

VICTIMS' POLITICS: JEWISH BEHAVIOR DURING THE HOLOCAUST

by

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation addresses the variation in the behavior of victims of genocides and mass killings: why do some resist, some try to escape, some cooperate with the perpetrators, and some simply do nothing? What explains different modes of victims' individual and group behavior? The study answers these questions by focusing on Jewish behavior during the Holocaust. I argue that the behavior of the Holocaust victims was determined by pre-genocide political and social factors, first and foremost activism in political parties and organizations and the level of integration into the broader non-Jewish society.

The first part of the dissertation explains the variation in patterns of collective Jewish resistance to the Nazis. Drawing on a unique dataset of more than 1,100 Jewish ghettos established by the Nazis and linking the data on ghettos with pre-war electoral returns from Polish national elections and elections for the Zionist Organization World Congress, I find that Jewish armed resistance was more likely to emerge in communities that exhibited high levels of political activism prior to the Holocaust. I also find that the vast majority of ghetto uprisings took place in Eastern Poland—a territory that was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1939-41 and then by Germany in 1941-4.

The second part of the dissertation examines how and why Holocaust victims chose their individual strategies of survival. I propose a new typology of victims' behaviors, arguing that the choice of a particular survival strategy was linked to victims' pre-Holocaust political and social experiences. I examine how Jews targeted by the Nazis chose their survival strategies. Focusing on the ghettos of Minsk (USSR until 1941, Nazi occupation 1941-4), Kraków (Poland until 1939, Nazi occupation 1939-45), and Białystok (Poland until 1939, Soviet occupation 1939-41,

Nazi occupation 1941-4) I also show how distinctively local histories, legacies, and factors affected the patterns of collaboration, coping, evasion, and resistance in each city.

TRANSLITERATION

For Polish names and places in Poland I use the original Polish spelling. The only exception is places that have a standard internationally recognized spelling form. Thus, I use Warsaw instead of the original Polish Warszawa. For places in Eastern Poland I use the pre-WWII Polish form, instead of the later Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, or Lithuanian forms. Thus, Białystok rather than Belostok, and Wilno rather than Vilnius. For the Russian, Belorussian, and Hebrew words I follow the Library of Congress transliteration rules. In the transliteration of Hebrew words I do not include special characters, such as dots and apostrophes (thus t instead of ʔ, s instead of ś etc.). Readers, familiar with the Hebrew language will have no difficulty to recognize the correct word, and others would not be affected by this transliteration decision.

Chapter 1: Introduction

June 12, 1942, Khmel'nik ghetto, Reichskommissariat Ukraine.

June 12, 1942 divided twelve-year-old Israel G.'s¹ life into two unequal parts—life before and after that day, when the young Jews of Khmel'nik were shot during the Children's *Aktion*. Until that day, Israel G. was much luckier than most of the Jews of Khmel'nik, the majority of whom had been shot dead near the town by the German mobile killing squad *Einsatzkommando 5* and its local collaborators. Of the pre-war Jewish community's population of almost 5,000, less than a fifth were still alive in the summer of 1942.

The beginning of Israel's travails began a year earlier, though, when Germany invaded the Soviet Union. His father was drafted into the Red Army, while Israel, his mother Alexandra, and his brother Binyamin, tried to escape to the Soviet hinterland. They reached Kiev, but were stopped by the need for a special permit to cross the Dnieper River and continue further east. After considerable effort, Alexandra was finally able to obtain the necessary paperwork—only to have the permit stolen by another Jewish family fleeing Khmel'nik. Alexandra and her children were forced to return to their town, which had been later occupied by the Germans.

Yet, Israel's family was better off than most of the other Jews in town. His grandfather was one of the best coppersmiths in the area. The German occupiers were more than happy to avail themselves of his services and this relationship gave the family a certain level of protection. And they had dollars, a desired commodity on the black market at the time. Israel was named after his uncle, who had immigrated to the United States before WWI, was drafted when US

¹The policies of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies do not allow me to list the full name of the interviewee.

entered the war and subsequently killed in France. Until the late 1930s the family received a pension from the US government.

On January 2, 1942 the Nazi authorities forced the Jews of Khmel'nik, including Israel and his family, into a ghetto. Two weeks later, only 1,000 skilled workers and their families were still alive. Israel's family was among the lucky few. Then, after several uneventful months, the June 12 Aktion came.

