in the ghettoes."[73]

Briefly, Nirenstein evaluates the role of the Polish population, concluding that they "did very little to help the uprising." He does not exclude the Communist left from this critique and is overall slightly more critical toward the Communists than in his earlier articles: "The left wing of course sympathized with the combatants of the Ghetto, declared its solidarity with them in its clandestine newspaper, helped the couriers and emissaries of the Ghetto who stole into the Aryan districts in search of arms." But "without doubt the help given to the Ghetto in its struggle could have been much greater." He condemns the "behavior of right-wing circles and the nationalist Poles [as] frankly abominable,"[74] perceiving these circles as antisemitic and unwilling to provide any help. Nirenstein's depiction of the role of the various political factions inside and outside the ghetto would later anger some of his readers, though his initial Italian readership found little to object to in his account.

Nirenstein's Italian and Italian Jewish readership was mostly not familiar with the conflicts between the different political factions among Polish Jews and would have little to take issue with his favoring of the left Zionists, since among

71 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, 85–86.
72 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, 84.
73 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, 2.
74 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, 105–106.

Italian Jews, and in particular within the Italian Jewish intellectual and political elite, a Zionist perspective became dominant after the war.[75] *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek* was well received in Italy.[76] As one of the first books on the Holocaust, it had significant influence in the 1950s and '60s. It served, for instance, alongside visits to Auschwitz and Warsaw, as inspiration for Luigi Nono's electronic composition *Ricorda cosa ti hanno fatto in Auschwitz* (Remember what they did to you in Auschwitz) (1966), as the title indicates. Nono read *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek,* marked and annotated his copy, proving his careful engagement with the text.[77]

Shortly after its publication, Giorgio Romano reviewed Nirenstein's book for *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel,* one of the most prestigious Italian Jewish cultural journals. Romano suggests that the book "has been greeted by critics with respect and consideration [. . .] which is owed to the truthful testimony [. . .] of a survivor who collects documents of a tragedy that has no equal in the history of civilized peoples."[78] He highlights that the heart-breaking accounts of suffering and resistance leave an enormous impression on the reader, and praises Nirenstein for including multiple voices, which allow the reader to gain "a full picture of the lives of Polish Jews during the time of German occupation." In his view, Nirenstein succeeds in his aim to provide Italians with a sense of Polish Jewish life before the war, which is depicted with "an efficacy and a very delicate sense of poetry; I had never read anything so clear and vibrant on this subject." Nirenstein, Romano writes, allows the reader to gain an understanding of Polish Jewish history, which Western scholars had frequently ignored, and he in particular valued the inclusion of accounts of Jewish resistance.

While later others depicted the book as politically biased, Romano commends it for its objectivity: "And here we should say something about the extreme care and intelligence with which the material has been chosen and divided and about the author's noble effort to preserve – despite his suffering that vibrates [. . .] on every page – an objective tone and a certain detachment." He concludes:

> An admirable book because it tries to tell without rancour, which must be read even if the heart is almost always tightened in such a way as to make us take our breath away; a book

75 Guri Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi: gli ebrei nell'Italia postfascista* (Rome: Laterza, 2004); Koch, *Home after Fascism,* 172–177.

76 Robert Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944–2010* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 174–175.

77 Carola Nielinger-Vakil, Luigi Nono, *A Composer in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 101–102.

78 Giorgio Romano, review of Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek, by Alberto Nirenstein, *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 4, no. 11/12 (November-December 1958): 472.

> to keep clearly visible in front of our eyes to always remember what Amalek did to us, even if we are unharmed and unscathed.[79]

As an Italian Jew, Romano evaluates the book within a discursive framework that valued stories of Jewish resistance, and he perceived Nirenstein primarily as a Polish Jew whose origin provided authority to share the history of the Jews in Poland, which he sees as related to but also distinct from the Italian Jewish experience.

A Tower from the Enemy

Soon after its publication, the book was translated into English. It was published with Orion Press in a shortened version adapted to the American market in 1959. The English version received a new title: *A Tower from the Enemy: Contributions to a History of Jewish Resistance in Poland,* and the epigraph, a quote from Deuteronomy 25:17–19 that commands the Jewish people to remember what Amalek did, was not included. The reference to German rearmament was likewise omitted and the specific reference to Italians as an ancient people was universalized to "men and women all over the world, who are justly proud of their own nations, societies and traditions."[80] Likewise not included were the excerpts of Ringelblum's notes[81] – most probably since Jacob Sloan's English translation of the JHI's 1952 Yiddish edition had appeared a year earlier.

One of the first reviews of the book published in *The Jewish Post and Opinion* on June 5, 1959, praises the book and, similarly to Romano, highlights its emotional impact: "If the reader has shed tears over the murder of Polish Jewry [. . .] he will weep once more when reviewing Dr Nirenstein's [sic] contributions to a history of Jewish resistance in Poland."[82] But Nirenstein's book was soon picked up by Polish-Jewish emigrants, who scrutinized it much more closely and found it lacking. While Romano perceived Nirenstein primarily as a representative of Polish Jews, and a survivor of the Holocaust with close personal ties to the events, these Polish Jewish emigrants who had left Poland after World War II saw in him – because he had worked for the Jewish Historical Institute in the early 1950s – a representative of Polish Jewish Communists. As Nirenstein's text indi-

---

79 Giorgio Romano, review of Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek, 472.

80 Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy*, viii.

81 This concerns two of his texts, namely: Dagli "Appunti" di Emanuele Ringelblum (pp. 26–57) and L'Archivo di Ringelblum (pp. 107–118) in Nirenstajn, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek.*

82 "Nazi Reports, Photos Authenticate Stories Told by Victims in 'Tower from the Enemy,'" *The National Jewish Post and Opinion* 14, no. 41, June 5, 1959, 7.

cates, different political groups had been involved in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and after the war each group was eager to claim ownership over the Jewish resistance. Political divisions along Cold War frontlines exacerbated existing differences as each camp aimed to claim the uprising as its own.

After resigning from the Central Jewish Historical Commission, Philip Friedman spent two years in Munich, Germany, before immigrating to the United States in 1948. He became a lecturer at Columbia University in 1951. In 1954, five years before the English translation of Nirenstein's book, Friedman published a book on the Jewish resistance. In his review of *A Tower from the Enemy*, Friedman highlights the large number of works on Jews under Nazism that had appeared in the last two decades and argues that these could be divided into two camps: one that focuses on victimhood and another that emphasizes resistance. The latter, so Friedman argues,

> comprises several sub-tendencies. The various Zionist groups and the Jewish Socialist Bund stress the unity of the Jewish organizations and the Jewish people in the struggle against the Nazis. Communists and their sympathizers, on the other hand, concentrate on the class conflicts within the Jewish community. In their view, the ghetto bourgeoisie, as represented in the Nazi-appointed *Judenrat,* betrayed the Jewish masses and collaborated in their extermination, while Jewish resistance was part of the broad anti-fascist uprising of the European proletariat, initiated and led by the Communists. Mr. Nirenstein's collection of documents reflects this latter viewpoint.[83]

Friedman's assessment, which sees Nirenstein's book as a classic Marxist-Leninist interpretation (i.e., as a class struggle in the ghettos), however, does not do justice to Nirenstein's account which falls between the Communist and Zionist camps, if we can divide these groups as clearly as Friedman claims. On the one hand, Nirenstein highlights the contribution of both Zionists and Communists and at times emphasizes Jewish unity, while on the other he stresses the exploitation of the Jewish masses by what he perceives as the Jewish elite.

Friedman also takes issue with the inclusion of the diary of Joshua Perle, which he depicts as a bitter account of a

> man who had lost his balance under the strain of the first forty days of the extermination; his diary, written in a mood of utter despair, is full of contradictions, and of outbursts of hatred and invective against his fellow Jews. To present this warped view as a basic text on the behavior of the ghetto population is to do Polish Jewry a grave injustice.[84]

---

83 Philip Friedman, review of *A Tower from the Enemy*, by Albert Nirenstein, *Commentary*, August 1959, https://www.commentary.org/articles/philip-friedman/a-tower-from-the-enemy-by-albert-nirenstein/, accessed March 19, 2024.

84 Friedman, review of *A Tower from the Enemy*.

Friedman criticizes Nirenstein's condemnation and critical perception of Jewish collaboration and accuses him of "promot[ing] a slander much favored by anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi publications: namely, that the Nazis were not as responsible for the extermination of the Jews as were the various Jewish groups and institutions which engaged in fratricidal conflict."[85] Indeed, Nirenstein dedicates more room to condemning collaborators for their betrayal than to pointing to the perpetrators' guilt. While Friedman reads the emphasis on Jewish betrayal as further proof of Nirenstein's ideologically tinted interpretation, other early historians shared this interest in Jewish collaboration. The influential works by Raul Hilberg and Hannah Arendt, published not long after *A Tower from the Enemy,* also grappled with the question of Jewish responsibility. Discussions around the question of the *Judenrat's* guilt went beyond Cold War alignments.[86]

Jacob Sloan, who reviewed the book for the *New York Times* in a piece titled "The Ghetto Catastrophe," published in November 1959, likewise chastises Nirenstein for overemphasizing the role of the Communists in the uprising: "the book is weak on organization and ideas, and strong on Communist-line attitudes (one is amazed to learn that it was the Stalinists who organized the Warsaw ghetto uprising!)."[87] Sloan, who had just a year earlier published his translation of Emanuel Ringelblum's ghetto diaries, claims that Nirenstein's book had little to add to the mass of publications that already existed on the subject.

A few years after the book's publication, in 1963, David Wdowinski, who had served as the head of the political committee of the Jewish Military Union (*Żydowski Związek Wojskowy*, ŻZW), the Zionist Revisionist organization in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, wrote a review of *A Tower from the Enemy*.[88] In the same year, Wdowinski also published his account of the uprising, *And We Are Not Saved*, in which he aims to rectify the historical record, which he claims obfuscated the role of the ŻZW for political reasons.[89] Unsurprisingly, Wdowinski finds Nirenstein's

85 Friedman, review of *A Tower from the Enemy*.

86 Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963). Roughly ten years later Isaiah Trunk's book *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) was the first differentiated examination of the Jewish Councils, which avoided generalizing judgements and examined its members' actions against the background of the German occupation. For a discussion of Western intellectual approaches to this issue, see: Adam Brown, *Judging "Privileged" Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation, and the "Grey Zone,"* 1st ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

87 Jacob Sloan, "The Ghetto Catastrophe: A Tower from the Enemy: Contribution to a History of Jewish Resistance in Poland," *New York Times*, November 22, 1959.

88 David Wdowinski, review of "A Tower from the Enemy," *Jewish Social Studies* (1963): 76–77.

89 David Wdowinski, *And We Are Not Saved* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1963).

book disappointing, arguing that it was ideologically biased and added nothing to the understanding of the Jewish resistance. Like Sloan and Friedman, he criticizes Nirenstein for trying to "present the whole tragedy of Polish Jewry as reflecting class differences, the struggle of rich Jews against poor Jews." While he is correct in suggesting that Nirenstein framed the history of Polish Jews within a struggle of an oppressed Jewish mass society against Jewish elites, his depiction offers ultimately a simplified account of the book. The picking and choosing of specific quotes without their context make the text sound more politically charged than it is. Read in its entirety, Nirenstein's book reveals the author's positionality, though to depict him as "ideologically brainwashed"[90] reflects the reviewer's political bias as much as Nirenstein's and highlights the extent to which political outlooks, sharpened by the Cold War, influenced the perception of the history of the Ghetto Uprising and of the genocide more broadly.

The harsh judgment in these reviews reflects the social pressures on Jews in the United States to profess anti-Communism, as well as the authors' political viewpoints and personal grudges. The three reviewers were certain that Nirenstein wrote as a Communist and thus overlooked his commitment to Zionism. They did not consider that at the time of writing the book, he had left Communist Poland, disillusioned with a regime that prevented him from seeing his family for almost five years. Nirenstein's work was shaped by a Marxist-Leninist perspective, which situated the genocide within a framework of class struggle; it was also influenced by ideas of a unified anti-fascist resistance that crossed national borders, as well as by his grief over the destruction of the Polish Jewish world.

In his work on Italian Holocaust memory, Robert Gordon states that while Nirenstein's work was important for Italian Holocaust historiography, the latter never became an integral figure within the field but remained on its periphery.[91] The obituaries published after Nirenstein's death in 2007 likewise suggest that, while highly appreciated, he remained in some ways an outsider. Stateless until his death, Nirenstein did not entirely fit among Italian Jewish intellectuals, nor did he belong with his former colleagues of the Jewish Historical Institute or among those Polish Jewish historians and scholars who had found a home in the United States. He and his work moved across the Iron Curtain, neither quite belonging on either side.

Nirenstein remained invested in telling the history of the Holocaust. He was, as one obituary notes, "convinced of the import of that imperative 'remember,'"

---

90 Wdowinski, review of "A Tower from the Enemy," 77.

91 Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture*, 175.

referring to the Italian title of his book.[92] His daughter maintains that her father spoke little of the Holocaust, "except to communicate his very lively bewilderment, the surprise, the furious agony that found no consolation as if it had happened yesterday."[93] It is this bewilderment, the "how was it possible?" that seems to have spurred Nirenstein's writing on the Holocaust, more so than any clear ideological commitment.

In 1993 Nirenstein published a new, shortened, and revised version of his source collection under the title *E' successo solo 50 anni fa. Lo sterminio di sei milioni di ebrei* (It happened only 50 years ago: the extermination of six million Jews). The book primarily addresses young people, hoping to introduce them to the history of the Shoah and the tone of the preface is more personal than its older version, reflecting the greater emphasis on individual stories of victimhood in the 1990s. "In the extermination camp of Sobibor," writes Nirenstein, "a remote agricultural village in the Lublin region, in the ovens of this camp, hidden in the middle of the birches, my father died in June 1942 together with my brother Moshe, then eighteen, my stepmother and their four daughters, still little girls."[94] He does not focus on the role of the *Judenrat,* or the presumed class conflict between the Jewish masses and the Jewish elite.

In the decades since his first publication, the discourse around the Nazi genocide had changed. Searching for those responsible among the victims played a lesser role, and the construction of a class conflict would have appeared strange to his readers. Nirenstein, however, returns to the question of "how was it possible," considering once again the limitations of humanity, though he focuses on the perpetrators.

> What the Germans have done [. . .] in the events covered in this book poses the problem of the limits of the peoples' humanity [. . .]. With this book, we pose the problem of the absolute immorality of a people who without restraint, abandoning all moral principles, murder, torture, starve, violate, burn, and humiliate entire cities and towns.[95]

92 Giulio Busi, "Testimone della Shoah," *Il Sole 24 Ore*, September 9, 2007. Similar also is Nello Ajello, "Addio a Nirenstein testimone della Shoah," *la Repubblica,* September 3, 2007, https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2007/09/03/addio-nirenstein-testimone-della-shoah.html, accessed April 23, 2024.

93 Fiamma Nirenstein, "In memoria di mio padre," http://www.fiammanirenstein.com/articoli/in-memoria-di-mio-padre-1777.html, accessed April 18, 2024.

94 Alberto Nirenstajn, *È successo solo 50 anni fa: Lo sterminio di sei milioni di ebrei* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1995), viii.

95 Nirenstajn, *È successo solo 50 anni fa,* xi.

Considering the human capability to do horrible things leads him to ask: if it happened once, could it not happen again, in another place, to another people? In this sense, Nirenstein remains invested in a leftist tradition that places the Holocaust within a universalist perspective, highlighting the limitations of modernity in preventing atrocities.[96]

96 Such a perspective was formulated by Zygmunt Baumann, among others, in his *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

Nadège Ragaru

East-West Encounters at the Adolf-Heinz Beckerle Trial (1967–1968): How Holocaust Knowledge and Remembrance Went Global

In the decades since 1945, a large body of literature has addressed the legal pursuit of war crimes in the postwar era, pointing to the role of judicial proceedings in the documentation and remembrance of the Holocaust.[1] Nevertheless, narrating such efforts to prosecute war crimes was long hampered by competition between East and West.[2] Similarly, in countries that were to become Soviet allies, the transnational dimensions of local judicial proceedings were neglected.[3] Without a doubt, research into the "second wave" of war crimes trials in West Germany has yielded major insights.[4] However, this topic has mostly been addressed via the dual framework of West German efforts to confront the past *and* East/West German competition over the remembrance of the Nazi era.[5]

The present contribution complements the extant historiography by drawing on new pieces of knowledge and archival records generated at the intersection of

1 Norman J. W. Goda, ed., *Rethinking Holocaust Justice: Essays across Disciplines* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018); David Bankier and Dan Michman, eds., *Holocaust and Justice: Representation and Historiography of the Holocaust in Post-War Trials* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and Berghahn Books), 2010.

2 Francine Hirsch, *Soviet Judgment at Nuremberg: A New History of the International Military Tribunal after World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

3 As noted in Gabriel N. Finder and Alexander V. Prusin, *Justice behind the Iron Curtain: Nazis on Trial in Communist Poland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

4 Annette Weinke, *Law, History and Justice: Debating German State Crimes in the Long Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018); Devin O. Pendas, *The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, 1963–1965: Genocide, History, and the Limits of the Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Rebecca Wittmann, *Beyond Justice: The Auschwitz Trial* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

5 Annette Weinke, "'Allierter Angriff auf die nationale Souveranität'? Die Strafverfolgung von Kriegs- und NS-Verbrechen in der Bundesrepublik, der DDR, und Österreich," in *Transnationale Vergangenheitspolitik. Der Umgang mit deutschen Kriegsverbrechern in Europa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Norbert Frei (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006), 37–93.

Note: Research for this chapter was supported by the French project "Nazi War Crimes in the Courtroom – Central and Eastern Europe, 1943–1991 / WW2CRIMESONTRIAL1943–1991," ANR-16-CE27-0001-01, led by Vanessa Voisin, now at the University of Bologna. The author wishes to thank Vanessa Voisin, Katharina Stengel, Ida Richter, and Ania Szczepańska for sharing archival records with her, as well as Stephan Stach and Anna Koch for their remarks on an earlier version of this chapter.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. CC BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-007

East European studies and Holocaust studies in the past two decades. More specifically, I propose to take a fresh look at the transnational dynamics underlying the prosecution of Nazi war criminals before local courts in the 1960s. At the center of the investigation lies the trial of Adolf-Heinz Beckerle at the District Court of Hesse in Frankfurt am Main (Federal Republic of Germany, FRG) in 1967–1968. During the Second World War, Beckerle was German Minister Plenipotentiary in Sofia. In that capacity, the former officer of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA, or brown shirts) worked with the Bulgarian authorities to negotiate the deportation of Jews from the Yugoslav and Greek territories that had been occupied by Bulgaria since spring 1941. Prosecutor Fritz Bauer, who had been named Attorney General of the State of Hesse (*Land Hessen*) in 1956, played a decisive role in bringing Beckerle to justice.[6] Following several years of investigation, the former diplomat stood trial. However, the proceedings were suspended on account of Beckerle's medical condition shortly before Bauer's premature death in July 1968.

In this chapter, I consider the legal proceedings as a prism on how knowledge about the Holocaust formed during the Cold War – a knowledge that developed through the complex entanglement between national, regional, and international scales.[7] In particular, a careful consideration of the investigative phase and the court hearings offers a novel narrative of legal pursuits, one that brings into focus the set of global connections between West Germany, the United States, Israel, Bulgaria, the USSR, Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Austria, which were instrumental in the prosecution of Beckerle's war crimes. Situating this micro-event within its multiple national and transnational contexts, I draw on a wide range of archives: German (Hessian State Archives Darmstadt), Israeli (Yad Vashem), Bulgarian (Central State Archives; Archives of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), American (World Jewish Congress), Russian (Central Archive of the Federal Security Services of the Russian Federation), Polish (Institute of National Memory, Austrian (Austrian State Archives), and Yugoslav (Archives of the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade), as well as existing Bulgarian, German, and Yugoslav scholarship.

An examination of the Beckerle trial delivers several pieces of information about the trans-bloc and trans-national dimensions of judicial prosecution. First, it sheds new light on the diversity of Jewish justice mediators involved in the

6 Matthias Meusch, *Von der Diktatur zur Demokratie Fritz Bauer und die Aufarbeitung der NS-Verbrechen in Hessen (1956–1968)* (Wiesbaden: Historische Kommission für Nassau, 2001); Irmtrud Wojak, *Fritz Bauer 1903–1968. Eine Biographie* (München: Buxus Edition, 2016) [1st ed. 2009].
7 Annette Weinke, *Die Verfolgung von NS-Tätern im geteilten Deutschland. Vergangenheitsbewältigung 1949–1969 oder eine deutsch-deutsche Beziehungsgeschichte im kalten Krieg* (Schöningh: Paderborn, 2002), 259–272.

quest for legal redress beyond Cold War boundaries. Until recently, the bulk of the studies of trials for war crimes centered on the role of legal actors – prosecutors, judges, defense attorneys, and the like – in the making of justice.[8] Rendering the early stages of the prosecution more comprehensively, however, requires a consideration of the individuals and advocacy networks that helped to produce evidentiary material during the pretrial phase,[9] which assisted the West German investigators in overcoming the obstacles posed by the FRG's absence of diplomatic relationships with such key Eastern European protagonists as Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. In our case study, these networks included Jewish organizations (the Institute for Jewish Affairs of the World Jewish Congress, in particular), local community leaders (in Israel and Bulgaria, among others), as well as associations of Holocaust survivors and institutions dedicated to the documentation and remembrance of the Holocaust (Yad Vashem, the International Auschwitz-Committee, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, etc.). Thus, this study of the Beckerle case contributes to the growing literature on Jewish agency in seeking redress for National Socialist (NS) war crimes.

Second, the chapter makes a more general argument about the East-West divide. This argument comes in three parts. Part one: there is little doubt that Cold War tribunals were arenas of political and ideological battles, where the retelling of the past was marshalled in the service of crafting a rival present. As will be shown, logics of competitive involvement encouraged the Bulgarian, Yugoslav, Polish, and Soviet authorities to support the West German investigation – at specific moments and to differing degrees. Additionally, the involvement of Jewish survivors from Southeastern Europe coincided with the intrusion into the German courtroom of bitter divisions, which brought Jews of different political persuasions into opposition, some of whom had settled in Israel, while others had remained in Bulgaria.

---

8 Donald Bloxham, *Genocide on Trial: War Crime Trials and the Formation of Holocaust History and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Lawrence Douglas, *The Memory of Judgement: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

9 Boaz Cohen, "Dr. Jacob Robinson, the Institute of Jewish Affairs and the Elusive Jewish Voice in Nuremberg," in *Holocaust and Justice*, ed. David Bankier and Dan Michman, 81–100; Laura Jockusch, "Justice at Nuremberg? Jewish Responses to Nazi War-Crime Trials in Allied-Occupied Germany," *Jewish Social Studies* 19, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 107–147; Katharina Stengel, "Mediators behind the Scenes: The World Jewish Congress and the International Auschwitz Committee during the Preparations for the First Auschwitz Trial in Frankfurt," in *Seeking Accountability for War Crimes in East and Central Europe: A People's Justice?*, ed. Eric Le Bourhis, Irina Tcherneva, and Vanessa Voisin (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2022), 320–349.

Part two: nevertheless, by moving away from a Eurocentric view of East-West dynamics centered on the idea of bipolar confrontation, intra-bloc cohesion, and seclusion between the blocs, the study of the Beckerle affair also underlines the often complex delimitation between East and West, democratic beliefs and authoritarian allegiances, and former associations with the Nazis and support for the Allies. In the decades since the end of the war, a number of former war protagonists have indeed switched sides, adopted new homelands, and built novel lives. As some of them travelled to the courtroom from the West and others from the East, it was occasionally difficult to ascertain who exemplified what and whether present ideological hostilities were not all the more intense since they were expected to mute past proximities. Symmetrically, East-East solidarities could not be taken for granted.

Part three: ultimately, our case study shows that there were moments when factors such as similar experiences of the war, shared generational belonging, and common professional identities could prevail over the ideological cleavages of the Cold War and allow for collaborative efforts to prosecute former war criminals. However, one may also concede that these cooperative undertakings – even if conceived by those people who took part in them as attempts to circumvent the East-West divide – did create channels through which the Cold War order was both subverted and sustained.

The Beckerle Trial in Context: The 1960s Moment – Germany's Second Wave of NS Trials

In West Germany during the 1950s, the dawn of the Cold War had put a premature end to the prosecution of war criminals, the denazification process, and discussions about individual and collective responsibility during the Nazi era.[10] Meanwhile, German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's policy of reintegrating former high-ranking National Socialists found a ready audience among a society eager for a return to normalcy. Several figures with a tarnished past advanced into the entourage of the chancellor, most prominently Hans Globke, a lawyer who had

10 Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); John Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy: West Germany Confronts the Aftermath of the Third Reich* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); *Coping with the Nazi Past: West German Debates on Nazism and Generational Conflicts, 1955–1975*, ed. Philipp Gassert and Allan E. Steinweis (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

written a legal commentary on the anti-Jewish Nuremberg Laws.[11] Within such state institutions as the Foreign Office and the judicial system, a high level of continuity had prevailed.

Towards the end of the 1950s, several factors converged to reverse this trend. Following the 1955 signing of an amnesty agreement between Adenauer and Soviet authorities, a large number of German military men, who had been tried in the USSR in the wake of the Second World War, were released from captivity. Their return to the FRG conferred new visibility on "the murderers among us" (to paraphrase the title of a 1946 feature film by Wolfgang Staudte) and prompted several associations of former victims and survivors to advocate for this group to be prosecuted in Germany.[12] Meanwhile, the extensive media coverage of the Ulm *Einsatzkommando* trial – in which ten Gestapo and SS officers were convicted as accessories to mass murder for war crimes committed in Lithuania in 1941 – convinced the Justice Ministers of the West German states or provinces (*Länder*) to create an agency, established in December 1958, responsible for investigating Nazi war crimes. Headquartered in Ludwigsburg, the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes (*Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*) was expected to initiate new proceedings before the expiration of the West German statute of limitations on "base motive murder" – the only qualification that could be used to condemn Nazi war criminals.[13] Although some might have envisioned this decision as a step towards closing the books on the judicial phase, the Central Office would play a prime role in bringing about new NS trials.[14]

Those who were determined to breathe new life into the prosecutions of Nazi war criminals could rely on the support of a small group of German lawyers. Among them was Fritz Bauer, a strong believer in the didactic mission of justice.[15] After he was appointed Attorney General of the State of Hesse, Bauer actively committed the General Prosecutor's Office to the investigation of war crimes. The Auschwitz trial (1963–1965) embodied his understanding of the law: in 183 days of

11 Daniel Rogers, "Restoring a German Career, 1945–1950: The Ambiguity of Being Hans Globke," *German Studies Review* 31, no. 2 (2008): 303–324.

12 A case in point is that of Walter Gerhard Martin Sommer, an SS *Hauptschartführer* who served as a guard at the concentration camps of Dachau and Buchenwald. He was retried by the Bayreuth district court in 1958, convicted for the murder of 25 detainees, and sentenced to life imprisonment. His trial received much press coverage in both Western and Eastern Europe.

13 Annette Weinke, *Eine Gesellschaft ermittelt gegen sich selbst. Die Geschichte der Zentralen Stelle Ludwigsburg 1958–2008* (Darmstadt: WGB, 2008).

14 The date for the statute of limitations was initially set to May 8, 1965.

15 Wojak, *Fritz Bauer*.

proceedings, 360 witnesses from 19 countries and several historians testified before the court, giving unprecedented resonance to the Nazi past in West Germany.[16]

The Auswärtiges Amt and the Final Solution in the Balkans

Early on, the Attorney General's priorities included examining the role of the German Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*, AA) during the Nazi era, as he witnessed the return to office of former high-ranking Nazi diplomats into the AA under the 1951 law on civil servants.[17] In this respect, the Balkans presented a unique case. Whereas the SS had taken the lead in the Jewish deportations from Slovakia, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, in Southeast Europe the German Foreign Office had enjoyed a much broader prerogative. Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary were allies of the Reich, not occupied states. Discussions regarding the implementation of the "Final Solution" thus transited through official diplomatic channels.[18] The Balkans also stood out in another respect: a number of former SA officers had been appointed as diplomatic representatives there.

At the central level, Martin Luther's Germany Division (*Abteilung Deutschland*) within the German Foreign Office – in particular Referat D III, headed by Franz Rademacher – played a pivotal role. Locally, two rival actors occupied center stage: the German legations *and* the advisors on Jewish affairs, whose prime allegiance often tilted towards the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichsicherheitshauptamt*, RHSA). In Bulgaria, unlike Romania, Minister Plenipotentiary Adolf-Heinz Beckerle faced no competition as there was no advisor on Jewish affairs, at least before *SS Obersturmführer* Theodor Dannecker was sent to Sofia on January 21, 1943.

In January 1941, Bulgaria, soon to become member of the Tripartite Pact (March 1), had enacted a piece of anti-Jewish legislation, the Law for the Protection of the Nation (ZZN). By the end of August 1942, a Commissariat for Jewish Affairs (KEV) was entrusted with the coordination of all anti-Jewish policies.

16 Pendas, *Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial*; Wittmann, *Beyond Justice*.

17 Hans-Jürgen Döscher, *Seilschaften: Die verdrängte Vergangenheit des Auswärtigen Amts* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 2005). On the involvement of Reich diplomats in the "Final Solution," see Eckart Conze et al., *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit: Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Blessing, 2010); Christopher Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office: A Study of Referat D III of Abteilung Deutschland, 1940–43* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978).

18 Browning, *Final Solution*, 89, 109.

Meanwhile the expulsion of Jews "into the provinces or outside the kingdom" was considered a viable option in the August 29 decree.[19] By October 9, Luther in Berlin instructed A.-H. Beckerle to extend an official proposal for deportation to the Bulgarian side. This was done on October 15. A month later, the Bulgarians gave their approval and requested assistance from a German advisor in the preparations for the deportations. The Foreign Office and the RSHA settled on Dannecker, who had illustrated himself in the deportation of Jews from France.

The son of a postman born in Frankfurt, Beckerle built his career on the back of a precocious membership in the Nazi party and the SA.[20] The opportunity to join the Foreign Office came in February 1941. By June of the same year, he arrived in Sofia as Minister Plenipotentiary, adding to the SA diplomats in Hungary, Romania, and Croatia. A strong believer in the Reich's millenarian dream, Beckerle was arrested by the Soviets with other German diplomats in Sofia as they tried to escape to Turkey in September 1944. In 1951, he was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment by a Soviet military court on account of his role in the repression of Soviet partisans. Meanwhile, he had been judged *in absentia* by the District Court of Hesse as a Class 1 (Major Offenders) criminal. The 1955 German-Soviet amnesty agreement allowed him to return to Germany. In 1956, the Association for Victims of Nazism (*Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes*, VVN), a left-wing organization created in the aftermath of the war, filed a petition to try him for acts he committed when he served as the Frankfurt chief of police. After their petition was denied in April 1957,[21] Attorney General Bauer decided to approach the case from another angle – the persecution of Jews in the Balkans.

Preliminary investigations against Beckerle commenced as early as 1956. The Frankfurt Prosecutor's Office filed a request with the West German Foreign Office for the personal files of several former diplomats, including Fritz Gebhardt von Hahn, who had worked as a deputy to Franz Rademacher, the Jewish *Referat* within *Abteilung Deutschland*, and whose legal case was joined to that of Beckerle in December 1965.[22] In the second half of the 1950s, a large body of records from the Political Archives (PA) of the AA, formerly American trophy archives, was trans-

---

19 Frederick Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940–1944* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972); Nadège Ragaru, *Assignés à identités. Violence d'État et expériences minoritaires dans les Balkans post-ottomans* (Istanbul: ISIS, 2019).

20 Hessian State Archives Darmstadt (Hessisches Staatsarchiv Darmstadt, HStAD), Fond/Abteilung (Ab.) 631a, Inventory/Band (B.) 597, pp. 2–4.

21 Wojak, *Fritz Bauer*, 384–386.

22 Von Hahn was indicted for his role in the roundups in Thessaloniki (in the German occupation zone) and for the deportation of Jews from Bulgarian-held territories. Prosecutor Richter was assigned to the case.

ferred back to Bonn from the United States.[23] Drawing on these and other incriminating documents, an indictment against Beckerle was issued in September 1959.[24] He was charged as an accessory to the deportations of Jews from the Bulgarian-controlled territories. First state prosecutor Wilhelm Wentzke was assigned to investigate the case. Competent personnel, however, were sorely lacking in the office of the Attorney General, as it was also preparing for the Auschwitz trial (1963–1965) and assisting Israeli authorities on the Eichmann case.[25] An attempt to transfer the investigation to the newly created Ludwigsburg Office had failed. Prospects were looking rather dim when the discovery of a novel piece of evidence gave the investigation a new impetus: the former diplomat's personal diary, recovered from the political archives of the AA.[26]

However, adhering to this linear narrative of the pretrial investigation would be misleading. For such an account fails to capture the extraordinary web of initiatives – West, East, and beyond – thanks to which the German investigators brought Beckerle to justice. I will now turn to the story of these transnational collaborative efforts.

Beyond the Cold War Divide: The Construction of a Legal Case – *East-West Prosecution Obstacles*

When the West German investigators took up the Beckerle case, they knew they could expect little help from the Eastern European countries where material and testimonial evidence of Beckerle's guilt were most likely to be found – Bulgaria, the USSR, and Yugoslavia. Following in the footsteps of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria had launched a media campaign calling to abolish the statute of limitations for Nazi crimes.[27] The daily press was replete with articles denouncing West German revanchism, imperialism, and threats to peace. At a bilateral level, however, Bulgaria's relations with the FRG were exempt from the bitter memories affecting German ties to Poland, East Germany, and Hungary. Twice over the course of a century, the Bulgarian state had sided with Germany in a war with the hope of achieving territorial goals. Additionally, during World War II, Bulgaria had been spared the extreme suffering experienced by other Slavic peoples in Europe.

23 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, pp. 134–35.
24 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, pp. 557–571.
25 Pendas, *Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial.*
26 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 618, p. 86.
27 "Svetovnata obštestvenost e protiv sroka za davnost," *Evrejski vesti*, November 9, 1964, 1.

In 1953, the two Cold War enemies exchanged official trade representatives. Shortly after the establishment of the Warsaw Pact (1955), the West German government further offered the Bulgarians the establishment of diplomatic relations.[28] For a short while, Soviet leaders seemed to favor a rapprochement between the FRG and the Eastern bloc. Bulgaria was a likely candidate as the country harbored neither anti-German *nor* anti-Soviet feelings. Yet, the strong reluctance of the East Germans to let socialist states normalize their relations with the FRG, on the one hand, and the West Germans' strict adherence to the Hallstein Doctrine, on the other, prevented this move. The existence of two German states, the recognition of the postwar borders, and the nuclear arms race remained divisive issues.

At the time of the Auschwitz trial, Attorney General Bauer had successfully reached out to the USSR, in part thanks to his longstanding credentials as a Social Democrat.[29] In the Beckerle case, the West Germans once again turned to the Soviet *Prokuratura* with the hope that they might obtain a copy of the verdict of the 1951 Beckerle trial and complementary data on the legal investigation.[30] Yet, whilst the indictment against Beckerle and von Hahn was being written, the line of communication between the Germans and the Soviets remained disturbingly silent. A few more weeks were needed before the precious document landed on their desk.

Tito's Yugoslavia offered an additional venue. A significant number of the Holocaust victims for whom Beckerle was investigated originated from Vardar Macedonia, a region that belonged to the Yugoslav kingdom prior to the war. In the wake of the Tito-Stalin split (1948),[31] Yugoslavia sought new allies in the West and exchanged ambassadors with the FRG in 1951–1952.[32] However, in the early 1960s,

28 Jordan Baev, "The Establishment of Bulgarian-West German Diplomatic Relations within the Coordinating Framework of the Warsaw Pact," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18, no. 3 (2016): 158–180.

29 Jasmin Söhner, "NS-Verbrechen ermitteln. Die Justizkooperation zwischen der Zentralen Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen und der Sowjetunion (1955–1973)" (PhD diss., Ruprecht Karl University of Heidelberg, 2022).

30 Central Archive of the Federal Security Services of the Russian Federation (Tsentral'nyi Arkhiv Federal'nykh Sluzhb Bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii, TsA FSB Rossii), H-20808, pp. 34–44, 98–117, https://web.archive.org/web/20190309091821/http://istmat.info/node/21979, accessed April 29, 2024.

31 Svetozar Rajak, *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in the Early Cold War: Reconciliation, Comradeship, Confrontation, 1953–1957* (London: Routledge, 2010).

32 Thomas Brey, "Bonn und Belgrad. Die Beziehungen zwischen Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Jugoslawien seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," *Osteuropa* 29 (1979): 632–644, here 633; Marc Christian Theurer, *Bonn-Belgrad-Ost-Berlin: Die Beziehungen der beiden deutschen Staaten zu Jugoslaweien im Vergleich 1957–1968* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2007). The author wishes to thank Natalija Dimić for enriching her knowledge of Yugoslav-German relations.

Yugoslavia's recognition of East Germany (1957), the influence of Croat émigré organizations in West Germany, and Yugoslav demands for financial indemnification of the Yugoslav victims of Nazi repression brought the bilateral ties to a low point.[33] Diplomatic ties would not resume until January 1968.

Overall, in their search for incriminating evidence, the German investigators would need astuteness. Of utmost priority was the identification of individuals whose broad network of contacts could bridge the cleavages between East and West.

Holocaust Survivors as Mediators of Justice

As soon as the first echoes of Beckerle's investigation spread, a surprisingly dense web of contacts took shape in Europe and the United States. Central to these connections were Jewish organizations and Holocaust survivors. One of the earliest initiatives preserved in the archives features Hermann Langbein, the secretary general of the International Auschwitz Committee, who contacted the German Prosecutor's Office on December 28, 1958. Langbein drew the prosecutor's attention to several pieces of scholarly research he thought might be of use to the investigators (Gerald Reitlinger, Léon Poliakov and Joseph Wulf), as well as to the existence of an agreement pertaining to the deportation of "20,000 Jews, initially," which bore the signature of "the subordinate of Beckerle, SS-Hauptsturmführer Theodor Dannecker." He further warned of the risk that Beckerle might flee at the slightest opportunity.[34]

By the summer of 1959, West German prosecutor Wentzke had identified two interlocutors in his effort to breach the Iron Curtain and reach out to Bulgaria: Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the Institute for Jewish Affairs (IFA) of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) in New York. Asking for assistance from Israel seemed all the more warranted given Attorney General Bauer's cooperation with the Israeli authorities on the Eichmann case. In addition, beginning in the mid-1950s, the director of the Research Department of Yad Vashem, Israel Halpern, had alerted the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the need of locating materials about Jewish history and the Holocaust in the countries where most of them lived prior to

33 Zoran Janjetović, *Od Auschwitza do Brijuna. Pitanje odštete žrtvama nacizma u jugoslavensko-zapadnonjemačkim odnosima* (Zagreb: Srednija Europa, 2007).

34 Austrian State Archives (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, ÖSA), Nachlass Hermann Langbein, E/1797, p. 96. The author wishes to thank Katharina Stengel for sharing this document with her. On June 19, 1959, prosecutor Wentzke asked Langbein for further assistance in establishing the identity and number of victims from the Bulgarian-held territories. ÖSA, E/1797, pp. 98–99.

the war, i.e., Eastern Europe. Several members of the Israeli Legations behind the Iron Curtain were asked to collect and copy records for Yad Vashem.[35] Moreover, the substantial Bulgarian Aliyah to Israel in 1948–1949 increased the likelihood that evidence for the crimes might be found in the Jewish state.[36] On August 25, Wentzke contacted the head of the Yad Vashem archive, Józef Kermisz (Joseph Kermish), himself a Holocaust survivor.[37] The Israeli archivist informed the prosecutor that trials for anti-Jewish crimes had actually taken place in Bulgaria in the spring of 1945 and that Yad Vashem possessed a transcript of the court session protocols.[38] He also provided a list of records relevant to the case.[39]

Already in summer 1959, Kermisz had directed the attention of the West German prosecutor to the former leader of the small Bulgarian Revisionist Zionist movement during the interwar period, Benjamin Arditi (1897–1981).[40] Upon leaving Bulgaria for Israel, Arditi had taken with him archival documents he used to offer a first reading of the Jewish fate in Bulgarian-held territories in 1952[41] and a second one, sent as a manuscript to Yad Vashem in 1959.[42] Prosecutor Wentzke contacted him to ascertain the fate of the Greek Jews deported from the Bulgarian harbor of Lom.[43] By way of an answer, Arditi offered a copy of his 1952 book, which sparked the prosecutor's interest.[44] In Arditi's account of the events, the German jurist saw evidence that in March 1943 no one in Bulgaria, much less a member of the German diplomatic corps, could ignore the fate awaiting the Jews expedited to the "Eastern provinces." Within a couple of months, a flurry of invitations was ex-

35 Boaz Cohen, "Setting the Agenda of Holocaust Research: Discord at Yad Vashem in the 1950s," in *Holocaust Historiography in Context*, ed. David Bankier and Dan Michman, 255–292, here 282. Cohen cites a report from 1955 according to which Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary all contributed files, books, museum displays, photographs, or films within the framework of this collection campaign.

36 Between October 25, 1948, and May 16, 1949, a total of 32,106 Bulgarian Jews departed for Israel. Cited in Bojka Vasileva, *Evreite v Bălgarija, 1944–1952* (Sofia: U.I. "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 1992), 125.

37 Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), P. 37/17, pp. 8–9. Prosecutor Wentzke also asked the Association of Bulgarian Migrants (*Hitachduth Olei Bulgaria*) in Israel for information on "Jewish persecution during the Second World War in Bulgaria."

38 YVA, P. 37/F 17, p. 3.

39 YVA, P. 37/17, pp. 12, 18.

40 YVA, P. 37/17, pp. 6–7.

41 Benjamin Arditi, *Rolijata na Car Boris III pri izselvaneto na evreite ot Bălgarija* (Tel Aviv: Kooperativen pečat O. P, 1952).

42 YVA, P. 37/17, pp. 4–5.

43 YVA, P. 37/17, pp. 14–15.

44 Michael Molho and Joseph Nehama, *In Memoriam. Hommage aux victimes juives des nazis en Grèce* (Salonique: Imp. N. Nicolaidès, 1948).

tended to Arditi to make a statement in Frankfurt, including by Attorney General Bauer himself. Efforts to follow this lead, however, proved disappointing, especially since the Israeli parliamentarian failed to locate survivors and witnesses.[45]

There remain, however, more narrative threads to this story. At the very time when he was in discussion with the German judiciary, Arditi maintained an epistolary relationship with the second major non-governmental actor involved in the early search for evidence in the Beckerle case – the Institute for Jewish Affairs of the WJC, then headed by Nehemiah Robison, a jurist and the brother of Jacob Robinson.[46] His organization put to use a breadth of contacts to assist German investigators in their work both during the early phase of the investigation against Beckerle (1959–1960) and during the initial forays into the past of Fritz Gerhardt von Hahn (from June 1963 until January 1964).[47]

Robinson had begun to investigate Beckerle's criminal deeds before prosecutor Wentzke sought his assistance. In the summer of 1959, he turned to the Tel Aviv branch of the WJC, and, through it, to the Bulgarian and Greek associations of *olim*.[48] By October 15 of the same year, he was probing the willingness of the Bulgarian side to support the German prosecution: his letter to Bulgarian Chief Rabbi Hananel, however, was left unanswered.[49] On February 9, 1960, prosecutor Wentzke penned a missive to the American lawyer, highlighting the difficulties he faced in gaining access to sources in East European countries:

> It is very likely that there exists in Bulgaria a number of people who, given their relationship of service or otherwise with the German embassy of the time in Sofia or with the government (i.e., the president of the Council of Ministers FILOFF, Ministry of the Interior GABROWSKI, Jewish Affairs Commissioner BELEFF) or for another reason had knowledge of the aforementioned events. I also find it likely that there are in Bulgaria a large number of documents of Bulgarian and German origin that are concerned with these deportations. In part, those who could serve as witnesses probably participated, as defendants or witnesses, in the war crimes trial (which took place in 1945 in Sofia) and some of the aforementioned documents were presented as proof in the course of this trial. [. . .] Given that my

45 YVA, P. 37/203, p. 31.

46 Michael R. Marrus, "A Jewish Lobby at Nuremberg: Jacob Robinson and the Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1945–1946," *Carodos Law Review* 27 (2006): 151–165.

47 Robinson made the first move, addressing a letter to Wentzke in June 1963, after he learned that von Hahn was being investigated. Robinson's successor, Oscar Karbach, was solicited less by the German team, despite a renewal of contact on the eve of the trial in 1967.

48 American Jewish Archives (AJA), World Jewish Congress (WJC) Records (New York Office), Manuscript collection no. 361 (MS-361), C187/10, Bulgaria, correspondence, Deportation of Jews, 1960–1968, Cincinnati, Ohio. Special thanks to Vanessa Voisin for making these documents available to the author.

49 AJA, WJC, MS-361, C187/10 (unpaginated).

> possibilities of finding these witnesses and documents are highly limited, I would be obliged, Mr. Robinson, if you might request the aforementioned information from the Jewish community of Sofia and, in particular, for them to name the witnesses and documents in question.[50]

A quick glance at Robinson's correspondence reveals his unrelenting efforts to collect incriminating evidence in Israel (the WJC representation in Israel; the associations of migrants from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece; the Section for Investigation of Nazi War Crimes of the Israeli police), West Germany (the United Restitution Organization, URO), and Bulgaria. On February 29, 1960, Robinson forwarded Wentzke's letter to the Central Consistory of the Bulgarian Jews.[51] By March 17, having received no response, he once again turned to Chief Rabbi Hananel. This time, however, he reminded his interlocutor of the recent restoration of Bulgarian-American diplomatic relations and made it clear he had also contacted the Bulgarian embassy in Washington.[52] The move paid off. On May 6, the Jewish Consistory sent "two photocopies of documents relating to the activity of A.–H. Beckerle, the German ambassador in Sofia during the fascist regime, that you may relay to the General Attorney of Hesse in Frankfurt," and a book entitled "Documents" with "text underlined by us with a red pencil on page 9."[53] Alas, the records sent by the Bulgarians were from the Nuremberg trial. Moreover, prosecutor Wentzke was already familiar with *Dokumenti*, an anthology of archival records compiled on the eve of the 1945 trial for anti-Jewish crimes. So much for the Bulgarian connection.

The Bulgarians were reluctant to support the West German investigation, and the Jewish community leaders felt uneasy. Following the creation of the state of Israel, only a tiny community of about 9,000 Jews had remained in Bulgaria. Their ability to put Jewish issues on the public agenda was limited; pressures to conform, politically and nationally, were rather high. Decisions affecting the community were centralized. In 1959, the Central Consistory of the Bulgarian Jews – hitherto a pivotal actor of Bulgarian Jewish life – and Chief Rabbi Hananel were marginalized through the creation of the Social, Cultural, and Educational Organization of Jews in the People's Republic of Bulgaria (OKPOE).[54]

50 AJA, WJC, MS-361, C187/10 (translated from German).
51 AJA, WJC, MS-361, C187/10.
52 AJA, WJC, MS-361, C187/10.
53 The document reproduced on page 9 is a facsimile of a February 4, 1943, report by the Bulgarian commissar for Jewish affairs detailing the understanding reached between Beckerle and the Bulgarian Minister of the Interior concerning the deportation of Jews from Bulgarian-held territories.
54 *Evrejski vesti*, 13, 416, July 21, 1959, 3.

There remained one last option – Yugoslavia. Here again, Robinson acted as a key mediator. In 1963, West German Prosecutor Richter was assigned the von Hahn case. He sought evidence regarding the Macedonian Jews deported to Treblinka in 1943. As Robinson made clear in a letter to the Tel Aviv WJC representative, diplomatic hurdles hindered this investigation too:

> [. . .] the Public Prosecutor tells me that in view of the strained relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and Yugoslavia, he does not expect any assistance from the Yugoslav authorities. Then, our only possibility of finding evidence is through our affiliated organizations in Yugoslavia and Greece and through your office in Israel because, as I mentioned, some of the survivors from Macedonia are residing there. I would ask you to contact the Irgun Olei Yugoslavia to find out whether they have on their rolls any names and addresses of survivors of Macedonia and possibly Thracia [sic]. If you are not successful, please issue a press release calling upon all survivors of these two regions to report to you. It might be possible that the Israel police have some documents relating to these two areas, but I am very doubtful of it. [. . .] Please communicate with the Irgun Olei Greece and try to obtain whatever information might be secured in this matter.[55]

Robinson also took it upon himself to ask the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, Albert Vajs, for his assistance. His attempt met with failure perhaps all the more so since Vajs was sick at the time and would die in April 1964. The head of the IJA, however, was not the kind of person to renounce an idea. Three months later, in announcing the publication of a scholarly volume by Macedonian historian Aleksandar Matkovski, Robinson took the opportunity to write to Vajs again.[56] Although he did not live to see the results of his efforts, his perseverance eventually bore fruit. On February 21, 1964, a copy of the *Tragedy of the Macedonian Jews* finally reached the IJA. It would take one more intercession, namely that of Zagreb-born American attorney Paul Neuberger, a specialist in questions of nationalized and "Aryanized" properties in Yugoslavia, before the Yugoslavs agreed to send expert witnesses before the Hessian court.[57]

Private individuals and non-governmental institutions thus not only acted as advocates of justice for war crimes, they also aided in the collection of evidence. Offering an overview of these circulations will illuminate another way in which the Cold War divide was traversed.

55 AJA, WJC, MS-361, C187/10.
56 AJA, WJC, MS-361, C187/10.
57 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, pp. 185–186.

Binding East and West: The Circulation of Evidence across Space and Time

The making of a trial might best be depicted as a maelstrom of journeys across space and time, uniting humans and non-humans in a strange merry-go-round. In our case study, these circuits involved people (investigators, defendants, witnesses, etc.) as well as things (original and certified copies of archival records, visual materials, maps, etc.) in what would ultimately become a worldwide investigation. This section of the chapter brings some of these movements to life and suggests a more complex reading of the ways in which symbolic and territorial divisions played out in the prosecution of Nazi criminals.

Prosecutor Richter gave a succinct account of the territorial scope of the investigation during a trip to communist Bulgaria in June 1968: "The investigations of the court started in 1958, 51 court sessions have already taken place, 70 witnesses were heard, and 8 requests for legal aid were carried out in foreign countries. This is an enormous amount of work."[58] The list of foreign countries whose cooperation had been solicited knew no East-West divides. It comprised Austria, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Israel, Poland, the USSR, and Sweden, among others. Moreover, the June 1968 journey of the West German judicial team to communist Bulgaria was only one in a catalogue of missions abroad undertaken by the investigators over the course of a decade. Richter himself had already visited Bulgaria in the fall of 1967. Aside from the German justice officials, several private individuals and organizations were commissioned to conduct specific inquiries, or else crossed into Eastern Europe of their own volition to support the prosecution. In October 1964, for instance, the recently established *Bulletin of the Documentation Center of the Association of Jewish Victims of the Nazi Regime* in Vienna informed its readers:

> The Documentation Center has sent an employee to Beograd at the invitation of the jugoslavian [sic] Ministry of Defense to look into the archives concerning the tragedy of the Jewish population of Yugoslavia. These documents have been checked for the first time and our operative was specially chosen to seek out documents proving the transport of 7,000 Jews from Skopje to Treblinka. These documents are most important for the trial of ADOLF HEINZ BECKERLE, the former NS ambassador in Bulgaria, who took an active part at the deportation of the Jews from Macedonia.[59]

58 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 619, pp. 37–45.