The Nazis ordered the ghetto inhabitants to gather in the main square, in front of the police building, where all the children and several old people—360 total—were rounded up and separated from their families. “What a beautiful boy,” a German soldier said, taking Binyamin away. During the year that had passed since Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, Israel G. had seen enough to understand the fate waiting for him. “I decided that I will run away no matter what,” he recalled. “In the worst case, I will die escaping.” Instead of windows, the police building had two large pieces of plywood. Israel G. hid between them while the seven-year-old Binyamin stayed with other children. Israel thus became the only survivor of the Children's Aktion, though he never forgave himself for not going with his brother toward certain death.

Having lost her younger son and fearing imminent liquidation of the ghetto, Alexandra G. decided to make another desperate escape attempt. She arranged fake passports in the names of Alexandra and Vasilii Donets that listed her and Israel's ethnicity as “Ukrainian” and fled the ghetto. Luckily, both mother and son spoke good Ukrainian and did not look typically Jewish. They crossed the border into Romanian-occupied Ukraine and snuck into the Zhmerinka ghetto, which was considered relatively safe; at this point, although the Romanian authorities kept Jews

in ghettos, they were not orchestrating their killing *en masse*. Yet, this sanctuary was short-lived for Alexandra and Israel, who were expelled by the ghetto's authorities for trying to obtain food outside the ghetto. The Jewish Police of the Zhmerinka ghetto knew perfectly well that if caught, Israel G. and his mother would be shot, but they also feared that the refugees' presence might endanger the whole ghetto. Israel and Alexandra continued roaming the Ukrainian countryside in hiding until the liberation in March 1944 (HVT-3648).

The Puzzle

Israel G. and his family's story is not atypical. Many, if not most, survivors have similar stories to tell. Dates, places, details vary, but the basic narrative often tragically similar: survivors recount losing family members, they discuss grief and pain—but they also emphasize luck and outright miracles. The underlying theme of these stories is that of choice; each and every Jewish person had to decide how to react to Nazi persecution. Each had to select a survival strategy (or, sometimes, several). In Israel G. and his mother's case, they attempted to escape, coped with the evolving situation inside Khmel'nik ghetto, and then escaped a second time. The Zhmerinka ghetto's Jewish Police chose to collaborate with and obey the orders of the Holocaust perpetrators—even when their actions entailed putting the lives of Israel and Alexandra, fellow Jewish victims, in grave danger. But there were also those who resisted, to varying degrees. For example, the Khmel'nik ghetto had an underground resistance group that obtained weapons and hid them in the synagogue, although there was no uprising there.

The Jewish experience during the Holocaust is not unique. In Rwanda, many Tutsis tried to escape the genocide, some organized armed resistance, and others joined the Hutu *Interahamwe* killing squads (Fujii 2009). In the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian reactions to the

1912 genocidal campaign ranged from armed resistance to passivity to collaboration. During the war in Bosnia, numerous Muslims reaped handsome benefits from active collaboration with Serbs (Andreas 2008); some even joined forces with Serbs, taking up arms against their religious and ethnic brethren (Christia 2008). What explains this variation?

In recent years substantial scholarly attention has been devoted to studying the behavior, decisions, and strategies of both perpetrators and supporters of mass violence in genocides and mass killings (Browning 1993; Dean 2000; Fujii 2009; Goldhagen 1996; Straus 2006; Weiss-Wendt 2009), civil wars, and domestic uprisings (Darden forthcoming; Kalyvas 2006; Petersen 2001; Weinstein 2007; Wood 2003). However, the substantial literature on collective violence has almost completely overlooked the choices and strategies of another crucial group of actors: *the victims*, a term I define as civilians (or those who were civilians prior to the outbreak of violence) targeted by mass violence. Yet, because collective violence is a dynamic and relational process (Kalyvas 2006; Tilly 2003), its trajectories and outcomes cannot be fully explored and understood by concentrating solely on perpetrators (Browning 2010, 291; Hilberg 1993). Civilians, when targeted by mass violence, also have choices to make and strategies to adopt. Being a victim does not deprive one of agency.² Victims of all ages, genders, and walks of life – whether they are Jews, Tutsis, or Cambodians—are ordinary people who are forced to face extraordinary dangers. This project asks, *what explains the different patterns of behavior adopted by people targeted by mass violence?* To answer this question, I analyze Jewish behavior during the Holocaust. I focus both on the individual (micro) level and the community (meso) level (Finkel and Straus 2012). I examine (1) variation in individual victims' choice of survival

² Stephen Lubkemann points out that a similar situation takes place in the scholarship on displacement and migration, where the refugees are treated as people “to whom things happen and are done, rather than agents who make things happen through their doing (Lubkemann 2008, 6).

strategies in three large ghettos: Minsk, Kraków, and Białystok, and (2) variation in patterns of ghettos' armed resistance to the Nazis.

The Argument

“If people only appear over the edge of the epistemic horizon just as they are killing Jews, then all we really know about them is that they are killing Jews,” notes Timothy Snyder (Connelly et al. 2011). The same can be said about the Jewish victims of the Holocaust; if they appear in an analysis only after their confinement to ghettos and murder by the Nazis, our ability to explain their behavior is limited. The past—both of people and their communities—must be taken into account if we want to analyze how and why they chose particular survival strategies. My main argument is that pre-World War II political and social factors, particularly activism in formal political organizations and the degree of Jews' integration into the larger society, determined Holocaust victims' behavior. More specifically, I argue that:

1. Victims' choices of particular strategies depended on their pre-Holocaust political and social experiences, as well as available credible (or perceived as credible) information on the likelihood of survival;
2. Local-level politics, experiences, and relations affected choices of survival strategies.

With regard to collective resistance—specifically ghetto uprisings—I argue that Jewish uprisings against the Nazis were strongly conditioned on community members' pre-Holocaust political preferences. In localities where Jews tended to vote for ethnic Jewish parties and where there were high numbers of politically active Jews, armed resistance *inside the ghetto* was more likely than in communities where the Jews supported non-ethnic parties. I also argue that the Jewish resistance was strongly affected by the political regimes under which the Jewish

community lived before the Nazi occupation, and that the patterns of resistance in the USSR differed from those in Poland. My argument is based on the assumption that genocide, and violence more generally, is not a one-time event or series of events, but a complicated social and political process (Lubkemann 2008; McGovern 2010; Rosenberg 2012; Straus 2012; Verdeja 2012) that unfolds over time. During that time, individuals can form opinions, gather and evaluate information, update priors, and rationally choose and change their behavioral strategies.

With regard to individual behavior, I propose a typology of strategies that expands and improves upon the existing frameworks (Hilberg 2003): collaboration, compliance, evasion, coping, and resistance. ***Collaboration*** means cooperation with the enemy by participating in or facilitating the process of killing. Collaboration can be of two basic types: (a) public and open, such as the behavior of the Jewish Councils' leaders or (b) private and secret, for example the actions of paid informants. ***Compliance*** means obeying the rules that the authorities prescribe and taking no active steps to change one's situation. ***Coping*** means trying to survive without leaving one's community or country, engaging in collaboration, or participating in organized armed resistance to the perpetrators. ***Evasion*** entails an attempt to escape persecution by hiding, immigrating, or assuming a false identity. ***Resistance*** is defined as involvement in organized activity that is aimed at harming the perpetrators.

Finally, building on Kalyvas's argument that violence is jointly produced by macro-level factors and micro-level dynamics (Kalyvas 2003),³ I argue that the behavior of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust was produced jointly by the interaction between micro-level, individual characteristics (e.g. age, education, or political experience) and meso-, community-level factors

³ In the article Kalyvas uses the term "local," but from his discussion it is clear that for Kalyvas "local" is equivalent to "individual." My treatment of "local" is somewhat different as I view "local" as something intrinsic to a specific locality.

(e.g. local histories, relations between ethnic group in the community, and local-level socio-economic profiles).

The Setting: Jewish Ghettos during the Holocaust

The prominent Holocaust historian Dan Michman has argued that “[T]he ghetto phenomenon was central to Jewish life under the national socialist regime and as a keystone of Holocaust consciousness and memory” (Michman 2011, 1). Before the twentieth century, ghettos—that is, specific residential areas for Jews—existed in many European towns. The word itself derives from the name of the island where Venetian Jews were forced to live. By adopting a familiar term, the Nazis sought to delude the Jews and present their new situation as the return to pre-emancipation times (Dean 2010, 340). Yet, the Nazi ghettos were very different from the medieval Jewish quarters.