59 Documentation Center of the Association of Jews Persecuted by the Nazi Regime (Dokumentationszentrum des Bundes jüdischer Verfolgter des Naziregimes), *Information Bulletin*, no. 2, October 1964, 4. The author wishes to thank Vanessa Voisin for sharing this document with the author.

Whether undertaken by private individuals or public officials, these transnational travels did not cease on the eve of the trial. In September 1967, the court had authorized the organization of a trip to Israel by members of the Prosecutor's Office in order to collect and record 12 Israeli witness statements.[60] No less impressive were the travels of the witnesses summoned by the court from Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Greece, Israel, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Yugoslavia. Some of them were asked to take part in several German trials concomitantly.[61] On a few occasions, the members of the court additionally agreed to move a session to hear the statements of witnesses, who were unable to come to Frankfurt. On January 9 and 10, 1968, for instance, a court session was held in Bayreuth to allow former *Judenreferat* Franz Rademacher to testify before the court, as he was held in pretrial detention.[62]

Documents swirled around, as well, leading multiple social lives. We have only to recall the cultural biography of several historical pieces used by the prosecution. During the investigation, *In Memoriam* by the Rabbi of the Thessaloniki Jewish community, Michael Molho, was cited by several protagonists in West Germany, Greece, Israel, and the United States. Arditi's 1952 book appeared at least four times in the exchanges between the FRG, the USA, and Israel, with copies offered to the German team. *Dokumenti* (1945) led a more modest, though ultimately more effective, life, as long segments of the volume were translated into German and quoted in the indictment and in the speeches of the prosecutors. The contribution of Macedonian historian Aleksandar Matkovski (1962), although a relative latecomer to the discussion, flew from Yugoslavia to the US and the FRG, and served to confirm several aspects of the organization of the deportations from Macedonia. The protracted connection between the Germans and the Yugoslavs enabled one additional book shipment, a volume which drew on a selection of documents collected by the Yugoslav Commission on war crimes in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War (1952).[63]

60 In the meantime, five new names were added to the list of witnesses, including that of Józef Kermisz, and the trip had to be postponed to the end of April 1968. HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, p. 141.
61 On February 12, 1968, the court was informed that only one of the three witnesses from Poland scheduled to appear on that day could stand in the witness booth – Maria Świderska-Świeratowa, a survivor of Auschwitz who had been deported from Salonica – since the two others had already been requested to testify against Heinrich Bernhard Bonitz and Josef Joachim Windeck, two defendants at the third Frankfurt Auschwitz trial. HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, p. 158.
62 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, p. 101.
63 Zdenko Löwenthal, ed., *The Crimes of the Fascist Occupants and Their Collaborators against Jews in Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Federation of Jewish Communities of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia, 1957) [1st ed. in Serbian, 1952].

Nevertheless, this account of the whirlwind of things and people conveyed by mail, train, or flight would be incomplete, were one to ignore the element of time travel. As was the case in most second wave trials for NS crimes, the German investigators borrowed from previous legal proceedings in the building of their argument: the Nuremberg trial, the Treblinka trial in Düsseldorf, the first and second Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt, the prosecutions of Dieter Wisliceny (1948), Franz Rademacher (1949), and Heinrich Baab (1950), as well as documents pertaining to the 1960 preliminary investigation against Max Merten and Arthur Meissner. In 1967–1968, the polyphonic voices of all these criminal cases entered the Frankfurt courtroom.

Making sense of the Beckerle trial, therefore, necessitates a consideration of the global circulation of incriminating evidence, defendant and witness statements, as well as juridical arguments, whose temporal range exceeds the 1956–1968 timeframe. This, in turn, requires us to recall the evolving map of Europe. Proximities and distances between allies and foes – old and new – underwent significant transformations during this period. Determining what stood for East and West, guilt and innocence, the ability or failure to prosecute war crimes – all this may be trickier than expected.

Two examples of superimposed movements in time (1944–1945 vs. 1968), in space (East vs. West), and in the given roles (defendants vs. witnesses) will illustrate the point. In Frankfurt, one of the major achievements of the German prosecution team was to bring several members of the former German Legation in Sofia to court. Apart from Beckerle, however, they all appeared as witnesses, not as defendants. Most of them had stood trial earlier. However, they had been sentenced by Soviet military courts whose legitimacy was nil in the eyes of Western observers. Former German consul in Sofia, Roland Gottlieb, and former technical assistant to Beckerle, Heinrich Biermann, were among the individuals who had been found guilty in Eastern Europe and stood free and self-confident as they addressed the judges in Frankfurt in 1968.[64] Even more important to our argument is the case of two Bulgarians, former defendants in Bulgaria (1945), who were summoned as witnesses by the Hessian judges (1968). Elucidating the reshuffling of positions and speeches, their situation opens a window onto how Cold War disputes made their way into the courtroom. Their shifting parts also underscore the fluid definitions of East and West. More broadly, the examination of the collaboration between the West German legal professionals and the Bulgarians will show how difficult it may be to associate one geopolitical bloc with the search for truth and the other with a mere attempt at manipulating history.

64 HStaD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, pp. 126–133, 209–212.

"Cold War" Disputes in the Courtroom – East, West: Uncertain Boundaries

Once co-nationals, our two characters appeared in West Germany as nationals of two countries diversely situated along the Iron Curtain. Let us trace the non-linear trajectories whereby the West German courtroom was turned into an arena where national and ideological battles were waged, and issues of guilt and innocence became blurred.

In 1945, Slavčo Zagorov and Pejo Draganov Peev stood trial before the Bulgarian People's Courts – exceptional jurisdictions set up in the fall of 1944 to prosecute war crimes *and* purge the former "bourgeois" elite – with Chamber 7 of the People's Courts specifically dedicated to the prosecution of anti-Jewish crimes.[65] The Germanophile Bulgarian ambassador to the Reich in Berlin from 1942 until the end of the war, Slavčo Zagorov cautiously decided to remain in Germany after the September 9, 1944, regime change. Sentenced to death *in absentia* in Sofia (January 1945),[66] he would soon embark on a brilliant career path as a professor at Stanford University (1950–1954) and the University of Vienna (after 1955).

A lawyer appointed the mayor of his hometown, Pejo Draganov Peev joined the Bulgarian Commissariat for Jewish Affairs (KEV) – the all-powerful institution in charge of anti-Jewish policies – shortly after its creation in 1942. On February 15, 1943, he was commissioned to Skopje to help prepare the roundups and the internment of Macedonia's Jews, and became commander of the Skopje temporary detention camp (used prior to the deportation of Jews to Poland).[67] Acquitted by the Bulgarian People's Court in April 1945 (he maintained before the judges that he had submitted his resignation, disagreeing with the policies being implemented in Macedonia), he remained in Bulgaria thereafter.[68]

By the time they came to the German courtroom, Bulgarian-born former diplomat Zagorov had acquired Austrian citizenship, while ex-KEV official Peev was still a Bulgarian national. As one travelled to the court from the West and the other from the East, little remained of their once shared pro-Nazi political beliefs.

---

65 Nadège Ragaru, "The Prosecution of Anti-Jewish Crimes in Bulgaria: Fashioning a Master Narrative of the Second World War (1944–1945)," *East European Politics and Society* 33, no. 4 (2019): 941–975.

66 Central State Archives of Bulgaria (Centralen dăržaven Arhiv, CDA) in Sofia, Fond (F) 1449, inventory (op.) 1, archival unit (ae.) 1, pp. 10–16.

67 CDA, F 1449, op. 1, ae. 193, pp. 111–123, 164, 166–168.

68 CDA, F 1449, op. 1, ae. 179, pp. 17–111; Nadège Ragaru, "Figure de l'accusé en témoin de l'accusation: les circulations internationales des poursuites judiciaires des crimes de la Shoah en Bulgarie," *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*, no. 214 (2021): 121–148.

Certainly, both converged on one basis: their insistence on Germany's responsibility in the persecution of Jews in the occupied territories. Beyond this one common feature, they used the witness stand to circulate sharply differing visions of Bulgarian wartime history and, thereby, take part in the historical controversies that divided communists in Bulgaria and Bulgarian anti-communists living in exile. Zagorov's account to the judges is particularly striking:

> The members of the cabinet to which I belonged were sentenced to death by a Soviet court and executed after 1944 upon the conclusion of the agreement with the Reich over the passage of German troops (through Bulgaria on their way to Greece and Yugoslavia).[69] I am the only survivor [. . .].
>
> The law against the Jews was inspired by the Germans against the will of the people and the government.[70] [. . .]
>
> The king played the leading role in the resistance. [. . .]
>
> Before I took up my duties in Berlin, Boris [the Bulgarian king] gave me important instructions in the farewell party. He was the real leader in foreign policy. The king gave me two arguments.
>
> 1. Military reasons:
>
> One cannot hand over soldiers and officers – the Jews were also in the army.[71]
>
> 2. Political reasons:
>
> The people are one hundred percent against extradition. The 20 Bulgarian divisions must remain operational, which is not guaranteed if the Jews are removed from the army. [. . .]
>
> The new Bulgarian Jews were not as important to us as the Bulgarian Jews, because they were not Bulgarian soldiers. [. . .][72]

By the end of Zagorov's testimony, a clear picture of the events had emerged – albeit a quite surprising one, given its loose ties to historical factuality. Zagorov, for instance, credited King Boris III – and himself indirectly – for the non-deportation of the near totality of the Bulgarian Jewish community, an estimated

69 The jurisdiction was Bulgarian, not Soviet. However, the sentencing for chambers 1 and 2 was negotiated between Stalin, Georgi Dimitrov, and the secretary of the Central Committee of the Worker's Party ahead of the hearings.

70 The Law for the Defense of the Nation (ZZN) was not initiated against the will of the government. The text was prepared by the Bulgarian government. It was publicly debated in parliament, adopted by the Bulgarian deputies in December 1940, signed by King Boris III, and enacted on January 23, 1941.

71 The sentence is misleading, to say the least. In January 1941, forced labor was imposed upon the Jews, who were initially conscripted into a specific branch of the army, the *Stroitelni vojski*. In August 1941, Jewish members of the forced labor battalions were transferred to the Ministry of Public Works, forbidden to wear uniforms, and supervised by non-Jewish commanders, with forced labor becoming an explicit part of the persecutions of Jews.

72 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, pp. 129–133.

48,000 persons.[73] Obviously, his appraisal of the monarchy was addressed as much to the West German court as it was to the Bulgarian audience in the courtroom and beyond.

Peev's name as a possible witness for the prosecution had been proposed by the Bulgarian authorities, as their West German colleagues looked for a person who could attest to the involvement of Nazis with the Bulgarian-led camp of Skopje in Macedonia and the transportation of Jews from Skopje to Treblinka. The former camp commander did perform this role: he insisted that "Belev and a German Commissar on Jewish affairs (his name is not known to me) visited the camp and beat the Jews" and that "a German watch commando took over the transport."[74] As expected, his testimony made no reference to the king as a possible "rescuer of the Bulgarian Jews."

The image of the Frankfurt legal proceedings that gradually crystallizes from a consideration of these testimonies defies simple assessment. Let us sum up our findings up to this point. Prior to the trial, a network of mostly private actors situated at both ends of the Cold War divide used their knowledge and contact networks to aid the prosecution in its investigative work – regardless of their political persuasions. During the court hearings, "East" and "West" donned several faces. Deciphering who was a "fascist" and who was "not" became a challenging endeavor. Yet, the fact that the East-West boundaries should appear as less stable and legible than is commonly assumed does not mean that Cold War infighting was absent from the courtroom. These sites of discord, however, may belie our expectations: contrasting Bulgarian and West German diplomatic agendas did contribute to the shaping of the Beckerle trial. Yet, Bulgaria's decision to collaborate with the West Germans also lifts a veil on an under-estimated facet of the East-West competition, namely the disputes amongst the Bulgarian communists, the Bulgarian anticommunists in exile, and the Bulgarian Jews in Israel. The final sections of this chapter are dedicated precisely to the role of multilayered trans-bloc contentions in the shaping of the Beckerle trial (and that of professional and personal solidarities in bridging divisions).

73 On the conflicting assessments of the fate of the Bulgarian Jews and Jews living in Bulgarian-occupied territories, see Nadège Ragaru, *Bulgaria, the Jews, and the Holocaust: On the Origins of a Heroic Narrative* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2023).

74 HStaD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, pp. 205–212.

German and Bulgarian Responsibilities for Deportation: A Zero-Sum Game

By the terms of logic alone, the Beckerle case was bound to resemble a zero-sum game. There seemed to be an inversely proportional relationship between the responsibility imparted to the Nazis and to the Bulgarians in the deportations of Jews from the Bulgarian-held Yugoslav and Greek territories. During World War II, Bulgaria – captured by Raul Hilberg's description as that of a "half-ally, half-satellite"[75] – although a member of the Tripartite Pact, did not declare war on the USSR. In exchange for allowing the Wehrmacht to cross its territory on its way to Greece and Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941, the country was granted custody of most of Vardar Macedonia and the Pirot area of Serbia (in Yugoslavia), as well as Thrace and Eastern Macedonia (in northern Greece). That the incorporation of these territories was not confirmed by any international agreement did not prevent the Bulgarians from exercising civil and military authority over them, dispatching Bulgarian personnel, introducing Bulgarian legislation, and adopting the lev as official currency.

In discussions over the implementation of the "Final Solution," several lines of communication sprang up, connecting the *Auswärtiges Amt* and the RHSA to the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the prime minister, and the king. As Minister Plenipotentiary of the Reich in Sofia, Beckerle acted as an intermediary between the Bulgarian and German institutions, forwarding German requests to the Bulgarian authorities and authoring several reports on the progress of the negotiations. As the date for devising concrete plans neared, two other figures took center stage: *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Theodor Dannecker, Eichmann's special envoy who worked closely with the head of the Bulgarian Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, Aleksandăr Belev, after January 21, 1943; and Adolf Hoffmann, who was appointed police attaché in early March 1943.

To assess Beckerle's precise extent of guilt, the German judges needed to determine whether the roundups of the Jews had been imposed by an almighty protector upon its weak ally, or whether they had been freely agreed upon between two partners whose leaders converged – at least to a degree – in their under-

75 Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 2006) [1st ed. 1961]; István Deák uses the notion of "politically independent allies" to depict Finland, Italy, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, and Bulgaria, "all of which had their own heads of state, ministries, diplomacy, armies, police, and national administrations." See István Deák, *Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution during World War II* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2015), 7.

standing of the ultimate goal of anti-Jewish policies. This, in turn, required that the prosecutors and court members evaluate the level of custody the Bulgarians had exercised over the occupied territories. Beckerle himself was keenly aware of this challenge. In his defense, he never failed to remind the audience that "the new territories were fully incorporated" into Bulgaria[76] and that "the German troops in Bulgaria did not have the strength of a division. They could not exert any pressure on Bulgaria."[77] Beckerle also argued that he was innocent, for he had used his connection to the king, in his words "a clever and influential figure," to bring about the "saving of the Bulgarian Jews."[78]

The Multiple Logics Underpinning Collaboration and Competition

German legal professionals may not have been fully cognizant of the fact that their dilemmas echoed the key bone of contention in discussions about the past in Bulgaria and Israel,[79] as well as among Bulgarian anti-communist *exilés*, that is Bulgaria's wartime policies towards Jews and the role of the king in these policies.[80] As a fact – alongside several discussions between high-ranking Soviet, Polish, and Bulgarian decision-makers in 1965[81] – this configuration may explain the belated decision (June 1966) of the Bulgarians to reach out to the West German Prosecutor's Office in Hesse and offer to "pinpoint new pieces of evidence."[82] The German prosecutor Richter was as astonished as he was hopeful: a couple of days later, he replied that he needed a certified copy of the Dannecker-Belev agree-

76 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, p. 114.

77 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, p. 126.

78 HStaD, Ab. 631a, B. 597, p. 139.

79 Frederick Chary, "Boris III, Tsar of the Bulgarians," in *Balkan Strongmen: Dictators and Authoritarian Rulers of Southeast Europe*, ed. Bernd Fischer (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 119–139.

80 In 1964 former Bulgarian Queen Giovanna, who had sought refuge in Spain, published her memoirs: Ioanna, Queen of Bulgaria, *Memorie* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1964).

81 In September 1965, exchanges took place between representatives of the Soviet General Procuracy, the Polish Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland (GKBZNwP) and the Bulgarian military procuracy, see the Institute of National Memory (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, IPN) in Warsaw file: IPN BU, 3058/84. The author wishes to thank Ania Szczepańska for sharing these documents with them, as well as Paul Gradvohl and Piotr Malachiński for their insights on these files.

82 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 612, p. 12.

ment concerning the deportation of 20,000 Jews from the occupied territories, witnesses who could authenticate the document[83] and the originals of several archival records cited in the indictment – including the February 4, 1943, report by Commissioner for Jewish Affairs Belev, where Beckerle's name was explicitly cited. Additionally, the German judiciary hoped to benefit from Bulgaria's assistance in locating Jewish survivors.[84]

The complex trail of events that followed these initial contacts reveals the many contradictory threads woven together in the fabric of the Cold War. One episode will illustrate this point: the journey of West and East German jurists to Bulgaria in June 1968.[85] The expedition aimed to collect witness testimonies; obtain incriminating material from the Bulgarian archives; and, upon a request by the Bulgarians, find a historian to ensure that their definition of judicial *and* historical truth would be heard in the Hessian court.[86] What we know from the trip of justice officials Richter, Bauer, and Koch; defense counsels of the accused, Geis and Schalast; and East German assistant to Friedrich-Karl Kaul (an East German lawyer who had made a name for himself during the Auschwitz trial and represented the interests of a Holocaust survivor from Greece in a civil claim) Joachim Noack to Bulgaria between June 20 and June 26, 1968, comes from a report co-authored by West German justice professionals in January 1969 to prove the points scored by the FRG in its relation to the East Germans on that occasion.

An examination of this report actually reveals the intertwining between attempts at turning the trial into a political stage, the building of interpersonal trust, efforts to negotiate reciprocal benefits, and close surveillance by the intelligence apparatus. Moreover, in this triangular game, that East-East solidarities should prevail could not be taken for granted. For their German guests, the Bulgarian hosts organized high-ranking meetings – the president of the Sofia district court, the chief of the Sofia Prosecutor's Office, and the president of the Special Court on legal assistance – suggesting the significance they attached to a visit that may have been seen as a first step towards formalizing bilateral judicial collaboration between the two states. There was, however, no mutual legal assistance agreement between Bulgaria and the FRG, on the one hand, and the FRG and the GDR, on the other. Therefore, all protagonists had to deploy extraordinary skills in meeting the demands of the Eastern and Western judicial players. With great

83 The certified copy was indeed delivered. However, the Sofia *Prokuratura* did not provide the original document to the Germans, despite the latter's repeated requests: HStAD, Ab. 631a, p. 612.

84 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 612, p. 1129, 1130.

85 For a different take on this trip, see Weinke, *Die Verfolgung von NS-Tätern,* 280–283.

86 HStAD, Ab. 631a, B. 619, p. 37–45.

creativity, in several dinners and sidelong discussions, solutions were actually found to most of the Cold War conundrums.

Nevertheless, the East-West binary was not the only game in town. For the West German prosecutors, the Bulgarian judicial professionals and the Jewish communal leaders all hoped that Beckerle and von Hahn would be sentenced – a position that the West German defense attorneys obviously did not share. To some extent, professional solidarities as well as personal affinities offset ideological differences. Additionally, the good relationship between prosecutor Wentzke and the Bulgarian journalist who had mediated bilateral contacts, Isidor Solomonov, facilitated the handling of political discords. One might have expected the Bulgarians and the East German representative to display a sense of proximity based on their shared belonging to the Eastern bloc. This proximity failed to materialize. Ultimately, as the foreign guests were invited to visit the renowned historical site of the Rila monastery, the presence in the Bulgarian car of an unnamed journalist, perhaps an agent of the communist State Security, went nearly unnoticed . . .

Conclusion

The outcome of the proceedings was a disappointment to all those Bulgarians who had pleaded for a collaboration with the West Germans. For medical reasons, A.-H. Beckerle's trial was suspended, never to be restarted; the former diplomat would die in his bed in 1976.

This chapter chose to adopt an extremely narrow focus – that of the prosecution of two defendants in the state of Hesse in the 1960s – in order to cast a prism on wider social and political processes of Holocaust remembrance during the Cold War, and on the production and migration of knowledge about the destruction of European Jews. Considering the events from an observation post based in Frankfurt has allowed us to embrace a vast range of transnational connections that exceeded the scope of the competition between the Federal Republic and the Democratic Republic by far, suggesting the existence of sometimes porous boundaries between state and non-state actors.

Rather than a linear account of multiple actors converging around the need for former high-ranking Nazi officials to receive punishment, the trial had emerged as the endpoint of competing logics of involvement and interests. The courtroom has thus offered an angle onto Cold War-era remembrance of the Holocaust that neither precludes nor eschews conflict, but brings into relief the social logics through which the many confrontations were mediated and played out. Some divisions were professionally defined and were exacerbated by poor interpersonal re-

lationships; others extended intra-Bulgarian political contention; still others related to the broader framework of the Cold War, implicating the United States, Israel, the USSR, Poland, and Yugoslavia to varying extents. It is this palimpsest-like configuration that gave the Beckerle-von Hahn trial its unique form and incorporated multiple temporalities (including the events themselves, their successive legal examinations, and the waves of testimonial recollections) into a handful of months in the tribunal.

In the final balance, one cannot but wonder at the unrelenting commitment, the thorough patience, and the tenacious attention of these networks of individuals who, regardless of their differing personal backgrounds, wartime experiences, and political beliefs, worked towards compiling documentary evidence and bringing the perpetrators to justice. These polyphonic claims for legal redress form an intrinsic part of the story of the Cold War – an era when there were those, in East and West, who shared a vision of human agency as at once humble and promethean.

Vanessa Voisin

Accountability and the Cold War: The Eichmann Trial and Holocaust Representation in the Soviet Union

> It is no wonder that the accused is installed in a special bullet-proof glass cage. After all, certain influential persons in West Germany would be extremely interested for Eichmann to fall silent before the trial opens.[1]

With these words ends the only newsreel footage about the Eichmann trial, lasting one minute and twenty-three seconds, to be found at the Russian Audiovisual Archives.[2] These two sentences make up about a quarter of the spoken commentary, and their placement at the end reinforces their significance. This example is characteristic of the approach that the Soviet media of the 1960s took towards Nazi crimes during World War II. Their vigorous denunciation of the failures of denazification in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and strident but unelaborated assertions of postwar collusion between former Nazis and capitalists permanently accompanied, even eclipsed, the crimes or trials. The prosecution of these crimes offered the USSR a legal weapon in its media battle against the Western bloc. If new elements were employed in presenting war crimes, such as the widespread use of testimonies with sound in films, these remained under the full control of Soviet censors. None of the testimonies filmed by Leo Hurwitz in Jerusalem was used.[3]

The Soviet Union had led the way in the mediatization of trials of war crimes defendants, with the spectacles of the Krasnodar and Kharkiv trials in July and December 1943, respectively. These first trials, widely covered by So-

1 *Foreign News* (*Inostrannaia khronika*), no. 8, 1961, Central Studio for Documentary Films (TsSDF), Russian State Archives of Cinema and Photography (RGAKFD), no. 19647.

2 The archives of Soviet television remain silent on the Jerusalem trial.

3 See Sylvie Lindeperg and Annette Wieviorka, "Hurwitz à Jerusalem: du procès comme série télévisée," in *Le Moment Eichmann*, ed. Sylvie Lindeperg and Annette Wieviorka (Paris: Albin Michel, 2016), 85–94. The use of (Eastern European) witnesses in Western European Nazi trials brought with it concerns both factual and juridical, undoubtedly familiar to the Eichmann prosecutors in Jerusalem as well. On Western use of Soviet-bloc witnesses and evidence, see Jasmin Söhner, "After Nuremberg: The Appearance of Soviet Victims of Nazi Atrocities as Witnesses in West German Postwar Trials, 1964–1969," *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 68, no. 4 (2020): 432–454.

Note: This article has been translated by Victoria Baena and David A. Rich, as well as significantly updated thanks to the research grant ANR-16-CE27-0001.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-008

viet and international journalists, sent a message to Axis troops and to domestic collaborators alike: there would be no impunity and no mercy. The trials also served notice to the western Allies that accountability for the crimes that occurred on Soviet territory would be high on the inter-Allied agenda. Other high-profile trials were filmed in winter 1945–1946; they foregrounded brief excerpts of witness, sometimes survivor, accounts of the crimes and concluded with the execution of judgments.[4] Besides these dozen very publicized trials, public hearings also characterized many local wartime trials of collaborators accused of violence against their co-citizens. It is important to add, however, that the overwhelming majority of trials for treason and collaboration, as well as trials of German, Hungarian, and other prisoners of war (POWs) charged with war crimes were held behind closed doors. The practice of public execution (by hanging) was limited to the years 1943–1946. By 1960, in the wake of de-Stalinization and legal reform, the USSR had begun a tentative movement towards a reopening of its Nazi-era crimes trials and the recordation of those processes in print and visual media. Witnesses counting in the dozens would play a central role in those later trials.[5]

In its early days, the "Eichmann affair"[6] had an ambiguous reception in the Soviet media. The June 24, 1960, edition of *Pravda* published the speech of the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Soviet representative to the UN. But the

4 An extensive recent literature exists on these spectacular proceedings. For a contextualization of these trials within the practice of international humanitarian law, see especially Vanessa Voisin, *L'URSS contre ses traîtres. L'Épuration soviétique 1941–1955* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015); Franziska Exeler, "Nazi Atrocities, International Criminal Law, and Soviet War Crimes Trials: The Soviet Union and the Global Moment of Post-Second World War Justice," in *The New Histories of International Criminal Law. Retrials*, ed. Immi Tallgren and Thomas Skouteris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 189–219.

5 The contributions to the volume, Eric Le Bourhis, Irina Tcherneva, and Vanessa Voisin, eds., *Seeking Accountability for Nazi and War Crimes in East and Central Europe: A People's Justice?* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2022), delve into the problems of publicity and openness in postwar Eastern European trials. Publicity such as trial testimony also created a framework within which surviving Eastern European Jews could re-center the essential place of Jews among Nazism's victims and thus affect historical memory of these events in the socialist East. See also: Kata Bohus, Peter Hallama, and Stephan Stach, eds., *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in Communist Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022); Vanessa Voisin, "The 1963 Krasnodar Trial: Extraordinary Media Coverage for an Ordinary Soviet Trial of Second World War Perpetrators," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 61, no. 3–4 (2020): 383–428.

6 To borrow the title of one of the rare texts published on the subject at the time: Lev Ginzburg, "Delo Eikhmanna [The Eichmann Affair]," in *Tsena Pepla* [The Price of Ashes] (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1961), 118–150. By this title, the journalist implied that beyond the Jerusalem proceedings, the Eichmann trial revealed a number of problems in denazification.

news report was not interested in describing Eichmann's responsibility for the genocide of European Jews, nor in the question of the violation of Argentine sovereignty, nor, to be sure, in the political and legal question of the punishment of war criminals.[7] Very quickly, the event was dragged into a propaganda campaign characteristic of the Cold War. The Kremlin presented the USSR as a peaceful power, disturbed by bellicose rumblings from the West. In one single denunciation, Soviet voices articulated the collusion between capitalist and Nazi interests, the "revanchism" of the West German government, and the forgetting of the USSR's role in the 1945 victory. There was not a single Soviet article, essay, or documentary film that did not take up these arguments, a pattern which the Kremlin's growing hostility towards the state of Israel intensified.

Among the consequences of de-Stalinization, launched in 1956 at the Twentieth Party Congress, was a need to redefine the country's identificatory framework. Encouraged by a new memory policy, the "Great Patriotic War" (as the Second World War was officially designated in the Soviet Union) gradually became an object of veneration, with aspirations toward unity.[8] Such aspirations also made it possible for the authorities to present the country as the savior of a Europe that had been vanquished from within by its own "fascist" demons.[9] But the myth of the war was never clearly formulated by higher Soviet authorities, and at times unexpected local interpretations were sketched out in turn.[10] The domestic aims of the war myth and its vulnerability to individual interpretation also explain the persistence of an ambivalent treatment of the Holocaust in the media. Nonetheless, the media campaign launched around the Eichmann trial invites us to reassess the Soviet narrative maintained until that time about World War II and about the civilian victims of the Nazi occupation of Soviet territory. The foreign policy issues related to the Jerusalem trial encountered an evolving

---

7 "At the UN Security Council," *Pravda*, June 24, 1960, quoted in Kirill Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild: The Holocaust in the Soviet Mindset, 1941–1964* (Sarrebruck: VDM Verlag, 2009), 55.

8 Nina Tumarkin, "The Great Patriotic War as Myth and Memory," *European Review* 11, no. 4 (2003): 595–611; Amir Weiner, "In the Long Shadow of War: The Second World War and the Soviet and Post-Soviet World," *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 3 (2001): 443–456.

9 The discourse that emerged at the beginning of the 1960s was more explicit than the propaganda of the war years on the racist and antisemitic nature of Nazi ideology. Nonetheless, Soviet media continued to designate the ideology of the Third Reich as "fascist" (and not Nazi).

10 For a detailed example, based on the Latvian case, see Irina Tcherneva and Juliette Denis, "*Je me souviens de tout, Richard* (Rolands Kalniņš, Studio de Riga, 1967): une manifestation précoce d'une mémoire concurrente de la Grande Guerre patriotique," *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*, no. 12 (2011), accessed April 29, 2024, http://pipss.revues.org/3875.

internal discourse that attempted to promote a return to glory, while also emphasizing Soviet sacrifices from 1941–1945.[11]

The scholarship has begun to analyze the press reaction in the USSR to Adolf Eichmann's arrest and the subsequent investigation, conducted over the course of an entire year, and finally to the trial and verdict.[12] It revealed how the Soviet propaganda campaign that accompanied these events was launched and what were its major structural facets. In the present contribution, I will follow these steps, focusing on the evolution of official discourse on the Holocaust, while insisting rather on its ambiguities and exploring literary, press, and filmic spaces in which the topic was discussed. Undoubtedly, in this regard the Eichmann trial played a vital role in the Soviet Union, even if it did not overcome resistance to public recognition of the specificity of the genocide of the Jews. The fate of the Jewish communities in the occupied territories, especially the Soviet ones, continued to be placed on the same plane as Nazi violence against the Slavs.

This study builds on news and documentary films of the time, archival documents available on their production, and the memoirs of the Jewish-Ukrainian director Rafail Aronovich Nakhmanovich.[13] I also examine the writings of Lev Ginzburg, a Moscow essayist deeply involved in this campaign, who participated in the production of a film.[14] Ginzburg, a war veteran, was a Germanist, translator, journalist, and author. In the early 1960s, he became one of the main scribes of the Kremlin's antifascist crusade, penning several articles on the Eichmann trial and a collection of thoughtful narratives on the war, Nazism, and the persistence of Nazi ideology in the contemporary world, which was reprinted several times over the course of the decade. Finally, he was involved in the publicity surrounding the trial of members of

---

11 The proliferation of writings on this theme in the USSR during the 1960s attests to the renewal of interest and the reorientation of censorship on the history of the Second World War, particularly the memories of some of its actors, major historical syntheses, memoirs of veterans (including partisans), and the like. Particularly noteworthy is: *Istoriia Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny Sovetskogo Soiuza 1941–45* [History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941–1945], 6 vols. (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1960–1965), compiled by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the CPSU and published in more than 200,000 copies, http://militera.lib.ru/h/6/index.html, accessed April 24, 2024.

12 Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild*; Nati Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions to the Eichmann Trial: A Preliminary Investigation 1960–1965," *Yad Vashem Studies* 35, no. 2 (2007): 103–141.

13 Rafail Nakhmanovich, *Vozvrashchenie v sistemu koordinat, ili martirolog metek*a [Return to the grid system, or martyrology of a dago], ed. Galina Nakhmanovich and Vitalii Nakhmanovich (Kyiv: Feniks, 2013).

14 Ginzburg, *Price of Ashes* (from the 1962 reprint); *Bezdna* [The Abyss] (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1966). The documentary film in question is entitled *In the Name of the Living*, directed by Leon Mazrukho on a scenario written by Lev Ginzburg (Rostov Documentary Studio, 1964).

Sonderkommando 10a held in Krasnodar in 1963, writing a book on the trial as well as the script for a documentary filmed at the time.[15]

A "Second Nuremberg?" Soviet Trials vs. the Jerusalem Trial

The Soviet reaction to the Eichmann trial recalls, in many ways, the situation of 1945–1946. The Kremlin, disappointed and even annoyed by the Nuremberg trial of 1945–46, embarked on a counter-offensive by trying war criminals itself: it organized eight high-profile trials of foreign criminals between December 1945 and March 1946. Another wave of similar public trials occurred in the fall of 1947, and a final one was organized in Khabarovsk in 1949.[16] But most trials of either foreign criminals or local collaborators unfolded behind closed doors. At the end of the 1950s a new visibility was given to these prosecutions. At the same time, the Jerusalem trial had begun. All eyes were on the trial, and as Soviet power sought to establish itself as the sole guarantor of international law, it adopted a discursive strategy of denigrating the Eichmann trial by constantly referring to the Nuremberg trial, even though it remained very critical toward the latter. In its campaign against the Western media, the Kremlin deployed rhetoric that mingled obligations of historical memory with legal arguments.

The announcement of Eichmann's arrest by Israeli forces in early May 1960 nearly coincided with the beginning of a new wave of public trials of war criminals in Poland and the Soviet Union.[17] While prosecutions on Soviet territory beginning

15 On Ginzburg, see Voisin, "The 1963 Krasnodar Trial,"; Maxim D. Shrayer, "Lev Ginzburg, Soviet Translator: The Story of a Jewish Germanophile Who Became a Soviet Investigator of Nazi Crimes," *Tablet Magazine*, October 24, 2018: https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/lev-ginzburg-soviet-translator, accessed May 29, 2024.

16 Francine Hirsch, *Soviet Judgment at Nuremberg: A New History of the International Military Tribunal after World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). Besides the works mentioned in footnote 5, see Valentina Polunina, "Soviet War Crimes Policy in the Far East: The Bacteriological Warfare Trial at Khabarovsk, 1949," in *Historical Origins of International Criminal Law: Volume 2*, ed. Morten Bergsmo, Wui Ling Cheah, Ping Yi (Brussels: Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher, 2014), 539–562.

17 Work on the so-called second wave trials (i.e., those that followed the several hundreds of thousands of proceedings which occurred under Stalin) has accelerated since 2010. Among the latest publications, see Le Bourhis, Tcherneva, and Voisin, *Seeking Accountability*; Rauschenberger, Katharina, Joachim von Puttkamer, and Sybille Steinbacher, eds., *Investigating, Punishing, Agitating: Nazi Perpetrator Trials in the Eastern Bloc* (Gottingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2023).

in 1961 received the widest media coverage, earlier trials in the peripheries or in the near abroad launched the legal and media campaign.[18] In March 1959, *Inostrannaia khronika* [Foreign News] offered the Soviet public a brief segment on the verdict pronounced at the trial of the former Gauleiter of East Prussia Erich Koch in Poland, which had begun in October of the previous year.[19] At the same time, in Chervonoarmiis'k (Rivne oblast, today Radyvyliv) a team from the Ukrainian News Studio filmed the judgment against five Ukrainian UPA nationalists accused of crimes between 1943 and 1947. Like many other film productions of this period, *Narod zvinuvachue* [The People Accuse] intertwined complex domestic and international issues.[20] Originally, the film was intended to discredit Ukrainian nationalists against whom the Kremlin had been waging a long war of counterinsurgency, following the annexation of parts of western Ukraine to the USSR.[21] Though the military operations stopped in the early 1950s, the political police remained extremely wary of any sign of resumption of "nationalist" activity in these regions, especially after the return from the Gulag of many of those convicted or exiled, released thanks to the post-Stalin amnesties or simply at the end of their terms.[22] The documentary stresses the long-standing collusion of these nationalists with Germany, a history it traces back to 1918, as well as to the war crimes committed during World War II and afterward. This narrative choice ultimately reduced the problem of Ukrainian nationalists in the USSR to a betrayal in favor of a particularly cruel enemy. Despite the confusion between two separate albeit related issues – the relationship between Ukrainian nationalism and the Soviet regime, on the one hand, and the Nazi occupation and its violence, on the other – the documentary ad-

---

18 The films, in particular, were shown throughout the USSR.

19 *Foreign News*, no. 6, 1959, TsSDF (RGAKFD, no. 18395). The segment on the Koch trial was fourth on the newscast and ran for fifty seconds.

20 *Narod zvinuvachue*, 1959, Ukraine News Studio, TsDKFFA (Central Audiovisual Archives of Ukraine), no. 2021. Sound film, 28 min. Directed and written by V. Sichevskii, camera by I. Goldstein. I checked the criminal investigation file of this trial in the HDA SBU (Sectoral State Archives of the Security Services of Ukraine) in Kyiv and the request for rehabilitation by the spouse of one of the accused was rejected by the regional military prosecutor's office in 1993 on the basis of evidence documenting the assassinations committed by the convicted man while he was serving as a member of an "SB" combat unit (security guard of the UPA): HDA SBU 5/67722(vol.15)/201 (document dated June 23, 1993).

21 Alexander Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

22 Oleg Bazhan, "The Rehabilitation of Stalin's Victims in Ukraine, 1953–1964: A Socio-Legal Perspective," in *De-Stalinising Eastern Europe: The Rehabilitation of Stalin's Victims after 1953*, ed. Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 170–185; Amir Weiner, "The Empires Pay a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics," *Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 2 (2006): 333–376, especially 370–371 on this specific trial.

dressed the problem of Nazi war crimes on Soviet territory. Two images of Babyn Yar enter directly at the beginning of the third section, with no relation to the crimes alleged against the accused. *The People Accuse* borrows most of the motifs we can observe in previous Soviet films on political trials since the late 1920s, and more specifically since 1943, surrounding the first trials of war criminals, particularly Krasnodar and Kharkiv. On June 20, 1960, the Soviet Ministry of Culture authorized an edited Russian version of the film to be broadcast throughout the Soviet Union, marking its importance within the state's propaganda efforts.[23] Several Soviet newspapers had just announced and commented on Adolf Eichmann's arrest by the Israelis. While it is impossible to establish a concrete link between these two events, their simultaneity should be noted.

Three other trial films were shot in Ukraine that same year. At the end of winter 1960, *Mi ne zabudemo* [We Will Not Forget] invoked the trial of six "nationalists" from the Sumy region, set against the backdrop of denouncing West German "revanchism." *Nizivskaia tragediia* [The Tragedy of Nizi], authorized to be released on April 9, 1960, narrated the trial in Belz (Lviv oblast) of five "UPA members" accused of violent crimes in the village of Nizi in 1944.[24] Finally, B. Kuptievskaia and two assistant cameramen filmed a seven-minute installment about the Kovel trial of July 14–16, 1960 (Volyn oblast), based on similar charges.[25] The film of most interest to us here is *We Will Not Forget,* which opens with contemporary images of "revanchist" West Germany. Shots of military parades alternate with close-ups of FRG officers, as the voice-over comments:

> These shots were taken neither twenty nor thirty years ago. These shots were taken yesterday. Once again, on the streets of West German cities, are walking those whom the patrons of fascism raise for future murders, arson, and looting. Fascism rears its head. But nations do not forget nor forgive crimes.[26]

23 In this new version, *Narod obviniaet*, the original film is adapted by shortening the long lyrical introduction on Ukraine, with commentary translated into Russian. The testimonies are, however, all preserved in their original, even if they are mostly in Ukrainian. See the film folder at the TsDKFFA containing detailed descriptions (*montazhnaia zapis'*) and release authorizations of the 1959 Ukrainian and 1960 Russian versions.

24 *Nizivskaia tragediia*, 1960, Ukraine News Studio, TsDKFFA, no. 2232. Sound film, 19 min. Directed by V. Sichevskii, photography by I. Goldstein, M. Poichenko. It was not possible, in this case, to find and study the criminal investigation file pertaining to this trial and therefore to assess the substantiation of the charges (based on a later re-examination through rehabilitation procedures).

25 *Sud nad ounovtsami* [A Trial of OUN members], 1960, Ukraine News Studio, TsDKFFA, no. 3352. Short film, 6–7 min. Photography: B. Kuptievskaia, B. Gladchenko and a third cameraman whose name is illegible (the filming report attached to the film file is hand-written).

26 *Mi ne zabudemo,* 1960, Ukrainian News Studio. TsDKFFA, no. 2225.

With no transition, the contemporary shots give way to images of sometimes questionable authenticity that illustrate the violence of the Wehrmacht in occupied Europe.[27] If the rest of the film did not return to these insinuations against the West German elite, the film at least opened an allegation that would continue to develop over the course of the decade.

In March 1960, the Extraordinary State Commission on Nazi crimes[28] was briefly revived in Moscow to mount a case against Theodor Oberländer, a minister in Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's cabinet and deputy in the Bundestag.[29] On April 5, the Commission held a press conference in the capital to inform the international community of crimes committed by Oberländer during the war. Foreign press correspondents were invited and a pamphlet was released the next year.[30] Film moved more quickly: the short feature, *Vy – prestupnik, Oberländer!* [You are a criminal, Oberländer!] reached screens in May 1960, at the very moment when the world was learning of the news of Adolf Eichmann's capture.[31] It was released at the same time as the first articles pointing to the high rank and quiet

---

27 In Ukrainian documentaries from these years, I have observed the frequent use of images reconstituted later (for example, the Auschwitz re-enactment in the spring 1945) or images drawn from famous fictional productions (like *The Unvanquished* by Mark Donskoy, 1945).

28 The organization's full title was the "Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Atrocities of the German Fascist Invaders and Their Accomplices and the Damage They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms, Public Organizations, State Enterprises and Institutions of the USSR" (*Chrezvychainaia gosudarstvennaia komissiia po ustanovleniiu i rassledovaniiu zlodeianii nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov i ikh soobshchnikov i prichinonnogo imi ushcherba grazhdanam, kolkhozam, obshchestvennym organizatsiiam, gosudarstvennym predpriiatiiam i uchrezhdeniiam SSSR*, or ChGK).

29 The ChGK was created November 2, 1942, to gather evidence for criminal prosecution of any "temporary fascist occupiers" who committed crimes on Soviet territory. It concluded its work and ceased operating after the completion of the Nuremberg trials. See Marina Sorokina, "People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR," *Kritika* 6, no. 4 (2005): 797–831. Sorokina consulted the last report of the Commission, dated March 28, 1960, and preserved at the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF R–7021/116/390/831). On the ChGK and its late operations, see also the ground-breaking dissertation of Paula Chan, "Eyes on the Ground: Soviet Investigations of the Nazi Occupation" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2023) and the book to be published at PUF, Paris, by Nathalie Moine (2025).

30 ChGK, *Krovavye zlodeianiia Oberlendera. Otchet o press-konferentsii dlia sovetskikh i inostrannykh zhurnalistov, sostoiavsheisia v Moskve 5 aprelia 1960 goda* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo literatury na inostrannykh iazykakh, 1961). The English edition of the pamphlet: *Report of an Investigation into the War Crimes of Theodor Oberländer. An International Press Conference Held in Moscow, April 5, 1960* (New York: Crosscurrents Press, 1960).

31 Valerii I. Fomin and Aleksandr S. Deriabin, *Letopis' rossiiskogo kino, 1946–1965* [Annals of Russian Cinema, 1946–1965] (Moscow: Kanon-Plus, 2010), 491. The film is conserved at RGAKFD, no. 18627: *Vy – prestupnik, Oberländer!*, 1960, TsSDF. Sound film, 17 min.

life led in the West by a former senior official in the Nazi Ministry of the Interior, Hans Globke.[32] Alternating archival footage of the war years (including German images) and contemporary sequences, the film denounced the FRG's feeble denazification. It showed a man, an "inexorable fascist" and "war criminal," as complacently accepted by federal Germany's political elites as he had once been by the ruling circles of the Third Reich.

Moreover, the documentary posed two essential ideas that would return unremittingly in later writings and documentaries. The first is that, in opposition to the immoral state of oblivion prevailing in the FRG (and with which other capitalist powers would soon be associated), the USSR paid tribute to the memory of victims and respected the international legal commitments concluded in 1943–1947 on the issue of war criminals. The second consisted in associating the inadequacies of denazification with the emergence of West German revanchism: the history of the interwar period would be repeated, with the complicity of the USSR's capitalist opponents, who favored German re-militarization and its entry into NATO (1955). The parallel between these two periods was particularly emphasized in Mikhail Romm's famous 1965 documentary, *Obyknovennyi Fashizm* [Ordinary Fascism]. But it appeared very explicitly as early as autumn 1961 in the second version of *From Munich to Nuremberg* by Arkady Poltorak, the secretary of the Soviet delegation to Nuremberg in 1945–1946.[33]

Thus, at the beginning of the summer of 1960, various newspapers and two short films were already challenging the FRG, and sometimes, in second place, the United States. At this stage of the press campaign, it was not the largest daily newspapers that carried such insinuations against Western powers, but rather *Vechernaia Moskva* (Moscow Evening), *Novoe vremia* (The New Times), and *Czerwony Sztandar* (The Red Banner), the paper of the Lithuanian Communist Party, written in Polish.[34] These press organs accused the West German and American governments of having sought, and continuing to aim at, the removal of Eichmann from

---

32 Globke had been instrumental in elaborating and implementing Nazi racial laws from the mid-1930s onward and in the 1960s was chief of staff of the German Chancellor's office. The campaign against Globke continued in the press in autumn 1960. A Belorussian newspaper suggested that Globke may have paid Eichmann's lawyer to ensure that the latter would not compromise him during the trial. See Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions," 117. Finally, a documentary from 1962 on the Koblenz trial mentions it again (*The Victims Accuse,* 1962, TsSDF, RGAKFD no. 18433). On the Globke campaign, see Jasmin Söhner and Maté Zombory, "Accusing Hans Globke, 1960–1963: Agency and the Iron Curtain," in *Seeking Accountability*, 351–386.

33 Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions," 128–129.

34 *Vechernaia Moskva*, June 7, 1960; *Novoe Vremia,* June 10, 1960, and June 17, 1960; *Czerwony Sztandar*, 3 June 1960 (quoted by Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions," 111–112).

prosecution, or of having Ben-Gurion limit the prosecutions to Eichmann alone, in order to protect other prominent figures.

The Soviet propaganda campaign only gradually adopted anti-Israeli indications. At the start of the case, with the announcement of Eichmann's arrest in June 1960, the Kremlin was still far from associating Ben-Gurion and Adenauer in its denunciation of capitalist leaders interested in minimizing the "Eichmann affair." Moscow expressed tacit support for Israel by not condemning the violation of Argentinian sovereignty at the UN Security Council.[35] The passages of the speech by Arkady Sobolev, the Soviet representative to the United Nations, which were reproduced in the June 24, 1960, issue of *Pravda*, stressed above all the duty and right of states to punish war criminals. The speech also expressed virulent criticism of several Western powers, considering their attitude towards Nazi criminals to be complacent.

Novoe vremia, a less visible periodical than *Pravda*, welcomed Eichmann's prosecution by Israel, given its lack of trust in Western criminal justice systems. Here, it was West Germany that was targeted, since it would not apply the death penalty.[36] Nevertheless, relations between Moscow and Tel Aviv deteriorated from 1957 on, as Israel appeared increasingly to belong to the Western camp.[37] On this precise point the Soviet media evolved between May 1960 and late 1961, as it began to wonder at the length of the investigation and insinuating that it was possible that the trial would ultimately not take place, given Western pressures and especially given economic links between Israel and West Germany.[38] According to *Pravda*, these links would explain an alleged agreement between the two countries on the charges against Eichmann and on others who escaped incrimination. Bonn's provision of the services of the lawyer Robert Servatius, known for his defense of Fritz Sauckel at the Nuremberg trial, served as further evidence of West Germany's influence on the trial.[39] This allowed Lev Ginzburg to conclude, at the end of 1961, that "Anticommunism and the 'Cold War' have united yesterday's enemies. In the courtroom of the Nuremberg trial, Göring had said with confidence

---

35 The Soviet delegation abstained from the vote on a resolution proposed by the US, Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild,* 55.

36 *Novoe Vremia,* June 24, 1960, quoted in Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions," 113.

37 Yosef Govrin, *Israeli-Soviet Relations 1953–1967: From Confrontation to Disruption* (London: Frank Cass, 1998).

38 "Who is protecting Eichmann?", *Moskovskaia Pravda,* October 13, 1960, in Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild,* 56.

39 *Izvestiia,* April 11, 1961, quoted in Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions," 119. The *Izvestiia* article interrogates Israel's decision to pay Servatius's fees, since the latter worked for the FRG and Israel was dealing with economic problems. The first insinuations regarding Servatius's double mission date from autumn 1960 (117).

to an American guard: 'The day will come when you will put our remains into marble coffins'."[40]

Indeed, the investigation lasted several months. A huge amount of work was carried out by the investigative team in charge of the inquiry.[41] Only the Eastern European countries refused to cooperate. Moscow, officially contacted on June 27, 1960, did not deign to respond even conventionally. According to Israeli diplomatic documents, the official reason for this disdain, asserted by the Soviets, was that "all the necessary information has already been presented to the Nuremberg Tribunal."[42] It seems, rather, that the Kremlin feared that the Soviet Union would lose its 1944–1945 "liberating country" aura and contribute, by its aid to Israel, to presenting that state as merely another combatant against the Nazis, within a general context in which the Kremlin confirmed its policy of privileging the Arab states of the Middle East. The Soviet press went so far as to assert in September 1961 that the Jerusalem trial would not reveal anything that Nuremberg had not already taught the world.[43] The very system of defense was worn out, Lev Ginzburg scoffed in *The Price of Ashes*:

> No, at the trial in Jerusalem, Eichmann is by no means original in his defensive tactics. This is the "style" of Kaltenbrunner, the "style" of Ribbentrop and Julius Streicher, who tried to confuse the minds of the Nuremberg judges with endless clarifications about the "framework" of their activities; this is an unscrupulous tactic developed by "decent people" in West Germany, who, speaking of the past, are ready to confess almost everything—that they were blind people, fools, soldiers, bureaucrats, but not the people they really were, murderers.[44]

Lev Ginzburg wrote these lines after joking about the organizational charts that Eichmann displayed in order to show the judges that his position in the Nazi state apparatus did not place him in a position of responsibility for murder. It was indeed the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, relying on the Statute of London from August 1945, that had for the first time condemned political leaders and senior officials for crimes that had often been committed thousands of miles away from Berlin – but on their orders. The Soviets, however, had begun to chal-

40 Lev Ginzburg, "The Eichmann Affair," 148. See also the article by the same author published in *Novoe Vremia,* no. 52, 1961: "Is the Eichmann Trial Over?" (quoted in Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions," 130).

41 Annette Wieviorka, *Le procès Eichmann* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1989), 28–33.

42 Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions," 123.

43 "There is only Eichmann on the defendant's bench," *Izvestiia,* September 3, 1961. The author of this article is Gerhard Leo from East Germany, Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild*, 56. This idea can also be found in the second edition of *From Munich to Nuremberg* by Arkady Poltorak.