On September 21, 1939, three weeks after the Nazi invasion of Poland, Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Reich Main Security Office held a meeting to discuss occupation policy in the newly-conquered Polish territories; in attendance were his adviser for Jewish affairs, Adolf Eichmann, and several high-ranking officials of the Nazi security apparatus. Heydrich was quite explicit about his plans for the Jewish minority: “The Jews are to be concentrated in ghettos in cities, in order to facilitate a better possibility of control and later expulsion” (Browning, 2011). Heydrich’s order notwithstanding, the main ghettoization drive started only shortly before the German attack on the USSR in 1941; eventually the majority of Jews in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe was concentrated in more than 1,100 ghettos, scattered from western Poland to the northern Caucasus. The smallest ghetto (Obol’ in the USSR) had about ten inmates; the largest (Warsaw in Poland) contained almost half a million Jews. Not every locality in which the Jews

lived had a ghetto, but the vast majority of towns and cities with a sizable Jewish population did—even if only for a short time.

While Nazi authorities “never elaborated a clear and unequivocal definition of what the ghetto was or should be,” (Michman 2011, 3) ghettos shared several defining features—namely the resettlement and concentration of the Jewish population into an area *only* for Jews, as well as severe restrictions on entering and leaving said area. The term ‘ghetto’ is rarely mentioned in the Nazis’ official discourse; instead, the neutral and inconspicuous “Jewish Residential District/Area” is generally used.

Martin Dean subdivides ghettos into the following types: open, closed, destruction, and remnant. Open ghettos were the officially declared Jewish Residential Areas, which were not enclosed by any physical barrier (although any Jew caught outside the ghetto would face severe punishment, very often being shot). Closed ghettos were physically enclosed, surrounded by wooden or stone fences, or barbed wire. Destruction ghettos existed for less than two months; they were established to facilitate the destruction of local Jewish communities, serving as the location for concentration of these target populations prior to mass shootings or deportations to death camps. Finally, remnant ghettos were established to house those not selected for deportations or mass shootings, usually Jews with needed skills and their families (Dean n.d.). Living conditions in the ghettos were harsh, with confined Jews suffering from overcrowding, food shortages, and epidemics such as typhoid—although the harshness of conditions varied considerably from one ghetto to another.

Alongside the ghettos’ physical attributes, their social structures were highly salient. Hilberg saw the ghetto as a form of government, imposed on the targeted Jewish populations by

an external force to improve control over them (Hilberg 1981). However, the majority of scholars view the ghetto as a unique (and also an imposed) geographical and social structure where important elements of the local pre-war Jewish society continued to exist—in effect, a sort of continuation of the pre-war community (Corni 2002; Gringauz 1949; Trunk 1972). Given the salience of community-level factors, in seeking to better understand the impact of pre-violence social and political factors on individual and collective behavior, individual ghettos during the conflict are a natural unit of analysis.

The Cases

The choice of the Holocaust as the main case study is determined by a combination of theoretical and practical considerations. First, the Holocaust is arguably the best studied and most-documented case of mass killing. But, despite the availability of research materials, the Holocaust—with some notable exceptions (Goldhagen 1996; Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011)—is almost completely overlooked by social scientists studying political violence. This is an omission that demands correction (King 2012). Furthermore, the Holocaust provides numerous opportunities for comparative research seeking to identify the impact of political and social factors on patterns of violence and resistance. The Holocaust took place in many countries and involved a wide range of killing methods, but several key variables—such as the ethnic and religious identity of both sides—remain constant. From Paris to Kiev to Athens, the main (but not the only) perpetrators were the Germans and the main victims were the Jews. Another constant is state strength, a crucial variable often employed in the literature. While some regional variation in this key variable undoubtedly existed, there is little evidence that the strength of the Nazi state differed substantially in, for example, Warsaw and Minsk. Similarly, Nazi territorial control was rather constant—especially in urban areas, where almost all Jews in the swaths of

Europe they controlled were concentrated. By the time the Nazi state started to lose power in 1943, most of these Jews were already dead. Finally, the Holocaust is clearly a critical case study for any general theory of victims' behavior and strategies when faced with mass violence; thus any theory that fails to explain Jewish behavior during the Holocaust losing a substantial portion of its external validity. On the other hand, a theory that can bridge historical studies of the Holocaust and the social science literature on mass violence would significantly contribute to both disciplines. Furthermore, precisely because the Holocaust is the most centralized, bureaucratized, and industrialized case of genocide, and hence the most unlikely place to search for the "local," it can provide the most convincing evidence of the impact (or at least the presence) of local factors and dynamics.