44 Lev Ginzburg, "The Eichmann Affair," 126–127.

lenge Nazi senior leaders in the first public trials of German collaborators, and later German officers themselves, in Krasnodar and then Kharkiv in 1943, and in various Soviet cities in 1945–1946. The public prosecutor of the trial incriminated the political leadership of the Third Reich, *in absentia* just as much as those concrete subordinates sitting on the defendants' bench. The problem, particularly for the 1943 proceedings, was that they were a bit too reminiscent of the political trials of 1936–1938, thus raising severe doubts for outside observers.[45]

Ginzburg's essay continued over several pages, denouncing a purported collusion between Ben-Gurion and Adenauer, who, he argued, was less anxious to perform justice than to protect the power of NATO:

> Eichmann's memoirs were discovered. 716 pages with an appendix of a long list of accomplices—from Hitler to Globke, from Himmler to Zionist traitors. It is difficult to say why Eichmann made this list—perhaps, bored in Argentina, he wrote out the names dear to his heart? The Israeli court accepted for consideration only 83 pages, the remaining 633 rejected along with the list.
>
> The newspaper *HaOlam HaZeh* explained:
>
> It is clear that exposing these criminals in the Eichmann trial could ruin the relationship between Israel and West Germany, and perhaps between Israel and the US, as this would damage NATO's prestige and complicate the issue of arming West Germany.
>
> Ben-Gurion kept his word and found a "mutually acceptable path." Politics![46]

In truth, Ginzburg was not the first to incriminate the Israeli government so bluntly. On January 1, 1961, an article in *Trud*, a Russian language periodical well-known and distributed abroad, had called the 25th Zionist Congress, which was being held in Jerusalem, a "gathering of bankrupts." According to this text, Israel and Zionist leaders were betraying the memory of millions of Jews by making an agreement with Hitler's successors: the "revanchists from Bonn."[47]

---

45 Ilya Bourtman, "'Blood for Blood, Death for Death'," 256; Prusin, "'Fascist Criminals to the Gallows!'," 4–5.

46 Lev Ginzburg, "The Eichmann Affair," 143–144. *HaOlam HaZeh* (This World) had a reputation for publishing stories likely to embarrass the government, as well as sensationalist materials and photos.

47 Article quoted by Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions," 118.

Capitalism and Fascism: The Denunciation of a Monstrous Collusion

Thus, beginning with the Eichmann trial, the Soviet media adopted a legal standpoint in order to present the USSR as a state respectful of basic human principles and of international law that had been devised collectively – but which the former Allies had hastily forgotten in order to satisfy their political and commercial interests. This argument, crafted for international propaganda purposes, then evolved into a denunciation of the West's refusal to consider Soviet evidence as embodied by witnesses and jurists. Before examining the first appearance of this charge in a film, it is useful to go forward in time and look at the arguments then offered by Soviet legal experts on the occasion of the twenty-year anniversary of the Nuremberg International Tribunal. Irina Lediakh and Feliks Reshetnikov recalled the Allied conventions passed during the war, which laid out the principle of a relentless pursuit of Nazi war criminals.[48] They then insisted on the universalization of the principles of the International Military Tribunal by the UN General Assembly, on November 21, 1947, concluding that the new states founded on the ruins of the Third Reich had the obligation to try these criminals. Only the German Democratic Republic (GDR), they found, had fulfilled this duty. In West Germany, the collusion of current with former elites, or even continuity between the two, had ensured a peaceful life for many Nazi criminals, not to mention the industrialists and financiers involved in the accession of Hitler to power or in the Nazi death machine.[49]

The next critique concerned the possible normalization of Nazi crimes when tried by means of existing criminal codes: while those who carried out mass crimes were inculpated as accomplices, the main instigators escaped all punishment, for want of a particular crime. "Thus, the lawyers and the courts of justice

48 The article lists the following: the Declaration of the governments of occupied countries from January 13, 1942 (the St. James Declaration); the Declaration of October 14, 1942, by which Moscow joined the St. James Declaration and which specified that participating states must aid each other in finding criminals and creating cases for prosecution, a principle that would be placed at the heart of subsequent international acts (the Moscow Declaration by the leaders of the three Allied powers of October 30, 1943; the Yalta Declaration of January 11, 1945; the Potsdam Agreement of August 2, 1945; the London Agreement of August 8, 1945; and the Declaration of the four powers of September 5, 1945). See Irina Lediakh and Feliks M. Reshetnikov, "Kazhdyi natsistskii prestupnik dolzhen ponesti nakazanie" [All Nazi Criminals Must Be Punished] *Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo i Pravo* [The Soviet State and the Law], no. 2 (1965): 24–33. This publication was a monthly journal of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

49 Lediakh and Reshetnikov, "Kazhdyi natsistskii prestupnik," 25–26.

of West Germany resort to all manner of quibbles and legal ruses in order to fulfil the mission entrusted to them by the leading circles of West German monopoly capital – to obstruct the severe punishment of Nazi criminals," claimed the article, brushing aside the creation in 1958 of the Central Office for the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes in Ludwigsburg.[50] The text closes with an indignant tirade against the FRG government's announcement of the statute of limitations for Nazi crimes as of May 8, 1965: Bonn's attitude, they found, was illegal and comparable to a policy of rehabilitating fascism.[51]

That same month, a much more famous writer would take up the same arguments. In a text entitled "Nazi Executioners must not escape punishment," Roman Rudenko, Soviet Procurator General and formerly chief prosecutor for the Soviet delegation in Nuremberg, condemned West Germany's refusal to extend the statute of limitations for international crimes. The text also referred to an official declaration of the Soviet government from December 24, 1964: the FRG, as heir to the Third Reich, had the obligation to punish every war criminal; no one could exempt it from this duty. Rudenko concluded with an accusation against Bonn, claiming that in order to protect these criminals, the West German government was preventing Soviet witnesses from attending trials in the West and ignoring evidence conveyed by the USSR.[52]

It is with this very same argument that the documentary *The Victims Accuse* (1962), a project filmed three years earlier in reaction to the Koblenz trial, opens:

---

50 Lediakh and Reshetnikov, "Kazhdyi natsistskii prestupnik," 28. The office's full title was the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes (Die Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen, known universally simply as Zentrale Stelle Ludwigsburg, of ZSt-L). The Central Office was initially charged with the investigation of extraterritorial Nazi crimes, but from 1964 of Nazi crimes without reference to place or date. See Annette Weinke, *Eine Gesellschaft ermittelt gegen sich selbst: Die Geschichte der Zentralen Stelle Ludwigsburg 1958–2008* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008).

51 Lediakh and Reshetnikov, "Kazhdyi natsistskii prestupnik," 29–30. The statute of limitations for crimes against humanity was ultimately pushed back, then abolished altogether: Wieviorka, *Le procès Eichmann*, 142.

52 Roman Rudenko, "Gitlerovskie palachi ne dolzhny uiti ot vozmezdiia" [Hitlerian executioners must not escape punishment], *Sotsialisticheskaia Zakonnost'* [Socialist Legality], no. 3 (1965): 2–8. This journal was the bimonthly review of the Ministry of Justice. In "The Nuremberg Trial," *Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo i Pravo*, no. 2 (1966): 3–11. Lev N. Smirnov, another important figure in the Soviet delegation to Nuremberg, insisted once again on the importance of this trial for international law.

> This film is being prepared for trial in the West German city of Koblenz as a document proving the crimes committed by Heuser and other SS members on the territory of Belarus in 1941–44.
>
> The government of West Germany did not allow Soviet jurists and investigators to arrive in Koblenz in sufficient time to present the trial with testimony and to provide the court with documentary materials on this case.[53]

The Soviet attacks, referring to Nuremberg, did not only target the enemies of 1941–1945. In an article from June 1965, Arkady Poltorak attacked the United States. According to him, the Americans were beginning to criticize the Nuremberg trial and its principles in order to avoid investigations into their crimes in Vietnam.[54] He did not, however, repeat these accusations in his *Epilogue to Nuremberg*, published later that same year, but the idea of a US betrayal of Nuremberg's principles was frequently mentioned in articles about the war in Vietnam in the late 1960s.[55] The aim of the legal argument put forward by the USSR was to present itself not only as Europe's liberator (as the only occupied state that had continued to fight the war on its own territory), but also as the heir to the battle against Nazism and the guarantor of Nuremberg law.

In March 1965, the Soviet Union adopted a decree, soon to be transformed into law, on the imprescriptibility of violent crimes committed during the Nazi occupation.[56] Adopted in a morning session, the decree appeared on the front page of the *Izvestiia* of the same day, was broadcast on Radio Moskva 1 at 12:58 p.m., and was reproduced the next day on the front pages of some republican newspapers.[57] Some capitalist states, to the contrary, revealed their true nature

---

53 *Zhertvy obviniaiut* (The Victims Accuse), 1962. TsSDF, RGAKFD, no. 18433. Director: Irina Zhukovskaia and Pëtr Shamshur. The Koblenz trial began in mid-October 1962 and lasted several months. It ruled against defendants for their participation in the crimes of *Sonderkommando* 1005 in Belarus, in Minsk, Maly Trastsianets [Russian: Maly Trostenets], Dziarzhynsk [Koidanovo], Rakau [Rakov], Slonim, and Slutsk.

54 Arkadii Poltorak, "Niurnbergskii protsess i vopros ob otvetstvennosti za agressiiu" [The Nuremberg Trial and the Question of Responsibility for Aggression], *Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo i Pravo*, no. 6 (1965): 58–66.

55 Arkadii Poltorak, *Niurnbergskii Epilog* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1965). My general observations of Soviet articles about the Vietnam war are based on research carried out building the "Database on East-European war crimes trials between 1957 and 1970, on the basis on local newspapers, project ANR-16-CE27-0001."

56 "On the punishment of those responsible for crimes against peace and humanity and war crimes, regardless of the time of the commission of crimes," *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR*, no. 10, 1965, p. 186. Ratified into law on October 2, 1965: *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR*, no. 39, 1965, p. 902.

57 *Izvestiia*, no. 53, March 4, 1965, p. 1. *Pravda Ukrainy*, March 5, 1965, p. 1. For the broadcast, see OSA, HU OSA 300-80-1, box 715, folder "Prestupleniia politicheskie, 1961–1967."

as soon as economic and financial questions were at stake, betraying Nuremberg law and instead protecting Nazi criminals and their accomplices. It was on the basis of this reasoning that Soviet media gradually changed their assessment of Israeli authority in judging Eichmann.

That the FRG – supported by international finance – was avoiding denazification was another recurring argument in the media campaign launched around the Eichmann trial. From 1960 to 1965, Moscow suggested, increasingly explicitly, that Eichmann was only a drop in the ocean: while all eyes were on Jerusalem, Hans Globke, Theodor Oberländer, and Friedrich Foertsch were living peaceful lives in the West. Foertsch was an interesting case, because he had been named Inspector General of the new Bundeswehr in April 1961. He was mentioned in an article in *Soviet Russia* from April 9, 1961, in which the author warned his readers not to expect too much from the Jerusalem trial insofar as Israel, like England and France, had chosen to forget the lessons of the war and to maintain cordial relations with militarists in Bonn.[58] In December of the same year, after the verdict in Jerusalem, Rafail Nakhmanovich's first feature film, with a screenplay by Viktor Nekrasov, came out on Ukrainian screens.[59] *To the Unknown Soldier* placed great emphasis on the crimes of the Nazi occupiers in Poland and Ukraine, and warned against renewed revanchism in the FRG.[60] A beautiful meditative sequence on the tribute paid to Kyiv fighters from 1941–1945 and their reasons for fighting – the future of their children – is followed by a shot of a military parade in West Germany juxtaposed with pacifist commentary:

> These shots were taken several years after the end of the most terrible war in human history. This is not Hitler's Germany, it is the Germany of Adenauer, the gathering place for members of the West German revanchist unions. On their conscience are millions of victims. Their goal: a Third World War.[61]

A stock of images on West German "revanchism" would develop from this year on: they can be found, systematically, in *To the Unknown Soldier, Ordinary Fascism,* and *In the Name of the Living* alike, sometimes supplemented with more re-

58 Article quoted by Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions," 118–119. In 1961, France was still placed on the same plane as the Allies who betrayed their 1945 promises.

59 *Nevidimomu soldatu*, Ukrainian News Studio, TsDKFFA, no. 2430. Sound film, 1,282 meters (43 min.). The broadcast authorization signed on November 30, 1961, allowed it to be shown on screens throughout Ukraine without a closing date.

60 In his memoirs, Nakhmanovich claims to have had to add the sequence on German revanchism so that his film, which was putting too much emphasis on Auschwitz, would pass the censors, Nakhmanovich, *Vozvrashchenie v sistemu koordinat*, 92.

61 *Nevidimomu soldatu* (To the Unknown Soldier), 1960. Ukrainian News Studio, TsDKFFA, no. 2430.

cent shots. In the middle of the film, Nakhmanovich summoned images of Nuremberg, in turn, in order to distinguish Nazism – always referred to as "fascism" – from the German people:

> The Nuremberg Process. But looking at the faces of these criminals, we should not forget that our enemy was not the German people but German fascism. These monsters did not embody all Germany. There were other Germans.[62]

The following year, *Sud narodov* [The Peoples' Court], a major documentary by Roman Karmen and Elizaveta Svilova on the Nuremberg trial and originally released in 1946,[63] was reedited and disseminated in an updated version, including abroad (and not only in the socialist camp).[64] The end of the film was dedicated entirely to the denunciation of neo-Nazism and revanchism in West Germany: a montage of juxtaposed shots of swastikas painted on gates or sidewalks with images of the Bundeswehr during training and with evocations of senior leaders of West Germany, incriminated during the war, and who only dreamed of revenge (Oberländer among them).[65]

The commentary openly denounced the collusion between the current leaders of the FRG and former war actors, sometimes attributing to them more responsibility than they actually had at the time:

> Humanity declared the Nazis criminals. Yet the rulers in Bonn gave them authoritative powers. Hitler's assistant Strauss yells ministerial speeches, demanding atomic weapons for the Wehrmacht. And American missiles are in the hands of exterminatory people.

The very first shot of the film sends the "warmongers" a warning:

> This film was created in 1946. Then, in Nuremberg, the International Tribunal tried the Hitlerite leadership. The peoples of the world have sentenced fascism, which has brought untold suffering to humanity. Today, when the militarists raise their heads again, we want to remind you: Revanchists! Arsonists! Remember Nuremberg![66]

---

62 *Nevidimomu soldatu.*

63 On the conditions of production of this film and the representation of Nazi crimes, see Jeremy Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938–1946* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 197–210. See also Victor Barbat, "Evidence and Soviet Rhetorical Devices: Staging Justice at the Nuremberg Trial," in *Seeking Accountability*, 106–141.

64 The archives of Soveksportfilm, the institution in charge of film imports and exports, confirm that the film was sold to FRG television: Russian State Archives on Literature and Art (RGALI), 2918/4/22/538 and 2918/6.

65 *Sud narodov*, 1962, TsSDF, RGAKFD, no. 18430. Sound film, 57 min. Directed by Elizaveta Svilova and Roman Karmen.

66 *The Peoples' Court*, 1962. TsSDF, RGAKFD, no. 18430.

The work of cinematography that most successfully established a link between the failures of denazification and the risk of a renewal of the horrors of 1939–1945 was carried out in 1963–1964 by Leon Mazrukho and Lev Ginzburg around the trial of nine Soviet collaborators at Krasnodar in October 1963. With a tone at once ironic, whistle-blowing, and alarmist, the montage and commentary of *Vo imia zhivykh* (In the Name of the Living) contrast images of rearmament in West Germany and recent photographs of Nazi criminals enjoying total impunity in the West (such as Walter Kehrer) with archival footage of the liberation of the occupied Soviet territories, where the nightmare of the "new Nazi order" was embodied in shots of ruined buildings and the exhumation of corpses.[67] The campaign denouncing West German revanchism and the inadequacies of the prosecutions in the FRG also relied on a comparison with the legal work accomplished in the GDR. Lediakh and Reshetnikov's article thus presented damning figures, though of uncertain origin: they found that 12,807 war criminals were tried and sentenced in the GDR, twice as many as in the FRG, even though the population of the latter was three times greater.[68] In the FRG, they argued, a number of Nazis had infiltrated the judiciary and the state prosecutor's offices, which accounted for why, out of 12,882 cases tried, only 5,445 resulted in conviction; 4,033 defendants were acquitted and the courts dismissed 2,563 cases.[69] In 1963, we find Hans Globke, who had been vigorously denounced by the Soviet media three years prior, at the center of a trial *in absentia* in East Berlin. Soviet visual media covered the trial.[70]

Thus, the Eichmann trial coincided with the return, in the Soviet Union, of the discourse on accountability and war suffering that had characterized the war and first postwar years. The demand for accountability was however articulated with the Cold War antifascist campaign that claimed that yesterday's victims

67 *Vo imia zhivykh*, Leon Mazrukho and Lev Ginzburg, 1964, Rostov Documentary Studio. Sound film, 37 min. Gosfilmofond.

68 The figures for National Socialist crimes trials in the Soviet occupation zone and then DDR are contested, ranging from 26,000 to 45,000. The project, *DDR-Justiz und NS-Verbrechen. Die ostdeutschen Strafverfahren wegen nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen 1945–1990*, surveyed all "criminal proceedings for National Socialist crimes of homicide conducted by the East German judiciary in the Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ) and – from 1949 – in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)," and identified 932 cases involving 1,642 defendants (junsv.nl, accessed April 30, 2023). One assessment argued that the "Waldheim trials [starting in 1950] heralded the end of genuine prosecution of Nazi crimes" in East Germany, after which the numbers tapered dramatically. See: Sonya Romeike, *Transitional Justice in Germany after 1945 and after 1990* (Nuremberg: International Nuremberg Principles Academy, 2016), 19–22.

69 Lediakh and Reshetnikov, "Kazhdyi natsistkii prestupnik," 26.

70 Wieviorka, *Le procès Eichmann*, 124. *Inostrannaia Khronika*, no. 14, 1963, devotes its third news report to this trial. RGAKFD, no. 20465.

were all too easily forgotten in the name of today's capitalist interests. Yet this state-level posture did not exclude a renewed (and very public) thought for all categories of victims, notably Jewish. Efforts at memorialization never stopped in the country, yet the international attention raised by the Eichmann trial offered a new visibility to the victims of the Holocaust, beyond localized initiatives. The next section analyzes the evolution of the evocation and commemoration of the victims in the Soviet Union when Khrushchev's new stance on war suffering and war crimes intersected with East-West tensions and high-profile events focusing on the perspective of the victims, like the Jerusalem trial.

An Ambivalent Treatment of the Holocaust

As soon as it became known to Soviet authorities, the Holocaust caused problems for the design of Soviet propaganda narratives. The genocide of European Jews intersected with an extremely predatory and lethal occupation of Soviet territory, resulting in an estimated eleven million civilian deaths. The Jews were the Soviet national minority systematically targeted by the occupiers and their local accomplices, but Jewish victims were part of a wider number of civilian losses. At first hesitant (and inconsistent), the country's media apparatus almost completely shut down on the subject beginning with the 1948 "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign, which was directed above all against Soviet Jews. Several scholars have recently returned to the oscillations and ambiguities on the part of Moscow as well as of local authorities as to the censorship applied to articles, works, or essays concerning the massacre of Soviet Jews.[71] Some examples of prohibition or redaction became famous: the *Black Book* prepared by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasilii Grossman, blocked by censorship as early as 1946; Grossman's *Life and Destiny*, in 1960; Evtushenko's poem "Babi Yar" in 1961 and the symphony it inspired by Shostakovich; the work of Anatolii Kuznetsov (1966), which has recently been republished in a complete and annotated edition.[72] If these events corresponded to very differ-

71 Karel C. Berkhoff, "'Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population': The Holocaust in the Soviet Media," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 1 (2009): 61–105. Mordechai Altshuler, "The Holocaust in the Soviet Mass Media during the War and in the First Postwar Years Re-Examined," *Yad Vashem Studies* 39, no. 2 (2011): 121–168. Olga Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013). Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*; Antonella Salomoni, *L'Unione Sovietica e la shoah: genocidio, resistenza, rimozione* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2006).

72 Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry*, ed. and trans. David Patterson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002). Gennadii Kostyrch-

ent contexts and issues, they were united on one point: the Kremlin's reluctance to publicly distinguish among Soviet victims of the Nazi occupation.

The years of interest here, at the turning point of the Khrushchev "thaw" and Brezhnev's toughening stand, were undoubtedly the most ambiguous. The official Kremlin line regarding the "Soviet" identity of the civilian victims in the USSR was put at test – and sometimes clearly challenged – by filmmakers, poets, and writers who used various methods in order to address the specificity of the Holocaust. The limits of what could be written, expressed, and shown were not clearly drawn, and in several cases authors applied to their works a self-censorship exceeding the caution of the authorities themselves.[73] Censorship authorized mention of the subject as long as it could be situated within a general framework that did not insist on the racist and in particular antisemitic nature of Nazism and which did not focus on the sole fate of the Jews.[74] It is also important to note that certain categories of civilian victims remained forgotten from the productions examined in this text (the Romani people, for instance). Despite this relative loosening, the authorities remained discomfited by the Holocaust, including during the Khrushchev years. Different procedures were employed in order to trivialize the lot of European Jews – even more so of Soviet Jews. In most of these cases, we can assume that the procedures were imposed by censors of different statuses and levels. Indeed, directors and screenwriters strove despite everything to sprinkle hints – visual, semantic – that could be deciphered by careful spectators, who might identify what they were really about as a result of their knowledge of local history, while learning more from the film.[75]

---

enko, *Tainaia politika Khrushcheva. Vlast', intelligentsiia, evreiskii vopros* [Khrushchev's Secret Policy: Power, the Intelligentsia, the Jewish Question] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2012), 325–334, 351–370; Anatoli Kouznetsov, *Babi Yar. Roman-document* (Paris: Robert Laffon, 2011).

73 See the discussions of Lev Ginzburg's project of feature movie on Soviet collaborators and perpetrators – ultimately never finalized – by the team of the Experimental Studio in 1965–1967: Voisin, "The 1963 Krasnodar Trial", 419–426. See also, for the East German case, Stephan Stach, "'The Jewish Diaries . . . Undergo One Edition after the Other': Early Polish Holocaust Documentation, East German Antifascism, and the Emergence of Holocaust Memory in Socialism," in *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism,* 275–301.

74 The film *The Victims Accuse*, from 1962, is a remarkable exception, but one limited to the region of Minsk. Later Latvian films (1967–1970) show the same audacity. See discussion in: Irina Tcherneva and Vanessa Voisin, "La Shoah dans les documentaires soviétiques des années 1960: une reconnaissance ambigue," in *Filmer la guerre. Les Soviétiques face à la Shoah, 1941–1946*, ed. Valerie Pozner, Alexandra Sumpf, and Vanessa Voisin (Paris: Mémorial de la Shoah, 2015), 115–122.

75 Studies on the emergence of the memory of the war (and the genocide) from below have developed in recent years, see notably Arkadi Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory. Holocaust Monuments in The Soviet Union* (Jerusalem, Yad Vashem: The International Institute for Holocaust Research,

The basic strategy consisted of not mentioning at all the victims' nationality and/or of focusing attention on other categories of those detained and deported. The three films on Ukrainian trials – *The People Accuse* (1959), *We Will Not Forget* (1960), and *The Tragedy of Nizi* (1960) – described victims according to their age and sex. At times, a film might specify that they belonged to the family of a Soviet partisan. The designation of victims, which became routine in official discourse, was "perfectly innocent people" (or civilians). It is possible that, in fact, these victims were not Jewish: the advanced date of the executions mentioned (1943–44), methods of killing, and the extermination of entire villages recalled instead the violence of the anti-partisan war that German troops and their local auxiliaries employed. But why, then, include in *The People Accuse* – a film adapted, moreover, for a Russian-speaking audience – photographs or reconstituted images of the Babyn Yar massacres in a sequence on the history of the occupation in Ukraine?[76] Indeed, the memory of Babyn Yar was especially complicated by 1959–1960; most Soviets had heard of the immensity of the massacre of Jews in Kyiv, even if only from the press in autumn 1941 or from *The Unvanquished* by Mark Donskoy (1945). Later efforts to emphasize POWs and Ukrainian civilians who were also shot at the site did not erase this memory. The allusion thus seems risky from the perspective of the censors, most likely deliberate and encrypted if one considers the film's authors, who were both war veterans and probably Jewish.[77]

In the Name of the Victims by Leon Mazrukho offers another eloquent example of deliberate silence on the identity of Jewish victims. Here, to the contrary, the film devotes a rather lengthy segment to the murder of sick children in a clinic-orphanage in Eisk (or Ieisk), on the Azov Sea, reminding a Soviet audience already familiar with this theme of the particular cruelty shown by the occupation towards children, who were sick and disabled. The film took care to show with maps the movement of *Sonderkommando* 10a across Eastern Europe and to preserve several statements from the 1963 trial referring to the extermination of

---

2018) and Irina Rebrova, *Re-Constructing Grassroots Holocaust Memory: The Case of the North Caucasus* (Berlin: De Gruyter; Oldenbourg, 2020) and her traveling exhibition: https://nsvictims.ru, accessed May 30, 2024.

76 The sequence appears at the beginning of the third section in the Ukrainian version, towards the end of the second section in the Russian version. TsDKFFA, no. 2021. The conclusions of the studio's editorial team after reading the script (in April 1959) do not mention these images, which were indeed kept in the film: TSDAMLM 1009/2/370/28–29.

77 The director of photography, I. Goldstein, had also participated in the filming of *The Battle for our Soviet Ukraine* (1943) and *Victory in Ukraine from the Right Bank* by Dovzhenko (1945). These films incorporate images of the mass graves at Drobitskii Yar (Kharkiv) and Babyn Yar, but entirely pass over the fact that the majority of the victims killed in those places were Jews.

Jewish communities.[78] But the word "Jew" was not pronounced even once. This detail is even more intriguing given that the screenwriter, Lev Ginzburg, would not, for his part, avoid exposing the specificity of Nazi genocidal operations in his text on the trial and in the film.[79] The interval of two years that separated the release of the film and the book might not explain this difference; to the contrary, the authorities' circumspection on this topic only grew between 1963 and 1966, as illustrated by the streak of bad luck suffered by Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar.*[80] Given the director's personal history as a Jew from Crimea where the same *Sonderkommando* had also left a trail of death, the avoidance of the term "Jew" cannot be mere chance. Plainly, collaboration with the KGB during the investigation and the trial imposed a certain prudence on the part of the film's directors. In July 1964, Mazrukho even took care to ask the security services for official authorization to distribute the film throughout the country.[81]

In parallel to the lexical taboo, the most common strategy for mentioning the Holocaust without paying it too much attention in the films and newsreels of the 1960s consisted in minimizing the genocide within the global politics of Nazi violence. If the question of Jewish victims, or of their total losses in Europe, was sometimes explicitly at stake, the representation of persecutions against this community was placed on the same plane as violence against the partisans, disabled people, or Slavic nationalities. The subject of newsreels devoted to the Koch trial in Poland listed the victims of the latter: "Here he is: the murderer of millions of Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and Jews."[82] Any contribution on the Jerusalem trial, of course, could not pass over genocide in silence. But the film's way of talking about it is revealing. Here is the voice-over commentary:

> The trial of the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann began in Jerusalem. The former SS *Obersturmbanführer* [lieutenant-colonel] is guilty of grave crimes against humanity. It was he who ordered the deportations of innocent people all across Europe. On his orders, 6 million Jews were tortured in the death camps. For 15 years, a fascist degenerate has been hiding under the names of others. And now Hitler's executioner is in the dock.[83]

---

78 Voisin, "'Au nom des vivants'," 402–407.

79 *Vo imia zhivykh.* Lev Ginzburg, *Bezdna* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel, 1966).

80 On the complex story of Kuznetsov's manuscript, see Annie Epelboin's preface to Kouznetsov, *Babi Yar*.

81 State Archives of Rostov-on-Don oblast (GARO), R-4105/1/226/6 (film dossier). The director indicates in a letter that KGB officers attended a private screening of the film at the Writer's House (Moscow) on July 16, 1964.

82 Commentary of shots 8 and 9 of the newsreel. *Inostrannaia Khronika*, March 1959, TsSDF, RGAKFD, no. 18395. The image is not exactly explicit: one sees a line of people in front of a Polish fortress.

83 *Inostrannaia Khronika*, no. 8, 1961. TsSDF, RGAKFD, no. 19647.

The shots outside the courtroom show us a document signed by Eichmann (illustrating the deportation order), detainees at one of the daily calls, German soldiers brutally pushing civilians, including children, a bird's eye view of the camp, the label of a box of Zyklon B in a large shot, naked bodies, and crematorium ovens. If the association of the commentary on the Jews to the camp – Zyklon B – naked bodies – ovens sequence constitutes one of the most explicit accounts of the Holocaust at the time, the relationship between the Eichmann who ordered deportations and the Eichmann who had Jews exterminated remained mysterious. The match between these "perfectly innocent people" and the "six million Jews," in order to function at all, required that the spectator recall the site of the trial. The reasons for Eichmann's dogged antisemitism are hardly any clearer. It was only with reticence that the Soviets dealt with the Holocaust in an explicit or even blunt way, constrained by the impact of the Jerusalem trial throughout the world.

Two other productions from 1961 confirm the influence of the trial on the official representation of war crimes in the USSR. In his memoirs, Rafail Nakhmanovich described the overwhelming and humiliating effect of the "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign on him as a young Jewish filmmaker in Soviet Ukraine. Having entered the working world at precisely the moment when the campaign was beginning, around 1948, this director experienced severe difficulties in obtaining authorization to pursue his career, to receive titles, degrees, and advancement, and to broach subjects that interested him. Nakhmanovich lingers in particular over two projects, one completed, the other aborted in its early stages, both relating to the Holocaust. His 1961 film, *To the Unknown Soldier,* produced under the aegis of a tolerant News Studio director and of a celebrated writer of "literature of the front," was the first documentary since 1945 to return to the Nazi concentration and extermination camps, except for the regrettable *Geroi ukhodiat v* bessmertie [The Heroes Depart into Immortality], a television production from 1959.[84]

Nakhmanovich reused images from the Soviet short films *Maidanek* (1944) and *Auschwitz* (1945), as well as shots of the Stutthof camp near Gdańsk (formerly Danzig). He also shot a sequence on three collections painted by Zinovii Tolkachev, following the shock of the discovery of the camps. According to him, the insertion of Tolkachev's drawings and the shots of Auschwitz, including those of

84 *Geroi ukhodiat v bessmertie*, TsSDF, TsDKFFA, no. 4862. Directed by N. Ignatovaia, F. Sakalis. Photography by I. Kuzmenko, V. Gusev. Sound film, black and white, 25 minutes. In this work, marred by serious historical confusion, particular attention is paid to the Sachsenhausen camp, where, unlike Auschwitz and Maidanek, political prisoners (including leaders of the OUN, which the film of course does not tell) and Soviet prisoners of war figured prominently among those held.

twin child detainees (images of Kutub-zade from February-March 1945), had sowed panic within the Ukrainian administrative apparatus.[85] The film was saved only by the intercession of well-placed people in Moscow, where the director went himself to present it to the Office of Film Distribution and Diffusion.[86]

The other event of the year, this time in direct relation to the Eichmann trial, was the publication of Ginzburg's *Tsena pepla* [The Price of Ashes], including the essay, "The Eichmann Affair." The work was reprinted with a run of 30,000 copies the following year. Ginzburg had been interested in the revival of Nazism in the West for some time, especially in the way that societies had partially forgotten the price of war as they returned to their capitalist comforts. The release of his book, precisely in 1961, was a Soviet response to questions raised by the Jerusalem trial. The figure of six million, repeated several times, obviously refers to the Jewish victims – even if the term itself is never associated with this statistic:

> Terrible images were resurrected in the courtroom. The invisible formations of the dead – six million dead – passed by the glass cube. These were victims from all European countries: those who were killed by gas in the death camps, and ghetto prisoners who died of starvation; children shot by *Einsatzkommandos* at the edge of anti-tank ditches; and old people who were driven into synagogues and then burned alive. None of them escaped Eichmann. He organized strict accounting and put in place an exemplary system of "identification." If on the ground, in satellite countries, the authorities showed hesitation, Eichmann acted through diplomatic channels, through plenipotentiaries – this is how he "cleansed" Budapest and prepared the complete elimination of Italian and Romanian Jews. If there were hitches with transport, Eichmann "pressured" the railroads, and the trains intended for the transport of troops went to the Gestapo. When gassing process breakdowns occurred in the death camps or the camps could not cope with the overload of the crematorium, Eichmann contacted the technicians and the engineers, and the "machine" again functioned without fail.[87]

The Jews are mentioned often in the text. Above all, Ginzburg exposes the racist and antisemitic nature of Nazism, discussing *Mein Kampf,* the Wannsee conference, the "final solution of the 'Jewish question,'" and the quotas of Jews that each occupied country had to deliver (he cites the total goal of 11 million, mentioned at Wannsee). The author, quite unusually for the USSR, dedicated some of the text to delineating carefully the criteria of "Jewishness" according to Nazi racial laws and the problems posed by mixed-race people or mixed marriages. Far from denying the antisemitic basis of Nazism, he ridicules Eichmann's defense, which had consisted of claiming that he was not a racial antisemite, but rather a mere

---

85 *Filmer la guerre*, 57, 62–63. Nakhmanovich, *Vozvrashchenie v sistemu koordinat*, 61–62, 91.
86 Nakhmanovich, *Vozvrashchenie v sistemu koordinat*, 52–53, 59–60, 176–177.
87 Ginzburg, "The Eichmann Affair," 121.

executor of Hitler's policy and orders. To believe Eichmann, if Hitler had hated redheads, the Nazi extermination apparatus would have tracked down and liquidated all European redheads without hesitation. "Oh, please . . . !" Ginzburg mocks.[88] The author recounts the successive persecutions endured by the Jews: yellow star, enclosure in the ghettos, massive executions of entire communities in ditches, or deportation and gas chambers. This is, to my knowledge, the most comprehensive treatment of the Holocaust that can be found in any Soviet publication, at least before the *Perestroika* years.[89]

However, despite this wealth of details on the nature and crimes of Nazism, "The Eichmann Affair" can be situated perfectly within the line that Khrushchev explained in person during an encounter with Moscow's intellectual community in December 1961. The First Secretary scolded the writer Evgenij Evtushenko, author of the poem "Babi Yar,"[90] for his emphasis put on the Jewish victims executed there:

> "This question – the struggle with anti-Semitism – is very important," began the party leader. Then he suddenly spoke for himself (obviously for the sake of greater persuasiveness), "I was brought up in the Donbass. In my childhood I saw the [1905] pogrom against Jews in Iuzovka [now Donets'k], and I can only say that the majority of miners – even the miners – were against this pogrom. And when, after the pogrom, a wave of strikes broke out, who were the majority of speakers among these strikers? They were Jews. They were loved; they were respected. Then there is "Babi Yar." I worked in Ukraine and went to this "Babi Yar." Many people died there. But comrades, Comrade Evtushenko, not only Jews died there – others died there, too. Hitler exterminated the Jews. He exterminated the Gypsies, but the next stage was the extermination of the Slavs – he also exterminated the Slavs. And if we now calculate arithmetically which peoples were exterminated in greater numbers – Jews or Slavs – then those who say that the Slavs were exterminated more, there are more of them than Jews, are correct. So why highlight this, why raise this question? For what purpose? I consider this wrong.[91]

---

88 Ginzburg, "The Eichmann Affair," 127–132.

89 On this subject, see Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, 425–430.

90 The first verse reads: "No monument stands over Babi Yar. / A drop sheer as a crude gravestone. / I am afraid. / Today I am as old in years / as all the Jewish people. / Now I seem to be / a Jew. / Here I plod through ancient Egypt. / Here I perish crucified on the cross, / and to this day I bear the scars of nails. / I seem to be / Dreyfus. / The Philistine / is both informer and judge. / I am behind bars. / Beset on every side. / Hounded, / spat on, / slandered." *The Collected Poems 1952–1990 by Yevgeny Yevtushenko*, ed. Albert C. Todd with the author and James Ragan (Henry Holt and Company, 1991), 102–104.

91 Excerpt of Khrushchev's speech delivered at a meeting with the intelligentsia on December 17, 1962, quoted in Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Khrushcheva*, 351–352.

Ginzburg was still in keeping with official practice when he wrote that the Eichmann "affair" largely went beyond the current trial and the extermination of the Jews. Emphasizing that the "bureaucrat," the "accountant of death" also concerned himself with Czechs, Poles, and Russians, he claimed that the Holocaust was a kind of training ground for genocide on a fully different scale – that of tens of millions of Slavs.[92] By focusing attention on this smokescreen, the Jerusalem trial had allowed all the other criminals to emerge unscathed. And it allowed Westerners to forget that it was the heroism of the Russian (rather than Soviet) people and its army that had defeated the Nazi tanks and saved Europe.[93]

* * *

The discourse on the Holocaust authorized by officials in the USSR at the beginning of the 1960s was thus accompanied by virulent accusations against the capitalist world, viewed as an accomplice of Nazism and neo-Nazism. Above all, the USSR refused to consider the Holocaust as an essential goal of Nazism in itself; the real targets were always the Slavs occupying the "vital space" desired by Hitler's people. Thus, it was perhaps indeed wiser to revert to more discrete allusions, as Leon Mazrukho did in *In the Name of the Living* or as Gerts (Hercs) Frank and Imants Brils did in *Prigovor obzhalovaniiu ne podlezhit* [The Sentence is Final] (1965).[94] The latter film takes the occasion of the Riga trial in 1964 to recount the fate of Latvian war criminals who emigrated to the West, three of whom were retrieved by the Soviets. The allusion to the Holocaust on Latvian territory is coded, suggested by scattered mentions of the Jewishness of certain victims.

The global significance of the Jerusalem trial allowed the memory of the Holocaust to re-emerge from the drawer where it had remained confined since the end of the 1940s. If most artists who broached this minefield too imprudently paid a price for it with their career, or even with their general fortune, like Rafail Nakhmanovich, the Eichmann trial contributed to a ceding of the floor to witnesses and victims. The noteworthy appearance of testimonies on the Holocaust in contemporaneous documentaries of the 1960s deserves more in-depth analysis. It obviously has everything to do with the "coming of the era of the witness," examined by Annette Wieviorka.[95] In the Soviet context, though, the "witness" has

92 Ginzburg, "The Eichmann Affair," 135–141.

93 On the Russocentric turn of Stalin's propaganda, see David Brandenberger, "Stalin's Populism and the Accidental Creation of Russian National Identity," *Nationalities Papers* 38, no. 5 (2010): 723–739.

94 Riga Studio. RGAKFD, No. 35078. Sound film, 21 min.

95 Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

been present, if only in the trials, from the start. It is also worth noting that a high number of Soviet trials of collaborators-perpetrators from the late 1950s onward relied even more on the evidence presented by co-perpetrators than by bystanders, survivors, or victims' relatives.[96] The larger place granted to the voices of witnesses in the public space and notably the media also entails complex relationships with the progressive differentiation of the memory of the war in the Soviet Union and, at an even deeper level, with the notion of the individual and of personal experience in a system meant to promote collectivism, including sacrifice in war.

96 On the propaganda dilemma that this specific category of witnesses posed to the authorities, see Rich, "Law and Accountability, Secrecy and Guilt."

Máté Zombory

Moral Universalism in the East: Anti-Fascist Humanism and the Memory of the Holocaust in Zoltán Fábri's Film *Late Season* (1967)

In his study "Holocaust and Trauma: Moral Universalism in the West," cultural sociologist Jeffrey Alexander reveals the historical process, in which the cultural significance of the Jewish genocide changed from a war atrocity into a historically unique, unprecedented, and distinctive event.[1] The uncertainties implicit in the historically and geographically fixed formation of moral universals, i.e., whether or not "post-Holocaust morality" is actually universal, has been of interest to Alexander ever since the first appearance of his study in 2002. In the conclusion, entitled "Is the Holocaust Western?", he contends that "this universalization has primarily been confined to the West."[2] However, Alexander himself applies universally his theory of the social construction of moral universals, which is based empirically on Western examples, specifically the postwar history of the USA. He postulates that even in the case of atrocities in East Asia or Africa, moral universalism should proceed in the same way as the memory of the Holocaust. Thus, if in other cases of historical suffering cultural trauma does not form, he interprets this as a blocking and abrogation of the normative trauma process.[3]

Yet it is not only the Western world that has attributed general moral significance to the Nazi genocide. As Martin Jay observed, Alexander "underestimates in his narrative of this American-centric universalization important counterexamples," such as "the continuing power of an alternative universalization in the Soviet bloc."[4] In what follows, I attempt to reconstruct antifascist humanism as

1 Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Holocaust and Trauma: Moral Universalism in the West," in *Trauma: A Social Theory*, by J. C. Alexander (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 31–97.
2 Jeffrey C. Alexander, "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The 'Holocaust' from War Crime to Trauma Drama," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 58.
3 Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Culture Trauma, Morality and Solidarity: The Social Construction of 'Holocaust' and Other Mass Murders," *Thesis Eleven* 132, no. 1 (2016): 3–16.
4 Martin Jay, "Allegories of Evil: A Response to Jeffrey Alexander," in J. Alexander et. al., *Remembering the Holocaust: A Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 107–108.

Note: This project was supported by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office in Hungary (NKFIH, PD 115736).

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-009

an "alternative universalization" in the Soviet bloc. Bearing in mind that anti-fascism was not exclusively "Eastern,"[5] I provide a transnational analysis of a film produced in the Eastern bloc, where de-Stalinization enabled a public discourse on questions of history and memory. The film, *Late Season,* is the work of one of the best-known Hungarian directors of the 1950s and 1960s, Zoltán Fábri (1917–1994). In this movie, released in 1967, the director, then at the peak of his career, responded to developments in the international film world more than in any of his previous work, creating his own "Holocaust film." *Late Season* was made at a historical juncture that proved to be decisive in terms of the cultural history of the Jewish genocide, proving that the aesthetics of anti-fascist film not only paralleled but well preceded filmic representations of the Holocaust considered today as canonical, such as the 1978 American TV series *Holocaust*. Just like other anti-fascist movies at the time, *Late Season* reflected on the problem of the "burden of history" in general and on the legacy of the Jewish genocide in particular.

For a long time, an exhaustive exploration of the "Eastern" social construction of moral universals was difficult due to the fact that scholarship on the history of memory was obsessively driven by the antagonistic opposition between Holocaust memory and anti-fascism as the ideology of state socialism. Fortunately, recent scholarship has successfully challenged the "myth of silence"[6] surrounding the Holocaust.[7] Also, a new field of anti-fascism research has emerged

---

5 Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta Rodrigo, Xavier Tabet, and Cristina Clímaco, eds., *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016); Michael Seidman, *Transatlantic Antifascisms from the Spanish Civil War to the End of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey, and David Featherstone, eds., *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, and Radical Internationalism* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2021).

6 David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London: Routledge, 2012).

7 Máté Zombory, András Lénárt, and Anna Lujza Szász, "Elfeledett szembenézés. Holokauszt és emlékezés Fábri Zoltán Utószezon c. filmjében," *Budapesti Könyvszemle* 25, no. 3 (2013): 245–256; Richard S. Esbenshade, "'Anti-Fascist Literature' as Holocaust Literature? The Holocaust in the Hungarian Socialist Literary Marketplace, 1956–1970," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry. Volume 31: Poland and Hungary: Jewish Realities Compared*, ed. François Guesnet, Howard Lupovitch, and Antony Polonsky (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2019), 409–426; Tamás Scheibner and Máté Zombory, eds., *Holokauszt és államszocializmus. A történelem terhe a hatvanas években* [Holocaust and State Socialism: The Burden of History in the 1960s], *Múltunk* LXIV, no. 2, special issue (2019): 4–135. See also Kata Bohus, Peter Hallama, and Stephan Stach, eds., *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in State-Socialist Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022).

in the framework of memory studies.[8] This conjuncture enables us to leave behind the antifascism vs. Holocaust memory paradigm and, instead of searching for the Western Holocaust canon in the Eastern bloc, to look at how anti-fascism, by its own cultural logic,[9] constructed a morality based on the historical memory of the Jewish genocide.

In line with this, my starting point is not that there was no discussion of the Jewish genocide in the Eastern bloc, but that it was discussed differently. I will reconstruct how moral universalism worked in the cultural framework of antifascist humanism. First, I describe Hungarian film production in the 1960s and Zoltán Fábri's artistic credo, followed by a discussion of the aesthetic and social characteristics of his filmography. Then, I analyze the film *Late Season* and its Hungarian and international reception, followed by an examination of the role that the Cold War played in the making of the film and its reception.

Humanism and Anti-Fascism: Fábri's Artistic Credo

The 1960s, particularly after 1963, were in many respects an unrepeatable golden age for Hungarian film. The thaw in Communist cultural policy was coupled with the desire of filmmakers to assume a role in public life, the cult of auteur films, and high audience numbers. In addition, the nationwide movie theater network made films available to everyone and the spread of television was yet to threaten the status of cinema. After the Stalinist dictatorship and the re-organization following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, film production was decentralized.[10] The basic experience of film in the 1960s was that of the thaw. On the one hand, cinema became an important domain for the regime's consolidation and legitimacy, on the other, it gave a freer hand to filmmakers eager for autonomous artistic expression. It became possible to touch on public social problems with the language of cinematography. In this period, Hungarian filmmaking became part

---

8 Zoltán Kékesi and Máté Zombory, "Antifascist Memory Revisited: Hungarian Historical Exhibitions in Oświęcim and Paris, 1965," *Memory Studies* 15, no. 5 (2022): 1087–1104.

9 Andreas Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

10 Balázs Varga, "Tűréshatár. Filmtörténet és cenzúrapolitika a hatvanas években," in *Művészet És Hatalom. A Kádár-Korszak Művészete*, ed. Tamás Kisantal and Anna Menyhért (Budapest: JAK–L'Harmattan, 2005), 116–138.

of the international film scene.[11] The post-Stalinist regime made no secret of seeing the production of internationally acclaimed artworks and films as a source of legitimization. The forums for these were predominantly important international film festivals, which were attractive not only for increasing the international recognition of the country, but also for the opportunity to acquire hard currency though distribution contracts.[12]

Zoltán Fábri encountered the new waves of the 1960s as an established and recognized director. Ever since the nomination of his third film, *Merry-Go-Round*, for the Palme d'Or at the 1956 Cannes film festival, Fábri had already been known internationally. His movies were regularly featured in international festivals. By 1967, three of his films had been shown in Cannes and two had won prizes in Karlovy Vary; he had won the special prize in Locarno, the first prize in Moscow and Rome, and had received prizes in Boston and Venice.

Fábri was a humanist artist, whose great theme was repressive violence. As he explained, the examination of everyday reactions to the historical borderline situations of violence threatening human dignity became a mania for him, a theme to which he returned time and again.[13] The archetype of violence against human beings in Fábri's films was fascism. He first dealt with this topic in his fourth feature film, *Professor Hannibal* (1956), set in the increasingly fascist Hungary of the late 1930s. In Fábri's films, the problem of violence against human beings often develops in the context of the relationship between past and present. In *Darkness in Daytime* (1963), the protagonist is forced to recall events in 1944, when he tries to save his young Jewish lover using his daughter's identity papers, unaware that his daughter was involved in the communist resistance and was wanted by the authorities. When his lover is captured with his daughter's fake papers, he must make a fateful moral decision. In the director's interpretation, the film deals with the repercussions of the crimes of fascism. As he put it in an interview, "A number of my contemporaries bear the psychological wounds caused by fascist violence, and though they may live their lives today as others do, their entire behaviour as human beings is determined by that old experience."[14] The ef-

---

11 Balázs Varga, "Párbeszédek kora. Történelmi reflexió a hatvanas évek magyar filmjeiben," in *"Hatvanas Évek" Magyarországon*, ed. Rainer M. János (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2004), 427–446.
12 See Dorota Ostrowska, "Three Decades of Polish Films at the Venice and Cannes Film Festivals: The 1940s, 1950s and 1960s," in *Beyond the Border: Polish Cinema in a Transnational Context*, ed. Ewa Mazierska and Michael Godard (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 77–94.
13 István Zsugán, "Az emlékezés kényszere. Interjú Fábri Zoltánnal," in *Szubjektív magyar filmtörténet 1964–1994* (Budapest: Osiris-Századvég, 1994 [1976]), 335–337.
14 László Kürti, "A Nappali Sötétség után," *Filmkultúra* 23, March-April 1964, 116.

fects of the past, he continued, are manifest in the film as flashbacks and as "a responsibility that racks the soul," ruining the protagonist. Fábri's humanism confronts historical, archetypically fascist constraints with human agency. According to a key line from *Darkness in Daytime*, which Fábri himself frequently quoted: "I hate times in which people have to be saints, martyrs, or heroes in order to remain human."

But history "repeats" itself only insofar as the violence and oppression tangible in the present is seen in the light of the morally borderline situations of the past. In connection to *Late Season*, Fábri put the problem of the burden of history as follows: the film is about the "absolute villainy, the most loathsome insult that has struck humankind since the beginning of history: fascism, which we rightly thought that, being a terrible trauma of humanity, once we had survived it, there was only one way to evaluate it. And how many places in the world, in how many forms, does it rear its head? Are we justified in remaining indifferent to it?"[15] As an absolute example of a system doing violence to the human being, fascism is expressed as a primal scene that is repeated in many varied forms in the present. In Fábri's vocabulary, fascism, as one outstanding example of historical atrocity, is a generalized symbol for absolute evil. His humanist perspective expresses fascism as a general human problem, an understanding of which provides the key to the struggle against violence in the present.

Aesthetics and Politics: Confronting the Past

From the second half of the 1950s, Fábri positioned himself in relation to developments in international film and found his reference points in Western cinematography. For inspiration in the visual representation of the effect of the human soul's vulnerability, he drew on the techniques of modern film. The cinematographic solutions of modernist aesthetics influenced Fábri in two fundamental respects. First, non-chronological editing made it possible to portray the reconstructive, associative, non-linear organization of the act of remembering, and thus avoid a chronological presentation. "This novel method of film dramaturgy, which gives the artist the opportunity to move in various levels of time without any kind of technical trickery," he noted, considering the filmic innovations of the last ten years in relation to *Darkness in Daytime*.[16] The second decisive formal solution proved to be the

15 István Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán – a Képalkotó Művész* (Budapest: Szabad Tér Kiadó, 1994), 165–166.
16 Kürti, "A Nappali Sötétség után," 117.

depiction of the processes of consciousness, which "brings to the surface the world inside a person, the problems, the mass of conflicts, in all their complexity, in all their intricacy."[17] Historical time relates to the present through the temporality of human consciousness. The film frames function as the images of consciousness, and the relationship between past and present is represented as an issue of guilt. As a result, the movie does not conjure up the past trauma as it happened, but examines the lasting effect the trauma has on ordinary people, and thus on humanity. Through the lingering effect of the past event, fascist violence is still relevant and pertinent in public life.

The analysis of the psychological processes of ordinary persons fits perfectly with his humanist understanding of the individual and of history. Yet Fábri's confrontational films have no shortage of sociological references: human nature is shown through belonging to a community. In one interview, he stated that in our time "the surviving criminals and the surviving victims of the fascist war live together in one human community, with forced tolerance, sometimes by custom, in small and large groups, with amity towards one another, because this is the only thing we can do on the basis of our historical lessons. But can this go hand in hand with neglecting to remember and to remind, particularly if in several places in the world certain perceptible and non-latent tendencies give us reason to do so?"[18] Consequently for Fábri, filmmaking has a social mission, confronting us with the past, and thus helping us to prepare to make the right decision in borderline situations in the future.

When dealing with fascism as the historical archetype of repressive violence, Fabri's filmic art inevitably addressed the paradox of anti-fascist aesthetics, which consists of "the necessity of engaging with fascism as a fascinating and powerful irrational force, and the problem of how to represent it without being seduced by it."[19] *Late Season*, a film dealing with fascism as a historical atrocity more directly than any of Fábri's other works, features strategies of anti-fascist aesthetics: a dialectical approach, a combination of historical documentation with modernist modes of representation, and a confrontational reception model. I will frame the analysis of the film according to these features. The most important impact on *Late Season* in this regard, as we shall see, was beyond doubt Alain Resnais's cinematography (besides Fellini's *8 and ½,* Fábri cited *Hiroshima, mon amour* as a defining experience for his film).

17 István Szabó, "Egy gondolat igézetében. Beszélgetés Fábri Zoltánnal," in *Filmkultúra 1965–1973. Válogatás*, edited by Bíró Yvette (Budapest: Századvég, 1991 [1965]), 25.

18 Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 166.

19 Jennifer Lynde Barker, *The Aesthetics of Antifascist Film: Radical Projection* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 133.

In Fábri's *ars poetica*, accordingly, confrontation with the past is not commemorative. The weapon for the fight against fascism is analysis: an analysis from many different aspects of what systematic violence does to social beings in morally borderline situations where there is no right choice. This is far from entertainment or the enjoyment of beauty. The film is supposed to trigger a reaction, to transfer the burden of history to the viewer, who should wrestle with it after leaving the cinema.

A Film about Remembrance and the Holocaust

Late Season is based on György Rónay's 1963 novel *Evening Express*, a "petit-bourgeois Eichmann case," as the author put it.[20] The protagonist, a retired apothecary assistant Kálmán Kerekes – whose conscience is already unquiet, only to be completely upset by the news of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem – starts to collect evidence for his increasingly probable trial. "It will not be a commemoration," writes Rónay in his diary, "but partly a self-justification of the protagonist, his defense plan before the expected court hearing – the living past, actually and authentically in the present (not merely as a writer's technical trick)."[21] Accordingly, the novel's temporal composition is non-linear. The three strata of time (1944, 1946, and the present) only loosely follow the division of the chapters, and the text contains several unlabeled temporal switches.

The film retains Rónay's idea, which ponders how the catastrophe could be passively observed. It is thus about the silent accomplices, the "bystanders," who are distinguished from the culprits punishable by the enacted laws. In autumn 1944, in answer to the police chief's question of whether there are still any Jews in the town, the assistant apothecary names Mr. and Mrs. Szilágyi – his kind, discreet employers. All this happens under extreme psychological pressure: Kerekes answers the question of his former childhood classmate, assuming the police chief knows that by dispensing drugs Kerekes had been helping the resistance and had thus committed "treason." "Unless the Szilágyis are Jews . . ." groans Kerekes in the film's betrayal scene. This all fits perfectly with Fábri's idea of the ordinary person compelled to be the subject of history.

20 György Rónay (1913–1978) was a poet, writer, translator, and literary historian, a representative of Neo-Catholic literature. From 1945, he served as editor, later editor-in-chief, of the Catholic literary and scholarly periodical *Vigilia*.

21 György Rónay, *Napló* (Budapest: Magvető, 1989), 671.

More striking, however, are the conceptual differences between the two works. The makers of *Late Season* departed markedly from the novel's concept in three respects. At the center of the film, instead of the past living in the present, they placed remembrance; instead of the war, they placed the Holocaust; and they drew a parallel between the genocide of the Jews and the threat of nuclear war.

From a Guilty Conscience to a Trial

The counterpoint between the presence of the past and memory can be found in the relationship between the characters. The former is represented by a group of pensioners, who spend the late summer at the resort of Lake Balaton, playing jokes on each other to help the time pass: Péter Holl, the former police chief of the town, who served his prison sentence and works as a petrol pump attendant (in the novel he disappears in 1944); Alfréd Zorkay Strób, the retired Curia judge; Bonta, the former state secretary; Sodits, the retired teacher; Dezső, the chauffeur, who, it transpires at one point, is none other than General Rudolf Drasitz Drapp, a fictional military commander, the "legendary hero of the southern front"; and Henrik Lauffer, a former horse dealer. In this group, which represents Hungarian society, the former perpetrators and victims live side by side. The latter are embodied in the figure of Lauffer, whose family was killed in Auschwitz. The protagonist Kerekes, a former apothecary assistant, is also part of the group.

Set before this social background, and in contrast to it, we see Kerekes's tribulations with memory. It all begins with a practical joke, when friends at the resort send Kerekes a summons, ostensibly from the county police station, to question him as a witness "in a certain matter." While for the rest of the group the ongoing Eichmann trial is nothing more than a magazine sensation, it stirs Kerekes's guilty conscience. The prank prompts him to travel to the scene of the deed for the first time since 1944, to find out what happened to the employers he unwittingly reported. The others follow him and up the prank by chasing him. In this sequence, with plenty of burlesque elements, the link to the past appears as an associational relationship of memory images and fantasies led by desires and resistance. Through the editing, the authors make associative temporal jumps in the non-linear story, and the filmic image represents the protagonist's interior world. The reconstructive nature of memory is hinted at by the dramaturgical solution of having Kerekes return to 1944 in his 1961 appearance. The first part of the film contains various modern film techniques: stop action photography, rotational editing, freeze framing, and fast motion.

In the second part of the film, the representation of the past receives another role, with an emphasis on narration and re-enactment. Late one night, the desperate Kerekes asks his friends to hold an unofficial trial against him. He wants to at last be sure of his guilt or innocence. Exhausted and under the influence of alcohol, the reluctant old men eventually toe the line. Zorkay is given the role of judge, Lauffer is the witness for the prosecution. Eager for evidence, the accused demands a confrontation with the petrol pump attendant, or the former police chief. The scene is an open reference to Dürrenmatt's short novel, *Die Panne* (*A Dangerous Game*, or *Traps* in the US). The whole thing is a drunken prank, yet deadly serious. In a grotesque manner, justice is carried out and remembrance takes on a social form. The characters assume their old roles under the former regime of 1944. Kerekes confesses to sending the Szilágyi couple to death, but Holl, although he remembers, proves to be uncooperative in the confrontation and denies ever blackmailing the former assistant. Without a dead body, the judge is at a loss with what to do with the accusation of murder: "What would a single 'unless' do? Nothing! It's a joke!" However, in response to the judge's verdict of not guilty, the "prosecutor" Lauffer confronts the old men with the truth: "Do you know what you are? Accomplices! Murderers!" and then he gives the closing speech for the prosecution. Crucially, this happens outside the context of the mock court: now the accused is not just Kerekes, but the others too, and Lauffer speaks to all of them as an eyewitness on behalf of all Holocaust victims. The scene ends with Lauffer asking for the death penalty "in the name of the felt soles, the soap bars, and the lampshades"[22] "as punishment for this 'unless,'" referring to the wording Kerekes used in his answer to the police chief's question about the Jews of the town.

Picture and Dream Image

Another conceptual difference between the novel and the film relates to what is being remembered. *Late Season* is a "Holocaust film." In the novel, the police chief has the Szilágyi couple executed in the town's main square, as a deterrence in response to the discovery of a bomb and a resistance sabotage campaign. Their indirect involvement in the resistance (providing the movement with medicine)

22 This is a reference to the victims of the Holocaust, which was a commonly used emblem of Nazi barbarity in the early postwar period, when factual knowledge about the Holocaust mingled with fear and uncertainty.

has turned them into martyrs. In the film, by contrast, the Szilágyis are persecuted solely for being Jewish.

In *Late Season*, the visual representation of the Holocaust has a dialectical structure. On the one hand, Fábri uses archival footage, clearly separated from the rest. Kerekes runs from the pranksters pursuing him, taking refuge inside a cinema where the newsreel about the Eichmann trial is being screened: "In the Dock." This is a mock newsreel; in actual fact, the Hungarian news used only images from the courtroom. In the newsreel, the courtroom scenes frame footage taken from Alain Resnais' 1955 film *Night and Fog*, showing people being herded into wagons, a concentration camp, prisoners, corpses, a crematorium, and a mass grave. The narration, which tells us that "the Nazi mass murderer is also responsible for the extermination of Hungarian Jews" is the work of the filmmakers: they relied on motifs taken from Rónay's novel. This pseudo newsreel made using old documentary footage and contemporary news is a "film within a film" addressing the problem of documenting the Holocaust as a historical atrocity. It is not only an aesthetic claim for the authenticity of real-time film footage as realistic, but also an anti-fascist claim about the social role of documenting atrocities.

The other strategy used in representing the Holocaust in *Late Season* is an integral part of Fábri's filmic art. He used powerful, expressive montages in various vision-scenes in his earlier films too. In *Late Season*, a sequence presents the surrealistic vision Kerekes dreamed on the night of the trial, where, led by Lauffer, he sets out to look for the bodies of the Szilágyis. In the dream composition, Kerekes is stigmatized by the yellow star on his coat and looks for the Szilágyis among the 666,666 dead and the lampshades mentioned in Lauffer's speech for the prosecution. The sequence ends in a gas chamber scene, where Kerekes is holding a bar of soap in his hand and he himself is placed among the naked victims waiting for the "shower." The gas chamber scene is composed to represent the protagonist's inner world. Its main element is the line of telephone kiosks, in which we see Kerekes after the newsreel of the Eichmann trial, as he searches for his former employers in the telephone book in order to gather evidence about their fate (and thus about his own responsibility). Thus, the scene is decidedly stylized, eschewing realism. This representational strategy portrays the Holocaust through the metaphor of hell, as a projection of the spiritual world of the protagonist. This can be seen as an aesthetic claim in favor of the artistic authenticity of representing the Holocaust as historical atrocity.

As a common strategy of anti-fascist film aesthetic, *Late Season* destabilizes authenticity by relating historical documentation to the artistic expression by modernist techniques of representation. Positioning the spectator in a representa-

tional space of authenticity, the film at the same time asserts and questions the possibility of representing historical atrocity.[23]

Auschwitz and Hiroshima

On the one hand, Fábri's film constructs the "absolute villainy," which he mentioned in interviews only as fascism, quite clearly as the Holocaust, and universalizes its significance as an archetypical example of violence against human beings. Yet on the other hand, his film does not depict the Holocaust as incomparable in relation to other acts of anti-human aggression. The moral universalism of *Late Season* places the present threat of nuclear war in parallel to the Nazi genocide. As in *Hiroshima, mon amour*, this parallel unfolds between the characters: Kerekes and his counterpoint, the figure of the Red Woman, who is not part of the novel. Like Kerekes, she is also troubled by guilt, and she bumps into the apothecary assistant in certain key scenes of the film. First, she appears in the pharmacy's window when Kerekes struggles with his memories trying to enter in his former workplace: his silhouette in the window overlaps with her image. She is there at the glass telephone kiosk next to the one in which Kerekes is looking for the Szilágyis' number. Both are driven by their inner fears and traumatic hallucinations: she thinks that Kerekes is an agent of her husband sent to take her home; for Kerekes, the Red Woman represents the nameless accuser, who "knows everything" about his deeds.

"This woman is just as driven as the main protagonist, but the reason for her determination comes from the present day: the most current of illnesses, radiation sickness, which killed her seventeen-year-old son, whose memory has driven her to distraction," said Fábri in a 1967 interview.[24] The film does not show how this happened, the spectators only know it from the account of the Red Woman. According to Fábri's interpretation, the Red Woman becomes Kerekes's conscience, and the two characters are mirrors for one another's anxiety (in fact Kerekes holds a mirror to the woman in one scene). Unable to cope with the loss, the Red Woman is haunted by the trauma of losing her son at the age of 17 because of leukemia. By linking Hiroshima with Auschwitz,[25] Fábri moved beyond the com-

23 See Barker, *The Aesthetics of Antifascist Film*.

24 István Zsugán, "A rettegés embertorzító közérzete ellen. Fábri Zoltán," in *Szubjektív magyar filmtörténet 1964–1994* (Budapest: Osiris-Századvég, 1994 [1967]), 66.

25 Ran Zwigenberg, *Hiroshima: The Origins of Global Memory Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

memorative representation of historical atrocity. Instead of representing the uniqueness of the Nazi genocide of the Jews, he counterpointed it with a contemporary threat of atrocity in a common anti-fascist framework.

In sum, Fábri's film is about the "late season" of war criminals, in which history presses down on society like a burden. The characters are literally pursued by the past: Kerekes by the old pranksters – the "old world"; Lauffer by a man, who turns out to be the son of his former business associate, asking for information in order to apply for compensation; the Red Woman by her husband, who would take her home, and put an end to this mad flight from reality. *Late Season* is an anti-fascist film, because it interprets the problem of the "past that does not pass" as an effect exercised on the present by fascism, understood as a symbol of absolute evil. The film focuses on the Jewish genocide, which it portrays as a constitutive feature of fascism, but not as a singular historical event with unique significance. The paradigmatic nature of fascism as the "absolute villainy" lies in its being the ultimate borderline situation of violence done to humans. After all, as Fábri put it, "It was this system that deformed and dehumanized to its utmost extreme the man, who is born to freedom. The memory of this period lives, or haunts, as a fatal trauma in everyone who experienced it; whether as a victim, a perpetrator, or a silent accomplice."[26] *Late Season* deals with the latter, stating that a potential killer lurks in everybody, who under the influence of soul-crushing social pressure may do something they would otherwise be incapable of. Fábri's humanism raises the moral significance of the Holocaust to a general level and draws a comparison with another form of aggression against humankind – the Cold War nuclear threat.

The Antimimetic Reception Model of *Late Season*

Late Season's genre is difficult to define. It starts out as a comedy and ends as tragedy, solemn scenes and burlesque alternate, and the entire film is characterized by a grotesque tone. As Fábri explained in an interview:

> It can be seen as a clownish prank. Perhaps as something else too. These days television viewers see serialized Grand Guignols, mysterious phantoms, and when these are on the air, the streets are deserted, everyone is glued to the screen. But from the gates of the Spandau prison [in Berlin, where Nazi war criminals sentenced at the Nuremberg Trials were incarcerated] from time to time also phantoms emerge, major war criminals who have served their term and are awaited by a line of luxury cars and torchlight processions, and

26 Zsugán, Zsugán, "A rettegés embertorzító közérzete ellen," 65.

> world magazines offer them astronomical sums for their appalling memoirs. Eichmann too, with a good contract in his pocket, was working on his memoirs when he was captured by the Israeli secret police. If they had been published, they'd be bestsellers on the book market. The world's hunger for sensation is insatiable. It demands shock. Well, *Late Season* meets this requirement too. It could even be classed as a horror.[27]

In this view, the grotesque is a kind of sign of the times, as if in its filmic form it simply follows the peculiarities of the topic, and the director follows the demands of the contemporary public.

One crucial function of the grotesque, however, is alienation, the recurrent frustration of the viewer's identification with the character – a significant part of the film's reception model. While in the novel Rónay grants a mercy killing to Kerekes, who, driven to distraction and paranoia, throws himself in front of the evening express, in the film, although Kerekes tries to kill himself, he fails. In contrast to the novel's relentlessly tragic but cathartic denouement, the film provides no solution: it ends with Kerekes slumping across a table in the pub with the old men, and the camera zooms in to a magazine hanging on a hook; on the cover is Eichmann sitting in the glass booth. The film ends with the first frame. As a characteristic of anti-fascist aesthetics, the film intends to initiate action in the spectators. After seeing *Late Season,* Rónay wrote a letter to the director in which he said that in connection with the filming, he had most reservations about the conclusion:

> The final frames, acted slightly differently from the "line" followed throughout, from the relentless harshness, could have given if only in mood, to a limited extent, the absolution which in the novel I did not give to the wretched Kerekes, nor did I wish to. But there is no absolution, and this is as it should be, and once more artistically courageous. The viewers should leave with this lack of absolution, Kerekes's guilt, or at least the problem of Kerekes's guilt. If only for one night, when they will be forced to think it all through and concede that what they have seen is not a "fiction film" (this is not just playing around!), but they have been instructed to confront for once what they did, or what they did not do – "unless" they are to deny their humanity.[28]

Though *Late Season* extends the significance of the Holocaust, it does not base its universality on the idea of uniqueness. Its moral universalism does not sacralize the Holocaust as an incomparable catastrophe, but makes it a parable of violence against human beings. By its formal language, the film prevents a mythologized reading of the Holocaust, that is to say, it frustrates its generalized reading as a struggle between good and evil. In addition, with its tragicomedy and alienating

27 Quoted in Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 167.
28 Quoted in Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 170.

effects, it prevents the viewer's identification with the characters, or, to use an expression of Terrence Des Pres, the film is "antimimetic."[29] Its intention is not to trigger catharsis, but horror, which the audience experiences in the context of the on-screen analysis of psyche and society, prompting them to relate it to themselves. Rather than catharsis through identification, the reception model of *Late Season* is self-scrutiny triggered by alienation.

"Striving Absurdly for the Absolute"

For contemporary views of *Late Season*'s antifascist humanism, it is worth surveying the reviews of the film in Hungary and abroad. In Hungary, the film premiered on February 23, 1967. Its topic was taken for granted and was seen as a logical continuation of Fábri's oeuvre. As an article in the official party paper put it: "With the sincere shock of a humanist, [the film] warns us of the soul-deforming operation of the machinery of violence and fear."[30] At the same time, the film achieved its aim and triggered a lively controversy. According to the aesthetician Miklós Almási, it was a genre-creating "debate film," which instead of providing an answer "merely forces each person to clarify his own personal solution in 'close combat' with the film."[31] The debate centered around the responsibility for the Holocaust, specifically on whether the film exonerates the average Hungarian embodied by Kerekes[32] or prompts him or her to take responsibility.[33]

The anti-fascist humanism of *Late Season* was thus qualified as legitimate by the reviewers. Its evaluation hinged on whether its formal language endorsed, or on the contrary, undermined the legitimate auteur's program. Aside from its formal eclecticism (slavish copying of international masters vs. *bravura d'auteur*), the film's grotesque-ironic tone sparked controversy. Those rejecting the film expected catharsis, which however the film denies, as the grotesque tone extinguishes any identification with the protagonist.[34] At the same time, many reviewers thought the grotesque heightened the drama,[35] and that it was an authentic expressive tool for

29 Terrence Des Pres, "Holocaust Laughter?" in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), 216–233.
30 Vera Létay, "Utószezon," *Népszabadság*, February 26, 1967.
31 Almási Miklós, "Milyen film az Utószezon? Egy műfaj, és egy vita margójára," *Kritika*, no. 5 (May-June 1967): 3–7.
32 László B. Nagy, "Az önvizsgálat zsákutcájában," *Élet és Irodalom*, February 25, 1967.
33 See István Örkény, "Tragikomédia a bűnről és a bűnhődésről," *Filmkultúra*, no. 1 (1967): 29.
34 See Ervin Gyertyán, "Utószezon," *Filmvilág*, March 1, 1967.
35 See György Kárpáti, "Utószezon," *Lobogó*, March 8, 1967.

the social problem with which it dealt.[36] The national daily *Magyar Nemzet*, which by the way features in the film, summed it up as follows: *Late Season* "strives absurdly for the absolute. It puts the viewer through hell, with no attenuating of the spectacle, nor does it allow us, while quasi enjoying the opus, to attenuate things, or for our attention to wander; indeed, it rather plunges each one of us into a cauldron of Dantesque penitence heated up by his own sins."[37]

Questions of formal language arose with especial vehemence in regard to the film's representation of the Holocaust. Critics were silent about Fábri's relational, even dialectical solution, which puts the authenticity of the archival footage in a relationship with the psychological authenticity of the surreal fiction. Reviewers were concerned solely with the vision of the gas chamber and were extremely divided about this Holocaust representation. Unfavorable reviews considered the scene morally unacceptable. Literary historian and magazine editor Anna Földes doubted whether "the depiction on the cinema screen of the undepictable" in other words "forcing of the hell of the death camp onto the screen [was] artistically and psychologically acceptable."[38] Similarly, according to the author for a journal of literary criticism, "the terrible reality of the deportations and gas chambers has no poetry, nor can it. These images of inhumanity humiliate art, and all the more so the memory of the former victims."[39] The revulsion may have been caused by the fact that, insofar as we give a realist reading to the dream scene, the predominantly bodily representation of the extras is unable to convey the ideas we have formed of the reality of the gas chambers. Accordingly, the weekly of *The Hungarian Writers' Union* wrote of a "naked revue of well-heeled extras,"[40] while the regional daily *Zalai Hírlap* mentioned "a scene far more reminiscent of nudist bathers than of the tormented prisoners condemned to death, herded into the gas chambers."[41] Several reviewers phrased their displeasure as simply tastelessness.[42]

From today's point of view, stranger are the appreciative comments about the gas chamber vision. The evening paper *Esti Hírlap* considered it a "memorable, splendid sequence,"[43] while according to the weekly cultural magazine *Film Színház Muzsika* "the visions appear with especially terrible authenticity in this

36 Almási, "Milyen film az Utószezon?"

37 Lázsló Zay, "Utószezon. Magyar Film," *Magyar Nemzet*, February 23, 1967.

38 Anna Földes, "Utószezon," *Nők Lapja*, March 25, 1967.

39 Fenyő, István. "Utószezon," *Kortárs*, no. 5 (1967).

40 B. Nagy, "Az önvizsgálat zsákutcájában."

41 J. A., "Gondolatok egy filmbemutató kapcsán," *Zalai Hírlap*, March 5, 1967.

42 See B. Nagy, "Az önvizsgálat zsákutcájában," Gyertyán, "Utószezon," Kárpáti, "Utószezon."

43 László Bernáth, "Utószezon," *Esti Hírlap*, February 22, 1967.

photographic style."[44] The Catholic weekly *Új Ember* mentioned the "masterly pictorialness of the sequence shot in the realm of the dead," remarking that "the rude naturalism of the gas chamber scene is a break in style with the dreamlike environment."[45] The political and literary journal *Látóhatár* emphasized that the film "gives no emotional charge to the moral message, which it expresses intelligently, nicely, with fine suggestiveness,"[46] while the regional daily *Dunántúli Napló* praised the "fantasy-born, horrifying lampshade scene," "which signals the inhumanity of fascism with terrible novelty."[47] Finally, the regional daily *Fejér Megyei Hírlap* respected both the authentic depiction and the scene's role in the dramaturgy: "And when we feel almost physical pain, Fábri claws into our nerves and our consciences with cruel honesty, by a splendidly composed vision sequence, by the authentic presentation of the horror of the gas chambers, by the 'lampshade-making workshop' edited in, and by plunging us into the forest of marble tombs preserving the names of hundreds of thousands of martyrs."[48]

Late Season's international renown was due to its being shown at the 28th Venice International Film Festival, in spite of Hungary not selecting it among the recommended works to enter into the competition. Luigi Chiarini, the artistic director of the festival, selected the film personally. The movie won the Venice International Film Festival's San Giorgio Prize for the most human progressive film, according to the jury's citation for its humane content and its message of responsibility. The Cineforum 1967 prize was awarded "for its humanity, for its timely imaginative language, in which the grotesque does not degrade the elevated, and for its fine confession of individual responsibility, for taking a stand against violence and impatience."[49] Fábri was awarded the grand prize of Venice for the film's conscience-stirring effect and humane sense of responsibility, while Antal Páger won the Cinema Nuovo prize for his acting in the main role.

The international reception of *Late Season* was unequivocally positive. Like their Hungarian counterparts, critics saw the choice of theme as a continuation of Fábri's oeuvre. Aldo Scagnetti argued that "the crisis of conscience examined by Zoltán Fábri gains broader, almost eternal interpretation, if we follow a constant leitmotif in the Hungarian director's works; the grinding away, the wearing down

44 Jenő Illés, "Utószezon. A bűntudat filmje," *Film Színház Muzsika*, February 24, 1967.
45 Lajos Bittei, "Utószezon," *Új Ember*, March 5, 1967.
46 Zoltán Hegedűs, "A bűntudat komédiája. Néhány szó az Utószezonról." *Látóhatár*, no. 3–4, (April 1967).
47 E. H., "Utószezon. Új magyar film," *Dunántúli Napló*, 26, 1967.
48 Antal Kátay, "Utószezon," *Fejér Megyei Hírlap*, February 25, 1967.
49 László Zay, "Több kitüntetést kapott az Utószezon velencében," *Magyar Nemzet*, September 9, 1967.

of people's inner selves, caused by peremptory violence and the terror of fascism, which leads even the most defenseless of individuals to unexpected, irrational deeds."[50] Georges Bratschi held a similar view, calling the film "nearly a masterpiece."[51] The reviews concurred that *Late Season* is not an easy film, and does not entertain, because "it is a mirror thrust aggressively before the viewer's face."[52] They found that one thing contributing to this disturbing nature was the unusual formal language. According to the critic of *Feuille d'Avis de Lausanne*, "The mixing of genres is so intimate, we feel like laughing and this is awkward, but if we give in to laughter all the same, a second later we regret it."[53] It is reminiscent of the films of Resnais and Fellini, writes Gian Luigi Rondi, but "without plagiarism, with strong, decisive individuality" and the irony with respect to the characters does nothing to reduce the scale of the tragedy.[54] Reviews of the film were unanimous in their praise of Antal Páger's interpretation.

Cahiers du cinéma wrote about *Late Season* in its section on the Venice Film Festival. In his review, Jean-André Fieschi pointed out that the film "is particularly surprising for the risky dosage it tries to bring about between tragedy and derision, buffoonery and message."[55] For him, *Late Season* had an unusual relationship between theme and filmic solutions, and "does not shrink from a type of caricature all the more appalling because it is of a subject where normally restraint is required, be it sincere or affected." At the same time, it was clear to him that this simply reflects the director's intentions. He wrote: "What numbs the critic is the extent to which all this is deliberate, calculated, graded by Fábri." In the end, Fieschi decided that rather than condemning the film, "the criteria of good taste should be seriously re-examined in the context of a work that abuses them with such assurance: indeed, here Fábri assumes an audacity close to pure recklessness, because the film, at least ideologically, cannot satisfy anybody." In conclusion, rather than condemning the film's "inept ideological-formal delirium," he recommends critics describe its "very real strangeness."

In 1969 the Bundesrepublik television broadcast Fábri's film, under the title *Die Vorladung* (The Summons). *Die Welt* called it a masterpiece, a film "whose geologi-

---

50 *L'Ora Palermo*, August 30, 1967, quoted by Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 172.

51 *La Tribuna de Genève*, August 31, 1967, quoted in Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 173.

52 This quote in Hungarian translation comes, without the source indicated, from the dossier on the reception of *Late Season*. *A film dossziéja*, Archive of the National Film Institute, NF 2087, n. d., 2.

53 *Feuille d'Avis de Lausanne*, November 1, 1967, *A film dossziéja*, 5–6.

54 *Il Tempo*, Rome, August 30, 1967, quoted in Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 173.

55 J. A. F., "Utoszezon (Arriere-Saison) de Zoltan Fabri (Hongrie)," *Cahiers du cinéma* 195 (November 1967): 27–28.

cal strata testify a great diagnostician of the time, and a great director."[56] German reviewers, like the Italians, wrote admiringly of the tone of the film, which they did not find to be at odds with its theme. The *Münchner Merkur* praised not only the fact that "over and over it enthrals with the carelessness with which it mixes shock and grotesque humor," but also the concept of drawing a comparison between the Holocaust and nuclear war, because the film "creates a general atmosphere of guilt (the old man's) and madness (that of a young woman)."[57] *Deutsche Welle* too pointed out the daring novelty of the grotesque tone, stating that over the past 20 years there had been countless attempts to explain the unexplainable: what was Auschwitz? "In *Late Season* the talented Hungarian director has attempted to approach the theme from a completely different angle. And it should be added that unprecedented courage and great self-assurance was needed to approach the drama of the deportations from this angle, the angle of the grotesque. But this courage was well-founded, and well-rewarded."[58]

Even from this incomplete description of the reception of *Late Season*, we can draw the conclusion that the moral universalism of Fábri's humanist antifascist film proved to be a legitimate experiment. This is shown by the unequivocally positive reception abroad and the fact that even negative Hungarian reviews objected to the failure of Fábri's authorial program due to the formal language of the film. The film was interpreted as a clearly humanist work, confirmed by the many citations for the Venice Film Festival prizes as well as reviews. At the same time, in some respects, there is a significant discrepancy between the Hungarian and international reception. While abroad the grotesque tone and the film's aesthetic grammar, in general, was seen as unequivocally positive, in Hungary critics were divided on both these issues. This difference may derive from the fact that in Hungary, a former axis country with a significant Jewish minority in the 1960s, the audience was involved in the problem posed by *Late Season*, both historically and in the present time. Here the ironic-grotesque tone applied in representing the Holocaust was qualified partly as morally unacceptable, partly as valid. Fábri made his film at a turning point in the social history of sensitivity to human suffering. The canon of visual representation of the Holocaust was not yet fixed, so the possibilities for authenticity remained open. The period was characterized by a plurality of moral universes of historicity.

56 *Die Welt*, November 21, 1969, In, *A film dossziéja*, 7.
57 *Münchner Merkur*, Novermber 21, 1969, *A film dossziéja*, 8.
58 *Deutsche Welle*, November 22, 1969, *A film dossziéja*, 9.

Cold War and Morality

International film festivals were sites of both Cold War networking and collaboration, as well as political rivalry. In Venice in 1967, the situation was tense in several respects.[59] Two days before the end of the festival, on September 6, 1967, *Variety* ran an article entitled "International and Internal Politics Simmer in Venice Fest Background: Hungarians Brush Anti-Semitism Rap," which among many political incidents mentioned the case of *Late Season*. The article recalls that on August 23, three days before the festival began, *Variety* wrote that the lead actor in a film addressing the question of guilt and war crimes was a "notorious Nazi." As a member of the jury, Susan Sontag lamented the fact that Antal Páger, a war criminal, had been given a role in the film, and Israel, which was just breaking off diplomatic relations with Hungary (established already in 1948), raised an objection with the Mostra.[60] On September 6, *Variety* reported that in the press conference for *Late Season*, in the presence of the actor, questions about Páger's past were addressed to Fábri, who defended him, saying that Páger "did appear in an anti-Semitic pic, but was not guilty of the other charges and had been cleared in Hungary after he came back from Latin American exile."[61]

By a quirk of fate, it was thanks to the Cold War that Antal Páger (1899–1986) could appear in Fábri's film. Already popular before the Second World War, he exploited the opportunities of the increasingly "Jew-free" post-1938 artistic scene. He himself featured in propaganda-like opuses of the Christian-national regime, and his daughter was on a wartime propaganda poster. Moreover, after the extreme right and pro-Nazi Arrow Cross Party took power on October 15, 1944, he appeared with the "Leader of the Nation" Ferenc Szálasi, who was executed in 1946 for war crimes. Páger did not wait for the People's Court to ascertain whether or not this established his guilt. In 1945, he fled from the Red Army to the West. Hungary asked the Allies for his extradition, but in vain, and he was never put on trial. Finally, he and his family settled in Argentina.

---

59 Riccardo Triolo, "Per Una Storia Della Mostra Internazionale d'arte Cinematografica: Revisione e Studio Della Serie Cinema Conservata Presso l'archivio Storico Delle Arti Contemporanee Della Biennale Di Venezia" (PhD diss., University of Padua [UNIPD], 2011).

60 See Thomas Quinn Curtis's article in *International Herald Tribune*, August 30, 1967, quoted in Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 172.

61 International and Internal Politics Simmer in Venice Fest Background; Hungarians Brush Antisemitism Rap, Variety, September 6, 1967, 2.

Hungarian authorities, who kept émigrés under observation, were aware in the early 1950s that Páger was racked by homesickness,[62] but the idea of his return was not contemplated until there was a change in the relationship of the Hungarian People's Republic to the diaspora in the West. Similarly to the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries, in the mid-1950s Hungary too embarked on a policy of enabling the return of émigrés in the West. The amnesty decrees issued in 1955, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of liberation, and in 1956, made it possible for Hungarians who had gone abroad after the war to return freely within one year without legal consequences.[63] Hungary's intention was both to weaken the hostile Western emigration by syphoning off its loyal elements and to increase its political legitimacy abroad and at home.[64]

A plan for the "voluntary" return of the actor was drafted in January 1955 in the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior. Naturally, there was an examination of his past activity, in which no seriously incriminating elements were found: Páger hailed from a poor peasant background, so he was not seen as a class enemy, nor had he been a member of the Arrow Cross Party. Although he had featured in ideologically disapproved films, he had committed no action against the personal freedom of others. During the lengthy, often petty bargaining, the Interior Ministry made it clear what it expected from Antal Páger: "You must have seen that this year [1956] at the Cannes festival our films have not achieved the results they ought to have done, and clearly you would be able to help us through our current problem."[65] The Ministry's contact person was referring to the fact that Fábri's *Merry-Go-Round* did not win the Palme d'Or prize. The deal paid off: Hungary's first festival prize at Cannes was indeed garnered by Páger in 1964 for his acting role in the film *Drama of the Lark*.

The popular actor finally arrived in Hungary in late summer 1956. The peculiar coverage of this sensational event was framed within the state policy toward the Hungarian political exile. The press reacted largely positively, supporting Páger's return, because he could put his skills in the service of the homeland, but it would be an exaggeration to celebrate the fact: he should behave modestly and work hard. At the same time, newspapers received letters from angry readers, while reports by agents (particularly in the world of the arts) spoke of a wave of

62 András Lénárt, "Derült égből. Páger Antal visszatérésének körülményei," *2000*, no. 11 (2013): 58–69.

63 Ferenc Cseresnyés, "A népi demokráciák hazatelepítési akciói 1954–1956," *Acta Scientiarum Socialium* 45 (2015): 245–259.

64 See Magdolna Baráth, "Attempts to Win and Break up the Hungarian Emigration after 1956," in *East Central Europe in Exile, Volume 2: Transatlantic Identities* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 293–309.

65 Quoted in Lénárt, "Derült égből," 61.

dissatisfaction. The reason for this was not just the lack of either exonerating or condemnatory public gestures, but an antipathy toward those returning from the West, "who, as one investigating officer put it, lived handsomely, while here at home we struggled, starved, and rebuilt [the country]."[66] To calm tempers, the party Politburo brought a resolution on the withdrawal of the exaggerated promises made to the actor. During the 1956 revolution, Páger remained passive and in 1957 he was given opportunities, first minor roles in theatre and then major roles in film, in an acting world that was forced temporarily to do without important figures because of the role they had played in the revolution. Soon he became one of the most employed film actors: by the time of the release of *Late Season*, he had already acted in 80 films and acted in another 90 after it.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have dealt with one "Eastern" response to the challenge posed by the "burden of history" in the 1960s. The oeuvre of Hungarian director Zoltán Fábri, particularly his film *Late Season*, makes a valid statement on the universal moral significance of the Holocaust at one of the turning points for the history of memory in Europe.

The moral universalism realized in Fábri's oeuvre is characterized by humanism and anti-fascism. Fascism gains general significance as an emblem of radical evil and becomes a parable of violence against human beings. The Holocaust is one particular example of this "absolute villainy," which the film under discussion compares to the Cold War threat of nuclear annihilation. In doing so, the film relies on the strategies of anti-fascist film aesthetics of the time, most importantly a dialectical structure, parallel usage of documentary footage, modernist artistic surrealism, and confrontation with the spectators.

In *Late Season*, the relationship between past and present is captured not by commemoration or archives, but by the concepts of analogy and analysis. The need to confront the past is expressed as a problem of the individual's conscience. The antimimetic reception model of the film is not to give catharsis through identification, but to trigger self-analysis through alienation. Accordingly, the tone of the film is not tragic, lofty, or sacred, but tragicomic and grotesque. The film demythologizes the Holocaust and constantly frustrates identification, unsettling viewers. It prompts them to continue the analysis of the conscience seen in the film on themselves.

66 Quoted in Lénárt, "Derült égből," 63.

Irina Tcherneva

A Tableau of a Crime Taking Shape under the Viewer's Gaze: The Trajectories of Yosef Kuzkovski's *The Last Way* (1944–1970)

Figure 1: The Last Way, oil on canvas, 1948, Dimensions: 300 x 160 cm (118,1 x 63 in).

> Anyone walking into the hallway of the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament, is greeted by the troubling painting by Y. Kuzkovski *If I Forget This* – a terrible rendering of the Action. This canvas deals with the events of Babi Yar and Panari, of Ninth Fort and Rumbula and of a thousand better known or unidentified locations where the Jewish catastrophe took place in the twentieth century. This piece serves as a powerful reminder to Knesset representatives, the people's elect. [. . .]. Thanks to his powerful artistic mastery, Yosef Kuzkovski brought immortality to the millennial tragedy of the Jewish people and conveyed the urgent call from the martyrs: "This should never ever happen again!"[1]

1 David Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski. Pamyati khudozhnika* (Tel-Aviv: Kariv, 1975), 5.

Note: This work was carried out within the project "Images of Justice" led by Sylvie Lindeperg. The translation of the text by Delphine Pallier was financed by the Project "Nazi War *Crimes* in the Courtroom – Central and Eastern Europe, *1943–1991* / *WW2CRIMESONTRIAL1943–1991*" led by Vanessa Voisin. I gratefully acknowledge suggestions offered by Karel Berkhoff, Eric Le Bourhis, Vanessa Voisin, David Rich, Gabor Rittersporn, the editors of this book, and anonymous reviewers on drafts of the chapter.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-010

These are the opening lines of a book about Yosef Kuzkovski[2] (1902–1970), a Jewish artist born in Mogilev, who worked in Soviet Ukraine (until 1941), Uzbekistan (1941–1948), and Latvia (1948–1969). Published in Israel in 1975, the volume pays homage to the recently deceased painter, who had settled in Israel in 1969. It features a collection of memoirs by the painter and one of his relatives. Its editor, David Zilberman, had belonged to the same Jewish memory group, seeking to commemorate the extermination of the Jews in Latvia as a painter. Zilberman defined himself as a person who "fought against Soviet power" while he was in Rīga between 1958 and 1971 and sought to emigrate to Israel.[3] Conceived in the political context of the 1970s, the book placed Kuzkovski's work in an anti-Soviet regime perspective. This article aims to restore the historicity of the artist's approach and to highlight the opportunities (partial and negotiated) for Holocaust memory opened up in Soviet public and semi-public spheres in the 1960s.

Kuzkovski established his position as a professional artist in Ukraine in the 1930s. During the war, like many Soviet refugees from the occupied territories, he resided in Uzbekistan. Paying close attention to the bloody events in Nazi-occupied Ukraine, where his relatives had remained, he began in 1944 to paint a work depicting the mass murder in Babyn Yar, which would become *The Last Way*. The painting was finished by 1948, when the artist took up residence in Rīga. Conceived three years after the Babyn Yar massacre, the painting had been worked out during a phase of the official and partial acknowledgment of the extermination of Soviet Jews (1944–1947)[4] and was finalized during the period of its silencing (1947–1959). The present article restores its genesis, then its public exposure in the 1960s, in order to show a progressive universalization of the pictorial representation of

2 The spelling of the artist's name varies depending on the country: Iossif Kuz'kovski in Ukraine, Iossifs Kuzkovskis in Latvia, and Yosef Kuzkovski in Israel and the US. I adopt Yosef Kuzkovski throughout.

3 Interview with David Zilberman at the Museum "Jews in Latvia" (MEL), # 12_05_Zilberman, 2012.

4 On the vacillating recognition of the Holocaust by Soviet authorities, cf. Karel C. Berkhoff, "'Total annihilation of the Jewish Population': The Holocaust in the Soviet Media, 1941–1945," *Kritika* 10, no. 1 (2009): 61–105; Kiril Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild: The Holocaust in the Soviet Mindset, 1941–1964* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009). On its visibility in cinema, see Jeremy Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust, Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938–1946* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); Valérie Pozner, Alexandre Sumpf, and Vanessa Voisin, eds., *Filmer la guerre: les Soviétiques face à la Shoah, 1941–1946* (Paris: Mémorial de la Shoah, 2015); Valérie Pozner, Alexandre Sumpf, and Vanessa Voisin, "Que faire des images soviétiques de la Shoah?," *1895. Mille huit cent quatre-vingt-quinze* 76 (2015): 8–41; Irina Tcherneva, "Historiciser les images soviétiques de la Shoah (Estonie, Lituanie, 1944–1948)," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 3 (139) (2018): 59–78.

Babyn Yar. Specific audiences of the painting arose as a result of the post-Stalinist "thaw," when Soviet republics tolerated the emergence of public knowledge of the Holocaust.[5] By examining the painting's audiences, I explore the variety of semi-private and public spheres that highlight an interplay of social initiatives in Holocaust memory.

Recent scholarship provides examples of the resurgence of this memory in literature, the press, and the erection of public monuments.[6] This article brings into conversation the evocation of the Holocaust in the media and the arts with factors specific to the Khrushchevian and Brezhnevian periods, namely the revelations of World War II war crimes trials held in the Soviet Union. Latvia, which the USSR had re-annexed in 1944 (after the first occupation in 1940–1941), first made some of its trials public in 1959. The Communist Party and state authorities disclosed written and visual materials on the crimes that year, while the work by Yosef Kuzkovski was shown in several Latvian cities where the trials were held. Thus, the painting should be analyzed on the border between state initiatives and social commemorative endeavors.

The sources of this chapter include the archives of arts administrations, the documentation of Artists' Unions, and the publishing houses in Rīga, as well as the files of the local KGB, which was leading the investigations into crimes against humanity, and the records of Soviet political authorities.[7] I also draw on the visual and textual archives of the Museum "Jews in Latvia," the city of Jēkabpils, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington DC.[8]

---

5 Zvi Gitelman, "Soviet Reaction to the Holocaust, 1945–1991," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR,* ed. Lucian Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993); Irina Tcherneva and Vanessa Voisin, "La Shoah dans les documentaires soviétiques des années 1960: une reconnaissance ambiguë," in *Filmer la guerre*, 115–122; Victoria Khiterer, "Memorialization of the Holocaust in Minsk and Kyiv," in *Holocaust Resistance in Europe and America: New Aspects and Dilemmas*, ed. Victoria Khiterer and Abigali S. Gruber (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 95–131.

6 Harriet Murav and Gennady Estraikh, eds., *Soviet Jews in World War II: Fighting, Witnessing, Remembering* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014); Arkadi Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Publications, 2018); Ilya Lenski, *Holocaust Commemoration in Latvia in the Course of Time. 1945–2015*, exhibition catalogue (Rīga: Muzejs Ebreji Latvijā, 2017).

7 All of these are held in the State Archives of Latvia (Latvijas Valsts arhīvs, LVA). I also examined the archival collections found in the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia and the Artists' Union of Latvia.

8 In particular, I compared the documents of the Museum "Jews in Latvia" to publications and texts held in the archives of the USHMM. The research into photographs and their identification was carried out in the Latvia State Archives of Audiovisual Documents (LVKFFDA).

Finally, Eric Le Bourhis and I carried out interviews with representatives of the Jewish community in Latvia.[9] These sources permit me to open a window on the visual presence of the Holocaust's remembrance. Moreover, a cross-analysis of the artistic imagery with the social environment where it was exhibited underpins this history of the social usage of the art works dedicated to the Holocaust. My purpose is to show an array of perspectives that viewers could adopt and to clarify how the perceptions of works of art were shaped by the various installations or exhibitions. Thus, I restore Kuzkovski's multifaceted career in order to reposition his artwork on the Holocaust within the wider context of his oeuvre. A visual analysis of the painting and its etchings helps to redraw the genesis of different aspects of his representation of Babyn Yar. I also examine official arrangements surrounding the painting's exhibition within the more flexible semi-public sphere of the 1960s. Finally, I look at various uses of the painting by specific audiences, namely the Jewish communities in Latvia.

Official or Fringe Artist? The Construction of a Pluralistic Career

Born in a family of construction workers, Kuzkovski grew up in a Yiddish-speaking environment and studied in a traditional Jewish school in a small Ukrainian town.[10] As a teenager of humble beginnings, he found a job in 1919 as a shop sign designer.[11] He then volunteered to fight in the ranks of the Red Army in 1919–1920 and drew portraits of the soldiers. As early as 1922, he started a career drawing posters for one of Kyiv's prestigious cinema theaters, then for the film administration. Later he would admit that cinema had a strong influence on his painting style. He turned again to the world of cinema in 1939 and collaborated with studios in Kyiv designing posters and film sets, becoming familiar through this work with the technique of lithography.

In 1926, Yosef Kuzkovski gained recognition as an official painter by joining the Trade Union of Art Workers. Between 1927 and 1930, he enrolled in the Faculty for Graphic Arts in the Kyiv State Art Institute, though he never finished the

9 Ten interviews with individuals involved in the trials to various degrees were held in Rīga and Jēkabpils in 2017.

10 Abstracts of Kuzkovski's memoirs in Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski,* 9.

11 Kuzkovski's autobiography, LVA, 230/3/136/6.

curriculum.[12] In his autobiography, Kuzkovski explained that he dropped out because of the school's strong stance against formalism, a claim that is confirmed by his memoirs.[13] During the war, while in Uzbekistan, he painted works illustrating the commitment of the hinterland population to the war effort and pursued his work as a poster designer. Between 1943 and 1944, he made propaganda posters that were hung in storefront windows, known as TASS Windows, and published in *Pravda*. He also produced agitprop work, characterized by images in factories and kolkhozes. Many cinematographers, painters, and photographers willingly contributed to the war effort in this manner.[14] For this, the Uzbek branch of the Art Workers Trade Union welcomed Kuzkovski as a member, which then allowed him to host other exhibitions in Uzbekistan in 1944–1945.

During the 1920s and 1930s, he dedicated just a few works to the Soviet Jewish population. In 1938, he painted a representation of the Kuban agricultural settlements in the Crimea, showing Jewish peasants toiling on the land.[15] He constructed a panel depicting sports competitions between the Don Jews and the Don Cossacks. This piece appeared in the first exhibition of his works, which took place in 1941 in Kyiv, shortly before the advance of the Wehrmacht forced him to flee to Uzbekistan. The panel was destroyed during the bombing of the city.[16] Kuzkovski's first major work on the fate of the Jewish population dates from the period of his evacuation to Uzbekistan. While working on the depiction of the Babyn Yar massacre between 1944 and 1948, he moved to Latvia. There he created paintings on the mobilization of the hinterland population and a large panel commissioned by the state, *Celebrating Victory!* (1947). It was displayed during the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the October Revolution.

Parallel with these developments, the painter returned to his first activity as a poster maker and participated in decorating the city. He painted portraits of political figures that were plastered on four-story buildings. In 1949, he initiated a series on Lenin with the drawing *Lenin in Rīga*. Then came a mosaic, *Stalin Is Our*

12 LVA, 230/3/136. This file on Kuzkovski contains a collection of relevant documents, others are found in his file of the USSR Artists' Union at the Russian Archives for Arts and Literature (RGALI), 2082/4/530.

13 Kuzkovski's memoirs in Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski,* 18.

14 Vanessa Voisin, Valérie Pozner, and Irina Tcherneva, eds., *Perejit voïnu. Kinoindustriia v SSSR, 1939–1949* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2018).

15 This political project gave birth to the film *Jews on Land* (*Evreï na zemle,* directed by A. Room. Script by V. Shklovsky, 1926), examined by Valérie Pozner, Eric Aunoble, and Alexandre Ivanov in Valérie Pozner and Natacha Laurent, eds., *Kinojudaica. Les représentations des Juifs dans le cinéma de Russie et d'Union soviétique des années 1910 aux années 1980* (Paris: Nouveau monde éditions, 2012), 131–219.

16 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski,* 20–21.

Sun (1950), shown on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the annexation of Latvia.[17] Aside from the portraits of political leaders, a genre that held strong potential for legitimation but also came with heightened surveillance, Kuzkovski began to illustrate books in 1951. He worked on novels by Valentin Kataev, Aleksei Tolstoi, and Nikolai Ostrovsky, recounting moments of heroism during the Crimean War, the Second World War, and the Russian Civil War.[18] During late Stalinism, Kuzkovski's work remained classical in its themes and artistic techniques. At the same time, progressively he demonstrated a stronger inclination to represent the place occupied by the Jews in the USSR. According to the memoirs published by Zilberman, he tried to increase the presence of Jewish characters in his illustrations for Vladimir Belyaev's novel, *The Old Fortress* (1952). In 1948, he wished to settle in Birobidzhan and to work for a Yiddish publishing house, *Der Emes,* and for the newspaper *Einikait*.[19] However, it was the heyday of the state's antisemitic campaign, arrests, and massive lay-offs, and *Der Emes* was closed.[20]

The status of his relationship to official commissioners of the arts is certainly at the root of Kuzkovski's turn to themes of heroism with settings of the Revolution, the Civil War, and World War II. Kuzkovski secured the institutional and financial support of the Artists' Union of Latvia. His career was on the rise. In the first half of the 1950s, he sat on two of the Union's governing bodies. He was part of the editorial team of the State Publishing House (Gosizdat).[21] His professional commitment was officially commended in 1956.[22] Kuzkovski became a member of a dense network of various state commissioners, the army, and the publishing world. Despite the antisemitic atmosphere upon his arrival in Rīga,[23] he gained the support of

---

17 Kuzkovski's artistic card, LVA, 230/3/136/2–5.

18 The painter worked on Mihail Lermontov, *Geroi nachego vremeni* [A Hero of Our Time] (1951), and on tales of the war in Crimea: Leo Tolstoy, *Sevastopol'skie rasskazy* [Sevastopol Sketches] (1953). He illustrated a novel by Anna Sakse, which details the beginnings of the revolutionary struggle: *Trudovoe plemia* [The Laboring Tribe] (1954). Other books he illustrated are also devoted to this theme: Kavi Nadzmi, *Vessennie vetry* [Winds of Spring] (1950), Aleksei Tolstoi, *Hozhdenie po mukam* [The Path of Torments] (1956), exhibited on the occasion of the Red Army's 41st anniversary, and Emmanuil Kazakevich, *Siniaia tetrad'* [The Blue Notebook] (1963–1969). The story of the civil war is partly reported in these novels, but also in Nikolai Ostrovsky, *Rozhdennye bureï* [Born of the Storm] (1960), and Belyaev, *Staraia krepost'* [The Old Fortress], (1952). The three other books illustrated by Kuzkovski dealt with World War II: Boris Polevoi, *Povest' o nastoyaschem cheloveke* [The Story of a Real Man] (1958) and *Glubokij tyl* [The Deep Rear] (1962–1963), and Valenkin Kataev, *Syn polka* [Son of the Regiment] (1969).

19 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, op.cit., 33.

20 Gennadi Kostyrchenko, *Stalin protiv 'kosmopolitov'. Vlast' i evreïskaia intelligentsia v SSSR* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010).

21 LVA, 230/3/136/32.

22 LVA, 230/3/136/14.

23 Mentioned by his spouse Olga Kuzkovskaya in Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski,* 26–27.

some members of the artistic circles, such as Arturs Eglītis, delegate from Soviet Russia and deputy director of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Latvia. He assumed Kuzkovski's unwavering patronage, organized his exhibitions, and composed the catalogues. He would be of even greater assistance in 1969 when the artist left the USSR for Israel and Eglītis helped him take his paintings out of the country.[24] And there was yet another guardian angel: Vladimirs Kaupužs, the Latvian Minister of Culture (1962–1986), another Latvian from Russia.