One another front, analysis of Jewish collective resistance can also serve as a corrective to biases in the dominant historical and public perceptions of genocide and resistance. In the case of the Holocaust, a singular focus on commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—which has become one of the key symbols of the Holocaust—has meant that other uprisings have been largely ignored. My data shows that Warsaw was only one among a number of ghetto uprisings (though it was the largest); rather than a unique occurrence, it was part of a broader pattern of events that remains unexplained.

The specific communities on which the project concentrates were selected because of their similarity in a number of important respects. First, it is possible that the inhabitants of rural areas might choose their survival strategies in a way that differs from the choices made by city dwellers, and that different factors might influence the choices in cities and villages. The three ghettos that I study are therefore of one type: large ghettos, located in major urban centers. The cases also allow me to control for the size of the ghetto and the percentage of the Jewish

population in the community. Before the WWII, both Kraków and Minsk had a Jewish population of about 70,000, or roughly 30% of each city's population. Białystok had a somewhat smaller Jewish community of about 50,000, or about half of the city's population.

Additionally, the three ghettos I study were all closed ghettos. The three ghettos were also subject to very similar German policies; they were located in what Helen Fein calls the “zone of extermination” (Fein 1979; see also Hollander 2008)⁴—no Jews were supposed to be spared by the German government in these cities. Kraków, Białystok, and Minsk were also important Nazi administrative and government centers, which meant that not only the macro-level policies, but also the level of the Nazi security services' control over each on the ground was largely similar. Finally, during the Holocaust the Jewish residents of these three cities engaged in *each* of the available strategies and modes of behavior. In each ghetto there were Jewish Councils, created to carry out Nazi orders, Jewish police, and individuals who collaborated with and were paid informants of the Nazi security apparatus. Each ghetto also had a Jewish underground resistance. All three ghettos contained Jews who tried to escape persecution by hiding and attempting to secure non-Jewish identity papers, while the majority of each ghetto's inhabitants coped with the situation without trying to escape, rebel, or collaborate with the perpetrators. Yet, the *distribution* of strategies varied from ghetto to ghetto. Thus, in Białystok only very few Jews chose evasion, while thousands escaped from the Minsk ghetto; in Kraków the Jewish underground made a decision to act outside the ghetto, while in Białystok there was an uprising (see Table 1.1).

⁴ Fein excludes the USSR from her analysis of the Nazi occupation and control zones, but as I will demonstrate later in this study, the Nazi policies in Minsk were no less (and in many respects substantially more) brutal than in the other two cities.

Furthermore, despite numerous similarities, Kraków, Białystok, and Minsk varied in terms of regime type and political structure. Before the Nazi occupation, Kraków was a part of the Polish state, which despite being an autocracy allowed multi-party political life both at the national- and the Jewish-community levels. Białystok was part of Poland until 1939, and in 1939-1941 was occupied by the Soviet Union, which suppressed and subsequently banned (but did not completely destroy) non-Communist political institutions. Minsk was the capital of Soviet Belorussia. This variation on the main explanatory variable is of key importance for testing my hypotheses, allowing this research to isolate the impact of pre-genocide political structures on survival strategies—and to determine the effects of not only the mere fact of previous political experience, but also the relevance of variation in its content (e.g. ethnic or non-ethnic; and Socialist, Liberal, Zionist, or Communist) on behavioral strategies.

Table 1.1: Main differences between Minsk, Kraków, and Białystok

	State pre-WWII	USSR 1939-41	Pre-WWII Jewish political activism	Jewish Integration into non-Jewish society	Evasion	Uprising
Minsk	USSR	Yes	Low	High	High	No
Kraków	Poland	No	High	Medium	Medium	No
Białystok	Poland	Yes	High	Low	Low	Yes

The Data

This study employs both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data consists of three large-N datasets, two of which (the Jewish Ghettos Dataset and the Zionist Elections Dataset) offer the opportunity to analyze data that scholars have not previously analyzed.

Jewish Ghettos Dataset: For this project I have collected data on 1,126 ghettos that the Nazis established in Poland, the Baltic States, and the USSR. The dataset does not cover the ghettos established by German allies, i.e. Hungary and Romania, as the dynamics of persecution and killing in Hungary, Romania, and the Soviet territories occupied by these states were quite different from those in Nazi-controlled areas. I have also excluded the only ghetto the Nazis established in Greece (Saloniki), as well as the “showcase” ghetto of Terezin/Theresienstadt (located in pre-war Czechoslovakia). The dataset includes information on each ghetto’s dates of establishment and liquidation, its population, whether or not there was a mass killing of the Jews prior to establishment, whether it was “open” or “closed,” pre-war census data on the Jewish community, and data on various forms of Jewish organized resistance (i.e. underground resistance groups, uprisings, and escapes to join partisan forces). It is the first dataset of this type that covers such a large number of ghettos.

1928 Polish National Elections Dataset: Out of a total of 1,126 ghettos included in the previous dataset, 677 were established in pre-WWII Poland, while 360 were in the territory that Germany occupied in 1939 and 317 in Eastern Poland, which the Soviets occupied from 1939-1941 preceding German conquest of the region in 1941. For each Polish ghetto, I have collected local-level electoral data from the communities in which the ghettos were established. I chose the 1928 election because it was the last free and fair election held in inter-war Poland. Out of the 677 Polish localities in which ghettos were established, I collected electoral returns from 569. This difference stems from the lack of published results for localities with less than five hundred eligible voters, and the creation of several ghettos in places that were agricultural estates before the Nazi invasion.

1937 and 1939 Zionist Organization (ZO) Elections: Zionism was the dominant political force among Polish Jews. Yet, these Jews' levels of commitment to immigration to Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state varied. This dataset contains local-level returns from the elections to the ZO⁵ Congress from almost six hundred localities in pre-WWII Poland. The ZO was established in 1897 as an umbrella organization for the Zionist movement that sought to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The ZO Congresses were held every two years and the right to vote for delegates was granted *only* to dues paying members of the ZO. The data thus allowed me to extract the number and the distribution of political preferences among the politically active Zionists in Poland. I was able to identify ZO elections results for 469 out of 667 ghetto localities. Ghettos were not established in all the localities that voted in the ZO elections, and I do not have electoral returns from one region (*województwo*) of Poland.

The qualitative part of the project is based on more than three hundred Holocaust survivors' testimonies—mostly videotaped oral history interviews and written accounts—that several dozen archives and oral history projects throughout the world have collected. The bulk of the testimonies I use come from the Yale University Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, and the Oral History Division of the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In addition to testimonies, I also use published memoirs and a wide range of Holocaust-era sources, such as official documents, diaries, and letters that Jewish victims of Nazi persecution produced as the Holocaust unfolded. The Mersik-Tanenbaum Underground Archives of Białystok ghetto were extremely important in this regard because they included, among other things, the minutes of the Białystok ghetto Jewish Council's meetings, and the diary and personal correspondence of the ghetto underground's commander.

⁵ Currently the World Zionist Organization.

Overall, I use primary and secondary data in five languages: English, Hebrew, Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian.

The use of survivors' testimonies has both advantages and limitations.⁶ First, survivors represent only a small subset of Jews targeted by the Nazi genocide, and the survivors who were/are willing to share their experiences are only a subset of this subset. Therefore, the testimonies do not present a random or representative sample of the Jewish experiences as a whole, and over-represent the stories of those who were able to survive these tragic events. Furthermore, the survivors' testimonies can be affected by factual distortions and omissions, as well as imprecise recollections and interpretations of events influenced by post-Holocaust knowledge and understandings.

My reliance on the already-existing testimonies also could have affected the analysis, in that I use data collected by others for their own research and commemoration purposes. More than once I was frustrated by an interviewer's insistence on directing subjects to discuss issues that I found completely useless for my research—and at times I was frustrated when an interviewer cut an answer and forced him or her to move on to a completely different topic a moment before the survivor, I felt, was about to provide me with a proverbial smoking gun. At the same time, I can be confident that interviewees did not provide me with the data I wanted to have because they knew about the topic of my research or felt that certain types of information would please me more than others.