At the end of the 1950s, a military commission, recently created within the Artists' Union, initiated a series of exhibitions on World War II.[25] Kuzkovski participated in meetings between painters and members of the military until 1968. That year, in appreciation of his remarkable commitment, he was shortlisted for a state distinction.[26] His institutional recognition seemed to have reached its apex at this time: his works were selected to be shown at the Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy in Moscow.[27] However, at the end of 1969, he chose to emigrate to Israel, which led to his ejection from the professional Union.[28]

In parallel with this official trajectory, another one was unfolding. After his depiction of Babyn Yar, the artist pursued his work on the Holocaust in the 1960s. In 1959, he made the etching *The Ghetto Uprising*. In the following years, he felt encouraged to continue working on this theme, as remembrance of Babyn Yar resurfaced after 1962 due to the mobilization of survivors and the public involvement of poet Evgenii Evtushenko and composer Dmitrii Shostakovich.[29] Kuzkovski maintained a connection with Babyn Yar and met the composer. In addition, in 1963, he started painting a series in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast of Birobidzhan, where he lived alongside those who had endured repression and dismissal following accusations of "bourgeois nationalism."[30] He made other paintings dedicated to the Holocaust during a visit in 1965 to the Ninth Fort in Kaunas on the occasion of the opening of the Fort's museum,[31] which gave rise to the production of *We Will Live* (fig. 2).

24 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 35. A special regulation from the Council of Minister of Soviet Latvia prohibited works of arts from leaving the territory. LVA, collection of the Latvian Council of Ministers, 270/1c/1952/31.

25 LVA, 230/1/390 and 452.

26 LVA, 230/3/136/26–27.

27 LVA, 230/3/136/29.

28 LVA, 230/3/136/17.

29 Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Khrushchëva: vlast', intelligentsiia, evreiskii vopros* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii, 2012)

30 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 45.

31 The visit was organized by a network of Jewish communities from the Baltic republics. Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 49.

Figure 2: *We Will Live*, 1965, colored etching, ink. Size: 74 x 45 cm (29.1 x 17.7 in).

Were these two trajectories distinct? Such an extrapolation is certainly supported by the split of Kuzkovski's work into two collections, one preserved in Latvia and the other in Israel.[32] The Artists' Union of Latvia kept in its archives illustrations for novels by Boris Polevoi and Aleksei Tolstoi and portraits of academician Solo-

32 Some of the publications and catalogues are held at the USHMM.

mons Hillers and the 1919 Latvian Bolshevik figure Pēteris Stučka.[33] Some private collections in Israel seem to also have preserved works on the Holocaust, following a first exhibition in Israel in 1970. After Kuzkvoski's settlement in Israel, several books, postcards, and stamps appeared that convey a coherent vision of the artist's work. In her memoirs, the painter's wife contrasted the commissioned work for the state with the dissident's personal creations: "The icons of the Party that Kuzkovski created worked as invisible protection against the KGB's snitches. They made it possible to hold meetings at our house with dozens of Jews from the Soviet Union."[34]

Here, his activity may be re-read through the prism of the work he did at the end of the 1960s and after his arrival in Israel.[35] Still, it would be anachronistic to assert that in the earlier decades Kuzkovski had created the "party icons" exclusively for utilitarian purposes. Both of these collections are institutional constructs and correspond to two imaginary trajectories that obscure the connection that lies behind both of the artist's commitments. The biography of the artist reveals a complex nexus of artistic references and institutional supporters, a certain proximity to authority, which also allowed Kuzkovski to advocate for the memory of the Holocaust in the 1960s.

The Genesis of *The Last Way* (Uzbekistan 1944-Rīga 1948)

Kuzkovski started to develop the painting on the Babyn Yar massacre while in Uzbekistan in 1944. The execution took place on September 29 and 30, 1941, in a ravine on the northwestern edge of Kyiv. After the mass murder of the Jewish population, the ravine was kept in use for the execution of Soviet prisoners of war and Roma.[36] In August 1943, the Germans had forced hundreds of prisoners of war to exhume and burn all the bodies in an operation aimed at erasing the physical evidence of the crimes. When the city was liberated on November 6, 1943, Soviet authorities found an empty ravine.[37]

---

33 Artwork numbers: 1346, 1349, 1351, 1352, 1742, 1338, Collection in the Artists' Union of Latvia.

34 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 30.

35 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 6.

36 The total number of people murdered at Babyn Yar is estimated at 100,000.

37 Karel Berkhoff, "The Dispersal and Oblivion of the Ashes and Bones of Babi Yar," in *Lessons and Legacies XII: New Directions in Holocaust Research and Education*, ed. Wendy Lower and Lauren Faulkner Rossi, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 256–276. Martin Dean, *Investigating Babyn Yar: Shadows from the Valley of Death* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2024).

In 1941–1942 and again in 1943, the Soviet press published reports on the tragedy, lending it an exceptional public resonance.[38] This was also accompanied with a progressive de-Judaization of the victims.[39] In 1943, foreign journalists from the *New-York Times* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* visited the site.[40] The same year, the writer Boris Gorbatov (1908–1954) published in *Pravda* the novel *The Unvanquished* [*Nepokorennye*], about the fate of the Kyiv's population during the occupation. Gorbatov only evoked the Babyn Yar massacre, whereas film director Mark Donskoy surreptitiously represented it in cinema in 1943–1945.[41] The real condition of the victims' murder was not reproduced on the silver screen (all were shown dressed, for instance). However, the film made clear that the victims of this massacre were Kyiv's Jews.

Kuzkovski's relatives remained in Kyiv and were directly under the threat of Nazi extermination policy. Therefore, he was on the lookout for "reports of mass

38 For the media coverage, see Karel Berkhoff, "Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population": The Holocaust in the Soviet Media," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 10, no. 1 (2009): 61–105. For a study of the representation of the murder in literature, see Boris Czerny, "Témoignages et œuvres littéraires sur le massacre de Babij Jar, 1941–1948," *Cahiers du monde russe* 53, no. 4 (2012): 523–70. For the feature film, see Olga Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 40–56; Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust,* 134–56. See also the pedagogical video by Valérie Pozner and Vanessa Voisin for the exhibition "Filmer la guerre: les Soviétiques face à la Shoah," Mémorial de la Shoah, 2015: https://filmer-la-guerre.memorialdelashoah.org/sequence_pedagogique.html, accessed Feb. 14, 2024, as well as the contribution by Karel Berkhoff, "What Does Soviet Footage from the 1940s Tell Us about the Holocaust in Kyiv and Its Soviet Aftermath?" at the conference "Documenting Nazi Crimes through Film: Soviet Union, 1942–1945" (Panel 6: "Historicizing the Footage: Case Studies of the Image in the Light of Other Types of Archives: Ukraine," https://www.vhh-project.eu/videos/what-does-soviet-footage-from-the-1940s-tell-us-about-the-holocaust-in-kyiv-and-its-soviet-aftermath/, accessed Feb. 14, 2024. See also Pavel Polian and D. Burago, eds., *Ovrag smerti–ovrag pamyati. Stikhi o Babyem Yare. Antologiyav 2-kh knigakh.*(Kyiv: Vidavnichy dim Dmitra Burago – BO "«BF "«Memorial Golokostu "Babyn Yar" 2021).

39 Nathalie Moine, *Les vivants et les morts. Genèse, histoire et héritages de la documentation soviétique des crimes commis en territoires occupés pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, fin XIXeme-début XXIe siècle* (HDR diss., National Center for Scientific Research [CNRS], 2015), 359–370.

40 The visit was filmed in November 1943 (Russian State Film and Photo Archives, no. 5204, and Central State CinePhotoFono Archive of Ukraine H. Pschenychnyi, no. 2593) and represents a part of three sessions dedicated to filming the site of the massacre by Soviet cameramen.

41 Olga Gershenson, "*Les Insoumis* (1945), ou comment le roman soviétique est devenu un film juif," in Pozner and Laurent, *Kinojudaica,* 341–364.

assassinations of Jews in German-occupied territories"[42] and Jewish refugees in Uzbekistan, who spoke about the antisemitic Nazi propaganda they had witnessed.[43]The first information regarding the scope of the killing was made public in November 1941 in major newspapers such as *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, which reported a total of 52,000 Jewish victims in Kyiv.[44] The following year, the Yiddish-language press provided detailed data.[45] The Soviet press's approach to the facts of the Holocaust delivers a striking example of the vacillating identification of the victims.[46] Often the newsreels did not identify the Jewish origin of the victims, whereas the newspaper articles on these killing sites, published simultaneously, did. Thus, citizens who remained concerned about the extermination of the Jewish people could cross-check

Figure 3: Sketch *The Action*, 1944. Photograph signed by Kuzkovski. LVA, 230/3/238/42.

42 Olga Kuzkovskaia's memoirs in Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 24.
43 For instance, this was the case with refugees from the Baltic territories, as noted in the interview with Hanna Rozenberg. MEL, # 14_18_Rozenberg_1,2 [2014].
44 Published on November 19, 1941. Cited in Moine, *Les vivants et les morts,* 359. Cf. Paula Chan, *Eyes on the Ground: Soviet Investigations of the Nazi Occupation* (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2023), 185–196, 202–209.
45 Arkadi Zeltser, "The Subject of 'Jews in Babi Yar' in the Soviet Union in the Years 1941–1945," https://www.yadvashem.org/research/about/mirilashvili-center/articles/babi-yar.html#footnote1_jnfrfzz accessed March 25, 2019.
46 For the general approach of the Holocaust by the Soviet press, see also 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 (Jersey City, NJ: Yeshiva University Press, 2003), 221–249.

Figure 4: Sketch *The Action*, 1944. Photograph. MEL (I)1274 P 4567.

Figure 5: Sketch, January 1948. Reproduction in the catalogue of Kuzkovski’s personal exhibition, 1963. LVA, 230/3/238/24.

the information available to them and did so, as was the case with Babyn Yar.[47] The fragmented nature of the data at Kuzkovski's disposal determined the depiction of the events. More than a detailed pictorial work serving as a testimonial, it was intended from its conception as an attempt at a more general reach.

The finished painting (Figure 1) foregrounds the path leading to the execution site. This motif avoids the direct representation of the extreme violence. A study of these etchings allows us to observe that Kuzkovski was torn about this narrative all the way to the last brushstrokes in 1948. The sketch entitled "the Action," dating from 1944 (Figure 3) and another one from 1948 (Figure 5), referring the Nazi German term *Aktion*, depict the execution by firing squad.[48] In the first sketch, the group, portrayed in the background, is distanced from a victim of two policemen. The scope of the representation is made dynamic by the introduction of a machine gun at the center of the picture and a corpse. Another sketch from 1944 bearing the same title (Figure 4) shows the emergence of the motif of the path leading to death. This pathway will become the heart of the painting to the point of inspiring its title – *The Last Way*. Present in the Donskoy film depicting the victims' fateful journey, the theme of the path evokes a crucial issue: a dialectic of choice between nascent disobedience and the adoption of a posture of harmlessness. This conflictual component of the representation of the Holocaust was expressed during the debates surrounding Donskoy's film[49] and in the press.[50] The sketches reveal it: Kuzkovski hesitated between acceptance and revolt. The choice he made was in tune with the perspective of "heroic realism." His paintings during World War II, with their larger format and lateral extension, glorifying the population's commitment in the background, are evocative of this movement.[51] Furthermore, in Rīga, while the painter was still working on Babyn Yar, he composed another work extolling victory.[52] He placed his characters in the same manner, whether they were *Led to the Slaughter* (the title he gave to the painting between 1945 and 1947) or to liberation.

The second substantial concern is the place the painter gave to the viewer. Starting with the first sketches, Kuzkovski blurred the figures of the perpetrators; they do not have any national or social characteristics. An important element can

---

47 Zeltser, "The Subject of 'Jews in Babi Yar.'"

48 The mass killing is depicted by Felix Lemberski, whose parents perished in Babyn Yar. Lemberski himself evacuated to safety in the Urals. From 1944 and 1952, he worked on a series of paintings dealing with the tragedy, including *The Slaughter of Babi Yar*.

49 Olga Gershenson, "Between the Permitted and the Forbidden: The Politics of Holocaust Representation in *The Unvanquished* (1945)," in Murav and Estraikh, *Soviet Jews*, 174–181.

50 In 1945, the theme of rebellion in Babyn Yar emerged in an article by Moyshe Mizhiritski, see Zeltser, "The Subject of "Jews in Babi Yar.'"

51 LVA, 230/3/238/42.

52 LVA, 230/3/136/20.

be seen in the sketch dating from 1948, when compared to the preparatory drawings and the final painting. The drawings illustrating the act of killing present the point of view of one of the executioners (Figure 3). But in the final painting, the viewer is invited to "look from the pit." Even if the whole painting can still evoke the gaze of one of the policemen who accompanies the group walking towards death, the fragments cut out in the 1960s, as we shall see, show the executioners removed from the line of sight.[53] The version that forces the viewer to look "from" the ravine and erases the perpetrators from sight was reused in the 1960s in a commemorative perspective (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Fragment embedded into the obelisk. Photo 103 from the archives of Iossif Schneider. Personal archives of Uri Schneider, Israel.

This painting was given several titles over the years: *The Action*, *The Last Way*, *If I Forget This*, *Babi Yar*, and *To the Memory of the Victims of Nazism*. According to the painter's wife, these titles changed on the basis of the readiness of the audience and the Soviet institutions to accept the theme of Nazi antisemitism. She stated that the original title was *If I Forget This*, in biblical reference to the exodus of the Jews. The title *Babi Yar* seems to have been more readily accepted in the immediate aftermath of the war, when *The Unvanquished* was released. Between 1947 and 1959, the artist

53 Artwork "Walking Towards Death," LVA, 230/3/238/48.

entitled his painting *The Last Way*. Finally, after 1959, he named it *To the Memory of the Victims of Nazism*, abiding by the unifying gaze on the victims that Soviet authorities had imposed. The initial ambivalence of the pictorial codes – between revolt and acceptance, a gaze placed "from the pit," and the erasure of the perpetrators from the representation – would find an echo in the various interpretations of the painting.

The Last Way and Lenin's Panegyric: The Public Exposure of Kuzkovski's Holocaust Paintings

In the immediate postwar period, the painting was not displayed. When Kuzkovski settled in Rīga in 1945, the theme drew a hostile response from his Latvian peers and from the Moscow Commission that frequently visited to place state orders. Kuzkovski tried to build trust with those members of the Commission susceptible to being more sensitive to the plight of the Holocaust. Some advised the artist to gain legitimacy by working on commissions more "in tune with official expectations." Others suggested he keep working on the Babyn Yar massacre without trying to exhibit the painting itself.[54]

Indeed, after the judgement of the German leaders responsible for the occupation of the Baltic countries and their public execution in Rīga in 1946,[55] all information on Nazi crimes committed in Latvia disappeared from the media. The coordinated persecution of the Jewish populations of the USSR contributed to the memory of the Holocaust fading from the public arena from 1948 onwards, whereas the judgement of war criminals continued behind closed doors.[56] The reemergence of a public discourse at the level of each Soviet republic gradually reappeared in the late 1950s.[57] In Latvia, the trial of the architect of the Kurtenhof camp (Salaspils) in 1959 opened a series of more than ten trials held in Rīga and the eastern regions of the country. Television, written press, and radio programs

54 Memoirs of Kuzkovski's spouse in Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 28–30, 32–33.

55 Dmitri Astashkin, *Rizhsky process*, https://histrf.ru/biblioteka/Soviet-Nuremberg/Rizhsky-process, accessed March 15, 2019. The trial records do not mention Babyn Yar, whereas the key perpetrator at Babyn Yar, Friedrich Jeckeln, was one of the major defendants.

56 See the special issue of *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*, "Juger les criminels de guerre à l'est de l'Europe (1943–1991)," no. 214 (2021).

57 Khiterer, "Memorialization of the Holocaust"; Vanessa Voisin, "Le procès de Jérusalem et la représentation de la Shoah en URSS," in *Le Moment Eichmann*, ed. Sylvie Lindeperg and Annette Wieviorka (Paris: Albin Michel, 2016), 139–168; Tcherneva and Voisin, "La Shoah dans les documentaires soviétiques."

spread information on the major places of the Holocaust in Latvia. Thus, in 1961, Latvian television broadcast a contribution about the Rīga ghetto and the extermination of its 25,000 inhabitants in the Rumbula woods.[58] In 1965, a highly mediatized trial addressed the executions of civilians in eastern Latvia in 1941 and 1942 (including Jews and Roma).[59] The hearings were broadcast by radio and TV and the trial was given daily four-hour time slots.[60] Rich evidence emerged about the murders of the Jewish population in the Rīga and Rēzekne ghettos,[61] as well as about Rumbula and other murder locations.[62] The historical events were featured in the midst of the case indictments, and were substantiated by public statements from witnesses and survivors.[63] The verdict of the trial mentioned Jewish and Roma populations as distinct categories of victims.[64] On October 24, 1965, another TV show recounted the events in Rumbula.[65] It came several months after another program on war crimes that featured an exceptional episode on the capital's ghetto.[66] Here again, the press singled out the Jewish population as a specific category of victims, provided figures, published documents from the occupiers where the policy of extermination was mentioned, and quoted testimonies.[67] The story of the extermination of the Latvian Jews started to be covered by documentary film in 1963.[68]

How did the art sphere react to these disclosures, even if only partial and negotiated? First of all, the military commission within the Artists' Union of Latvia contributed to the setting up of a travelling (Rīga-Moscow) multi-year exhibition entitled *In the Name of Peace* and dedicated to the Second World War. When the commission made its selection from among the available works in 1959, Kuzkovski was among the finalists and the commission members visited his workshop. One of the commission's members was his mentor Arturs Eglītis.[69] Remarkably,

58 LVA, Collection of the Republic's Television Studio, 1184/3/312/111–114.

59 The Latvian KGB and the Soviet Council of Ministers intended the trials to stand as a prime example of condemnation of Nazi crimes against the republic. LVA, Collection of the Party's Latvian Central Committee, PA-101/28/57/35–36.

60 LVA, 1184/3/903, 934, 1005, 1023.

61 LVA, 1986/1/45038/vol. 27/59 – 65.

62 LVA, 1986/1/45038/vol. 9/202 – 215, vol. 26.

63 LVA, 1986/1/45038/vol. 35, 37.

64 LVA, 1986/1/45038/vol. 37/344 – 370.

65 LVA, 1184/3/934/145.

66 LVA, 1184/3/886/35–52.

67 Z. Banka, M. Borisov, E. Karklins, Ju. Dmitriev, K. Sausnitis, "Fachistskie oubiïtsy pered soudom naroda" [Fascist assassins facing the People's Court], *Sovetskaia Latvia*, October 12, 1965.

68 Irina *Tcherneva*, "Créer 'les documents qui accusent'. Documentaires sur les crimes de guerre en Lettonie soviétique, 1961–1971," *Cahiers du monde russe* 61, no. 3–4, 2020: 463–498.

69 LVA, 230/1/390/2, 9, 19.

Kuzkovski's works on mass murder were not selected for the exhibit. He participated in the exhibitions with his illustrations and paintings showcasing the people's commitment during the war, while works from other artists depicting Nazi killings in Latvia were featured.[70] Paradoxically, within this highly politicized framework, Kuzkovski exhibited works pertaining to other themes of the war[71] in Rīga and Moscow.[72]

In the USSR, Kuzkovski's work on the Holocaust was never the object of a specific exhibition per se. Nevertheless, the Artists' Union, with the approval of the Latvian Republic's Council of Ministers, agreed to show Kuzkovski's paintings and etchings on the Holocaust in private exhibitions. Held within the art milieu, they bore less obvious political implications than exhibitions initiated by the military commission. The painting *The Last Way* (by then entitled *To the Memory of the Victims of Fascism*) and the etchings *The Ghetto Uprising* and *We Will Live* were exhibited on the initiative of Arturs Eglītis. Catalogues published as early as 1963[73] showed their reproductions. This focus on the Holocaust gave rise to tensions, as can be seen in the following abstract of the memoirs:

> In 1964, the director [of the museum] refused to show [*The Last Way*], describing it as "utterly nationalistic." As a sign of protest, Kuzkovski declined his participation and requested that all the works lent to the museum be returned to his home. [. . .] Suddenly, the museum's director sent a car to Kuzkovski's house to have the painting brought to the museum. [. . .] The number of paintings evoking Jewishness was limited, whereas there was a profusion of those on Lenin, illustrations and portraits, sketches and fragments. However, the new painting *The Warsaw Ghetto*[74] was exhibited with the following caption "Please, brothers, do not stand by." It was unusual for the Soviet Union to have this type of caption in Yiddish.[75]

A strong politicization of the issue by the director of the museum was indisputably due to the fact that the commemoration of the Babyn Yar massacre was posed as a civic phenomenon from 1962 onwards. Through negotiations and conflicts, writers and journalists, poets and filmmakers, as well as architects, campaigned for its enduring visibility in Kyiv.[76] The Soviet republic of Latvia seems to have experienced

---

70 For example, the works of Semen Shegelman and Artur Ritov, LVA, 230/1/451/73.

71 Particularly his illustrations for *The Deep Rear* by Boris Polevoi. LVA, 230/3/238.

72 The exhibition "In the Name of Peace" and an exhibition on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Soviet Latvia (Rīga) in 1965.

73 LVA, 230/3/238/7–27.

74 This is a distinct etching of *The Ghetto Uprising*, dated from 1964.

75 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 46.

76 Viktoria Khiterer found that between 1965 and 1969 the commemoration at Babyn Yar witnessed a resurgence of repression by local authorities and in turn a form of politicization of this struggle, see Khiterer, Khiterer, "Memorialization of the Holocaust." In his study of the situation

a more subdued movement. Other personal exhibitions of Kuzkovski's works were held there during this decade, notably one in April 1967 at the VEF Culture Palace, a factory building where one year and a half earlier a highly mediatized trial had been held.[77] These exhibitions gave the public the opportunity to see art works on the Holocaust, as well as portraits of public figures from Rīga's Jewish community.

On the opening night, Jewish artists gave speeches, including in Yiddish. One of them emphasized the major contribution of Kuzkovski's paintings to the cultural life of the Soviet Jewish population. The factory's management showed open support for this endeavor.[78] Receptions in the painter's workshop during recurring "open house" events were another way of showing the artworks to a large audience[79] (Figure 7).

They were organized with the help of the Latvian branch of the Artists' Union and were open to the public. This scale of the gatherings, which can be qualified as semi-public, allowed for a privileged exposure of those paintings that mattered particularly to the painter.

Within these more or less mediatized exhibitions, his works on the Holocaust were exhibited alongside paintings on Lenin or the wartime patriotic effort, producing an impact on the way the viewers perceived them. Some abstracts from the visitor's book of the 1964 exhibition in the State Museum of Latvian and Russian Art testify to this interrelatedness:

> I really liked the paintings of Lenin and Stučka, *Lenin in 1900*, and others. [. . .] The painting *Celebrating Victory!* also leaves a good impression. I was overwhelmed by the big and truthful painting *To the Memory of the Victims of Fascism*. [. . .] Signed F. Arones.
>
> [. . .] *To the Memory of the Victims of Fascism* and *The Ghetto Uprising* left an extraordinary mark upon us. It strengthened our hatred of fascism. We would like our Soviet artists to further stigmatize Hitler's followers. As a former officer in the Soviet army during the Great Patriotic War,[80] I met many victims of fascism. Signed: a group of tourists from Minsk.[81]

---

of the Jewish population in the USSR after Stalin's death, Kostyrchenko dedicates a chapter to political conflicts surrounding the artistic representation of Babyn Yar, see Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Khrushchëva*, 351–370. In his J.B. and Maurice C. Shapiro Annual Lecture at the USHMM, Karel C. Berkhoff suggested a long-term history of this memory, see Berkhoff, "Babi Yar: Site of Mass Murder, Ravine of Oblivion," *Occasional Paper*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, Washington, D.C., 11 February 2011, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Publication_OP_2011-02.pdf, accessed May 30, 2024.

77 LVA, 230/3/238/29–31.

78 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 54.

79 Programs and leaflets. LVA, 230/3/238/29–31.

80 The officially recognized term used to designate World War II in the USSR.

81 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 115–117.

Figure 7: Press photograph taken in the painter's workshop. One can see the etching *We Will Live* hanging on the wall. Rīga, January 14, 1967. Photographer Juris Poišs. LVKFFDA, # 6663-1.

Some visitors inscribed the representation of the Holocaust in a more orthodox interpretation of the Second World War, without blurring the memory of the tragedy endured by the Jews in the midst of other categories of victims. Others searched for a more accentuated recognition of this tragedy. According to a comment from a visitor, recounted by Zilberman, the 1964 exhibition "turned into an expression of the Jews' solidarity with their painter under the banner of the national theme that was so close to their hearts."[82] The variety of the testimonies shows the vectors of interpretation, depending on the socialization of the viewers and on the immediate social environment of the works' contemplation. Undeniably, Kuzkovski's works occupied a middle position between the public narratives of crimes committed in the republic and more specific commemorative efforts. The following pages address the issue of singular reuses of these paintings by the

82 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 46.

Jewish communities of Latvia, exploring a semi-public sphere where distinct memories of the Holocaust emerged.

The Painting as Used by Memorial Communities (1963–1970)

Simultaneously to the official exhibitions, private visits to Kuzkovski's workshop and "open house" constituted opportunities to showcase his paintings and etchings on the Holocaust to a group that was forming around the remembrance of the Holocaust in Latvia.[83] Several members from the Rīga Jewish community started to gather information and to advocate for the recognition of a form of cultural autonomy for the Jewish population and for the right to emigrate to Israel.[84] This tight-knit community featured lawyer David Garber, Mark Blum, David Zilberman, and Frida Mihelson (a survivor of the Rumbula massacre).[85] They met Yosef Kuzkovski in the early 1960s. He showed them *The Last Way* and commented on it, as recalled by Zilberman:

> The painting can be split into two sections, left and right. To the right – the people, the Jews. In the center – the young mother and her newborn baby. To the left – the fascists[86] and their dogs. I [Kuzkovski] voluntarily blurred and greyed this [last] part. In the image, the armed executioners can almost be identified with the raging pack of dogs. There are no human attributes. Only boundless and meaningless cruelty. Thoughts, emotions and figural images do not belong to the left-hand side. They are escorting the people. Upon closer inspection of the group and each individual, one perceives that these are Soviet Jews. The young mother's face in the center expresses fury. She could very well have been a member of the Komsomol. [. . .] The old man, who wears a rabbi's kippah, is discouraged. He is the opposite figure from the woman. He represents wisdom. As if he had already seen this over the centuries laden with bloody pogroms.[87]

Kuzkovski also described the masculine figure to the left as being that of a Jewish Red Army soldier, who escaped from a Nazi prison and was arrested with his

83 A documented testimony of these initiatives can be seen in Shmuel Tseitline's *Dokumental'naia istoria evreev Rigi* (Rīga, 1989).
84 MEL, # 12_05_Zilberman.
85 Frida Michelson's book, *I Survived in Rumbula*, was first published through non-institutional channels in the USSR thanks to the work of David Zilberman. Then it was published in Israel in 1973 and in New York in 1979. It was published in Rīga in 2005, then in Russia in 2011.
86 This term was used in the USSR to designate Nazis.
87 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 38.

family by the occupiers. One should be cautious with statements credited to the painter, as they were remembered and reported by a witness. However, these statements, made in private, show an expression between a religious and cultural Jewish perspective and a leitmotif of resistance or revolt, specific to the Soviet discourse on the Holocaust.[88] Thus, the members of the group perceived the painting as located at the intersection between "Nazi barbarism" and "the ulterior profanation of Jewish mass graves."[89] Kuzkovski and the members of the Rīga Jewish community were products of a divergent political socialization,[90] even if they progressively developed a close relationship.

Between 1962 and 1964, the group started to turn the Rumbula woods into a place of homage to the departed.[91] The Jewish volunteers took care of the neglected site of mass murder, which the local population continued to excavate for valuables. To mark the location's symbolic importance, Kuzkovski made a sign (Figure 8), which was placed at the side of the Rīga-Moscow railroad for everyone to see. This billboard was brought down by the Rīga municipal services on several occasions. Even though a note specified that this was on behalf of the fight against *fascism*, the city still felt this was a taunt aimed at the Soviet authorities, according to Shmuel Tseitline. The use of *The Last Way* expanded within the framework of this movement and this representation of the Babyn Yar massacre started to encompass, within this growing perception, other places of the Holocaust. As Mark Blum noted:

> To commemorate the Warsaw ghetto uprising, Kuzkovski commissioned Schneider [. . .] to photograph a fragment of *The Last Way*. Artist Zalman Baron erected an obelisk made of seven-meter-wide wood planks. The photograph was placed under a glass panel in a frame carved in its center. Baron painted the obelisk black and, following Kuzkovski's blueprint, drew drops of blood. We gathered 50 people in spring 1963 for this illegal demonstration. It was merely the beginning of a "Jewish revolution."[92]

Inaugurating the obelisk (Figure 9) was a moment of consecration: candles were lit in front of the painting, prayers were spoken. Later the painting was abundantly photographed and visitors took pictures of themselves standing next to it (Figures 6 and 10). These acts broke with the usual distance adopted by spectators in a museum setting. In this way, the painting made its entry into people's daily lives.

88 In particular, to its literature. See Harriet Murav, "Poetry After Kerch': Representing Jewish Mass Death in the Soviet Union," in Murav and Estraikh, *Soviet Jews*, 159–161.

89 Olga Kuzkovskaia, in Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 36.

90 Olga Kuzkovskaia, in Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 38.

91 I would like to thank Uri Schneider and Ilya Lenski for the opportunity to consult with them on unclassified pictures taken by professional photographer Iossif Schneider, a member of this movement.

92 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 43–44.

Figure 8: Photograph of the sign. Private collection of Iossif Schneider. Courtesy of Uri Schneider, Israel.

Used in the obelisk, the artwork was now open to new legitimacy, but also to changes. The canvas and the material were modified, and the painting was reframed. The artist *cut out* his initial work for the members of the community and placed the old man of faith and the rebelling soldier at the center the image of the young woman and her baby. The representations of these most vulnerable categories of the population (the woman, the child, the elderly) were now stabilized in the public imagery (fig. 6). Reframing the painting removed the diversity of the population that was taken to the execution site and the wide array of attitudes towards imminent death. Kuzkovski toned down traces of fear and psychological col-

Figure 9: Photo # 126. Iossif Schneider. Personal archives of Uri Schneider, Israel.

lapse and foregrounded the old man's stoicism. He also expunged references to violent representation of the landscape. Moreover, this new framing turned the rage of the young woman, who may have been a member of the Communist Youth (as he stated in private), into a more universalized form of dignity in the face of death.

The reemployment of the painting became more frequent as a system of reproduction was put in place. The painter's diversification of techniques (paintings, etchings) prompted the production of copies.[93] Aron Chpil'berg[94] "put uninter-

93 This technique was used to print militant posters. Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 40.

94 Aron Chpil'berg [Spielberg], who came from Leningrad, had the opportunity to look at the painting in early 1966 when he visited the Kuzkovskis. He printed copies of pictures he took of

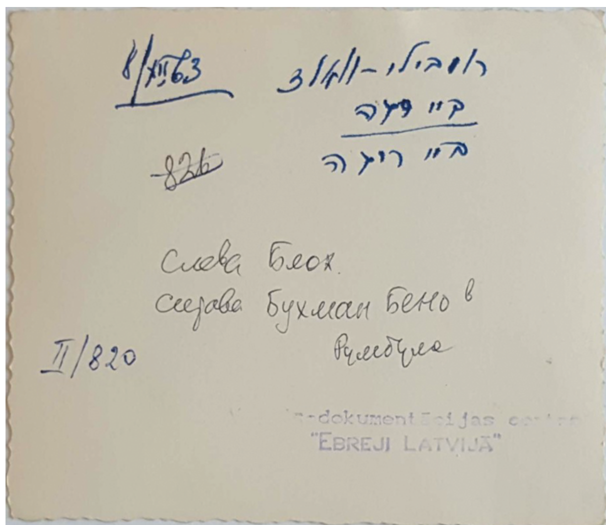

Figure 10a & b: Members of the Jewish Association standing in front of the memorial in the Rumbula forest, December 8, 1963. d MEL # F II 820.

the painting and distributed them to “dozens” of people, according to his memoirs published in Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski,* 87.

rupted work" into its "reproductions accompanied by books on Jewish and Zionist culture which [were] sent out to cities all over the Soviet Union. [. . .] The etchings in particular were massively circulated across the country. In Rīga, Kuzkovski's paintings could be seen in practically every home where there was a national streak."[95] This quotation reveals the milieu in which the packages were being circulated. They were integrated with *samizdat* works and destined for an audience of Soviet Jews, potentially receptive to the Israeli cause.[96] The literature[97] that was sent along with each etching played on the expectations of the viewers of these reproductions. In return, the painting contributed to incitement of the memory of the Holocaust, crucial to the social mobilization for recognition of the rights of the Jews,[98] knowing that the Babyn Yar memory was on the political forefront.

Furthermore, circulating in Latvia, Kuzkovski's paintings on the Holocaust resonated with local commemorative endeavors. Two Latvian towns related to Kuzkovski's exhibitions were shaken by trials of war criminals in the second half of the 1960s. The first one, Jēkabpils, served at the time as the stage of debates surrounding the atrocities that had been committed there less than a quarter-century earlier. Those who had committed crimes there[99] first stood trial in June 1965. They were members of an auxiliary police unit accused of having taken part in the execution of the Jewish inhabitants of Kūkas on August 10, 1941, as well as the murder of members of the Communist Party on September 10, 1941.[100] A second trial, set up six months later, stood in judgment of crimes committed in Krustpils and Kaķīši. Two exhibitions by Kuzkovski in Jēkabpils – in spring 1965 and November 1966 – should be seen as part of an array of public events remembering the war crimes. Set up by the Department of Culture and the Party's District Organization, they were not illicit gatherings. Representatives of the Party and the city attended a meeting with the artist. In 1965, paintings about the Holocaust were exhibited for several weeks in the Culture Palace located in the city center. A group of Kuzkovski's friends came from Rīga for the occasion and there were almost 500 local visi-

95 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski,* 57.

96 For the history of the Soviet Jewish milieu, united around a sustained religious practice and/or sensitized to the right to immigrate to Israel, see Pauline Peretz, who studied *Nativ*'s diplomatic work in favor of Jewish emigration from the USSR to Israel: Peretz, *Let My People Go: The Transnational Politics of Soviet Jewish Emigration during the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2017).

97 They were churning out copies from textbooks, dictionaries, and texts by Bialik and Zhabotinski. Iossif Schneider took an active part in the endeavor. Tseitline, *Dokumental'naia istoria evreev Rigi,* 284–286. As for David Zilberman, he was in charge of the translations. MEL, # 12_05_Zilberman.

98 Maurice Kriegel, "Trois mémoires de la Shoah: États-Unis, Israël, France," *Le Débat* 117, no. 5 (2001): 59–72.

99 In Jēkabpils and Krustpils (the towns were merged into Jēkabpils in 1962).

100 KGB file on the trial. LVA, 1986/1/45034 and the prosecutor's file LVA, 856/2A/1101, 1102.

tors. The exhibition's opening featured poetry readings and an introduction to musical pieces by Jewish artists from Latvia. The evening was hosted in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, and Latvian. The guests from the Latvian capital were taken to the old Jewish cemetery, where the destroyed synagogue had stood and where the Jewish population had been murdered.[101]

The exhibition was advertised in the press[102] and the visit was privately documented by Iossif Schneider. In one of his photographs (Figure 12), lawyer David Garber, who came from Rīga to attend the exhibition, and Reizel Miljun, a survivor from Krustpils, can be seen in the old Jewish cemetery which had been cleared by locals in 1958. There, Kuzkovski met local witnesses, among whom was a man who, after having been affected by the events of the Holocaust, helped to rearrange the graves and started to attend synagogue (Figure 11). These meetings coincided with the public status of the exhibition. Reproductions of *The Last Way* were circulated locally. For example, one of the interviewees, Frīda Minskere, born in Preiļi and whose immediate family perished during the Holocaust, has a photograph of it. Another inhabitant of Krustpils had his displayed in his home.[103]

The interviews conducted in Jēkabpils attest to the extent to which knowledge of the perpetrators and their victims remained a part of everyone's daily life. In the immediate postwar era, survivors had informed the police of known perpetrators. Among the accused, some tried to justify themselves publicly. There were strong expectations for justice from survivors. Yet they were not informed of the judgement rendered.[104] The trials of the perpetrators of Jēkabpils took place in Rīga, far from the sight of locals. A series of plain articles without any supporting documentation or images was published in the local press. Any mention of the Holocaust was erased from the unique documentary dedicated to the first trial[105] broadcast on national TV in 1966–1967. However, through Kuzkovski's exhibitions and meetings, the local Jewish memorial group was consolidating a local memory of the Holocaust of its own.

---

101 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski*, 50–51.

102 "Josifa Kuzkovska darbu izstāde Jēkabpilī," *Padomju Daugava*, November 19, 1966, and "Kad portreti atdzīvojas," *Padomju Daugava*, November 29, 1966.

103 Interviews with Frīda Minskere and Zinaïda Livche led by Irina Tcherneva and Eric Le Bourhis on July 18, 2017.

104 On the trials, held *in camera* since 1944, see Uldis Lasmanis, "Holokausts Jēkabpils pilsētā," in *Holokausta pētniecības problēmas Latvijā*, ed. Andris Caune (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2008), 260–286.

105 *Mazpilsētas hronika* [Chronicles from a small town], directed by Gerceļs Franks (Rīga studio, 1966).

Figures 11 and 12: Private collection of Iossif Schneider. Courtesy of Uri Schneider, Israel.

A similar dynamic can be witnessed in Daugavpils, where the painter's works were shown at the same time as the legal proceedings were taking place. The network regrouping Jewish artists, Arturs Eglītis, the Daugavpils Museum of History and Arts, and the Secretary of the Party's municipal organization, all helped to set up an exhibition there in 1967. The Party's local branch explicitly addressed the painter's commitment to Jewish culture in the USSR. There were over 5,000 at-

tendees and various public meetings with Kuzkovski were held. The event took place shortly before the trial of the Daugavpils auxiliary policemen.[106] One can thus observe that locally the memorial encounters around works of art could be supported by the authorities, and thus differed from the highly conflictual relations between the Rīga memorial group and the municipal authorities.

Yosef Kuzkovski, one of the prominent figures in the struggle for memory in Rumbula, together with his paintings should thus be considered as mediators between different levels of knowledge and experience of Nazi crimes. Kuzkovski's work on the Holocaust was never concealed, nor was it ever acknowledged as such by the administrative and political authorities. The painter remained close to both the political authorities and the community representing the victims, two group that often clashed.[107] Moreover, the legitimacy that derived from his pictorial work and status within the Artists' Union allowed him to hold this bridging position. During official meetings, he was among those representing "the Jews from Rīga." Foreign visitors and members of "progressive" political movements in the West were now directed to him – a "Jewish artist."[108] Between 1963 and 1970, the distance between the authorities and the memorial group in Rīga was growing, for several reasons. First, none of the trials specifically addressed the tragic events of the Holocaust that occurred in Rīga. In the phases of the triangular relations between the USSR, Israel, and the United States, Pauline Peretz distinguishes three turning points: the year 1963, when in the United States a campaign was launched to provide aid to Soviet Jews; the Six-Day War in 1967, after which the Liaison Bureau (*Nativ*) was created in Israel to encourage Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union to the country and oriented itself exclusively in favor of immigration; and finally, the Leningrad trial in 1970 and the crackdown on advocates of immigration to Israel finally drove a wedge between the Soviet Union and its Jews.[109]

---

106 The defendants were accused of having murdered the city's Jews as well as partisans in the summer of 1941. The trial was held in the club of the main factory in the town on December 18–27, 1967, and was covered in at least three newspaper articles. Report to the Director of the Daugavpils Museum, November 30, 1966, LVA, 230/3/136/25; testimonies in Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski,* 49, 52.

107 Tseitline, *Dokumental'naia istoria evreev Rigi,* 333–424.

108 Zilberman, *Iossif Kuzkovski,* 47–48. In December 1964, a meeting of the "representatives of Rīga the Jewish community" was organized with Paul Novick, a reporter from the Yiddish-language American newspaper *Morgn Frayhayt* [Morning Freedom]. Among the people gathered at this meeting were Mark Razumny (a prewar reporter and correspondent), Moisei Shneiderov (an operator in the Rīga Studio), Iossif Schneider, and Kuzkovski. Tseitline, *Dokumental'naia istoria evreev Rigi,* 290–291. Aron Vergelis, editor-in-chief of the Yiddish-language periodical *Sovetish Heymland* [Soviet Homeland] published in Moscow, suggested to the painter that he publish a reproduction of *The Last Way.*

109 Pauline Peretz, "Une influence méconnue de l'État hébreu sur sa diaspora. Israël, la communauté juive américaine et le mouvement d'aide aux Juifs soviétiques (1958–1979)," *Hypothèses* 1, no. 8 (2005): 179–88.

Figures 13–16: Manuscript using Kuzkovski's visual material. 1970. MEL, # Npk 2113.

Yosef, son of Binyamin, Candle of Israel [Netzach Yisrael - NY], a righteous man for blessing who passed away. May peace be upon him in heaven
may he rest deceased. Tevet 26, year.
'On these I cry and my eyes are overflowing tears with the passing away of the soul (…)
The sacred, the important, the dear (soul) Yosef, son of Binyamin, NY, a righteous man for blessing torah savant (…)
Blessed be you
the spirit of the sacred and the pure
and blessed be your soul
and to your spirit in the sky.
a bright rest
be at whole.
above of the high angels and glory
And your bones will rest without decay and you will not
feel sorry in the grave for any sadness, and I am poor and painful.

Desecrated from crimes and sins I came here
to your burial place, to your place of rest,
To reconcile you and speak to your heart what I have said
And I have acted and things have come to my heart which are against your honor and splendor and glory and magnificence I acknowledge and leave, and say I answered your bones Yosef son of Binyamin, rest in peace NY a righteous man for blessing in Heaven he shall rest, and we shall say amen, amen, amen.'[110]

After the outbreak of these political tensions and, on an individual level, after the painter's immigration to Israel, the reproduction of his painting and the reinterpretation of his path was even more channeled. For example, an anonymous author[111] dedicated a handmade book to him in 1970.[112] It contains a fragment of *The Last Way* (Figure 13), taken in black and white by an amateur photographer. It keeps the group of victims in its entirety, but acquires a quality of atemporality and non-territoriality. It could be a pogrom, or any persecution, especially since one finds three photographs of the Warsaw ghetto on subsequent pages. The author also attached prayers for the dead in Hebrew to the reproduction of the fragment and to a self-portrait of the painter (made in a style reminiscent of iconography) (Figures 14–16). During commemorative meetings in Rumbula, the painting had begun its transformation into an icon by means of the extension of its significance to other sites of the Holocaust and the accompaniment of the viewing by a moment of reverence and religious symbolism. In the handmade book, its "iconic" usage became salient, and the painting is supplemented with prayers and excerpts from the Torah.

The exhibition of *The Last Way* and other works of Kuzkovski about the Holocaust, if studied in its political and social context, deepens an understanding of a stratified collective stance in the Soviet Union concerning the Holocaust in the 1950s and 1960s. The painting was appropriated within multiple fragmented private and semi-public spheres, starting with the circles of activists committed to a memorial effort in Rumbula and ending with a wider group of citizens, who were concerned by the bloody crimes of the war. Thus, a memory formation of the Holocaust crossed different layers of Latvian society during a period when debates around war crimes opened a space for various re-narrations of the Second World War. Moreover, the "interpreters" (and Kuzkovski, above all) acted on the painting, selecting fragments, literally reframing and re-editing it with the help of texts, oral commentaries, or other images. This incremental reframing progres-

110 The translation from Hebrew is by Lital Henig, to whom I would like to express my gratitude.
111 Signed "Yosef, David's son."
112 August-September 1970. MEL, # NPK 2113.

sively reinforced two perspectives: the gaze from the ravine and the disappearance of the perpetrators from the representation.

∗∗∗

This chapter has embraced the diversity of audiences of the painting: those whose family members experienced a tragic fate during the Holocaust and those who simply went to the painter's public exhibitions. Tracing their appropriations helps to clarify the way these groups were structured and measures the variations in distance and proximity they adopted towards the dynamics and actions spurred by the state. Yosef Kuzkovski's work played a major part as a connecting link between collective representations of the crimes, the memorial effort, and state proceedings that only seemed to be for show, on the one hand, and an autonomous social framework that was gradually empowered, on the other.

The political authorities were at pains to control the impact of his paintings on society and had no control over the circulation of their reproductions. Analyzed at the crossroads of social history and the history of art, the painting is viewed here as a "space of experience." Different layers of meaning had accumulated while the painter worked on his representation. Then, they were reinterpreted when the work was reproduced. The diversity of mediums in which *The Last Way* was circulated and made public played a large part in the emphasis, or conversely, the disappearance of some elements that the artist had himself been debating.

The history of the painting also reveals diverse levels of conflict and politicization of the memory of war. Between 1962 and 1970, individuals and groups who personally viewed the artwork experienced a change in attitude towards the Soviet state and its official recognition of the crimes. Through the interpretation of the same painting, one can see how memorial communities in Rīga gradually distanced themselves from the judicial and political proceedings led by the state. While exhibited locally, his paintings on the Holocaust theme were integrated into autonomous commemorative social initiatives. Through Kuzkovski's exhibitions, local Jewish survivors were given the opportunity to be publicly visible and to plead on behalf of their memory.

Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska

The West German View of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union: The Case of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, 1955–1960

In the first episode of the television miniseries *Am grünen Strand der Spree* (On the green shores of the River Spree, 1960), a Wehrmacht soldier by the name of Jürgen Wilms observes an execution of Jews near the Soviet town of Orsha. As he approaches the snow-covered shooting site, he encounters local children reciting antisemitic slogans in a barely recognizable Slavic language. He then walks along the railway tracks and sees Jewish men, women, and children disembarking from a train wagon, as German policemen guard the site. However, two important details set the images apart from comparable motifs of Holocaust iconography: the sides of the wagons bear the Cyrillic letters "CCCP" (USSR) alongside the hammer and sickle, while the Jews proceed through a gate bearing a large five-pointed star that we can only assume is red (the film is black and white). Symbolically, these shots correspond to pictures of people arriving in a concentration camp and entering it beneath the words "*Arbeit macht frei.*" Here, however, instead of the usual Nazi icons, we find the symbols of the Soviet Union and Communism.

Among the Jews, Wilms discovers a girl whom he recognizes from his previous military deployment in occupied Poland and tells her to run, but she does not heed his advice and returns to the column. In subsequent shots, we see the Jews taking off their shoes and coats and walking in silence towards the shooting site. In small groups of four to six people, they enter the trench where a killing squad awaits them. However, the shooters are not Germans but Latvians wearing white armbands with the inscription "In the service of the German Wehrmacht. The Latvian People's Army."[1] They are supervised by a member of the SS who orders them to fire. Wilms stays several meters away and observes the scene from a distance. Just after the Latvians fire their last volley, we hear his thoughts in an external diegetic voiceover. He declares his love for his former Jewish girlfriend and recalls the Yiddish song he used to listen to with her, "*Bei mir bistu shein*" (To Me You're Beautiful). From this point on, no more victims appear on the screen; only the closeup of Wilms's face remains in the frame as we hear the shots and his thoughts in voiceover.

1 All translations from the original German are those of the author.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-011

This unusual representation of the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union, presented from the perspective of a Wehrmacht soldier, reached audiences in the middle of the Cold War. The 22-minute scene was the very first fictional account of the mass murder of European Jews shown on West German television. Approximately 7.5 million viewers watched the episode and it was reviewed more than 150 times in the West German press.[2] It was broadcast on the first and, at the time, only channel of West German television (ARD) on March 22, 1960. The scene of the massacre was preceded by a fictional story about Jürgen Wilms's military service in occupied Poland and the Soviet Union. The series presents him as an ordinary Wehrmacht soldier, not particularly courageous, homesick, unfaithful to his German girlfriend as he is seeing Polish and Jewish women, and a witness to atrocities. This image of the everyday life of the German soldier, although probably resembling many real experiences, clearly contradicted the then popular narrative of heroic Germans fighting on the Eastern Front, such as the protagonists of *The Doctor from Stalingrad* (1958, dir. Géza von Radványi), or *08/15* (1954–1955, dir. Paul May).

Most of the critics who reviewed *Am grünen Strand der Spree* in 1960 praised the scene of the massacre for its courage in dealing with the difficult past. Yet nobody drew particular attention to the Soviet symbols, the antisemitic children, or the Latvian shooters. Viewed from today's perspective, the images seem to suggest that East European actors were complicit in the crime. Was this a deliberate attempt to slander the Soviet Union during the Cold War or did the producers of the miniseries merely seek to establish the territory in which the events took place? In order to trace the intersections between Cold War discourses and West German Holocaust representations, this chapter discusses the case of *Am grünen Strand der Spree* along with the previous texts on which the miniseries was based: the 1955 novel by Hans Scholz, its 1956 reprint in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*), and the SWF (Südwestfunk, Southwest Broadcasting Corpo-

2 The number of viewers is estimated on the basis of an audience share of 83 percent, 3.375 million registered TV sets, and an average of 2.7 inhabitants per household in 1960. See the opinion poll report: Archive of the Academy of Art (Archiv der Akademie der Künste, AAK) in Berlin, Fritz Umgelter Archive, file 283, *Sehbeteiligung und Stellungnahmen der Fernsehzuschauer zur 1. Folge der Sendung "Am grünen Strand der Spree" am 22.3.1960* (Munich: Infratest GmbH, 1960), p. 1; Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus and Mike Friedrichsen, *Geschichte der Medienökonomie: Eine Einführung in die traditionelle Medienwirtschaft 1750 bis 2000* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2012), 135; Statistisches Bundesamt, ed., *Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1960* (Stuttgart: Kohlhamer, 1961), 266. The reviews are collected in AAK, Fritz Umgelter Archive, file 281. Seventy of them were republished in a special volume of the annual WDR issue: "Im Urteil der Presse: 'Am grünen Strand der Spree'," in *Westdeutscher Rundfunk. Jahrbuch 1959–1960* (Cologne: WDR, 1960).

ration) radio play that was aired the same year. The analysis of the cultural texts is combined with a thorough reading of archival documents, which give insight into the process of production and reception of the "media complex" that was *Am grünen Strand der Spree.*[3]

In the first two sections of the chapter, I take into account the expectations of the actors (producers and audiences) involved in the media complex. In the 1950s and early 1960s, they operated in the realities of the Cold War and therefore often had to take into consideration the possible reactions to the film that might occur in the GDR. The last section discusses the media complex as seen from today's perspective, in light of our subsequent experiences with Holocaust representations. Therefore, I refer to Reinhart Koselleck's categories of the "horizon of expectations" and the "space of experience," which were partly inspired by Hans Robert Jauss's theory of literary reception.[4] For Koselleck, the discrepancy between "expectation" and "experience" proves the historical change. What does this change mean for the reading of the massacre scene in *Am grünen Strand der Spree*?

The Early Versions of Am grünen Strand der Spree

Hans Scholz's novel debuted on September 5, 1955, in the Hoffmann & Campe publishing house in Hamburg. The book comprises seven stories. The frame narrative depicts a party in West Berlin arranged in honor of the recent return of a former prisoner of war (POW) from the Soviet Union. The men gathered at the party start, one after another, telling stories, the first of which is based on Jürgen Wilm's diary. Others concern various events from recent German history such as the occupation of Norway during World War Two, soldiers' experiences in allied POW camps, or the division of Germany. Despite their historical framing, all stories are also about love affairs and are interlaced with anecdotes, jokes, and personal comments made by the men at the party.

---

3 The term "media complex" was first introduced by Stefan Scherer and refers to a media phenomenon that encompasses the book, serial novel, radio play, and television series, see *"Am grünen Strand der Spree". Ein populärer Medienkomplex der bundesdeutschen Nachkriegszeit*, ed. Stefanie Heck, Simon Lang, and Stefan Scherer (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2020). I am very grateful to Stefan Scherer for kindly providing me with a copy of his introduction to the volume prior to publication.

4 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 255–276; Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 23.

Scholz's book was a great success. In March 1956, it was awarded the prestigious Fontane Prize for literature. In summer of the same year, the *FAZ* reprinted it as a serial-novel, which was a great exception, as the literary column in the newspaper was generally dedicated to preprints only.[5] Simultaneously with the reprint, the SWF broadcast five of the seven stories as a radio play directed by Gert Westphal. Four translations of the book followed, among them one in English with the title *Through the Night.*[6] In France, the Netherlands, and Sweden, the book hardly evoked any reactions. In the US, the reviews were positive, but the publication was a commercial failure. When in 1959 Hanns Hartmann, director general (Intendant) of the WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk, West German Broadcasting Corporation) sought suitable material for a miniseries, he thus soon discovered *Am grünen Strand der Spree.* The director was Fritz Umgelter, who had previously created the first and enormously successful West German television miniseries *So weit die Füße tragen* (As Far as My Feet Will Carry Me, 1959). At the same time, two companies made efforts to adapt Scholz's novel for a feature film, but the negotiations ended without any result. Neither was the drama adaptation of one of the episodes, proposed by the exile writer Gabriele Tergit, ever published or staged.[7] Today, the book has reached thirteen editions with a total circulation of about 200,000 copies,[8] with both the radio play and miniseries easily available on DVD.

Hans Scholz himself served in a Wehrmacht truck transport column (Kraftwagen-Transport-Regiment 605) and witnessed the "liquidation" of the ghetto in

---

5 Cristina Priotto, *Fortsetzung folgt. Feuilletonromane in der "Frankfurter (Allgemeinen) Zeitung" im 20. Jahrhundert* (Marburg: Tectum, 2007), 60.

6 Despite the existence of the English translation, I use the German title throughout the text as neither the radio play nor the television series were ever broadcast outside of Germany and have thus no formal English titles. Quotations from the book are taken from the English edition: Hans Scholz, *Through the Night*, trans. Elisabeth Abbott (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell, 1959).

7 For further information about the planned adaptation as a feature film, see my article "Travelling Memories of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union: Hans Scholz's Through the Night and Its Remediation," in *German Studies Review* 44, no. 3 (2020): 499–515. For information about the failed theatre adaptation, see Hans Wagener, *Gabriele Tergit. Gestohlene Jahre* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2013), 157.

8 Hans Schmid and Christian Adam argue that the book reached 200,000 or even 250,000 copies during the first year after its release. However, these numbers cannot be confirmed on the basis of the sales data in Hoffmann & Campe's archive. Hans Schmid, "Scheener Herr aus Daitschland. Vermisste Nachrichten vom grünen Strand der Spree," *Telepolis*, July 23, 2011, http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/34/34900/1.html, accessed September 9, 2019; Christian Adam, "Hans Scholz: Am grünen Strand der Spree (1955)," in *HolocaustZeugnisLiteratur*, ed. Markus Roth and Sascha Feuchert (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018), 99.

Orsha (present-day Belarus) on November 26–27, 1941.[9] In the course of these two days, Einsatzkommando 8, probably accompanied by local auxiliaries, killed over 1,800 people.[10] The local deputy commander, Paul Eick, ordered additional Wehrmacht soldiers to guard the site, which was located at the Jewish cemetery next to the ghetto.[11] As Scholz's military unit does not appear in any of the archival files concerning the mass killings that took place in the region of Orsha,[12] it is impossible to determine whether or not he was involved in the massacre. According to his own statements, he was an onlooker who watched the execution from a safe distance.[13]

In 1953, Scholz submitted his manuscript to the Rowohlt publishing house and – on the advice of his friend and successful writer Paul Hermann – also to the Hoffmann & Campe publishing house, both located in Hamburg.[14] While Wolfgang Weyrauch, then editor at Rowohlt, quickly rejected the proposal, the editors at Hoffmann & Campe accepted it. Scholz's version already included the motifs of the antisemitic children, the Latvian shooters and – in another episode – the attempt to rescue the Jewish girl, whereas the Soviet symbols were absent from his novel. The massacre was described on about fifteen pages of the 300-page manuscript.

In her first comments, the editor in charge, Henriette Wegener, did not mention the massacre. She only reviewed the general idea of the novel. Among her main arguments for accepting it was that West German readers were eager to read literary texts from and about the then isolated West Berlin. She encouraged

9 Federal Military Archive (Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv) in Freiburg, BAM RW59/2077, Hans Scholz's personnel files; AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 17, Hans Scholz, Speech on the occasion of the Heinrich Stahl Prize, 1960, unpaginated.

10 Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 187; Wolfgang Curilla, *Die deutsche Ordnungspolizei und der Holocaust im Baltikum und in Weißrussland 1941–1944* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), 440–441; Daniel Romanowski, "Orsha," in *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933 –1945*, Vol. 3, ed. Geoffrey P. Megargee (Washington: United Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009), 1709–1712.

11 Protocol of the interrogation of Paul Eick from January 19, 1946, in *Tragedija evreev Belorussii v gody nemeckoj okkupacii, 1941–1944 gg. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, Vol. 2, ed. Raisa Andreevna Černoglazova (Minsk: Dremač, 1997), 170.

12 See files from the Soviet War Crime Commission in 1946 at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, collection RG-06.025, RG-06.025*03/504, RG-06.025*04/757; files from the trial against members of Einsatzkommando 8 at the Federal Archive in Ludwigsburg (Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg), collection B162, files 3275–3284 and at the Munich State Archive (Staatsarchiv München), collection 3270, files 2–8; *Tragedija evreev*.

13 AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 17, Hans Scholz, Speech on the occasion of the Heinrich Stahl Prize, 1960, unpaginated.

14 The history of the book is presented on the basis of the documents collected at the AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, files 1–5, 20 and the archive of the Hoffmann & Campe publishing house.

Scholz to shorten the seven stories and enlarge the frame story at the party. However, other editors at Hoffmann & Campe suggested deleting the description of the massacre in order to make the book "more gentle to the nerves" of veterans.[15] Obviously, the editors cared not only about the readers' "nerves," but also about their own business, and therefore aimed at adjusting the book to the anticipated preferences of their target audience. Jauss would refer to this as taking into account the readers' horizon of expectations. Eventually, Wegener insisted on leaving the description of the massacre in the book. Shortly before it was printed, the passage with the description was even shifted from the second to the first chapter. In this new composition, more importance was attached to the massacre.

Regardless of the controversy over the description of the massacre, other fragments of Scholz's initial manuscript caused much bigger discussions. Among them was a story about people living in the region of Lower Lusatia (*Niederlausitz*), speaking Sorbian, and cultivating their local traditions. In the mid-1950s, the West German media reported on an alleged plan of the Soviet Union to establish a separate Sorbian state. The weekly *Die Zeit* argued, for instance, that this was the actual reason for accepting the Slavic minority and their language in the GDR.[16] Therefore, the editors at Hoffmann & Campe feared an accusation of supporting Soviet policies and forced the author to shorten the episode significantly. This time, they did not care about the readers' expectations but were afraid of possible political interventions. After *Am grünen Strand der Spree* became a bestseller, Scholz published the deleted fragments as a separate novella, entitled *Schkola*, with the Munich-based publishing house Langen & Müller.[17] The publication courted no particular controversy – in fact, it remained hardly noticed.

Hoffmann & Campe advertised *Am grünen Strand der Spree* as a "Berlin novel." In accordance with this campaign, the reviewers paid much attention to the frame narrative, which took place in West Berlin, whereas their comments on the description of the massacre were usually very brief, if they appeared at all.[18] Similar opinions were expressed by members of the Fontane Prize jury[19] and later by Karl Korn, co-editor of the *FAZ*, who decided to run the serial novel. Not only did he address the massacre in a mere one sentence of his enthusiastic review but his interpretation presented the German soldier as a frightened victim of a horrendous war: "The diary ends with poor Private Wilms, hounded by fear

15 N.N., "Boccaccio in der Bar," *Der Spiegel*, no. 12 (1956), 46.

16 N.N., "Oberlausitz: Bautzen heißt jetzt Budysyn," *Die Zeit*, no. 9, 1954.

17 Hans Scholz, *Schkola* (München: Langen & Müller, 1958).

18 AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 7, collection of reviews.

19 Berlin State Archive (Landesarchiv Berlin), B Rep. 014/1138/1, Report on the Sitting of the Fontane Prize Jury, March 9, 1956, p. 62.

and a moral dilemma, bearing witness to one of the horrific scenes of the mass murder of Jews in the East."[20] Moreover, in order to emphasize that the frame narrative was located in West Berlin, Korn had changed the novel's title in the newspaper edition: Instead of the original subtitle *So gut wie ein Roman* (As good as a novel), he proposed *Ein Berliner Decameron* (A Decameron from Berlin).

Only two West German reviewers, Joachim Kaiser and Helmut Kreuzer, who were both affiliated with Gruppe 47 (Group 47) and wrote for the high-brow magazines *Texte und Zeichen* and *Frankfurter Hefte*, respectively, paid particular attention to the description of the massacre. Kaiser criticized Wilms on the grounds that he "reported what the Germans did to Polish and Russian Jews, while he himself performed small acts of compassion,"[21] and Kreuzer argued against the depiction of the Latvian shooters and the antisemitic local children as a way of externalizing German guilt.[22] East German literary scholars argued akin to Kaiser and Kreuzer, despite the fact that *Am grünen Strand der Spree* was officially unavailable in the GDR. During the conference "War and Militarism in Literature," which took place in 1960 at Humboldt University in East Berlin, the book was criticized for, among others, its anti-Communist content.[23]

Sources proving the book's reception in the GDR are scarce, but unlike the West German reviews they all mention the description of the massacre, either critically, when they represent the official viewpoint, or positively, when they come from private persons. A reader from East Berlin, for instance, praised Scholz for delivering a "history work or an anthology about the German people in the time of World War Two."[24] Another, also from East Berlin, wrote in a letter to the author:

> In general, when reading about topics such as the persecution of the Jews and the war, I cannot avoid a quiet feeling of insubordination. I belong to the generation that had to shout "Heil Hitler" at school, a few times in the morning, at noon and in between, while at the same time the mass murders were committed. After the surrender, when suddenly everyone became a democrat, we often asked ourselves, why nobody before had taught us about the world beyond "Führer" and National Socialism? In the East, a generation is growing up again whose youthful idealism is misused in support of a criminal system. [. . .] In your book, you address these problems in a way that is, for the first time, readable for young people.[25]

---

20 Karl Korn, "Berliner Dekameron 1955," *FAZ*, January 27, 1956, 5.

21 Joachim Kaiser, "So gut wie ein Ufa-Film," *Texte und Zeichen. Eine literarische Zeitschrift* 2, no. 5 (1956): 536–542.

22 Helmut Kreuzer, "Auf den zweiten Blick," *Frankfurter Hefte* 1 (1957): 57–61.

23 Gerhard Schneider, "Von Strindberg, über Hauptmann zu Böll," *Neue Zeit*, November 27, 1960.

24 AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 26, Letter from a reader, October 1, 1956, unpaginated.

25 AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 217, Letter from a reader, July 5, 1958, unpaginated.

It seems therefore that the description of the massacre could have been read in various ways, depending on the readers' horizon of expectations and spaces of experiences. While some of them simply ignored the passage, others disliked it because it suggested an externalization of guilt, yet others praised it for addressing the difficult issue of German acts of mass murder. Apparently, the political framework in which the book was perceived played a crucial role in establishing these differences. The critical opinions from the leftist literary magazines usually stood in sharp contrast to enthusiastic ones that appeared in the rather conservative mass media, and the few East German critics, who were allowed to admit that they had read the book, reacted much more negatively than the numerous reviewers from West Germany. Moreover, no one accused Scholz of sympathizing with the Soviet Union, despite the publisher's prior fears.

One of the most positive opinions of the book was to be found in Korn's review for the *FAZ*, which convinced Friedrich Bischoff, the director general (Intendant) of the SWF, to record the radio play.[26] For the purpose of the script, Scholz shortened the text and kept only five of the seven stories. The format of a radio play consisting of five separate episodes required further changes and cuts in the frame narrative. The reception of the radio play was very limited, not least due to the fact that the SWF channel was only available in the southwestern part of Germany. The few reviews discussed the radio play's fidelity to the book and proved no traces of Cold War discourses – neither related to the depiction of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, nor to the motif of the Sorbs, nor to the division of Berlin as presented in the frame narrative. In March 1957, six months after the initial release, the SWF re-aired the episode with the description of the massacre as a discrete broadcast, but it failed to draw the attention of any reviewers.

Am grünen Strand der Spree on Television

Despite the radio play's limited reception, it represented a milestone in the development of the media complex. It is very likely that the television miniseries would not have been made if there had been no radio play before. The license agreement between Hoffmann & Campe and the television channel WDR was signed on June 16, 1959, and the shooting started on September 7 of the same year.[27] Umgelter had thus

26 AAK, Hans Scholz Archive, file 475, Gert Westphal, "Rückblick auf seine Arbeit vor 20 Jahren" (manuscript).

27 Hoffmann & Campe Archive, *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, Box 1, Agreement between Hoffmann & Campe and WDR from June 16, 1959; Historical Archive of the West German Broadcasting

to write the script in just two months. As Scholz did not want to cancel his holiday in Greece and refused to cooperate,[28] the director adopted the writer's ideas, which were previously developed for the purpose of the radio play. He too divided the text of the novel into five episodes and reduced the frame narrative. Although each episode was shot in a more or less chronological order, i.e., earlier scenes at the beginning and later scenes at the end of the shooting, the massacre scene was finished only in February 1960, three weeks before the episode's broadcast. On the one hand, it takes place in winter, and Umgelter might have waited for the appropriate weather conditions, on the other hand, he needed time to discuss the scene with Hartmann, the director general at WDR. Only after the post-production of *Am grünen Strand der Spree* was completed, the members of the media group's advisory board were informed of what they would see in the first episode. Hartmann explained to them that, together with Umgelter, they had no concerns about "what" to show, but hesitated on "how" to do it.[29]

In comparison to the scarce references to the massacre in the novel's and radio play's reception, the extensive responses to the shooting scene as shown on television are striking. The first episode of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, entitled *Das Tagebuch des Jürgen Wilms* (The Diary of Jürgen Wilms), was praised for its "courage," "great style," and "impressive images."[30] The reviewers mentioned the "documentary" character of the film that, in their opinion, presented nothing but the "truth."[31] Many of them claimed that the time had arrived to "come to terms with the past."[32] However, most critics omitted the issue of the perpetrators. They preferred to write about "horrible events" without mentioning who the murderers actually were.[33] Only a few of them wrote, in a general manner, that it was

Corporation (Historisches Archiv WDR; HA WDR) in Cologne, no signature, Work plan (Dispo) *Am grünen Strand der Spree*.

28 Hoffmann & Campe Archive, *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, Box 1, Internal note from a phone conversation from May 14, 1959.

29 HA WDR, sign. 4084, Letter from Hans Hartmann to Hanno Schmidt from March 14, 1960, unpaginated.

30 *Tagesspiegel*, March 24, 1960; *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, March 25, 1960; *Kölner Rundschau*, March 24, 1960. Unless quoted with full bibliographical data, the quotations from the press are taken from the review collection "Im Urteil der Presse."

31 *Telegraf*, March 24, 1960; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 23, 1960.

32 *Westfälische Rundschau*, March 23, 1960; *Münchner Merkur*, March 24, 1960; *Die Zeit*, April 1, 1960.

33 *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten*, March 23, 1960; *Hannoversche Presse*, March 24, 1960; *Kölnische Rundschau*, March 26, 1960.

Hitler, along with the "Nazi core and auxiliary groups," who were responsible for the "madness" of the war.[34]

The Latvian gunmen were mentioned only in a few of the reviews. On the one hand, the conservative daily newspaper *Der Tag* praised Umgelter for proving the innocence of the Wehrmacht by showing the Latvians supervised by an SS-man, as well as for portraying the antisemitic children.[35] On the other hand, the local dailies *Westfälischer Anzeiger* and *Stader Tageblatt* referred to the same elements of the plot to argue that the scene did not depict the events realistically and silenced the engagement of German soldiers in the killings.[36] Although most of the reviewers referred to general slogans, none of them neglected the need to recall the Nazi past or ignored the massacre in the same way reviewers of the novel had done four years earlier.

A day after the broadcast of *Das Tagebuch des Jürgen Wilms*, the Infratest opinion poll institute conducted interviews with the audience asking them about their opinions on the massacre. The report explains:

> Certainly, the depiction of this "mass atrocity" was occasionally praised: "It had a powerful effect on me." However, on the whole it was more common [for audience members] to state that we "should finally stop perusing Germany's book of sins" and "fouling our own nest"; at most, these scenes should have been "implied," but by no means shown "so openly."[37]

In contrast to the reviewers who commented on the miniseries in the press, many individual viewers reacted emotionally, were personally affected, and claimed to have been surprised and shocked. The series was often perceived as "horribly exciting," "too brutal," and "nerve wracking," while for some it seemed "inappropriate."[38] A common argument was that the reviewers had taken part in the war themselves and thus had better knowledge of the events.

As in the case of the book, the reception of the miniseries was influenced by the social and political frameworks. While the massacre scene was generally praised, the arguments that supported the positive opinions were different. The two most extreme examples were the reviews in *Vorwärts*, a newspaper affiliated with the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and in *Der Tag*, which represented the standpoint of the Christian Democrats. The enthusiastic reviewer from *Vorwärts* praised the WDR for its political courage in coming to terms with the past, whereas the critic from *Der Tag* emphasized the responsibility of the SS and the

34 *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 23, 1960; *Neue Ruhr Zeitung*, March 24, 1960.
35 *Der Tag*, March 24, 1960.
36 *Westfälischer Anzeiger*, March 24, 1960; *Stader Tageblatt*, March 26, 1960.
37 *Sehbeteiligungen* [opinion poll report], p. 2.
38 *Sehbeteiligungen* [opinion poll report], p. 7–8.

Latvian collaborators, and acknowledged that Wilms, the Wehrmacht soldier, remained free of guilt. Both reviewers seemed to adjust their opinions to their readers' horizon of expectations – the one who worked for the SPD's press organ accepted a critical approach to the Nazi past, while the author who likely supported the CDU preferred to leave the past behind and look toward the future instead.[39]

Comments referring to the geopolitical situation of the time were made by individual viewers rather than by critics in the press. Some of the viewers who were interviewed by Infratest raised concerns about the political consequences of the massacre scene as well as the reactions in "the East." They feared the scene might be misused for the purpose of political propaganda against the Federal Republic. One of the interviewees asked, for instance, "What would the 'gentlemen' from the East zone [Ostzone] make of that broadcast?"[40] Another viewer asked: "How can others stop hating us?"[41] In fact, it was in 1960, almost simultaneously with the screening of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, when the GDR campaign, aimed at accusing the West German state of maintaining Nazi legacies, had reached its peak. The affairs surrounding ex-Nazis Hans Globke and Theodor Oberländer, who became high-ranking members in the Adenauer administration, had provided useful arguments to the GDR propaganda effort. Therefore, the audience of the miniseries worried that beyond the Iron Curtain the shooting scene might be perceived as a confession of guilt.

Notably, the miniseries was never broadcast outside of West Germany. No sources – either in the press, in the SED files, or in the Stasi files – speak to its East German reception.[42] Sure enough, it must have been clandestinely watched in East Berlin and in the regions of the GDR where West German television was technically available.[43] However, in the early 1960s television was not yet as popular in the GDR as it was in the Federal Republic. The price of television sets was high and the choice of programs was still quite limited. The medium became more accessible only a couple of years later and only then did SED authorities start controlling who watched Western television and why.[44] Therefore, it is diffi-

---

39 *Der Tag*, March 24, 1960; *Vorwärts*, March 25, 1960.

40 *Sehbeteiligungen* [opinion poll report], p. 8.

41 AAK, Fritz Umgelter Archive, file 282, Franz L., letter to Fritz Umgelter, unpaginated.

42 Georg Herbstritt of the Stasi Records Archive (BStU) in Berlin, email to the author, September 9, 2017.

43 Franziska Kuschel, *Schwarzhörer, Schwarzseher und heimliche Leser. Die DDR und die Westmedien* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), 47–48.

44 Kuschel, *Schwarzhörer*, 104–109.

cult to make definitive statements regarding how viewers in the GDR reacted to *Am grünen Strand der Spree.*

A Massacre in the "Wild East"

The few works that exist on the film point to the depiction of the massacre as the most interesting element of the media complex.[45] The scene proves that the 1950s and 1960s were not really the era of "communicative silence"[46] and provides an early and exceptional portrayal of what has recently become known as the "Holocaust by bullets."[47] In comparison to the images of the concentration camps that had been available in the West German public sphere prior to the screening of *Am grünen Strand der Spree* – among them the films and photographs from the British and American reeducation campaigns[48] and Alain Resnais's documentary

45 For the book, see: Adam, "Hans Scholz"; Norbert Puszkar, "Hans Scholz's *Am grünen Strand der Spree*. Witnessing and Representing the Holocaust," *Neophilologus* 93, no. 2 (2009): 311–324; Norman Ächtler "'Entstörung' und Dispositiv – Diskursanalytische Überlegungen zum Darstellungstabu von Kriegsverbrechen im Literatursystem der frühen Bundesrepublik," in *Das Prinzip Störung in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften*, eds. Norman Ächtler, Carsten Gansel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 57–82. For the miniseries, see: Lars Koch, "Das Fernsehbild der Wehrmacht am Ende der fünfziger Jahre – zu Fritz Umgelters Fernsehmerteiler 'Am grünen Strand der Spree'," in *Geschichte im Film. Mediale Inszenierungen des Holocaust und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, ed. Waltraud Wara Wende (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), 78–93; Peter Seibert, "Medienwechsel und Erinnerung. Der Beginn der Visualisierung des Holocaust im westdeutschen Fernsehen," *Das Deutschunterricht* 5 (2001): 74–83; Knut Hickethier, "Der Zweite Weltkrieg und der Holocaust im Fernsehen der Bundesrepublik der fünfziger und der frühen sechziger Jahre," in *Der Krieg in der Nachkriegszeit. Der Zweite Weltkrieg in Politik und Gesellschaft der Bundesrepublik*, eds. Michael Th. Greven, Oliver von Wrochen (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 2000), 93–112. To prove the groundbreaking character of the series, Hickethier mentions a few of the subsequent television shows: the documentary *Das Dritte Reich* (1960–1961), the television broadcast of the theatre play *Korczak und seine Kinder* (1961) or the television adaptation of Christian Geissler's *The Sins of the Fathers* (orig. *Anfrage*) from 1962. For more information about the media complex, see also Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, *Microhistories of Memory: Remediating the Holocaust by Bullets in Postwar Germany* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2023).

46 Hermann Lübbe, "Der Nationalsozialismus im deutschen Nachkriegsbewußtsein," *Historische Zeitschrift* 236, no. 3 (1983): 279–299.

47 Father Patrick Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest´s Journey to Uncover the Truth behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*, foreword Paul A. Shapiro (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

48 Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung. Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998); Habbo Knoch, *Die Tat als Bild. Fotografien des Holocaust in der deutschen Erinnerungskultur* (Hamburg: Hamburger

Night and Fog (*Nuit et Brouillard*, 1955)[49] – the mass executions in the occupied Soviet Union were far less frequently represented. In Heinrich Böll's novella *The Train Was on Time* (orig. *Der Zug war pünktlich*, 1949), the reader learns that the Jews were killed but is not confronted with the description of the killing itself. The same concerns the successful report *Die unsichtbare Flagge* (The Invisible Flag) by Peter Bamm, which appeared in 1952, or Erich Maria Remarque's *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (orig. *Zeit zu leben und Zeit zu sterben*, 1954).[50] Although a few commanding officers of the killing squads were sentenced in the course of the Einsatzgruppen trials in Nuremberg (1947–1948) and later in Ulm (1958), the topic of the massacres was limited to a few barely illustrated press articles.[51] Only after the screening of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, photographs of the massacres were included in the photo album *Der Gelbe Stern. Die Judenverfolgung in Europa 1933 bis 1945* (1960)[52] and the documentary series *Das Dritte Reich* (1960/1961). Generally, however, West German collective memory lacked voices that might have brought public attention to the massacres. Many of the Soviet Jews had escaped to the east prior to the German invasion in June 1941. Among those who left, only a few survived. Local witnesses of the executions usually remained in their towns and villages and avoided speaking about what they had seen. The perpetrators, in turn, some of whom were interrogated by West German attorneys as early as the 1950s, consequently denied they had witnessed any massacres, let

---

Edition, 2001); Ulrike Weckel, *Beschämende Bilder. Deutsche Reaktionen auf alliierte Dokumentarfilme über befreite Konzentrationslager* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2012).

49 Ewout van der Knaap, *"Nacht und Nebel". Gedächtnis des Holocaust und internationale Wirkungsgeschichte* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 85. In the GDR, the film was occasionally screened since 1960 with changed translations. Sylvie Lindeperg, *Night and Fog: A Film in History*, trans. Tom Mes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 195–205.

50 For details concerning Remarque's novel, see: Thomas Schneider and Angelika Howind, "Die Zensur von Erich Maria Remarques Roman *Zeit zu leben und Zeit zu sterben* 1954 in der BRD. Mit einem Seitenblick auf die Rezeption in der DDR," in *Militärische und zivile Mentalität. Ein literaturkritischer Report*, ed. Ursula Heukenkamp (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991), 303–320.

51 Hilary Earl, *The Nuremberg SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial, 1945–1958: Atrocity, Law, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Claudia Fröhlich, "Der 'Ulmer Einsatzgruppen-Prozess' 1958. Wahrnehmung und Wirkung des ersten großen Holocaust-Prozesses," in *NS-Prozesse und deutsche Öffentlichkeit. Besatzungszeit, frühe Bundesrepublik und DDR*, ed. Jörg Osterloh and Clemens Vollnhals (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 233–262.

52 The album was edited by Gerhard Schoenberner and published by the Rütten & Loening publishing house – the same which in 1961 published documents that incriminated Hans Globke. *Dr. Hans Globke: Aktenauszüge, Dokumente*, ed. Reinhard M. Strecker (Hamburg: Rütten & Loening, 1961).

alone being actively involved.[53] *Am grünen Strand der Spree* was therefore important, because the media complex provided a fictional (yet partly autobiographical) image of the Holocaust beyond the concentration camps and showed the routine of killing.

The "space of experience" in regard to the memory of the mass murder of the European Jews has changed significantly since the initial appearance of *Am grünen Strand der Spree.* While the abovementioned titles are not well-known today, many of the contemporary readers, listeners, and viewers may have watched other miniseries, such as *Holocaust* (1978, dir. Marvin Chomsky) or *Generation War* (*Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*, 2013, dir. Philipp Kadelbach). They provide images that strongly resemble *Am grünen Strand der Spree*: an SS man supervising a mass execution in the Soviet Union in *Holocaust* or Polish peasants repeating antisemitic slogans in *Generation War.* Finally, a great deal of effort has since been made to understand the specificity of the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union. Organizations such as the Shoah Foundation or Yahad-In Unum have collected interviews with witnesses and historians have pored through thousands of files in the archives in order to reconstruct the Nazi machinery of death in the Soviet Union. All these various experiences of being confronted with the representations of the mass killings must influence our current reading of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*.

Among the fragments that were only scarcely commented on at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s was Wilms's military service in Poland, prior to his arrival in the Soviet Union. In both versions of *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, the story starts in the Polish town of Maciejowice in June 1941. Jews still lived there, which was not unlikely in historical terms as the ghetto in the town was established in July 1941 and "liquidated" in October 1942.[54] In *Am grünen Strand der Spree*, however, Jews seem to be persecuted by their Polish neighbors rather than by the German occupiers. Wilms, in turn, sympathizes with both ethnic groups and is consequently presented as a "good German." At first, he helps a Jewish child who escapes a group of Polish men, then is attracted to a Polish girl who teaches him several words in her language, and later feeds a Jewish boy. During the battle against the Red Army near the town of Brest-Litovsk, he feels sorry for the Jews who are told by the German officers to bring and bury the bodies of the fallen soldiers. Notably, except for one sadistic officer, the members of his unit share Wilms's outrage.

53 See the documentation of the trials for Nazi crimes: https://www.expostfacto.nl/index.html, accessed September 9, 2019.

54 Shmuel Spector and Gieffrey Wigoder, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life before and during the Holocaust*, Vol. 2, foreword by Elie Wiesel (New York: New York University Press and Yad Vashem, 2001), 780.

When it comes to describing Orsha, the novel and the miniseries mention the poor weather conditions. In the book, Wilms notes that the temperature had reached –14° Celsius. Television viewers watched the protagonist stomping through the deep snow. While the motif of the hard winter invokes prevalent memories of the war in the Soviet Union, it also reflects the myth of the cold and unfriendly East that had been widespread since Napoleon's defeat in Russia. In the book, Wilms takes photographs during his service – a common practice among Wehrmacht soldiers – and is fascinated by the landscapes and languages of the countries he occupies. Westphal, the director of the radio play, omits this motif, but it is repeated in the miniseries, which provides even more schematic images of Poland and the Soviet Union. In the literary text, Polish and Russian words are written correctly and Wilms takes accurate notes on their meaning. During the editing process of the book, Scholz paid special attention to the correct usage of the diacritical marks of the Slavic languages. However, for the purpose of the radio play and the miniseries, these linguistic remarks were removed. A similar discrepancy characterizes the depictions of Maciejowice. The literary description of the town emphasizes its cultural and social diversity as Wilms notices the Polish and Jewish inhabitants, the pharmacy, and the tailor's shop, and so on, whereas in the miniseries Maciejowice is presented as backward, with wooden houses and hardly any cobbled pavements.

It seems, therefore, that Umgelter created images that largely reproduced clichés of East Central Europe, despite the fact that Scholz's intention was rather the contrary. The writer claimed that he liked the places that he had visited during his military service: "A great journey. War is bad, they say, but I was lucky and as a rare or never fighting man I had enough opportunities to fall in love with the countries. The longer the stay, the more [to love]. Russia therefore the most."[55] This kind of attitude towards the East was also typical of Scholz's later writing. He never accepted the division of Berlin and travelled often to the GDR, even after the erection of the Berlin Wall. Later, he made notes from these trips and published them, usually in *Der Tagesspiegel* – a liberal daily newspaper from West Berlin. Umgelter's adaptation lacks this kind of fascination with the countries eastward of the Iron Curtain. Made at the peak of the "economic miracle" in the Federal Republic of Germany, the miniseries contributes rather to the stereotype of East Central Europe as backward and underdeveloped. When compared to the book and the radio play, the film stands out in its portrayal of an increasingly wild and primitive East. Due to the remoteness and vague qualities of the East European space, the crimes that are committed there by mostly non-German per-

55 Hans Scholz, "Leben mit allerlei Liedern," in *Jahr und Jahrgang 1911*, ed. Hans Mommsen, Hans Scholz, and Jan Herchenröder (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1966), 106–107.

petrators give the impression of being unrelated to the lives of the readers, listeners, and viewers in the postwar reality. Consequently, the audience took this image of Eastern Europe for granted: no reactions whatsoever addressed the portrayal of Poland and the Soviet Union.

With the exception of the Soviet trains and the Latvian gunmen, Scholz's description generally corresponds with the historical sources.[56] The testimonies of witnesses collected by the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission for Nazi war crimes[57] confirm Wilms's comments on the place of the massacre at "the Jewish cemetery," the size of the trench: "ten by ten meters, four in depth," and the number of victims: "eighteen hundred people."[58] However, the director from SWF, Westphal, had already added sounds that were absent from Scholz's text, among them men shouting "*bystro*" and "*davaj*" – Russian words meaning 'fast' or 'go on.' On the one hand, these expressions suggested the local population's engagement in the massacre, but on the other hand, they can be seen as references to individual memories of the veterans of the Eastern Front, who may have heard the two words in combat or as POWs.

As in the book, in the radio play there is no information about any means of transportation. This corresponds with the historical sources as well, because the Jews killed in the occupied Soviet Union were usually local people forced to walk to the shooting sites. None of the consulted sources speak to Umgelter's motivation for adding the motif of the train to his adaptation. He might have used props from his previous miniseries, *So weit die Füße tragen*, which was shot one year earlier in the same studio as *Am grünen Strand der Spree* and contained scenes in which Soviet trains transported German soldiers to Soviet POW camps. Indeed, the wagons in both series look very much alike. Consequently, the motif might have been understood as a parallel between the fate of the Jews and the experiences of the German POWs, especially when viewers had the miniseries *So weit die Füße tragen* still in mind. In any case, Umgelter's version juxtaposes images of the execution with Soviet symbols.

The television version of *Am grünen Strand der Spree* thus presents the Holocaust as an international crime committed on Soviet soil, with Soviet support. Of all the props, it is the train, the very icon of the Nazi machinery of death, that is associated here with the hammer and sickle. Yet, the viewers and critics in 1960

---

56 Arad, *The Holocaust*, 187; *Tragedija evreev*; Romanowski, "Orsha"; Aleksandr Rozenberg, *Po stranicam istorii evrejskoj Oršy* (Minsk: A.N. Varaksi, 2012), 52.

57 *Tragedija evreev*, 170–177; Alexander Victor Prusin, "'Fascist Criminals to the Gallows!' Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials, December 1945–February 1946," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003), 14.

58 Scholz, *Through the Night*, 51, 54.

did not mention this discrepancy. Possibly they did not recognize it at all as the train wagon was a less common Holocaust icon back then. Although it had previously appeared in, among others, Wanda Jakubowska's Auschwitz film *The Last Stage* (1948) and had been repeated by Resnais in *Night and Fog*, it took another three to four decades for it to become a widely recognized symbol.[59] Rather, *Am grünen Strand der Spree* was itself among the films that contributed to the emergence of this icon, which would explain why it is so eye-catching today.

The clearest delineation between fact and fiction appears in the motif of the Latvian paramilitary force, however. The Latvian auxiliary police did collaborate with the SS at the time and were indeed involved in mass killings, but never in Orsha.[60] In the book and the radio play, they obviously cover up the crimes committed by German troops. Umgelter kept them in the miniseries, albeit changed their appearance by using the white armbands bearing the inscription "In the service of the German Wehrmacht." This detail deserves attention as the Wehrmacht's participation in the executions was subsequently denied until the end of the 20th century. That is why the curators of the so-called second Wehrmacht exhibition referred to the miniseries as a "provocation" and called the reactions to it "taboo breaking."[61] Indeed, viewers reacted very critically to the suggestion that the Wehrmacht might have been involved in the crime. Apart from finding this image "inaccurate," some viewers raised concerns over whether young men would join the newly founded Bundeswehr after the suggestion that the Wehrmacht had been guilty of mass killings.[62] As in the case of the train, we can only speculate about Umgelter's motivation for using the armbands. Yet at the same time, the director added the figure of the SS man, who is in charge of the execution. Unlike the armbands which suggested the Wehrmacht's co-responsibility for the shooting, the SS man corresponded to the historical consensus of the time, according to which the SS was the only formation in the German armed forces that could be considered criminal.[63]

Among the motifs that shifted the responsibility for the atrocities onto non-Germans are also the antisemitic children whom Wilms meets on his way to the

---

59 Oren Baruch Stier, *Holocaust Icon: Symbolizing the Shoah in History and Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 15.

60 Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia 1941–1944: The Missing Center* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1996).

61 *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944. Austellungskatalog*, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition 2002), 675–676.

62 HA WDR, Sign. 5720, Letter to Hanns Hartmann from March 27, 1960, unpaginated.

63 Scholz himself was skeptical about this change. Hans Scholz, "Der Autor vor dem Fernsehschirm," *Der Tagesspiegel*, May 29, 1960: 5.

shooting site. In the novel, they keep saying, partly in Russian, "*Jewreii kaputt.* The Jew is done for."[64] They are absent from the radio play, but reappear in the miniseries. Their presence may be just another hint that the local population supported the persecution of the Jews. Indeed, historical sources provide much evidence of such incidents,[65] but, seen from today's perspective, the presence of the antisemitic children in the West German media complex appears as a means of blurring the primary German responsibility for the Holocaust. This is especially problematic as children are usually associated with innocence. Attributing to them the role of co-perpetrators seems to break a certain taboo. Or did Scholz and Umgelter imply that antisemitic propaganda influenced even children? In the miniseries, they repeat the antisemitic slogan in a language that resembles Polish rather than Russian or Belarussian. Notably, in Scholz's novel the usage of languages is always correct. The linguistic mix-up in Umgelter's version proves therefore once again how the West German popular culture of the time treated East Central Europe as a strange and wild region where people spoke bizarre but similarly sounding languages.

Conclusion

The fact that the media complex *Am grünen Strand der Spree* appeared in the Federal Republic of Germany during the Cold War influenced its production and reception. Even though the West and East German book markets were officially separated from each other, literary texts from the Federal Republic often reached readers in the GDR. Smuggling books was not difficult until the construction of the Berlin Wall. Hence, the publishers at Hoffmann & Campe feared political controversy due to Scholz's positive description of the "East zone." Anxious about potential accusations of supporting Soviet propaganda, they forced the author to delete large fragments of his novel. At the same time, the publishers were less

---

64 Scholz, *Through the Night*, 48.

65 For the specific case of Orsha, see: Arad, *Holocaust*; *Tragedija evreev*; Romanowski, "Orsha"; Rozenberg, *Po stranicam*. For the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union see: Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (Handmills: Macmillan Press, 2000); Leonid Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns: Collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II* (New York, Oxford: Berhgahn, 2011); Waitman Wade Boern, *Marching into Darkness: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belarus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). For the Holocaust in occupied Poland see, among others, the recent publication *Night Without End: The Fate of Jews in German-Occupied Poland*, ed. Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelking (Bloomington: Yad Vashem and Indiana University Press, 2022).

afraid of printing the description of the massacre. They took their readers' horizon of expectations into account, assuming that some of them might not like the passage, but anticipated no political consequences.

Friedrich Bischoff and Hanns Hartmann from the SWF and WDR, respectively, had no such concerns. The problematic episode about the Sorbs was already shortened in the novel and they did not have to adapt it in full length anyway. Besides, the SWF was among the radio channels that were not available in the GDR and television was not yet very popular there. In fact, the discussion about the depiction of the massacre in the miniseries was limited to the West German media. And even there the scene failed to become a political issue. The reviews appeared almost exclusively in the film and television sections of the daily and weekly press, while the channel's advisory board did not even react to Hartmann's warning. The viewers who claimed that the images had been inappropriate or shocking saw themselves as victims under attack by images projected into their own living rooms. As television was a fairly young mass medium providing mainly entertainment, it seems that no one really expected a miniseries to raise weighty debates.

Koselleck argues that modern history is characterized by a discrepancy between the expectations and the experience. In fact, our current experiences with the history and memory of the Holocaust may change our views of *Am grünen Strand der Spree.* As we have read and seen many other accounts that prove the mass killings beyond doubt, the story about Jürgen Wilms can hardly shock a contemporary reader, listener, or viewer. It provides evidence, however, of West German efforts to kill two birds with one stone: to introduce the issue of the mass murder of the European Jews in the public sphere and at the same time to blur the German responsibility at its core. Nonetheless, this early proof of coming to terms with the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union remains exceptional in the West German culture of the time. Just one year after the appearance of the miniseries the Eichmann trial was broadcast on television in many European countries, both in the West and East, and in 1963 the Auschwitz trials began in Frankfurt. These widely received events shifted public attention towards the atrocities in the concentration camps. Despite of *Am grünen Strand der Spree* and a few other accounts, among them the abovementioned miniseries *Holocaust* and *Generation War*, the mass killings in the occupied Soviet Union have never become a solid component of German memory culture and have remained overshadowed by the memory of the camps.

Anna Pollmann

“The Second Death”: Günther Anders’ Travels to Postwar Berlin

In February 1959, when the Students’ Committee against Nuclear Armament invited Günther Anders to Berlin, they dedicated a great deal of effort to bringing him to the former capital of the German Reich. Among other correspondence, the letters preceding that visit demonstrate the extent to which Anders thought of himself as the intellectual and philosophical mentor of the anti-nuclear protests that began in 1958. Initially led by the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) under the existentialist-sounding title “The Campaign against Atomic Death,” the protests continued outside parliament as well.

In a letter to his former wife Hannah Arendt, with whom he had lived in Berlin between 1929 and 1933, he wrote with both pride and a hint of astonishment about his popularity with the West German public. “As a so-called nuclear moral expert (what things exist!),” he was supposed to “constantly deliver exclamation points. But for God’s sake, only exclamation points.”[1]

Given the political developments of the Cold War, Anders’ preoccupation with a radically reinvented theory of moral action turned into a “nuclear idée fixe” – at least that is how an indignant friend of his from Europe put it, as quoted by Anders in his travel journals from Japan: “As sensational as your address might sound, I feel depressed by it. To me, it is proof that you turned into a ‘particularist,’ that you got carried away by one singular issue, that you made yourself unilateral and now spend your life with one nuclear idée fixe. Hence, you’re missing out.”[2] Anders responded that admittedly, “the question about the sheer ‘if’ (if

1 Letter from Günther Anders to Hannah Arendt, April 2, 1958, in: Hannah Arendt and Günther Anders, *Schreib doch mal* hard facts *über Dich: Briefe 1939 bis 1975*, ed. Kerstin Putz (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2016), 70. For a contextualization of the correspondence, see the editor’s epilogue: “Nachwort. Korrespondenzen. Hannah Arendt und Günther Anders,” 227–254.
2 Günther Anders, *Der Mann auf der Brücke. Tagebücher aus Hiroshima und Nagasaki* (Munich: Beck, 1959), 174.

Note: This chapter has been translated from German by Susan Wille and is based on parts of my book chapter “Von Zeitgenossen und Menschen: Eine negative Anthropologie des technischen Zeitalters,” in Anna Pollmann, *Fragmente aus der Endzeit. Negatives Geschichtsdenken bei Günther Anders* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 43–116. A longer and in some theoretical aspects more elaborate version of this chapter was published in Jan Gerber, Philipp Graf, and Anna Pollmann, eds., *Geschichtsoptimismus und Katastrophenbewusstsein. Der Holocaust in Europa* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022), 201–224.

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-012

the world would continue)" certainly lacked "any depth," any "historical saturation," and that the "banality of the apocalypse" was indeed indisputable.[3]

Anders' ironic comment on the tedium of the apocalypse seems surprising given the urgency usually oozing from his texts on that very subject. The charged relationship between the apocalyptic and the historical will be the focus of this chapter, since it directs our perspective towards the specificity of historical consciousness after the atomic bomb had been dropped and under the wider conditions of the Cold War, especially its arms race. The catastrophic explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki demonstrated to the world for the first time that not only the technical means to end human history as such existed, but also the willingness to employ them. Anders referred to this event as a "historical suprathreshold."[4] For the first time, the possibility "that everything (not only all future, but with it also all past) was futile and would be lost" was laid bare. His magnum opus, *The Obsolescence of the Human* – which he started to write during his American exile and later finalized with a chapter on the atomic bomb – can be approached in this double point of view. It was published at a particular historical moment – a 1950s West Germany, shaped by both a euphoric social reconstruction *and* nuclear threat – but it also contained traces of his experiences in exile and the process of historical insight he had undergone there.

The imagination of a possible end of mankind also affects the very conditions for thinking about the Holocaust, this article claims. Günther Anders' writings are an extremely interesting case for exploring the relationship and differences of these two events of mass destruction, because they show many ambivalences and boundaries when making analogies. These ambivalences become tentatively visible while Anders is trying to agitate the West German anti-nuclear movement in the late 1950s. Since the time of his invitation by the Students' Committee, he had become an important mentor not only for the protest movement, but also for the journal *Das Argument*, a major platform for the West German unorthodox Marxist left.

The ambivalences in his thinking concerning the Holocaust become even more evident when compared to his political and biographical writing as found in his philosophical diaries *Die Schrift an der Wand* (The Writing on the Wall). Published in 1967, these ended with a travelogue from the Auschwitz extermination camp to his place of birth in the former German, then Polish city of Wrocław (Breslau), where he grew up in a secular German-Jewish milieu. Because there

3 Anders, *Der Mann auf der Brücke*, 175.

4 Günther Anders, *Antiquiertheit Bd. 1: Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1987 [1956]), 262. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by Susan Wille.

was no continuity-based story of his life to tell, Anders described the notes as “negative diaries.” These autobiographical snapshots are many things at once, but not what one would expect from a diary: they comprise a typology of the emigrant, and a topography of flight and return. Places like Paris, Los Angeles, Berlin, Vienna, Auschwitz, and his birth city of Breslau play a central role as “chronotopes”[5] through which a different way of thinking about history can be traced.[6] This article will discuss the relationship between the historical consciousness – namely Holocaust consciousness – and apocalyptic thinking referring to a short time span between Anders’ two trips to postwar Berlin from 1952 to 1959. It takes into account not only Günther Anders’ work on the atomic bomb, but also the reception of his work in West Germany. The relationship between past, present, and future is presented in completely different terms at each end of this timeframe.

Berlin 1953: A Mirage of the Past

The lecture trip to the Free University of Berlin (Freie Universität Berlin) in spring 1959 was not Anders’ first visit to postwar Berlin. Anders’ later visit had a clear political mission framed by programmatic declarations and the addressing of a post-apocalyptic political human subject. His first explorations of the destroyed city had been captured in 1953, in a completely different context. It is in the biographical introspection of his journal that we find his first descriptions of the city and its inhabitants. These, titled *Ruinen heute* (Ruins Today), bear witness to his deep bewilderment and historical perspective.

“Über Berlin” (Above Berlin) is the title of one of the journal entries Anders captured in 1953 during his first visit after the war, 20 years after he had fled Berlin on the Berlin–Paris night train. Only two years earlier Anders had returned to the German literary establishment with his controversial Kafka essay, *Kafka Pro und Contra. Die Prozess-Unterlagen* (Kafka, Pro and Contra: The Trial Records).[7]

5 For a strong emphasis on Michail Bachtin’s concept of chronotope, see: Ruth Ginsburg, “Ida Fink’s Scraps and Traces: Forms of Space and the Chronotope of Trauma Narratives,” in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 4, no. 2 (2006): 205–218.

6 Günther Anders, *Die Schrift an der Wand. Tagebücher 1941–1966* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1967). For his travelogue from Poland, see Irmela von der Lühe, “Besuch im Hades. Günther Anders’ Reise nach Auschwitz und Breslau 1966,” in *Wrocław – Berlin. Germanistischer Brückenschlag im deutsch-polnischen Dialog, Bd. 4: Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. Bernd Balzer and Marek Halub (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut – Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe; Neisse Verlag, 2006), 169–179.

7 Günther Anders, *Kafka. Pro und contra. Die Prozess-Unterlagen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1951).

The subject had accompanied him since the time of his Paris (1933–1936) and American exile (1936–1950). During these years, however, he only had a few opportunities for publication. He wrote reviews for the exiled Institute for Social Research and published some philosophical articles on Heidegger and philosophical anthropology.[8] However, he had to make a living mainly through "odd jobs" on the assembly line and in the film studios of Hollywood. The publication of his Kafka book even preceded his own physical return to Europe in 1952, where he chose to live in Vienna with his Austrian wife, the writer Elisabeth Freundlich.

His arrival by plane to Berlin, as documented in the journal, had hidden the historic city topography that was so familiar to him prior to the war. From the aircraft, the site of the Reichstag building had been obscured by an endless field of "rectangularly arranged ruins."[9] This "indistinctability" not only applied to the heaped-up rubble of the Reichstag building, but also to his perception of the causal connections that had led to this landscape of devastation. His glance onto the ubiquitous ruins mirrored his sense of an omnipresent, permeating guilt, which had become unfathomable in its vastness: "[. . .] the higher the number of its [the guilt's] victims, the higher its chance to hide away. Only the small guilt remains visible [. . .], the vast guilt buries itself under its consequences."[10]

The occasion that led Anders to travel to Berlin for the first time after the war was Fritz Kortner's staging of the play *The Silver Tassie* by Irish dramatist Sean O'Casey in West Berlin's Schiller Theater on June 21, 1953. His wife, Elisabeth Freundlich, had translated the play into German and Anders himself had adapted the "poetically inflated war scenes."[11] The mid-June theater visit had been overshadowed by the strikes and riots of workers in the Soviet occupation zone, which were sparked by the increase in labor standards and, more generally, were directed against the new course taken by the Socialist Unity Party (SED). It had led to violent intervention by the Soviet military, against which the Western allied forces had protested, but not intervened militarily.[12] The day of June 17 – which later had its own life as a "beacon of freedom" in West Germany, symbolizing the

8 See, for example, Günther Anders, "Une interpretation de l'a posteriori," *Recherches philosophiques* 4 (1934/35): 65–80; "On the Pseudo-Concreteness of Heidegger's Philosophy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 3, no. 3 (1948): 337–371.

9 Anders, "Ruinen heute (1952/53)," in *Die Schrift an der Wand*, 229.

10 Anders, "Ruinen heute (1952/53)," in *Die Schrift an der Wand*, 215.

11 Elisabeth Freundlich, *Die fahrenden Jahre, Erinnerungen* (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1992), 137.

12 For the reception of June 17 in East and West Germany, cf. Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 65–85.

wish for German reunification and eventually declared a national holiday – had been accompanied by violent riots, looting, and physical attacks.

From the very beginning, Elisabeth Freundlich described the atmosphere around the staging as aggressive. The theater management had received threatening letters demanding cancellation of the play, which had previously been unknown to German audiences.[13] During the staging of O'Casey's anti-war play, strident protests occurred and revealed antisemitic resentment against the Jewish actor and director Fritz Kortner.[14]

The scandal surrounding *The Silver Tassie* reminded Anders of something that had happened 20 years earlier, when Kortner had stood on the stage of the *Deutsches Theater* in Berlin for the last time before emigrating, while the Nazis had tried to chase him out of the building.[15] Regarding the protests of 1953, Anders only stated in a rather general manner that they were an expression of the "'executing' power of mimesis," as the confrontation with war scenes on the stage had more than ever made the reality (of Berlin) visible to the audience, and thus provoked a defensive attitude.[16] And although the notes Anders took in Berlin in 1952/53 barely acknowledge the tense political and social atmosphere surrounding him, they certainly bear traces of overlapping time dimensions. They awoke memories of the 1930s antisemitic scandal at the same place, though political circumstances were rather different.

Anders also described a visit to an exhibition entitled "Modern Art," as well as its visitors, in a similarly abstract manner. The resurrection of the term "modern" seemed to him almost "eerie." Its "now paradoxical historical optimism" made it "horribly obsolete," he wrote, and to him the term, as a piece of vocabulary, could only emit "the idiosyncratic odor" of yellowed futures and faded hopes.[17]

It was no longer possible for Anders to recognize the dialectics of destruction and liberation rooted in modernity, since its destructive side had culminated in the extermination of human beings: "[. . .] the disintegration machine continued

---

13 Elisabeth Freundlich, "Kortners bitterer Pokal," *Frankfurter Hefte* 8 (1953): 638–641, here 638.

14 Freundlich, "Kortners bitterer Pokal," 638. This anxious perception of the events surrounding June 17 and the parallel memory of the Nazi takeover was not an isolated case. For instance, the memories of Eugen Gollomb, Auschwitz survivor and later chairman of the Jewish community in Leipzig, as well as those of Alexander Abusch, are compiled in Karin Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt. Die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR* (Berlin: Böhlau, 1999), 396–407.

15 I thank Stefan Hofmann for drawing my attention to the turmoil in the context of the 1932 staging. Cf. Richard D. Critchfield, *From Shakespeare to Fritsch: The Provocative Fritz Kortner* (Heidelberg: Synchron, 2008), 65–66.

16 Anders, *Ruinen heute*, 234–235.

17 Anders, *Ruinen heute*, 241.

its work: Now, it is every single person that's disintegrated, each individual is chopped down into 'dividuals.' [. . .] As they stood in front of the artworks, they were fragments before fragments; torsos enjoying torsos. In fact, they themselves belonged in the paintings, as shards amongst the depicted shards."[18]

Soon after, he again reflected on how the premises of modern aesthetics had turned into reality. For Anders, surrealist artwork had fulfilled the reversal of the thing and the human.[19] Both problems – the very unmetaphorical objectification of the human and its simultaneous destruction as a subject – were at the core of Anders' work after his remigration in 1952. They also laid bare the ruins of his own thinking, which was brought about by the biographical disruption of his own emigration and the historical caesurae of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. All of these historical and biographical breaks made obsolete not only the epistemological and philosophical traditions Anders had belonged to – Marxism, existential ontology, philosophical anthropology, and phenomenology – but also the means of representation. Anders tried to shed new light on present singular phenomena and this change of perspective necessarily questioned traditional forms of philosophical classification. Yet, even though Anders still addressed *the human* rhetorically, he no longer addressed it as an entity in the present, but as a temporally decentered, *obsolete* (German: *antiquiert*) *human.*

1956: The Obsolescence of the Human

Only a few years after surveying Berlin's ruins, in 1956 Anders published four essays he had begun to write during his American exile under the title *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution* (The Obsolescence of the Human: The Soul in the Age of the Second Industrial Revolution).[20] With this work, Anders was one of the first intellectuals to present a comprehensive philosophical analysis of the atomic bomb. The iconic title did not yet annunciate an ontological break though. In fact, its subtitle, "The Soul in the Age of the Second Industrial Revolution," had the tone of an even

18 Anders, *Ruinen heute*, 243.

19 Günther Anders, "Die Antiquiertheit der Phantasie," in *Antiquiertheit*. vol. 2, 330–333; first published as "Die Krise der Phantasie, Zwei Philosophische Dialoge," in *Die Sammlung März* 10 (1955), 122–134.

20 The book is currently being translated into English by Christopher John Muller and will pe published as "The Obsolescence of the Human." Two chapters were translated for the American journal *Dissent*: Gunther Anders, "Reflections of the H Bomb," *Dissent* (Spring 1956) and "The World as Phantom and Matrix" (Winter 1956).

more general cultural criticism and zeitgeist critique, which made the book one of the many pessimistic analyses of the technological age to be published after the Second World War.

Yet, it was only when he finished his essay on the atomic bomb that Anders felt compelled to compile and publish these technology-critical essays as a collection. The book begins with a journal entry from his Californian exile in 1942. While visiting the technology museum, one of his friends had "hidden his hands behind his back while spectating at the apparatuses that worked with such accuracy and refinement."[21] Based on this observation, Anders developed the idea of the "Promethean shame." He transfers the anthropological phenomenon of a failed self-identification from the interpersonal sphere to the relationship between man and the world of objects. The concept of a Fordist assembly line production was central to describing his own feeling of shame from his own working experience during his American exile. In the act of failure before the machine, the worker is thrown back "onto himself, the old residue," confronted with a state of being "worldless, inept, and 'discarded,'" and "not knowing what to do with himself."[22] Central to the dynamics of capitalist production – understood as the generation of ever newer products and needs – is a "morphologically constant" body; a "dead weight amongst the rising apparatuses."[23] Anders observes this tension in several cultural and social phenomena of his time. He finds examples in the violent extension of human limits not only in the industrial sphere, but also in the National Socialist camp system.

Stretching the representational method of illustrating this shift of boundaries between man and thing or technology – and by that depicting the Marxian terms "reification" and "alienation" in their literal sense – was more than a formal method for Anders. It corresponded to the central (philosophical) premise of his work, as Anders himself, not very humbly, described it: "a critique of human limits."[24] In his *The Obsolescence of the Human,* he responded to those limits by calling for an "extension of the limits of philosophy." Accordingly, he points out that

> those who reject the singular as an epistemological subject of philosophizing, because it is contingent and empirical, sabotage their own philosophizing. They are like the simpleton who bricked the entrance to his newly built house from the outside because it was "something ambiguous," as he wrote on the cornerstone. [. . .] He froze to death on the threshold.[25]

21 Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 23.
22 Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 94.
23 Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 33.
24 Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 18.
25 Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 12.

This new orientation, in Anders' case, also meant developing a disrespectful relationship with tradition. His work does echo the influences of some of his teachers, like Husserl and Heidegger, though he thoroughly opposes the Hegelian systematic thinking that denies "the prole"[26] access, and also rejects a "pseudo-concrete" turn toward the existing, as in Martin Heidegger's epochal work, *Being and Time* (1927).

Anders' technique of alienation also has to be considered in connection with Marx's fetishism of commodities. According to Marx, the mystery of the produced and consumable commodity lies in the fact – as spelled out in his famous formula – that "the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour."[27] While for Marx the commodity obscures the social relation mediated by abstract labor and exchange, Anders uses the technique of inversion to present the notion of things as actors but clearly ignores all levels of social mediation.[28] Analogous to this inversion, he describes "the obfuscation of labour and activity."[29] Due to increasing industrialization and mechanization, human activity has been degraded to a mere "co-laboration," or machine support. Here too, it is noteworthy that Anders' remarks do not use Marx's explanations of abstract work.

The dropping of the atomic bomb – human agency reduced to the push of a button – claiming tens of thousands of lives and leaving behind many heavily contaminated survivors, provided a glimpse into the possibility of nothingness; a vast emptiness, an attainable end of the world and humankind. With that, the gap between creation and imagination had been expanded immeasurably: a man-made "event that, although empirical, withdrew itself from the grasp of the imagination."[30] Following the "non-synchronicity" of man as described by Anders, the bomb seemed to mark the end point of human development. It had suspended the means-ends principle of creation, since even the smallest possible impact of the atomic bomb would still be greater than "all military or political ends defined by man, no matter their grandness." With the creation of the atomic bomb,

26 Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 12–13.

27 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works: Volume 35: Marx, Capital, Vol. 1: Production of Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 83. In the original: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Das Kapital Bd. I, Erster Abschnitt, MEW Band 23* ([East] Berlin: 1968), 86.

28 To this end, as to Anders' handling of literary inversion figures, cf. Magret Lohmann, *Philosophieren in der Endzeit. Zur Gegenwartsanalyse von Günther Anders* (Munich: W. Fink, 1996), 109–113.

29 Gabriele Althaus, *Leben zwischen Sein und Nichts. Drei Studien zu Günther Anders* (Berlin: Metropol, 1989), 120.

30 Althaus, *Leben zwischen Sein und Nichts*, 120.

human beings had turned into "masters of the apocalypse."[31] The "Promethean gap" gave way to the transgression of the historical itself.

Yet, the Promethean gap also helped to frame two past events that were inherently "erratic:" Auschwitz and Hiroshima. While in exile in America, Anders had heard the radio report about the dropping of the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. He later recalled that his thinking and imagination had gone on strike in the face of the "monstrosity of the events."[32] He had found similar words in a journal entry already in 1944:

> Since our perception is incapable of grasping the contemporary world, since it is too shortsighted to see the enormous, or rather, the monstrous proportions of the havoc we ourselves can wreak, since it disguises the monstrous as unmonstrous, it becomes merely a variety of fantasy, as contradictory as it may sound. [. . .] We should at least be able to grasp the enormity of what we can produce and set in motion. [. . .] Yet, I am not willing to sacrifice any vision of the enormity of what havoc we can wreak: that is, the vision of the enormity of our misdeeds. Of the seven thousand.[33]

The figure of 7,000 people murdered, given by Anders, was later found to severely underestimate the magnitude of the Holocaust. His journal entries from the 1940s foreshadowed his central motive, but remained unpublished until 1979, thus his struggle concerning a proper representation of the Holocaust was first reflected on only in the chapter "Reflections on the H-Bomb."

The epistemological challenge Auschwitz and Hiroshima posed for Anders as single events seemed bigger than an understanding and interpretation as an outcome of the same structures of modern society: "Those who are astonished by these [atrocities] as erratic chapters of our epoch, refuse themselves an understanding thereof, since those atrocities in isolation cannot bear any reality, at least not an understandable one."[34] Both events could only be explained through their "kindred connection": the "type of activity" that had led to their realization.[35] In that regard, they occurred to him as "twin events."[36] Anders then explains, in a passage several pages long, the organizational structure of mass killing in the National Socialist extermination camps. As a consequence of "medi-

31 Anders, *Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 239.

32 Interview mit Mathias Greffrath, "Wenn ich verzweifelt bin, was geht's mich an?", in *Günther Anders antwortet. Interviews und Erklärungen*, ed. Elke Schubert (Berlin: Edition Tiamat, 1987), 19–53, see 42.

33 Günther Anders, "Rückblendungen 1944–1948," in *Besuch im Hades. Auschwitz und Breslau 1966. Nach "Holocaust" 1979* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1993), 39–40.

34 Anders, *Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 288.

35 Anders, *Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 288.

36 Anders, *Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 346, Annotation 255.

ated" production, based on a division of labor and comprised of a sequence of individual processes "devoid of any telos," workers had turned into murderers.

Marx found that the dialectic of labor lies in its quality of simultaneous appropriation and alienation of the world. On the one hand, it was a necessary mediation between man and nature, and – in its unalienated, creative form – a driving force of human emancipation. In its abstract, capitalist form, however, labor increasingly divides man from the world. In opposition to Marx, though, Anders further argues that the increasing alienation of man, not only from nature and the world but also from the products of labor, ultimately results in the exact opposite of the predicted process of emancipation: the very unmediated destruction of individual human beings in the industrially organized work process of the National Socialist extermination camps.[37] The smallest possible work step, the button-pushing, had demonstrated one thing during the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: not only the possibility of killing individual human beings, but also that of an end to humankind.

While the development of the atomic bomb in the 1940s had still been part of the "dimension of history" since the preliminary research had been driven by the hope to "achieve historical future goals," this historical dimension had "co-exploded" alongside the nuclear warheads "on the day of the first explosion."[38] Given this background, the mass extermination in the German camps occurred to him as a mere "pre-history" of an apocalyptic scenario, a final catastrophic event, but one that was at least still part of history.

Here, Anders writes, the universal statement "All men are mortal" has lost its former ubiquitous meaning. If it would have been "inscribed above the entrance gates of the liquidation installations, it would have aroused jeers." Once the camps were put into operation, it should have been transformed into the more accurate proposition: "All men are exterminable." But even with this proposition, the shock of the modern philosophical understanding of death and killing had not even reached its endpoint. Anders clarifies this by demonstrating a small linguistic shift:

> However, many things changed in the last decade, the bomb under whose threat we live has ensured that [the truth] still lives in this proposition to this day. And if anything changed, it is only that the implication has become even more evil, for what is exterminable today is *humankind as a whole*, and not "merely all men." [emphasis in original][39]

37 For a more detailed account of the connection between Marx's abstract work and how Anders related to it, see Reimann, *Verweigerte Versöhnung*, 99–107.

38 Anders, *Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 263.

39 Anders, *Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 243.

In this context, Anders also spoke of a "second death," which did not refer to human individuals, however, but rather to the question of the possibility of historical transmission in the face of the nuclear situation: "How would that, which has been, differ from that which has never been, when there is (going to be) nobody who could remember that which has been?"[40] Not only does the notion of the final eradication of humankind move into the realm of the imaginable, the final death also puts history – as a mobile medium of memory and transmissibility – to an end.[41]

Anders' fable "Die beweinte Zukunft" (The Mourned Future) can also be seen in this context. It is an adaptation of the Noah story from the Book of Genesis, written in 1961 and first published three years later in the collection *Gegen den Tod. Stimmen deutscher Schriftsteller gegen die Atombombe* (Against Death: Voices of German Writers against the Atomic Bomb), edited by the left-wing writer and publisher Bernward Vesper and his partner Gudrun Ensslin, a later member of the Red Army Faction.[42] Anders' impressive opening in the volume focuses on Noah, who unsuccessfully tries to convince his fellow citizens of the necessity to build an ark. Contrary to divine law, he steps onto the street in a mourning robe as "the bereaved of the dead of tomorrow," hoping to address "those weaknesses and vices of his fellow citizens, their curiosity, their schadenfreude and their superstition."[43] The evocation of the Holocaust here is primarily created through references to the Kaddish, the Jewish sanctification or mourning prayer. The Kaddish for the future dead, as anticipated by Anders, has to be understood as one that catches up at the same time, as a Kaddish for all those who have already died, anonymously and without a prayer in their honor. For that very anthology, and in the same line of thinking about universal human death, the writer and Holocaust survivor Nelly Sachs gave permission to reprint a poem from her poetry cycle, *In den Wohnungen des Todes* (In the Houses of Death), written in 1944 in face of the Holocaust.

40 Anders, *Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1, 245.

41 Hans Ebeling, "Die Willkür des Todes und der Widerstand der Vernunft. Historische und interkulturelle Differenzen," in *Tod und Sterben*, ed. Rolf Winau and Hans Peter Rosemeier (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984), 51–73; Gudrun Ensslin and Bernward Vesper, eds., *Gegen den Tod. Stimmen deutscher Schriftsteller gegen die Atombombe* (Stuttgart: Studio Neue Literatur Gudrun Ensslin, 1964), 15–25; Helga Raulff, *Strahlungen, Atom und Literatur* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2008), 33.

42 Gudrun Ensslin (1940–1977), founder and member of the far-left terrorist group Red Army Fraction, and her partner, the writer and publisher Bernward Vesper (1938–1971).

43 Anders, "Die beweinte Zukunft" (1961), in Ensslin and Vesper, *Gegen den Tod*, 17–18.

West Berlin 1959: In the Shadow of the Apocalypse

When Günther Anders visited Berlin in February 1959, for the second time since his return to Europe, he no longer regarded the city as the landscapes of ruins and rubble whose epistemological meaning he had tried to capture six years earlier from the aerial view of the plane. Now he entered a city that was, beside Cuba, the Cold War's most important location. The Berlin question had become a central point of conflict for the two superpowers, caused by the repeated attempt of the Soviet Union – which was strengthening its domestic and foreign policy under Khrushchev – to incorporate West Berlin into the GDR. Soon after, the President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, declared that he would even accept nuclear war in order to preserve the status quo of the city – as a guarantee of freedom for the inhabitants of West Berlin, the presence of Western troops, and their secure access.[44]

In his short text "Berlin," issued after the Berlin Wall was built in the summer of 1961, the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot described the city as an "insane political abstraction" that was "something dramatically concrete at the same time."[45] The coexistence of concretion and abstraction, which Blanchot mentioned, was also reflected in the discussion of a necessary political practice in the "nuclear situation."

The politically concrete reality, the division of the former German Reich and the dwindling chance for an imminent reunification in the process of integration with the West, led to an abstract threat that crystallized in the fear of a nuclear war on German territory. Günther Anders became an intellectual mentor for the emerging anti-nuclear movement among students in postwar Berlin. The Students' Committee against Nuclear Armament, which had hosted Anders in the late 1950s, had been formed in the context of a campaign titled "Kampf dem Atomtod" (Fight the Nuclear Death), the first post-World War II protest movement in the Federal Republic. First initiated before the Bundestag election of 1957, a total of one and a half million German citizens protested for months against the plans of the Adenauer government to arm the Bundeswehr (German armed forces) with nuclear weapons under the control of the United States.[46]

---

44 Bernd Stöver, *Der Kalte Krieg 1947–1991. Geschichte eines radikalen Zeitalters* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2007), 132–135.

45 Maurice Blanchot, "Berlin," in *Modern Language Notes* 109, no. 3 (1994): 345–355.

46 Cf. *"Kampf dem Atomtod!" Die Protestbewegung 1957/58 in zeithistorischer und gegenwärtiger Perspektive*, ed. Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg (München: Dölling und Galitz, 2009).

The political and public debate surrounding the integration of West Germany into NATO's nuclear policy under conditions of the Cold War acquired its own specific character, given that the question of how to deal with the National Socialist past remained a pressing issue. During the protests, a connection was drawn not only to the traumas of two world wars and the Allied bombing campaign, but also to the lack of resistance against the Nazis, highlighted especially by the Christian and unionist opponents of rearmament.[47]

The Social Democrats dropped their support for the campaign with the adoption of the Godesberg Program in 1959. This included not only the reorientation of the party but an acceptance of NATO's deterrence doctrine – and thus also the arming of the Bundeswehr.[48] What remained was an extra-parliamentary protest movement, which from 1960 onwards found an important organizational platform in the so-called Easter Marches. In contrast to its predecessor Fight the Nuclear Death, this equally existential name expressed a hope of redemption.[49]

While Anders' efforts to initiate a branch of the Committee against Nuclear Armament in Vienna – where he had lived since his return to Europe in 1950 – failed, he became a virtual icon of the movement in West Berlin.[50] With hindsight, the Marxist philosopher and then student Wolfgang Fritz Haug described Anders' seminar as well as his *The Obsolescence of the Human* as the founding moments of the leftist journal *Das Argument*, of which he himself became editor. "On the basis of a strictly conducted ontological analysis of time," the first *Das Argument*

---

47 Susanna Schrafstetter, "The Long Shadow of the Past: History, Memory and the Debate over West Germany's Nuclear Status," in *History and Memory* 16, no. 1 (2004): 118–145, here 120; Schrafstetter, "Auschwitz and the Nuclear *Sonderweg*: Nuclear Weapons and the Shadow of the Nazi Past," in *Coping with the Nazi Past: West German Debates on Nazism and Generational Conflict 1955–1975*, ed. Philipp Gassert and Alan E. Steinweis (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 309–325.

48 Holger Nehring, "National Internationalist British and West German Protests against Nuclear Weapons, the Politics of Transnational Communications and the Social History of the Cold War, 1957–1964," *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 4 (2005): 564.

49 On the opposing names of the campaigns, cf. Holger Nehring, "Angst, Gewalterfahrung und das Ende des Pazifismus. Die britischen und westdeutschen Proteste gegen Atomwaffen, 1957–1964," in *Angst im Kalten Krieg*, ed. Bernd Greiner, Christian Th. Müller, and Dierk Walter (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2009), 436–464, here 439.

50 Elisabeth Röhrlich, "'To Make the End Time Endless'. Günther Anders' Fight against Nuclear Weapons," in *The Life and Work of Günther Anders: Émigré, Iconoclast, Philosopher, Man of Letters*, ed. Günter Bischof, Jason Dawsey, and Bernhard Fetz (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2014), 45–58, here 47. On the position of Günther Anders in the political context of the Cold War, see Christian Dries, "'Zeitbomben mit unfestgelegtem Explosionstermin'. Günther Anders und der Kalte Krieg," in *Den Kalten Krieg denken: Beiträge zur sozialen Ideengeschichte*, ed. Patrick Bernhard and Holger Nehring (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2014), 63–89.

leaflet stated, Anders had formulated a "new moral code" for "our existence under the threat of the bomb,"[51] which came to be reflected in many of the journal's articles from then on.

In the first years, Anders was probably the most published author in the magazine. At the Free University of Berlin, he gave a lecture on the topic "Responsibility Today," for which he had already given an English version at the Peace March in Kyoto. For the introduction to his speech for a German audience, he had chosen quite an abstract discussion of moral conduct:

> The moral commandment is not already fulfilled by the fact that we withdraw at the moment we recognize the irresponsibility of a deed. Such refusal [. . .] is only the first step, only the beginning of the necessary moral action. By no means must we believe that we have already achieved our goal by keeping our own hands clean [. . .]. The refusal to participate in murder never replaces the abolition of murder [. . .].[52]

In the following, he defines the task of contemporary moral responsibility as a "corrective to the division of labour." He calls for intervention precisely because the division of labor does not follow moral principles, but undermines them. In order to explain how the limitation of conscience to only certain fields of work leads to "mere conscientiousness," Anders only briefly refers to the much more obvious background of experience of his German audience: the National Socialist extermination of the Jews.

The casualness of his remarks on the Holocaust may be astonishing not only because in *The Obsolescence of the Human* the National Socialist perpetration plays such a central role in developing his concept of the Promethean gap. It is quite surprising he makes no mention of the Ulm *Einsatzgruppen* trial, which took place less than a year earlier in April 1958. Here the judicial plea for the recognition of fragmented responsibilities had led to a reduced sentence for the defendants who had murdered more than 5,000 Jewish men, women, and children in the East Prussian-Lithuanian border region alone.[53] Thus, the perpetrators were not sentenced to life imprisonment due to their high degree of personal initiative, as demanded by the public prosecutor's office during the trial, but only as an "accessory to murder."[54]

---

51 Anders, Antiquiertheit, vol. 1, 235.

52 Günther Anders, "Über Verantwortung heute" (1959), in *Endzeit und Zeitenende. Gedanken über die atomare Situation* (München: C.H. Beck, 1972), 24–54.

53 Sabrina Müller, "Zum Drehbuch einer Ausstellung. Der Ulmer Einsatzgruppenprozess von 1958," in *Vom Recht zur Geschichte. Akten aus NS-Prozessen als Quellen der Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Jürgen Finger, Sven Keller, and Andreas Wirsching (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 205–218, 212.

54 See, for example, Patrick Tobin, "No Time for 'Old Fighters'. Postwar West Germany and the Origins of the 1958 Ulm Einsatzkommando Trial," *Central European History* 44, no. 4 (2011): 684–710.

While *The Obsolescence of the Human* can be interpreted as an approach to a radically changed theory of moral action under the influence of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, this complexity has been abandoned in favor of a more simplistic theses. Anders finally left an aesthetic-political manifesto to the student protestors in Berlin with his "Theses on the Nuclear Situation." The exaggerated assertions, Anders said in a dialectical visualization of his rhetoric, were "written down so that they would not come true."[55] As "inverted utopists," people were from now on confronted with the task of no longer merely "imagining the non-existence of something particular within a world frame that was substituted as being and continuing," but also Anders made formulations using philosophical vocabulary that was clearly influenced by Heidegger's existential ontology, "with the task of imagining this framework, that is, the world itself, at least our human world, as non-existent." This "total abstraction"[56] should be approached with imagination and the "courage to fear." In Anders' abstract aesthetics of danger, fantasy and fear have the function of a corrective to perception.[57] In a (kind of) reversion of this abstraction, the degradation of human action to mere work or – in extreme cases – to button-pushing must also be made "perceptible."

Nevertheless, in his theses Anders still refers twice to "particular" incidents within the National Socialist persecution and extermination policy, each of which he assigns a different connection to the nuclear threat. The threat of nuclear war, as he formulates it at one point, transforms the earth "into a concentration camp without the option to escape." The fact that Anders here speaks of concentration camps and not of extermination camps might have been a conscious distinction in so far as he sees the analogy between nuclear war and camps not in the threat and reality of extermination, but in the "extreme deprivation of liberty" that he sees realized in the overarching danger of nuclear war.[58] At the end of his manifesto, however, a strange ambivalence emerges.

---

55 Günther Anders, "Thesen zum Atomzeitalter" (1959), in *Endzeit und Zeitenende*, 93–105, 104.

56 Anders, "Thesen zum Atomzeitalter," 104.

57 Anders, "Thesen zum Atomzeitalter," 97. Particularly interesting is the contrasting assessment of the imagination and fear given by Herbert Marcuse. His work "Eros and Civilization" (1957) culminates in a vision of the "freedom to live a life without fear." Cf. Tim B. Müller, "'Ohne Angst leben.' Vom Geheimdienst zur Gegenkultur – Intellektuelle Gegenentwürfe zum Kalten Krieg," in *Angst im Kalten Krieg*, 397–435, here 398. For Marcuse, knowledge is only possible through the imagination; philosophy connects with the real history of mankind only through the imagination. Cf. Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophie und kritische Theorie," in Herbert Marcuse, *Schriften. Vol. 3: Aufsätze aus der Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung 1934–1941* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 227–249, here 244.

58 Based on this quote, Christian Dries recently positioned Günther Anders next to Hannah Arendt and Hans Jonas. He sees him as a contributor to a theory of modernity for which the topos of the camp is central. Cf. Dries, *Die Welt als Vernichtungslager. Eine kritische Theorie der*

Anders had previously referred to the idea that, in modern "annihilism," an abolition of hostility takes place, since "the scene of the crime and the place of suffering are torn apart, i.e., suffering does not happen at the scene of the act."[59] In the testimonies of the Hiroshima victims, he had noticed that the perpetrators were hardly mentioned, and if it happened at all, they were referred to almost without hatred. Yet, according to Anders, the foreign policy involvement in a cold, "hate-free" war had to go hand in hand with a distorted image of the enemy in the domestic political sphere:

> In order to feed it, identifiable and visible objects of hatred will be focused on, or invented: "Jews" of all kinds [. . .] But this hatred will not be able to enter into any connection with the actual war events at all: the schizophrenia of the situation will thus also show itself in the fact that hatred and violence can target quite different objects.[60]

With this paragraph, Anders also ultimately relativized the analogy of the earth as an "escapeless concentration camp." He briefly turned his gaze away from the overarching abstraction of the nuclear-equipped world and highlighted the ideological constitution of a political collective and the accompanying "particular" threat of annihilation.

The second issue of *Das Argument* dedicated to the nuclear threat was published in February of 1961, at a time when the Berlin crisis and the fear of a nuclear strike were still smoldering – a situation that was only defused with the construction of the Wall in August. For this issue, Anders had contributed a short text under the title "Die Komplizen" (The Accomplices). These ontological considerations were accompanied by a concrete political intervention: an open letter to then-chancellor Konrad Adenauer addressing the "German question" associated with the global rearmament, supported by the editorial staff and signed by renowned intellectuals such as Max Born, Helmut Gollwitzer, Eugen Kogon, and Martin Niemöller.

The young Marxist scholar Thomas Metscher contributed an unusually long and abstract-philosophical article on the nuclear question to this issue, which in large part paraphrased the *Obsolescence of the Human* and Anders' critique of Jaspers, and translated the matter into an existential-philosophical argument. Due to its linguistic intensity, the article almost reads like a strategy for rhetorical

Moderne im Anschluss an Günther Anders, Hannah Arendt und Hans Jonas (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), esp. 323–354.

59 Anders, "Thesen zum Atomzeitalter," 104.

60 Anders, "Thesen zum Atomzeitalter," 104.

overpowering. Using the analogy the author produced, it read in capital letters, or rather exclaimed, that life could only be defined from the negative, "with the formula coined in a concentration camp (which Anders points to) as NOT-HAVING-BEEN-MURDERED-YET."[61]

In subsequent paragraphs, Metscher made an inflated use of the word "annihilation." He employed such formulations as: man has become the "*object of annihilation*"; man has defined themself as "*annihilability*" with the production of the bomb; "our existence means *nothing* to annihilation"; and, we are "*those to annihilate*."[62] Yet, nowhere does he refer to the annihilation of the European Jews. In the last part of the article, Metscher finally tries to point to the possibility of civil protest against the bomb: "The proof of existence in the nuclear situation can only be in protesting against the bomb." Only then could man return to their purpose as "subjectivity." Four decades later, a retrospective assessment by Wolfgang Fritz Haug confirms the impression of a primarily existentialist-political self-image, which at the beginning of the 1960s was fueled by reading Anders' work:

> To understand Anders, who was a student of Husserl and Heidegger, one must engage in philosophical thinking. It aims at ruthless statements, without diplomacy and compromise, which are alien to everyday understanding. This also applies to the ontological statement that, through nuclear destructive power, humankind, with its history and habitat, has become annihilable and thus exists from now on in the "not yet" of annihilation. This is at the core of the critical concept of existential philosophy: the atomic situation.[63]

Anders' critique of technology became existential during the nuclear armament race of the Cold War, but although he was a left-leaning intellectual, he did not restrict his critique to one side. For him, it was a universal problem that was as bad in the hands of Western liberal democracies as in those of the Soviet regime, an ontological threat that was irreversible.

A few years later, it was Anders whose glosses were to turn the name of one extermination camp into the focus title of *Das Argument*'s February 1967 issue: "Auschwitz and Vietnam and No End." Up to this point, this subject had remained rather marginal in the journal. Positioning the two emblematic places on the cover had emphasized the "analytical character" of Anders' texts and thus contributed to the latter's great success, editor Wolfgang Fritz Haug wrote. Anders had analyzed

---

61 Thomas Metscher, "Notizen für eine Ontologie der atomaren Situation" (1961), in Wolfgang Fritz Haug, ed., Argument reprint 18–21, Berlin, 1975, 34.

62 Metscher, "Notizen für eine Ontologie der atomaren Situation," 38–39 [emphases in original].

63 "'Was die Vorstellbarkeit übertrifft, darf nicht hergestellt werden'. Interview with Wolfgang Fritz Haug, in: *Phase 2* 41 (2011), https://www.phase-zwei.org/hefte/artikel/was-die-vorstellbarkeit-uebertrifft-darf-nicht-hergestellt-werden-132, accessed March 11, 2024.

the Vietnam War under the same premise as Auschwitz and Hiroshima before, as a result of the relationship between man and technology. He interpreted the massacres of the Vietnamese civilian population, such as the massacre of My Lai, as the American soldiers' transformation into machines. Anders also tried to reinterpret the concept of genocide in the context of the Vietnam War Crimes Tribunal, a civil society tribunal initiated by Bertrand Russell to condemn the American atrocities against Vietnamese civilians. The decisive criterion for Anders was not only the lack of differentiation between the military and civilian population, but rather the fact that the annihilation of the civilian population became the focal point of war actions, and that even special weapons were used for this purpose. Non-combatants were declared as military and "destructible" objects, and became objectifiable and liquidable in large numbers through the technically perfected war equipment.[64] To this extent, Vietnam had historical predecessors, according to Anders, and thus he proposed the site of the Auschwitz extermination camp as the venue for the Vietnam Tribunal.

In this peak phase of his political commitment to the West German left, Anders finally published his diaries as *Die Schrift an der Wand*. His concluding chapter, "Visit to Hades," documents his trip to Poland in 1966, which took him first to the former extermination camp of Auschwitz (Oświęcim) and then to his birthplace of Wrocław. The extermination camp itself and the events there had been largely omitted from Anders' notes. Only with the spatial distance and in juxtaposition to (the failure of) Jewish emancipation, for which Wrocław stands, is Auschwitz as a place given meaning. While in the diaries, Auschwitz still stands for the disruption of the concept of historical continuity, it becomes a cypher for the continuity of human atrocities one year later and a backdrop with the potential for political activism. In West Germany's public perception, Auschwitz was willfully perceived as only one event in a series of "events of the same order."[65] Anders encouraged this tendency with his own political engagement. His journals, on the other hand, since they document the futility of a historiographical assigning of meaning, came out "too late for a strong primary breakthrough effect, too early for a mere historical interest," as a reviewer in the Berlin newspaper *Tagesspiegel* stated.[66]

---

64 Günther Anders, *Visit Beautiful Vietnam. ABC der Aggressionen heute* (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1968), 64.

65 Anders described them as "same order of events." Cf. Literary Archive at the Austrian National Library, Günther Anders Collection, 237/B1506, Letter of Günther Anders to Bertrand Russell, March 8, 1967.

66 Joachim Günther and Günther Anders, "Die Schrift an der Wand" (review), *Neue Deutsche Hefte* 14, no. 5 (1968): 220–225, here 221.

Jonathan Kaplan

Fighting Nazis and Confronting the Past: The German Democratic Republic and the National Committee against Nazis in the United States

The end of the Second World War and the division of Germany between the victorious allies brought back to their homeland Germans who had left the Third Reich. The German Democratic Republic (GDR), which was created in 1949 in the Soviet occupation zone, was founded by a group of German Communists, who had spent the war years fighting the National Socialist dictatorship, many of whom were persecuted because of their Jewish descent.[1] Some were liberated from concentration camps, others returned from exile in South or North America, Palestine, East Asia, and the Soviet Union. These people, who came to form the future East German leadership, wanted to create a new society and to establish a new German state that would be constructed on the principles of Marxism-Leninism, peace-seeking, and anti-fascism. The German Democratic Republic formulated a unique understanding of the historical development of the German Nation. By doing so, the new state rejected the National Socialist past and fashioned itself as the political ideological opposite of both the Third Reich and of the Federal Republic in the West. The postwar social, historical, and political conditions forced the Federal Republic and the GDR to confront German guilt and responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism and to face the moral outcomes of the Holocaust. With the destruction of Jewish communities across Europe in the Holocaust, the end of the war, and the establishment of the two German states, a new era in German-Jewish relations had begun that was overshadowed by the horrors of the past.

"Coming to terms with the past" (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) is a key concept in German postwar historiography. The eminence of this term in scholarship has long pervaded debates on German national identity.[2] In contemporary Germany, the term is associated mostly with commitment to the welfare of Holocaust survivors and the State of Israel. The rise of far-right political parties and movements,

1 For a historical and biographical overview of leading German-Jewish communists in GDR politics, see: Karin Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt. Die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000).

2 Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-013

and the increasing number of antisemitic attacks in Germany, especially following the Hamas Attack on Israel in October 2023 and the war in Gaza have led to an ongoing reexamination of the German culture of "coming to terms with the past." Most of the attention has been given to disturbing tendencies in eastern German states that were once part of the former GDR before German unification, where the popularity of the Eurosceptic and radical AfD (Alternative to Germany) political party is much higher than in western parts of the Federal Republic, as seen in the elections for the European Parliament in June 2024.[3] More than three decades since German reunification, scholars from a wide range of disciplines have provided distinct interpretations of the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, relying on different methodologies as well as focusing on various aspects such as legal processes against Nazis, reparation for the victims of Nazism, or memory cultures. Notwithstanding their contributions to historical research, I find that the dominant discourse builds mostly on West German experiences.[4]

This paper concentrates on one aspect of what I identify as a key element of coming to terms with the National Socialist past in the GDR, namely the political preoccupation of East Germany with the Holocaust in its fight against Nazi criminals. At the peak of an international campaign waged by the GDR government against Nazi culprits during the 1960s, East German officials contacted Jewish public figures, organizations, and political movements in Israel, the United States, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe. The article focuses on the contacts that were created between GDR officials and the National Committee against Nazis in the USA based in Chicago and with its leader, Rabbi Samuel Burr Yampol. This is only one example of such contacts that demonstrates, first, the East German dip-

---

3 For the results of the 2024 elections for the European Parliament in Germany by federal states, see: Europawahlergebnisse 2024 in Deutschland, Verbindungsbüro, Europäisches Parlament, published June 13, 2024 https://berlin.europarl.europa.eu/home/pagecontent/grid/main/aktuelles/europawahlergebnisse-2024-in-deutschland.html, accessed June 30, 2024.

4 Two prominent examples that cover different definitions, aspects, and manifestations of "coming to terms with the past" in Germany are: Thorsten Eitz and Stötzel Georg, *Wörterbuch der "Vergangenheitsbewältigung". Die NS-Vergangenheit im öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2007); Torben Fischer and Matthias N. Lorenz, eds., *Lexikon der "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" in Deutschland. Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015). See also: Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (München: Beck, 1996); Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Legenden, Lügen, Vorurteile: Ein Wörterbuch zur Zeitgeschichte* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1992), 197. Christa Hoffmann defines three central dimensions of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: juridical, political, and historical, see Hoffmann, *Stunden Null? Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland 1945 und 1989* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1992), 26.

lomatic efforts in non-socialist states; second, the GDR's concern for its self-image as a fighter against Nazis among Jewish audiences; and third, the East German interest in opening a new page in German-Jewish relations.

This research challenges the idea that by hiding behind its anti-fascist rhetoric the GDR failed to confront the National Socialist past. The encounters with Jewish communities forced the GDR to face its national responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich and to develop a different kind of German-Jewish relationship from that in the Federal Republic. The GDR strove to find common ideological ground for political cooperation with the victims of the Holocaust, and at the same time tried to find diplomatic ways to evade its hostility towards the State of Israel. This article claims that in order to settle the inherited paradox in its version of coming to terms with the past, the GDR applied anti-fascist rhetoric and chose a Marxist-Leninist line of ideological argumentation when turning to Jewish audiences. This distinct form of addressing the Nazi past characterized the GDR politics from the very beginning: neglecting and officially ignoring it, on the one hand, and constantly dealing with it, on the other one. I do not deny the fact that unique experiences in the two German states concerning the indoctrination of the Nazi past resulted in distinctive political trends in different parts of unified Germany. One of my purposes in this paper, however, is to provide historical evidence for the East German variety of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which questions the common assumption among scholars regarding the absence of a coming to terms with the past in the German Democratic Republic.

The significant challenges encountered by both the Federal Republic and the GDR in dealing with the National Socialist past are reflected in their varying approaches towards the State of Israel. The Federal Republic signed a reparations agreement (*Wiedergutmachungsabkommen*) for Holocaust survivors in 1952,[5] and established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1965. Parallel negotiations between the GDR and Israel concerning the *Wiedergutmachungsabkommen* failed. At the time, the GDR government claimed that it had paid its debts to the countries that were affected by the German occupation, as stated in the Potsdam Agreement of 1945. The agreement was signed between the victorious allies of the Second World War and determined the reparations to be paid from Germany to countries that were attacked by Nazi Germany – first and foremost the Soviet Union. The GDR had argued, furthermore, that Israel was not one of the countries entitled to receive compensations, as it had not yet been founded during the war. After subsequent geopolitical developments in the Middle East, specifically following the

5 See: Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur in Politik und Justiz* (Munich: Beck 2007).

Six-Day War of 1967, the GDR adopted a more radical approach toward Israel, one that was directed and dictated by the Soviet Union as part of its Cold War politics. The GDR supported the Palestinian cause in the Arab-Israeli conflict, a fact that did not make it easy for Israel to find common ground with East Germany. This explains the premise among scholars who argue that the GDR's antagonism towards Israel was driven purely by deep rooted institutional antisemitism. For example, historians Michael Wolffsohn and Jeffrey Herf focus on the anti-Zionist character of the GDR's foreign policy and examine the influence of Cold War politics on its position towards Israel. Both reject any other consideration behind the GDR's anti-Israeli position and interpret every critique of Israel by the GDR as fundamentally antisemitic. Wolffsohn borrows the term "useful idiots" in reference to the Jewish East German politicians and public figures, who let themselves be exploited by the GDR government to justify its antisemitic acts.[6] Similarly, Herf dedicates one of his recent works to the role of the Arab-Israel wars in sharpening the antisemitic tone of the GDR's international politics.[7]

An alternative historical explanation of historian Angelika Timm provides a more nuanced view on GDR-Israeli relations and justifies the politics of the GDR towards Israel and the Jews as an implementation of anti-fascist ideology. Considering the difficulties, differences, and political tensions between the two states, Timm defines GDR-Israel relations as *Nichtbeziehung* (non-relations).[8] Indeed, a closer look into the politics of the GDR and GDR-Jewish relations, which were entangled with GDR-Israel relations, reveals a complex set of behaviors that highlight different political considerations taken by the GDR leadership. On the one hand, the GDR refused to develop diplomatic relations with the State of Israel, on the other hand, it encouraged its official delegates to approach Israelis and Jewish communities around the world. Given these "non-relations" with Israel, the establishment of contacts with Jewish individuals and organizations enabled an immediate discussion with representatives of the Jewish (and Israeli) people without having to establish a direct dialogue with the Israeli government. I see this strategy as a way for the GDR to justify its label as an anti-fascist state, express sympathy to the Jewish victims of the Nazis, attack the West, and remain loyal to the politics of the Soviet Union. The following examination of the relations between

6 Michael Wolffsohn, *Die Deutschland-Akte: Juden und Deutschen in Ost und West: Tatsachen und Legenden* (Munich: Ed. Ferenczy bei Bruckmann, 1995): 14.

7 Jeffrey Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967–1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

8 Angelika Timm, *Hammer, Zirkel, Davidstern. Das gestörte Verhältnis der DDR zu Zionismus und Staat Israel* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1997), 19; Angelika Timm, "The Burdened Relationship between the GDR and the State of Israel," *Israel Studies* 2, no. 1 (1997): 44.

the GDR and the National Committee against Nazis in the USA touches on topics such as continuity and discontinuity, guilt and responsibility, as well as antisemitism in East German foreign policy and the relations between the GDR, Jews, and Israel. My purpose is to offer both a new understanding of East German political behavior and a new historical perspective on the development of German-Jewish relations after the Second World War.

Hand in Hand: Diplomacy and Propaganda

East German diplomatic activities were utilized in the GDR's contest with the Federal Republic for international political acceptance. Both states saw themselves as representatives of the German people and had to find allies in different parts of the world in order to justify their eligibility. The investment in efforts to establish diplomatic relations with members of the Soviet Bloc, the Arab World, Africa, and communist countries in East Asia did not prevent endeavors to negotiate with potential partners in the West. The GDR government used the anti-fascist background of leading East German politicians and their experience prior to 1945 in order to distinguish itself from the Federal Republic. Here the GDR detected a vulnerable point of West Germany: many former employees in the juridical and political systems, diplomacy and military of the Third Reich, returned to their old positions after 1945 and developed successful careers in the Federal Republic.[9] Therefore, in order to reveal "the true face" of the liberal democratic Federal Republic, the GDR launched an international campaign against West Germany. Nevertheless, alongside this campaign, the GDR leadership also had to acknowledge the need to integrate former members of the Nazi party into East German society.[10] One solution was the establishment of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD), which served as the political home of former members of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) and officers of the Wehrmacht. As recent research has shown, em-

9 Regarding former Nazis in the West German public sector, see Norbert Frei, ed., *Hitlers Eliten nach 1945* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003).

10 A prominent example of the early response to the "Nazi problem" in the Soviet occupation zone is a statement of future president of the GDR, Wilhelm Pieck, given in an interview with the official newspaper of the German Communist Party, *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, in 1946: "[they] need to be provided with the opportunity to engage in the anti-fascist democratic struggle, and thus to free themselves from the shame of having been a members of the Nazi party and to regain trust among the anti-fascists," see "Die nichtaktiven Nazis," *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, February 6, 1946.

bracing former Nazis who accepted the new anti-fascist worldview allowed people with a Nazi background to develop a political career in the GDR.[11]

Diplomatic activities at state and non-state levels played an essential role in East German international propaganda efforts, and vice versa. An inherent part of these efforts was the image-building of East Germany as the better and sole representative of the German people. The GDR labeled itself as an anti-fascist state and identified West German politics as reflective of the same values of the recent past: fascism, militarism, and antisemitism. East German leadership assumed the role of chief prosecutor of the Federal Republic and, beginning in the late 1940s throughout the 1960s, ran a campaign against the integration of former Nazis in West German public life. The 1961 Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and other legal proceedings against Nazis represented the significance of the moral and juridical accounting for Nazi crimes, as well as the international interest and involvement in the hunt for Nazis at the time. The GDR used the global attention these trials received and became one of the leading actors behind the international campaign against National Socialists. During this time and as part of its international campaign against Nazis in West Germany, the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, apart from its official diplomacy, began maintaining semi-diplomatic contacts with Jewish organizations, which were themselves dedicated to uncovering and hunting former Nazis and war criminals.[12] The Ministry promoted the establishment of contacts and relationships with anti-fascist Jewish organizations in the United States, Israel, and other West European countries, which became a unique target audience for its propaganda and political activities. Official organizations, such as the Committee for the German Unification (*Ausschuss für deutsche Einheit*), or the *National front*, which was an alliance of different political parties, published dozens of books and pamphlets listing Nazis and war criminals that were still politically and socially active in the Federal Republic.[13] These publications basically demonstrated and proved the failure of the Federal Republic in carrying out the denazification process,

---

11 For an overview of recent research on the West and East German ministries and authorities and their confrontation with the National Socialist past, see Frank Bösch, Martin Sabrow, and Andreas Wirsching, eds., *Die zentralen deutschen Behörden und der Nationalsozialismus. Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung* (Munich-Berlin: Institut für Zeitgeschichte; Potsdam: Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, 2016).

12 See Philip Alexander Matthes, "David und Goliath. Der Anerkennungslobbyismus der DDR in den USA von 1964 bis 1974," in *Umworbener Klassenfeind: Das Verhältnis der DDR zu den USA*, ed. Uta A. Balbier (Berlin: Links, 2006), 47.

13 For some examples, see: Otto Bräutigam, ed., *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Judenmörders. Weitere Dokumente über die Durchsetzung des Bonner Staatsapparates mit Verbrechern gegen die Menschlichkeit* ([East] Berlin: Ausschuss für deutsche Einheit, 1956); *Das Terrorgesicht des Bonner Unrechtsstaates. Weitere 44 Bonner Richter als Nazihenker entlarvt* (Berlin: Ausschuss für deutsche

which was determined and executed by the allies immediately after the war. The most prominent publication was the *Braunbuch* (Brown Book), first published in 1965 after years of preparation,[14] which then became one of the main components of East German propaganda abroad. In order to reach as wide a readership as possible, the *Braunbuch* was distributed in different languages, including English, French, and Spanish. It won world-wide attention, placing the GDR at the front of the fight against Nazis who had escaped punishment in the Federal Republic. East German diplomats across the globe played a significant role in distributing the *Braunbuch* in their host countries.[15] The Peace Commission (*Friedensrat*), an East German public organization promoting world peace and co-existence, was responsible for creating mailing lists of persons and organizations to which the *Braunbuch* should be sent. These lists show the attention that Jewish organizations in Western countries had received: the *Friedensrat* reached out to such organizations as the French Movement against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples (*Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples*, MRAP), the Italian-Jewish journal *Ebrei d'Europa*, the Emma Lazarus Federation of Jewish Women's Clubs (ELF), and the American Association for Jewish Education and the National Committee of the Defenders of Peace in Israel. It also contacted scholars such as German-born sociologist Amitai Etzioni, then at Stanford University, and Jewish community leaders such as Jacob Majus from the National Committee of the Defenders of Peace in Israel and Chicago native Rabbi Samuel Burr Yampol, head of the National Committee to Combat Nazism.[16]

The GDR and the National Committee against Nazism

The leadership of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the ruling party in the GDR, saw the American Jewish community as a political group and as a political instrument

Einheit, 1957); . . . *wieder am Hebel der Macht. Militaristen, Revanchisten, führende Nazis beherrschen den Bonner Staat* (Berlin: Ausschuss für deutsche Einheit,1960).

14 See: *Braunbuch: Kriegs- und Naziverbrecher in der Bundesrepublik. Staat, Wirtschaft, Armee, Verwaltung, Justiz, Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1965).

15 Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt, PA AA), M C1573/76, “Arbeit mit dem Braunbuch,” October 28, 1965.

16 German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv, BArch), DZ 9/2295, “Braunbuch – Versand,” 1965–1966.

with which it could influence the US government.[17] The relationships developed with American-Jewish communities were therefore intended not only to legitimize the GDR diplomatically, but also to bolster the narrative among the American general public and its political elites of East Germany as a moral anti-fascist state.[18] Without ignoring the antisemitic subtext of the perception of American Jews as a mere political lobby that could be exploited by the GDR, I argue that the East German approach went beyond such pragmatic considerations. While East German politicians and diplomats (some of whom were of Jewish descent) primarily engaged in this relationship because of their need for international political recognition, other reasons played a role as well, in particular a sincere commitment to combatting fascism and to uncovering unpunished Nazi criminals. I would also suggest that this commitment served as an important component of the East German version of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, namely joining hands with Jewish communities around the world for the higher cause of fighting Nazism.

My research shows that one of the central figures in this fight in the United States during the 1950s and the 1960s was Rabbi Menachem Burr Yampol, head of the Chicago-based National Committee against Nazis in the USA. Yampol was born in 1899 in Berdiansk, Tsarist Russia, and moved to the United States in 1917. He served as rabbi in different congregations in California, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania.[19] Around 1940 he moved to Chicago, where he worked for the Hebrew Theological College and became a leading figure in the local Jewish community.[20] Yampol's political positioning and mission for civil engagement led to a years-long relationship between his National Committee and the GDR. For almost a decade, GDR officials were in personal contact with Yampol and supported his organization.

Different historical sources reveal fascinating sides of Yampol's political engagements. In an article collection on the political and social position of the American-Jewish press, the American-Jewish communist activist and publisher of the communist *Morgn Frayhayt*, Paul Novick, defined Yampol as "an important figure

---

17 The political power of Jewish communities in the United States allowed the GDR to use antisemitic prejudices, for example, when referring to "American capital," see Philip Alexander Matthes. *Puppet Regime vs. Lead Nation, Der lange Weg zur Anerkennung der DDR durch die USA* (Bonn: Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn, 2010), 155.

18 Matthes, *Puppet* Regime, 153.

19 See John Simons, ed., *Who's Who in American Jewry*, vol. 3 (1938–1939) (New York: National News Association, 1938), 1161.

20 Yampol's short biography was published in an article of the newspaper of the Chicago Jewish community, see: "Telshe-Chicago Branch to Honor Rabbi S. Burr Yampol Dec. 15," *The Sentinel*, December 5, 1986, p. 29.

in the Zionist movement and among the rabbis of Chicago."[21] In her monograph on Americans who fought against the presence of former Nazis in the United States, the American writer and scholar Rochelle G. Saidel quotes the known Nazi hunter and journalist, Charles R. Allen, Jr. who worked closely with Yampol in the National Committee: "He [Yampol] devoted the balance of his life to seeking justice for Nazi war criminals in the United States."[22] Saidel continues by citing Allen's comment on the political views of Yampol and other members of the National Committee, some of whom were communists "but not everyone – for example, Yampol and myself."[23] Yampol's political activities were also documented by different branches of the American government and administration, for instance, as an exhibit in a report titled "Communist Political Subversion" of the Committee on Un-American Activities of the House of Representatives.[24] An FBI report from 1969 titled "Characterization of Subversive, Racial, Klan, White Hate, and Militant Black Organizations. Internal Security – Communist" mentions the National Committee as one of these "tagged" organizations. According to the relevant sections on the National Committee, ran the report, "Rabbi Yampol is anticommunist but would accept aid from communists if it would serve his purpose."[25]

Yampol's National Committee against Nazis in the USA was rebranded several times. Originally it was founded for a more specific reason and was initially called the Anti-Heusinger Committee. At the time, it aimed at preventing the nomination of Adolf Heusinger, a former lieutenant of the Wehrmacht and later a general of the West German army, as Chairman of the NATO Military Committee.[26] The work of the Anti-Heusinger Committee, such as the organization of public rallies and memorial events for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, was described in a report by USA/

---

21 Paul Novick, *Jews in the U.S.A. and the Role of the Jewish Press* (New York: Morning Freiheit, 1962), 29.

22 Rochelle G. Saidel, *The Outraged Conscience: Seekers of Justice for Nazi War Criminals in America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 63.

23 Saidel, *The Outraged Conscience*, 63.

24 *Communist Political Subversion: The Campaign to Destroy the Security Programs of the United States Government* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957).

25 Department of Justice, "Characterization of Subversive, Racial, Klan, White Hate, and Militant Black Organizations. Internal Security – Communist," September 19, 1969, Ernie Lazar FOIA Collection, FOIA: SAC Letter 69 50 re Characterizations of Subversive Orgs, https://archive.org/details/foia_SAC_Letter_69-50_re_Characterizations_of_Subversive_Orgs, accessed September 9, 2022.

26 For the activities of the Anti-Heusinger Committee, see reports from the "Inside the Jewish Community" section of the journal *Jewish Currents*: "Chicago Anti-Heusinger Comm.," *Jewish Currents* 15, no. 6 (166) (1961): 36; "Voices Rise Against Heusinger," *Jewish Currents* 15, no. 7 (167) (1961): 33; "Call for Heusinger's Removal," *Jewish Currents* 15, no. 11 (171) (1961): 24.

Canada Department of the East German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[27] In this report, Yampol is quoted comparing Heusinger to Adolf Eichmann by saying: "In Israel, Eichmann, who has not committed less crimes against humanity than Heusinger, was found guilty, and here in my land this murderer gets [. . .] a high position in NATO."[28] In the early 1960s, the Soviet Union and its allies tried to stop Heusinger's nomination, accusing him of committing war crimes during the Second World War. Yampol soon expanded this personal campaign against Heusinger into a more general fight against war criminals and former Nazis living in the United States, as well as against the Statute of Limitations for Nazi war crimes in the Federal Republic, which threatened to leave many Nazi criminals unpunished.[29] As we will see later, his public work helped Yampol to establish a name for himself as a dominant figure in Chicago's Jewish community and anti-Nazi circles in the United States. In one of its pamphlets, presumably from the mid-1960s, members are described as "Americans of various backgrounds, traditions and experiences, representing various national groups. We have formed a National Committee against Nazi War Criminals and Nazism in America."[30] The committee's chief aim was "to work with any and all individuals and groups to bring about the extradition of these criminals so they stand trial in those countries where their crimes were committed."[31] The strategy planned for carrying out and achieving its goals was to "give names, places of residence and expose the nature of their crimes. In this way, we hope to arouse the conscience of the American people in all walks of life. We hope that the recipients of this message will bring information to the attention of their neighbors, labor

27 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Information," April 19, 1962.

28 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Information," April 19, 1962.

29 For the juridical and social aspects of the Statute of Limitations in the Federal Republic, see: Martin Clausnitzer, "The Statute of Limitations for Murder in the Federal Republic of Germany," *The International Comparative Law Quarterly* 29, no. 2/3 (1980): 473–479; Robert A. Monson, "The West German Statute of Limitations on Murder: A Political, Legal, and Historical Exposition," *American Journal of Comparative Law* 30, no. 3 (1982): 605–626; Caroline Sharples, "In Pursuit of Justice: Debating the Statute of Limitations for Nazi War Crimes in Britain and West Germany during the 1960s," *Holocaust Studies* 20, no. 3 (2014): 81–108; *Zur Verjährung nationalsozialitischer Verbrechen. Dokumentation der parlamentarischen Bewältigung des Problems* (Bonn: Deutscher Bundestag, 1980); Andreas Eichmüller, "Die Strafverfolgung von NS-Verbrechen durch westdeutsche Justizbehörden seit 1945. Eine Zahlenbilanz," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 4 (2008): 621–640.

30 *Nazi War Criminals Exposed*, issued by the National Committee against Nazi Criminals and Nazism, no date. The document is available on the website of the CIA's library, document no. 519b7f9c993294098d5137b2, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/519b7f9c993294098d5137b2, accessed September 30, 2022.

31 *Nazi War Criminals Exposed.*

unions, fraternal societies, churches and synagogues and particularly to the attention of senators and congressmen."[32]

The correspondence between the GDR and Yampol underlines how important these contacts were for the East Germans in gaining credibility in the United States. The GDR's contacts with Yampol and the National Committee began as early as the beginning of the 1960s. It was Yampol's request from late 1962 to receive archival documents on former Nazi criminals that opened a yearlong relationship between his committee and the GDR's *Friedensrat.*[33] In the following months and years, members of the *Friedensrat* supported Yampol's committee and initiated the delivery of historical documents, which were supposed to help with his investigations of Nazis, who then lived in the United States. Formally, the *Friedensrat* was not a governmental organization of the GDR. However, even though it was supposed to work independently of the government, the archival documentation shows that these close and personal relationships with Yampol were directed, monitored, and oriented by the heads of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Reports written by different departments of the foreign ministry describe the suggested strategies towards Yampol. They expose, on the one hand, the immediate political interests of East Germany and the political benefits of the GDR in its cooperation with Yampol, on the other. The GDR was eager to help Yampol achieve his own important mission, which was first and foremost "the cleansing of the American soil from Nazi murderers."[34] A letter written by the USA/Canada Department of the foreign ministry to the International Relations Department of the Central Committee of the SED (*Zentralkomittee der SED*) provides evidence of these political interests behind building cooperation with Yampol and his committee. In order to "inform the members and supporters of the committee about the GDR and its politics," Mr. Urban of the foreign ministry asks for "short biographies of leading officers and generals in our *Volksarmee* [People's Army] (especially with details about their anti-fascist resistance activities), as well as statistics (especially in comparison to West Germany) about the democratic and anti-fascist character of the officer cadre of the *Volksarmee*; and also facts about the social background (professional development) would be an asset."[35] The department saw emphasizing the anti-fascist credentials of leading East German army officers in comparison to their West German colleagues as essential to gaining trust among Yampol and the co-founders of the National Committee. These kinds of

32 *Nazi War Criminals Exposed.*

33 See PA AA, M C1571/70, Letter from Yampol to Leo Regener, October 3, 1962.

34 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Information," April 19, 1962.

35 PA AA, M C1571/70, Letter of the Fifth Non-European Department of the foreign ministry to the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Central Committee, April 1, 1962.

professional discussions about Yampol and his committee, as well as subsequent actions on the part of the ministry and the *Friedensrat* towards them, reveal the pragmatism behind the GDR's official façade surrounding the fighters against fascism and Nazism.

As an organization that aimed to change both the local and overseas (specifically West German) policies against former Nazis, the National Committee intended to extend its activities beyond local Jewish circles and turn to general American audiences. This way, Yampol and his team believed, they could influence members of Congress, who could, in turn, force the Federal Republic to change the Statute of Limitations on murder. The East German foreign ministry perceived this as an opportunity to push and distribute the GDR's political program in its talks with the committee. Correspondence of the USA/Canada Department of the foreign ministry from early 1963 regarding contacts with Jewish organizations in the United States highlights the importance of future contacts with Yampol. The department saw in these contacts an opportunity for "stressing the different character of the two German states,"[36] meaning showing the East German commitment to the fight against Nazis, whereas in the Federal Republic former Nazis held public positions. Practically, the foreign ministry determined that the *Friedensrat* and its members "should express their sympathy towards the actions of the committee [. . .] by offering relevant historical material."[37]

Building mutual trust between Rabbi Yampol and the East Germans started to bear fruit. The two sides continued negotiating and exchanging important material. Yampol arranged lists of organizations and individuals that could find interest in GDR publications (such as the *Braunbuch*), while the GDR provided further documented information about Nazi criminals. To show his respect and gratitude, Yampol visited the GDR twice: in 1964 as an official guest of the GDR government on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary for the GDR's establishment and in 1966 during his trip to different European countries. His 1964 visit was organized by the *Friedensrat* and coordinated with the East German Jewish community. His visit included a meeting with the Jewish community in East Berlin and with Chief Rabbi Martin Riesenburger, a tour of the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Mitte to see the gravestone of Moses Mendelssohn, and a Shabbat prayer at the synagogue. In Potsdam, he visited Cecilienhof Palace, where the Potsdam Agreement was signed. Before his departure to Warsaw, Yampol traveled to the former Sachsenhausen concentration

36 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Information über Kontakte zu jüdischen Kreisen in den USA," January 16, 1963.

37 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Informationsblatt der 5. Außereuropäische Abteilung," Novemver 27, 1962.

camp.[38] A similar cultural program was presented for his visit in 1966, including a conversation with Helmut Aris, the president of the Jewish communities in the GDR, and with deputy foreign minister Georg Stibi.[39] The purpose of these visits was clear: to receive relevant information for the National Committee on Nazis in the Federal Republic. The foreign ministry planned his visit by considering Yampol's major task: "to bring to justice Nazi and war criminals, especially those who committed crimes against the Jewish people."[40] Moreover, East German diplomats knew about Yampol's "connections" and wanted to make sure that these "are to be used in order to make public the information about [West Germany's Federal President Heinrich] Lübke[41] as a Nazi war criminal, among Jews in the US."[42] The USA/ Canada Department of the East German Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared topics for discussion with Yampol prior to his visit. For instance: his hosts could ask him about his impressions of his trip to the GDR; they could stress the impact of Nazi and war criminals in different parts of public life in the Federal Republic; and could highlight West German support in the Vietnam War.[43] A later report of the foreign ministry shows that the meetings with Yampol were relatively successful and that he and delegates of the *Friedensrat* talked about strengthening the work with "influential persons" and agreed on continuing the exchange of information.[44]

For Yampol, these visits were important first of all because they allowed him to pursue his search for incriminating material on Nazis who resided in the United States. Visiting the GDR was also an emotional experience for him, as he had the chance to explore Jewish life in East Germany in person and to learn about the social and economic situation of German Jews living in the GDR. In a letter to Kurt Hälker from the *Friedensrat*, Yampol writes:

---

38 PA AA, M C1571/70, Programm für den Aufenthalt von Rabbi S. Burr Yampol, Vorsitzender des Komitees gegen Nazi-Verbrecher und Nazismus in America, zum 15. Jahrestag der Republik vom 2. bis 9. Oktober 1964, n.d.

39 PA AA, M C1571/70, Programm für den Aufenthalt Rabbiner Yampols, USA, in der Zeit vom 15. bis etwa 23. Juni 1966, n.d.

40 PA AA, M C1571/70.

41 Heinrich Lübke was a West German Christian Democrat politician. In 1959, he was elected President of the Federal Republic of Germany. The GDR accused Lübke of being a war criminal, see: *Aufstieg und Fall des Heinrich Lübke. Die Geschichte einer Karriere* (Berlin: Nationale Front des Demokratischen Deutschland, 1969).

42 PA AA, M C1571/70, Programm für den Aufenthalt Rabbiner Yampols, USA, in der Zeit vom 15. bis etwa 23. Juni 1966, n.d.

43 PA AA, M C1571/70, Information in Vorbereitung eines Gesprächs mit Rabbiner Burr S. Yampol (USA) am Donnerstag, dem 23. Juni 1966 um 11.30 Uhr, June 22, 1966.

44 PA AA, M C1571/70, Bericht über den beusch Rabbi S. Burr Yampol vom 21. bis 23. Juni 1966, n.d.

> James Boswell wrote once: 'We cannot tell the precise moment when friendship is formed. As in filling a vessel drop by drop, there is at last a drop which makes it run over. So in a series of acts of kindness there is, at last, one which makes the heart run over.'[45] The friendship of your *Friedensrat* in general, and especially yours and Renate's [Kurt Hälker's wife], was so great and heartfelt that my heart was overflown. I will always remember this wonderful week that I spent with you in Berlin.[46]

Yampol attached to his letter some newspaper articles on his visit and continued sketching his future plans for collaborative work with the GDR.

The 1960s, which were the peak of the close relations with Yampol, also embodied a diplomatic challenge for the GDR, as many Western countries still refused to acknowledge it and establish official diplomatic contacts with the East German government. The United State and the GDR established official diplomatic relations only in 1974. This precious occasion to invite and host an American guest in the GDR was a special opportunity to talk directly to the American people (and the American-Jewish community), promote the GDR's anti-Nazi agenda, and try to influence public opinion on the GDR regime. And in fact, after returning to Chicago, Yampol shared his thoughts and experiences from his visit in East Berlin with his community.[47] In different interviews he gave for East German television and radio, he expressed his positive impression of the GDR's commitment to hunting Nazis, its support to the local Jewish community, and his satisfaction that the GDR government had passed a law against the Statute of Limitations for Nazi crimes.[48]

The Israeli Obstacle

Alongside his official mission and the negotiations about receiving materials from East German archives, Yampol always kept referring to and asking his East German counterparts about Jewish life in post-1945 Germany, about the GDR's refusal to pay reparation to Holocaust survivors living in Israel, and generally about the hostility between these two nations. His pro-Zionist approach led to growing tensions between him and his counterparts in the GDR. The GDR's reaction to Yam-

45 James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (New York: Knopf, 1992 [1791]).

46 See: PA AA, M C1571/70, Yampol's letter to Leo Hälker, October 25, 1964.

47 "Rabbi Yampol Reports," *The Sentinel,* November 5, 1964, p. 19; "Rabbi Yampol Tells of Visit to East Europe," *The Sentinel*, September 1, 1966, p. 22.

48 See PA AA, M C1571/70, "Bericht über den Aufenthalt von Rabbi S. Burr Yampol, von 3. bis. 8 Oktober 1964"; A Letter from Yampol to Kurt Hälker, March 31, 1966.

pol's "double mission" – his Nazi hunt, on the one hand, and his focus on the Jewish/Israeli political topics, on the other hand – was twofold and contradictory. Kurt Hälker, then a senior official of the *Friedensrat*, was disappointed with Yampol. Hälker believed that the rabbi's commitment to the persecution of Nazi criminals did not originate from his sympathy towards Socialism (or more specifically towards the GDR), but rather from his Jewish faith.[49] Inside the foreign ministry, however, the same "allegations" were perceived positively. According to the USA/Canada Department, Yampol's religious orientation and commitment were an advantage in his mission to carry out a Nazi hunt, as he did his job with "eagerness, energy and consistency."[50]

In contrast to Hälker and the statements of the foreign ministry's officials, the GDR government in its response to Yampol's questions and "Jewish interests" showed a unified position. Under the title "material for a response letter to Yampol," we find their replies to Yampol's queries concerning the *Wiedergutmachung* or about diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. In this draft, East Germany repeated its argument that it fulfilled its obligations to the Potsdam Agreements and the refusal to negotiate with Israel. In terms of reparations to Holocaust survivors, the document claimed that "with the Potsdam Agreements all of Germany's debts were divided into two. The representation commitments of the then Soviet occupation zone – the current GDR – were limited to payment only to the Soviet Union and Poland, territories that undoubtedly suffered the most from the fascist aggression. [. . .] Other countries have to turn to West Germany."[51] In this vein, the GDR explained why Israel cannot be part of a reparations agreement as such. It claimed that according to international law the reparations agreements signed between the Federal Republic and Israel "have nothing to do with reparations for the Second World War [. . .] because Israel did not take part in the fight against Hitler's Germany."[52] Therefore any reparations for Israel must take place only on a "moral-political level," and to ensure that "German imperialism will never have the chance to carry out such crimes against the Jewish people or against any other peoples."[53] This was a clear message against the West German-Israel agreements, because they included the deployment of military assistance and funding for building the Israeli army. In terms of its own care for Holocaust survivors, the GDR claimed it stood by its obligation to what it defined as "inner" *Wiedergutmachung*, meaning repara-

---

49 See Matthes, *Puppet Regime*, 155–156. See also: BArch, DY 30/IV A2/20/608, Report on Yampol's visit, October 8, 1964.

50 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Bericht über den Aufenthalt von Yampol 3–8.10.1964," n.d.

51 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Material für einen Antwortsbrief," n.d., presumably from end of 1965.

52 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Material für einen Antwortsbrief."

53 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Material für einen Antwortsbrief."

tions for victims of fascism who are living in the GDR, according to GDR law. For example, victims and their families were paid higher pensions and received different privileges in obtaining apartments, health care, higher education, and more. The document ends with information that should be communicated to Yampol about Jewish citizens in the GDR, such as: copies of the Jewish community's newspaper, a copy of an interview with Helmut Aris, the president of the Jewish communities in the GDR given to the *New York Herald Tribune*, and facts about the financial state support received by the Jewish community in Karl-Marx-Stadt (today Chemnitz) for renovating the local synagogue.[54]

The same arguments are mentioned on other occasions when Yampol showed interest and curiosity about GDR policies towards the Jews, for example, asking whether the GDR would be ready to absorb Jewish immigrants from West Germany. In his answer to Yampol, the GDR Minister of Church Affairs, Hans Seigewasser, repeated the known GDR commitment to the Potsdam Agreements. By doing so, Seigewasser confirmed his government's seriousness in accepting and carrying out international treaties. Seigewasser added in his answer, written in the name of the East German government, that unlike in the Federal Republic, in the GDR there was no place for "the barbaric isms of the German past, racism, anti-Semitism and chauvinism" and therefore West German Jews were of course invited to immigrate to the GDR.[55] Yampol reacted positively to this commitment, seeing it as an important act on the part of the GDR that would be respected and recognized in the United States.[56]

By looking at future developments of his relationship with the GDR, we can see a shift in Yampol's conviction in those arguments. A change in their cooperation occurred in the second half of the 1960s. Alongside his continuous concern about the physical and financial condition of the East German Jewish community, Yampol also expressed his discontent with SED and state leader Walter Ulbricht's visit to the United Arab Republic and with GDR support of what Yampol called "Israel's enemies." Yampol was also concerned with the rise of antisemitism in the Soviet Union and demanded immediate explanations from GDR government representatives.[57] Albert Norden, an official in the SED and a senior political figure in the GDR responsible for propaganda, was the one who was chosen to respond to Yampol's allegations. I would suggest that Norden was not chosen

54 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Material für einen Antwortsbrief."

55 PA AA, M C1571/70, Letter from Hans Seigewasser to Yampol, November 24, 1964.

56 See PA AA, M C1571/70, "Bericht über den Aufenthalt von Rabbi S. Burr Yampol, von 3. bis. 8 Oktober 1964"; Letter from Yampol to Kurt Hälker, March 31, 1966.

57 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Auszug aus einem Brief des Rabbiners Yampol vom 5.3.1965 an Gen. Hälker, Friedensrat", n.d.; Letter from Yampol to Kurt Hälker, August 31, 1967.

unintentionally. He himself was of Jewish origin and is known in the historical literature as "the Rabbi's son in the Politburo."[58] In his response, Norden justified Ulbricht's visit and claimed that Western press coverage of the visit "was influenced by different political circles that planned to slander the GDR and to defame the historical truth, that the GDR exterminated fascism and racist ideology from their roots."[59] He continued, claiming that "the people who are behind these campaigns are those forces in West Germany that criticize the humanist politics of the GDR."[60] According to Norden, GDR diplomacy was based on anti-fascists traditions and therefore Ulbricht's visit took place on the basis of these principles and had pure diplomatic and political reasons that did not contradict the GDR's friendly relations with "Israeli anti-fascists."[61] The GDR did not accept the decisions of the Israeli government, and he asked how Israel could cooperate with former Nazis in its war in the Sinai. Norden repeated the GDR commitment to reparations for its *own* Jewish citizens. He also did not forget to stress his criticism of the West German-Israeli cooperation as another excuse for why the GDR chose not to negotiate with Israel. In addition, as proof that the GDR treated its Jewish citizens well, Norden rightfully pointed out that the GDR passed laws for the benefit of the victims of fascism living in East Germany, which made Jewish citizens eligible as well as "other anti-fascists." Similar to Norden, many people of Jewish origin were in high positions in the GDR leadership.[62]

In a letter to Hälker, Yampol expressed his discomfort with Norden's criticism of Israel as well as with the GDR's hostility to the Jewish state. At the time, following the Six-Day War, Norden had also initiated a declaration of East German Jewish citizens against Israeli "aggression" in the Middle East.[63] Yampol criticized the East German government and picked Norden as the main target of his allegations. He asked:

> How can Professor Norden, or the humanist Walter Ulbricht, call that [the Israeli policies in the Middle East] aggression? [. . .] Professor Norden, although the son of a rabbi, is not a member of the Jewish community, and I can imagine that other Jewish citizens who gave

---

58 See Albert Norden's biography: Norbert Podewin, *Der Rabbinersohn im Politbüro: Albert Norden – Stationen eines ungewöhnlichen Lebens* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 2003).

59 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Auszugsweise Abschrift eines Briefes des Genossen Albert Norden an den amerikanischen Rabbiner Yampol, der dem Genossen Norden nach der Reise des Staatsratsvorsitzenden Genossen Walter Ulbricht, in die VAR ausführlich geschrieben hatte," December 8, 1965.

60 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Auszugsweise Abschrift eines Briefes.

61 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Auszugsweise Abschrift eines Briefes.

62 PA AA, M C1571/70, "Auszugsweise Abschrift eines Briefes.

63 See "Erklärung jüdischer Bürger der DDR," *Neues Deutschland*, June 9, 1967, 2.

> their signature for this explanation, like Professor Norden, are not members of the community. As I see it, the Jewish community of Berlin and of the GDR does not condemn Israel.[64]

From this time onward, the relationship between Yampol and the GDR began to deteriorate. Besides his disappointment with the GDR's anti-Israeli position and his inability to comprehend how an anti-fascist state could be so hostile towards the Jewish state, Yampol also believed that the GDR had not fulfilled its promise to provide the requested material on Nazi criminals and to deliver this material to West Germany. He asked: "what is it worth if you keep the documents in East Berlin and the war criminals are set free in West Germany?"[65]

Yampol's Hopes and West German Skepticism

During the 1960s, the West German embassy in Washington, DC, was worried about the growing protests of Jewish organizations against the Federal Republic and the Statute of Limitations. Dozens of protest letters were sent to then German Foreign Minister, Gerhard Schröder, by members of the New York-based Committee against Nazism and Antisemitism.[66] The embassy in Washington blamed the GDR government and the East German organization *Gesellschaft Neue Heimat* (New Homeland Society),[67] for coordinating and supporting these activities.[68] Observing the GDR's relationship with Yampol from the West German side reveals more about Yampol's personality and political tactics behind his encounters with the Germans. The first indications of the West German inspection of Yampol's activities can be found in correspondence from 1968 between Yampol and Karl H. Knappstein, the West German ambassador in Washington. The correspondence deals with questions regarding the Federal Republic's position on the Statute of Limitations and Yampol's search for material on former Nazis in East and West German archives. In the following exchange of letters inside the West German foreign ministry, Knappstein referred to Yampol as "the head of the far-left 'Na-

64 PA AA, M C1571/70, Letter from Yampol to Kurt Hälker, August 31, 1967.
65 PA AA, M C1571/70, Letter from Yampol to Kurt Hälker, April 3, 1968.
66 For a selection of such letters, see: PA AA, B 83, no. 381.
67 *Gesellschaft Neue Heimat* was founded in 1964 to "maintain the relationship with German-speaking minorities abroad," see: Ingrid Muth, *Die DDR-Außenpolitik 1949–1972: Inhalte, Strukturen, Mechanismen* (Berlin: Links, 2000).
68 PA AA, B 83, no. 381, "SBZ-Propaganda in den Vereinigten Staaten," March 12, 1965, with attachment of a call published by the *Gesellschaft Neue Heimat*, n.d.

tional Committee to Combat Nazis.'"[69] The West German General Consulate in Yampol's hometown of Chicago was also in contact with the socially and politically engaged rabbi and followed his difficulties in his search for incriminating material on war criminals in both Germanies. Talks between Yampol and West German diplomats took place parallel to those he had with the East Germans. As we can see, both the Federal Republic and the GDR were aware of Yampol's political objectives and his plans. In contrast to the relatively friendly attitude of the East German Ministry for Foreign Affairs and of the *Friedensrat* of the GDR, the West German side was much more hesitant towards Yampol. For instance, in an answer from the office of the Federal Minister of Justice at the foreign ministry about a letter Yampol sent to the embassy in Washington concerning his negotiations with the GDR, it was stated that under no circumstance should Yampol be notified about the direct negotiations between the GDR and the Federal Republic. The Federal Ministry of Justice suggested informing Yampol only that "the Soviet zone's claims that the authorities of the Federal Republic denied accepting archival material from the Soviet zone on tracing Nazi crimes, or the claim that this material was forged, are wrong. [. . .] Moreover, the attempts of the West German justice system to receive the available archival documentation from the Soviet occupation zone and East Berlin on unknown cases were unsuccessful."[70] The West German ministry suggested therefore that if Mr. Yampol thought he could change this "Soviet zone's" attitude on the matter, he was more than welcome to try to do so.[71]

Later, in order to learn more about Yampol's public work, West German diplomats spoke with different members of the Jewish community in Chicago about whether Yampol held any official role in its organizations. The results are surprising. The West Germans were informed that Yampol "has almost no meaning, and that according to these Jews he has no representative role, and they hardly know anything about his existence, and moreover, they rejected his extreme left political positions."[72] Statements in the name of anonymous members of the Jewish community claiming that Yampol was unknown in local Jewish circles were convenient to

69 PA AA, BRD, B 83, no. 381, "Ermittlung von Kriegsverbrecher," Brief aus der deutschen Botschaft in Washington an das Auswärtigen Amt in Bonn, March 11, 1968.

70 See PA AA, B 83, no. 381, "Ermittlung von Kriegsverbrechern," May 22, 1968.

71 See PA AA, B 83, no. 381, "Ermittlung von Kriegsverbrechern."

72 PA AA, B 83, no. 381, "National Committee to Combat Nazism," Letter of the General Consulate in Chicago, June 6, 1969; "Verjährung von NS-Verbrechen," Letter of Department V4 of the foreign ministry to the Federal Minister of Justice and to the head of the chancellery, August 8, 1969.

West German political strategy, but they were wrong. As I have shown earlier in the presentation of his negotiations with the GDR, Yampol played an important role in the Jewish community in Chicago and took part in many activities that were published in the local media. For instance, in 1962 *The Sentinel*, the newspaper of the Jewish community in Chicago, discussed Yampol's contribution to the fight against Nazis and antisemitism as part of his work in the National Committee.[73] The same newspaper honored him on his birthday a year later.[74] Moreover, the Telshe-Chicago Yeshiva honored Rabbi Yampol with the annual "Ohaiv Torah" award, "which is presented each year to a prominent member of the Chicago Jewish community of outstanding Service to Torah."[75] *The Sentinel*'s report included a short biography of Yampol mentioning his activities as chairman of the National Committee, adding that "in this connection [he] was invited to be the guest of the German Democratic Republic."[76] It would seem that even a simple rabbi from Chicago could catch the attention of both German foreign ministries. Yampol, aware of his actions' implications or not, revealed the political, ideological, and propagandistic tensions between the GDR and the Federal Republic.

Conclusion

The relationship between the official GDR and Rabbi Yampol had begun with great hopes and ended with great disappointments. I see the story of Rabbi Yampol and the GDR as typical of the paradoxical and contradictory behavior of the German Democratic Republic when dealing with the National Socialist past. The self-positioning in the front lines of the battle against former Nazis and expressions of sympathy towards the Jewish victims of the Holocaust could not go together with other geopolitical interests. The chance to set the moral tone and to stand by with genuine support for the Jewish people was held back by Soviet Cold War policy and East German domestic political interests. These tensions and contradictions created a different approach to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* from that of the Federal Republic.

73 See "Committee against Nazis, Racism, To Hold Meeting," *The Sentinel*, October 25, 1962, p. 33.
74 See "Honor Rabbi Yampol on His 65th Birthday," *The Sentinel*, October 24, 1963, p. 25.
75 "Telsche-Chicago Branch to Honor Rabbi S. Burr Yampol Dec. 15," *The Sentinel*, December 5, 1968, p. 29.
76 *The Sentinel*, December 5, 1968, p. 29.

In this paper, I dealt with the seemingly unconventional relationship between the German Democratic Republic and Rabbi Samuel Burr Yampol as a case study of other contacts between the GDR and American Jews, Jewish communities and political organizations worldwide, as well as the greater discourse surrounding the "Coming to Terms with the National Socialist Past" in the GDR. An examination of the GDR's position towards American-Jewish figures and organizations as reflected in the archival sources reveals some of the characteristic features of GDR foreign policy in a nutshell: first, the aspiration to gain political recognition outside the Soviet Bloc; second, the occurrence of these contacts both during and as part of the contest with the Federal Republic for legitimacy and international political acceptance; and third, the permanent need to prove the anti-fascist character of the GDR, hence its stated struggle against fascism, Nazism, and capitalism by tracking down former Nazi criminals in the Federal Republic. The GDR's complicated confrontation with its past was embodied in its relationship with Jewish personalities and organizations, demonstrating political, ideological, and moral tensions. The contacts with Yampol as well as other public figures on the Jewish scene point to conflicts arising from a serious GDR preoccupation with the Holocaust. They show how important the involvement with German history and its outcomes were both personally for GDR politicians as well as for the GDR regime in general. In a broader diplomatic context, these types of relationships with Jewish organizations constitute an East German attempt to reach out to the Jewish people by overlapping the non-existing official diplomatic interstate relations with Israel. A future project will deal exclusively with these contacts with organizations from the United States, Israel, and Western Europe, first, in order to explore the transnational cooperation between this network of organizations and, second, to provide a deeper understanding of the GDR's historical indoctrination. The historical Marxist-Leninist / socialist / communist ideological structure and the following complicated (or insufficient) confrontation with the National Socialist past affected the GDR's political actions on the international arena. The state's leaders refused to take responsibility for the crimes of the German people during the Third Reich, did not acknowledge the existence of Israel, and refused to pay reparations to Holocaust survivors. At the same time, they stood at the front of an international campaign against Nazi criminals and invested great effort in exposing Nazi war criminals and in fighting fascism and neo-Nazism.

Can the GDR be still considered as not taking responsibility for the Nazi past? To absolve the East Germans of all responsibility for their actions by claiming that they were under Soviet control would be too easy. The combination of antifascism, Soviet influence, and the singularity of German history created in the GDR a unique historical and political playground, which needs to be further explored. The relationship with Yampol shows that the GDR saw great importance in bringing Nazis to justice and in revealing the truth about the "brown" past of

many West German public figures. Even if the approach taken toward this goal was distorted, one should not underestimate the East German contribution to the fight against former Nazis. As the political situation in the Federal Republic today shows, the confrontation of “the first socialist state of workers and farmers on German soil” with its own past, despite its initial denial of this past, portrays a fascinating picture of postwar German society.

Contributor Biographies

Boaz Cohen is head of the Holocaust Studies program at Western Galilee College, Akko, Israel, and teaches history at the Shaanan College of Education, Haifa. He is an affiliated research fellow at the Centre for Collective Violence, Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the UCL Institute for Advanced Studies at University College London. His work focuses on the development of Holocaust memory and historiography in their social and cultural context and on Jewish and Israeli post-Holocaust society. His current research focuses on work with survivor children after the Holocaust, their rehabilitation, and the collection of their testimonies.

Elisabeth Gallas is deputy to the director and head of the research unit "Law" at the Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture – Simon Dubnow in Leipzig, Germany. She received her PhD in Modern History from Leipzig University in 2011 with a thesis that was turned into her first book. A revised and translated English version was published in 2019 with NYU Press: *A Mortuary of Books: The Rescue of Jewish Culture after the Holocaust*.

Jonathan Kaplan is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) fellow at the Center for European Studies at the University of Verona. In his postdoctoral research project, he focuses on the history of the German Democratic Republic and its interactions with Jewish communities abroad. Previously, he served as a Junior Fellow at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI), a Hilde Robinsohn-Guest Fellow for European-Jewish Studies at the Moses Mendelssohn Center, and a Lahnstein Fellow at the Bucerius Institute for Research of Contemporary German History and Society (Haifa University). Drawing on his dissertation at the Free University in Berlin, he published a book on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its National Socialist past in 2022.

Anna Koch is the Francis L. Carsten DAAD lecturer at University College London, School of Slavonic and East European History. She previously taught European and Jewish history at the University of Southampton and the University of Leeds and has held fellowships at the Centre for Jewish History in New York City, the German Historical Institute in Rome, and the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah in Paris. Her research has been funded by the British Academy, the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes, and the Social Science Research Council. Her book *Home after Fascism: Italian and German Jews after the Holocaust* was published by Indiana University Press in 2023.

Simon Perego is associate professor in contemporary history in the department of Hebrew and Jewish studies at the INALCO (Institut national des langues et cultures orientales) in Paris, France. His doctoral dissertation has been published by Champ Vallon in French in 2020 under the title *Pleurons-les: Les Juifs de Paris et la commémoration de la Shoah, 1944–1967*. He is currently working on testimonial practices among Yiddish-speaking Jews after the Holocaust.

Anna Pollmann is a researcher at Konstanz University, where she is editing the publication *Key Concepts of Social Cohesion: A Critical Vocabulary*, (Göttingen: Wallstein Publishing, 2025). She specializes in modern Jewish history and European intellectual history post-1945. In 2018–2019 she held a Minerva Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and in 2008–2016 she was a researcher at the Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture – Simon Dubnow at Leipzig University. Her PhD from 2017 was published as *Fragmente aus der Endzeit. Negatives Geschichtsdenken*

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-014

with Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in 2019. Recent publications include: "No Judges, Only Witnesses: Witnessing Genocide in the Vietnam Tribunal's Courtroom Setting of 1966–1967," in *Witnessing the Witness of War Crimes, Mass Murder, and Genocide: From the 1920s to the Present*, edited by Manuela Consonni and Philip G. Nord (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023), 217–239; *Geschichtsoptimismus und Katastrophenbewusstsein. Europa nach dem Holocaust*, co-edited with Jan Gerber and Philipp Graf (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022) (open access).

Nadège Ragaru, a historian, is full Research Professor at Sciences Po Paris (France), where she teaches the transnational history of war crimes trials. Formerly, she was Reid Hall Fellow at Columbia University and Oxpo Visiting Scholar at the University of Oxford. She has carried out extensive research on the history and historiography of the Holocaust in Southeastern Europe, the history of socialism in Bulgaria, and minority issues in 20th century Bulgaria and Macedonia. Her latest book, *Bulgaria, the Jews and the Holocaust: On the Origins of a Heroic Historical Narrative* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2023), was awarded the Shofar Award of the Organization of the Bulgarian Jews 'Shalom'. She is currently working on a book project dedicated to war crimes trials held in end-of-war Bulgaria. Her recent publications include: "Visual Clues to the Holocaust: The Case of the Deportation of Jews from Northern Greece," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 35, no. 3 (2021): 376–403; "Viewing, reading, and listening to the trials in Eastern Europe. Charting a New Historiography," *Cahiers du monde russe*, 61, no. 3–4 (2020): 297–316.

Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska is professor of cultural studies and director of the German Historical Institute Warsaw. Her research interests include cultural memories, media, and visual history. She is the author of *Microhistories of Memory: Remediating the Holocaust by Bullets in Postwar West Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2023) and *Bilder der Normalisierung. Gesundheit, Ernährung und Haushalt in der visuellen Kultur Deutschlands, 1945–1938* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017, co-authored with Anna Labentz).

Stephan Stach is managing director of the Robert Havemann Society (Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft) in Berlin and a historian with a focus on East Central Europe in the 20th century, national minorities, and Holocaust memory during the Cold War. His previous positions include the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw and the Institute of Contemporary History at the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague. His publications include: *Nationalitätenpolitik aus der Zweiten Reihe. Konzepte und Praktiken zur Einbindung nationaler Minderheiten in Piłsudskis Polen* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2024); *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in State-Socialist Eastern Europe*, co-edited with Kata Bohus and Peter Hallama (Budapest: CEU Press, 2022).

Irina Tcherneva, a film scholar, specializes in Soviet documentary film and photography and is senior researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). Her research focuses on the socioeconomic history of documentary cinema, the history of film audiences and film technique, and the role of visual documents and artworks in the Second World War and in postwar trials. Her recent publications include: *Photographier les violences extrêmes*, co-edited with Paul Bernard-Nouraud and Luba Jurgenson (PETRA, 2024); *Seeking Accountability for Nazi and War Crimes in East and Central Europe: A People's Justice?*, co-edited with Eric Le Bourhis and Vanessa Voisin (Rochester University Press, 2022); *Perezhit' vojnu: Kinoindustrija v SSSR 1939–1949*, co-edited with Vanessa Voisin and Valérie Pozner (Rosspen, 2018); and a special issue of the journal *Conserveries mémorielles*, "The Cinema Goes to War: Screens and Propaganda in the USSR (1939–1949)," co-edited with Valérie Pozner (no. 24, 2020).

Vanessa Voisin is associate professor at the Department of History, Cultures and Civilizations (DiSCI) at the University of Bologna, where she teaches Russian and Soviet history. She specializes in the history of the Soviet Union and studies the repressive mechanisms set up by the Soviet party-state during and after the Second World War, as well as the political and cultural mark that the conflict and the war purges left on Soviet society. Recently, she participated in the collective program "CINESOV 1939–1949" on the Soviet cinema at war. In 2017–2019 she served as supervisor of a research grant on war crimes trials in Central and Eastern Europe from 1943 to 1991 at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CERCEC – EHESS/CNRS). She published her PhD in 2015 (*L'URSS contre ses traîtres*, Paris).

Arkadi Zeltser is director of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union at Yad Vashem. He is the author of the book *Evrei sovetskoi provintsii: Vitebsk i mestechki 1917–1941* (The Jews of the Soviet Provinces: Vitebsk and the Shtetls 1917–1941) (Moscow, 2006) and *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union* (published by Yad Vashem in English in 2018 and in Russian in 2023). He also edited a collection of letters entitled *To Pour out My Bitter Soul: Letters from the USSR 1941–1945* (published by Yad Vashem in English in 2016 and in Russian in 2019).

Máté Zombory is associate professor with the Faculty of Social Sciences at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE TáTK) and senior research fellow at the HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences in Budapest. His field of interest is the historical sociology of transnational and cultural memory. He is the author of *Maps of Remembrance: Space, Belonging and Politics of Memory in Eastern Europe* (2012) and *Traumatársadalom. Az emlékezetpolitika történeti-szociológiai kritikája* (Trauma Society: A Historical-Sociological Critique of the Politics of Memory) (2019). His current research projects include the Cold War history of Holocaust documentation and the history and memory of international anti-fascism.

Index

Abusch, Alexander 279n
Adenauer, Konrad 9, 60, 105–06, 150–51, 180, 182, 184, 188, 265
Ajzensztajn, Betti 125
Aleichem, Sholem 29
Allen, Charles R. Jr. 301
Almási, Miklós 214
Almazov, Shlomo 23n
Alter, Wiktor 29n, 87
Anders, Günter 13, 20, 275–92
Antelme, Robert 133
Arditi, Benjamin 157–58, 162
Arendt, Hannah 5, 142, 275, 289n
Aris, Helmut 305, 308
Arones, F. 240
Asch, Shalom 28
Azouvi, François 74

Baab, Heinrich 163
Bachtin, Michail 277
Bamm, Peter 267
Baron, Zalman 243
Bauer, Fritz 148, 151, 153, 155–56, 158, 169
Beckelman, Moses 6
Beckerle, Adolf-Heinz 18–19, 147–50, 152–56, 158–59, 161, 163, 166–171
Belev (Beleff), Aleksandăr 158, 166–69
Belyaev, Vladimir 228
Ben-Gurion, David 51–52, 57–58, 60, 63–66, 70, 106, 182, 184
Bialik, Hayim Nachman 247
Biermann, Heinrich 163
Bischoff, Friedrich
Black, Helen 34
Blanchot, Maurice 286
Bloch, Anne L. 40
Blum, Mark 242
Blumental, Nachman 123, 131n
Böll, Heinrich 267
Bonaparte, Napoelon 269
Bonitz, Heinrich Bernhard 162n
Boris III, King of Bulgaria 165
Born, Max 290
Borwicz, Michał 125
Boswell, James 306
Brainin, Joseph 34n, 36, 39
Bratschi, Georges 217
Brezhnev, Leonid 101, 192
Brils, Imants 198

Calamandrei, Piero 129
Chernaia, Liudmila 102
Chiarini, Luigi 216
Chomsky, Marvin 268
Chpil'berg, Aron 245
Christmann, Kurt 104
Churchill, Winston 3
Connerton, Paul 74

Daniel, Yuli 101
Dannecker, Theodor 152–53, 156, 167–68
Des Pres, Terrence 214
Diecke, Günther 111
Donskoy, Mark 180n, 193, 232, 235
Draeger, Gusta 132
Draganov Peev, Pejo 164
Dubnow, Simon 38
Dürrenmatt, Friedrich 209
Dwyer, William O. 24

Eglītis, Arturs 229, 238–39, 249
Ehrenburg, Ilya 16, 30, 32–34, 44, 45n, 48, 98, 100, 102, 115, 191
Ehrlich, Henryk 29n, 87
Eichmann, Adolf 9–10, 11n, 81n, 105–08, 116, 154, 156, 167, 173–77, 179–85, 188, 190–91, 194–98, 207–08, 210, 213, 273, 298, 302
Eick, Paul 259
Einstein, Albert 24, 28, 39, 44
Eisenbach, Artur 123n
Eisenhower,Dwight D. 53n, 286
Eisler, Gerhart 7
Eisler, Hanns 8
Eisler, Hilde (Brunhilde) 7
Éluard, Paul 84
Ensslin, Gudrun 285

Open Access. © 2024 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. BY-NC-ND This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110672657-015

Erlich, Alexander 85
Etzioni, Amitai 299
Evtushenko, Evgenii 98, 100, 115, 191, 197, 229

Fábri, Zoltán 13, 20, 201–207, 210–221
Fansten, Nahum 89
Fefer, Itzik 28–29, 34, 47
Fellini, Federico 206, 217
Feuchtwanger, Lion 28
Fieschi, Jean-André 217
Filov (Filoff), Bogdan 158
Focardi, Filippo 134
Foertsch, Friedrich 107, 188
Földes, Anna 215
Frank, Anne 14n, 16, 110, 112–13, 116, 133
Frank, Gerts (Hercs) 198
Frank, Otto 16
Frank, Waldo 28
Freundlich, Elisabeth 278–79
Friedman, Philip 123, 141–143
Fureix, Emannuel 75

Gabrovski (Grabowski), Petăr 158
Garber, David 242, 248
Geis, Egon 169
Gershenson, Olga 110
Ginzburg, Lev 99, 108, 111, 176, 177n, 182–84, 190, 194, 196–98
Giovanna (Joanna), Queen of Bulgaria 168n
Glick, Hirsch 108
Globke, Hans 9, 105–06, 116, 150, 181, 184, 188, 190, 265, 167n
Goldberg, Ben Zion 24, 28, 30–31, 34, 36–41, 43, 45–47
Goldmann, Nahum 29, 30n, 34, 48
Gollomb, Eugen 279n
Gollwitzer, Helmut 290
Goodrich, Frances 110
Gorbatov, Boris 232
Gordon, Robert 143
Gottlieb, Roland 163
Gramsci, Antonio 121
Grant, Alfred 89
Green, Nancy 78
Grinberg, Reuven 85
Gromyko, Andrei 34, 48
Grossman, Vasilii 34–35, 44, 102, 108, 191
Guterman, Perets 88

Habermas, Jürgen 11
Hackett, Albert 110
Hahn, Fritz Gebhardt von 153, 155, 158, 160, 170–71
Hälker, Kurt 305, 307, 309
Halpern, Israel 156
Hananel, Asher 158–59
Harlan, Veit 109
Hartmann, Hanns 258, 263, 273
Haug, Wolfgang Fritz 287, 291
Hausner, Gideon 81n
Hayes, Saul 40–41
Heidegger, Martin 278, 282, 291
Herf, Jeffrey 296
Hermann, Paul 259
Heun, Willy 84
Heusinger, Adolf 301–02
Hilberg, Raul 2n, 142
Hillers, Solomons 231
Hitler, Adolf 24, 27, 54, 62, 66, 88, 99, 109, 184–85, 188–89, 194, 197–98, 240, 264, 307
Hochhuth, Rolf 102
Hoffmann, Adolf 167
Hurwitz, Leo 173
Husserl, Edmund 282, 291

Jackson, Justice 42n
Jakubowska, Wanda 271
Jarblum, Marc 86
Jauss, Hans Robert 257, 260
Jefroykin, Israel 87
Jonas, Hans 289n

Kadelbach, Philipp 268
Kafka, Franz 277–78
Kaiser, Joachim 261
Kaltenbrunner, Ernst 183
Kantorowicz, Alfred 8
Kapel, René 85
Karmen, Roman 189
Kataev, Valentin 228
Kaul, Friedrich Karl 10n, 169
Kaupužs, Vladimirs 229

Kehrer, Walter 190
Kermisz, Józef (Kermish, Joseph) 123, 131, 157, 162n
Khrushchev, Nikita 97, 100–01, 103, 115–16, 191–92, 197, 286
Klarsfeld, Serge 90
Knappstein, Karl H. 310
Koch, Erich 178, 194
Kogon, Eugen 169
Konrad, Franz 132
Korman, Yidl 88
Korn, Karl 260–62
Kortner, Fritz 278–79
Koselleck, Reinhart 257, 273
Krakowski, Shmuel 123
Kreuzer, Helmut 261
Kriegel-Valrimont, Maurice 84
Kubowitzki, Léon 34n
Kuptievskaia, B. 179
Kutub-zade, Kenan 196
Kuzkovski, Yosef 14, 20, 223–32, 235, 237–44, 247–48, 250, *251*, 252–53
Kuznetsov, Anatolii 100, 191

Landau, Ludwik 132
Langbein, Hermann 156
Lattes, Dante 129
Lattes, Wanda 120, 129
Lazarev, Lazar 111
Le Bourhis, Eric 226
Lediakh, Irina 185, 190
Lemke, Bronisław 113
Lemkin, Raphael 42
Lenin, Vladimir 123, 227, 239–40
Levada, Iurii 97
Levi, Primo 133, 136n
Lowe-Fox, Patricia 40
Lozovsky, Solomon 48
Lübke, Heinrich 305
Luther, Martin 152–53

Mac Gee, Willie 89
Mahler, Raphael 30, 34
Majus, Jacob 299
Mandel, Arnold 19, 78
Mann, Mendel 87
Marcuse, Herbert 289n
Mark, Bernard (Ber) 11n, 113–115, 122, 129–30, 132n, 135
Marx, Karl 282, 284
Matkovski, Aleksandar 160, 162
May, Paul 256
Mayer, Hans 8
Mazrukho, Leon 19, 193–94, 198
McClernan, Frances 40
Meissner, Arthur 163
Mendelssohn, Moses 304
Meras, Icchokas 100
Merten, Max 163
Metscher, Thomas 290–91
Mihelson, Frida 242
Mikhoels, Solomon 28–29, 31–32, 34, 47–48
Miljun, Reizel 248
Miller, Arthur 94
Minskere, Frīda 248
Mitterrand, François 90
Molho, Michael 162
Moretzka, Yehudit 81n
Motzkin, Leo 31n

Nakhmanovich, Rafail Aronovich 176, 188, 195, 198
Nasser, Gamal Abdel 88
Neuburger, Paul 160
Niemöller, Martin 290
Nirenstein, Alberto 17, 19, 119–124, 126–145
Nono, Luigi 139
Norden, Albert 308–310
Novick, Paul 250n, 300

O´Casey, Sean 278
Oberländer, Theodor 9, 180, 188–89, 265
Ostrovsky, Nikolai 228

Páger, Antal 216–17, 219–21
Paul, Marcel 86
Pechersky, Alexander 132, 133n
Peretz Pauline 250
Perle, Jehoshua 131, 136, 141
Perlzweig, Maurice 24, 30, 35, 39–41
Polevoi, Boris 230
Poliakov, Léon 112, 130, 133, 156
Poltorak, Arkady 181
Poznanski, Gitel (Gertrude) 40

Rademacher, Franz 152–53, 162–63
Radványi, Géza von 256
Raginskii, Mark 112–13
Rait-Kovaleva, Rita 112
Rakowski, Jerzy 115
Razumny, Mark 250n
Reitlinger, Gerald 156
Remarque, Erich Maria 267
Reni, Peter 111
Reshetnikov, Feliks 185
Resnais, Alain 206, 210, 217, 266, 271
Ribbentrop, Joachim von 183
Richter, Joachim 153n, 160–61, 168–69
Riesenburger, Martin 304
Ringelblum, Emanuel 15–16, 123, 131, 140, 142
Riurikov, Boris 94, 97
Robinson, Jacob 35, 38n, 39, 42, 158
Robinson, Nehemiah 158–160
Rolnikaitė, Maria (also Rolnik, Masha) 14n, 19, 93
Romano, Giorgio 139–40
Romm, Mikhail 110, 181
Rónay, György 207, 210, 213
Roosevelt, Eleanor 26
Rosenberg, Ethel 8, 89
Rosenberg, Julius 8, 89
Rothberg, Michael 12, 101
Rozen, V. 108
Rubinowicz, Dawid 14n, 113
Rudenko, Roman 186
Russell, Bertrand 292

Sachs, Nelly 285
Saidel, Rochelle G. 301
Sauckel, Fritz 182
Scagnetti, Aldo 216
Schacht, Hjalmar 129
Schalast, Hanns 269
Schneider, Iossif 243, 245, 247n, 248, 250n
Schnurre, Wolfdietrich 10n
Scholz, Hans 11, 20, 256–63, 269–70, 271n, 272
Schröder, Gerhard 310
Seghers, Anna 8
Seigewasser, Hans 308
Servatius, Robert 182
Shefner, Borekh 87
Shneiderov, Moisei 250nn
Shostakovich, Dmitri 191, 229
Shub, David 35
Shvernik, Nikolay M. 30
Sierakowiak, Dawid 14nn, 113
Silberberg, Nathan 83
Sinder, Henri 30, 34
Sinyavsky, Andrei 101
Slánský, Rudolf 6, 57, 79–80, 128
Sloan, Jacob 16–17, 132, 140, 142–43
Sobolev, Arkady 182
Sontag, Susan 219
Soyer, Daniel 28
Stalin, Joseph 9, 37, 62, 99, 121, 123, 155, 165nn, 177nn, 198nn, 240n
Stangl, Franz 108
Staudte, Wolfgang 151
Stevens, George 110–11
Stibi, Georg 305
Streicher, Julius 183
Stroop, Jürgen 132
Stučka, Pēteris 231, 240
Sutzkever, Abraham 34, 44–45
Svilova, Elizaveta 189
Świderska-Świeratowa, Maria 162n
Szenes, Hannah 84
Szpigelman, Jadzia 217

Tergit, Gabriele 258
Timm, Angelika 296
Tito, Josef Brosz 155
Tolkachev, Zinovii 195
Tolstoi, Aleksei 228, 230
Trainin, Aron 41
Tseitline, Shmuel 243
Tvardovsky, Alexsander 102

Ulbricht, Walter 308–09
Umgelter, Fritz 258, 262–264, 269–272

Vajs, Albert 160
Vergelis, Aron 250n
Vesper, Bernward 285

Wasserstein, Ursula 40
Wdowinski, David 142
Wegener, Henriette 259–60
Wentzke, Wilhelm 154, 156–58, 170

Westphal, Gert 258, 269–70
Weyrauch, Wolfgang 259
Wiesel, Elie 13
Wieviorka, Annette 74, 198
Windeck, Josef Joachim 162n
Wise, Stephen S. 24
Wisliceny, Dieter 163
Wittkowski, Grete 11n
Wolf, Konrad 110
Wolffsohn, Michael 296
Wulf, Joseph 113, 156

Yakovlev, Alexander 114
Yampol, Samuel Burr 21, 294, 299–313
Youdine, Albert 86, 88

Zagorov, Slavčo 164–165
Zerubavel, Yael 79
Zhabotinski, Ze'ev 247
Zilberman, David 224, 228, 241–242, 247n
Zweig, Arnold 8