Another potential and related issue of which I am aware, but cannot control for, is the issue of meta-data, and “shades of truth and lies,” as Fujii calls the phenomenon (Fujii 2010).

⁶For a detailed discussion of using oral testimonies from the Holocaust period in the political science research, see Monroe (2012, Appendix A).

Fujii argues that in interviews with people who experienced mass violence, just as important as the factual information are the meta-data: rumors, inventions, denials, evasions, silences, and other things that are being said by what is not being said. While it is possible to pay attention to survivors' silences and body language, and to try to incorporate the meta-data into my analysis, the task is complicated by the fact that I can see only what the cameraman decided to film, as well as the fact that the vast majority of interviews were conducted in survivors' second (and sometimes third) languages. Interviewees' body language and silences were thus affected by their attempts to find relevant words, gestures, and expressions in their non-native tongue.

I try to overcome these challenges by including as many Holocaust-era sources as possible and by treating the survivors' testimonies with the caution required. At the same time, building on pioneering studies of the Holocaust such as Gross's *Neighbors* (Gross 2002), I view survivors' testimonies as an important and valid source of information. Survivors' testimonies, notes Greenspan, are stable over time; the conformity between early and late testimonies is remarkable (Greenspan 2001). Furthermore, when the testimonies are used to identify certain key strategies and modes of behavior, rather than to precisely reconstruct the unfolding of events, distortions and omissions that do exist should not significantly affect my findings. Also, as Browning emphasizes, Holocaust survivors are much more likely to discuss sensitive and potentially incriminating topics in later testimonies; these topics were taboo immediately after the event (Browning 2010, 276).

The Contribution

The goal of this study is to contribute both to empirical knowledge of the Holocaust and to more general theoretical explanations of violence and human behavior in extreme situations.

This work contributes to a better understanding of the Holocaust by conducting an in-depth comparative analysis of three important but understudied ghettos. In addition to the in-depth analysis of three large ghettos, this study's key contribution to the literature is the Jewish Ghettos Dataset, which is the first dataset to collect information on virtually all of the Nazi-established ghettos. Based on these data, I present findings that shed new light on one of the key components of the Holocaust: modes of Jewish victims' decision-making under Nazi persecution. These findings not only improve our knowledge of the Holocaust, but also challenge previously held conventional wisdom and popular images. For instance, I find that about half of the ghettos were not enclosed by any physical barrier that prevented escape, that there were many more ghettos in the USSR than the scholarship assumes, that the armed resistance to the Nazis inside the ghettos was more widespread than historians have thought, and that this resistance followed a distinct pattern.

The study also contributes to the broader genocide studies scholarship by bringing in and analyzing the choices, strategies, and agency of the victims – a topic that is generally overlooked by genocide studies scholars. Additionally, it improves our knowledge of genocide as it happens on the meso-, community-level, which is the least developed level of analysis in this field of study (Finkel and Straus 2012). The study also bridges the literatures on genocide and political violence, and demonstrates how theories and findings of the political science research on civil war, insurgency, and resistance—for instance, research that has stressed the importance of local factors—can also be applied to extreme forms of mass violence. Finally, a broader contribution of this study to the wider social sciences literature is that it demonstrates the long-lasting impact and importance of political identities and experiences, even under conditions of extreme violence.

Structure of the Research

The study is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the existing scholarship on armed resistance, violence, and genocide. The chapter shows that the existing literature on political violence and armed resistance fails to incorporate cases of victims' armed resistance to mass violence, and goes on to argue that political identities and experiences are largely overlooked by the scholars of violence. It also demonstrates that the genocide studies scholarship tends to focus on the perpetrators of violence, as well as on the macro (and recently, the micro) levels of analysis; the claim is presented here that our understanding of genocide and mass violence will be improved if greater attention to both victims' behavior and to the meso-level are incorporated into scholarly analysis.

In Chapter 3, I analyze armed resistance to extreme forms of oppression by focusing on the ghetto uprisings during the Holocaust. Based on the datasets that I constructed, I argue that Jewish uprisings against the Nazis were strongly conditioned on pre-Holocaust political factors. Uprisings were more likely in localities where Jews tended to vote for ethnically Jewish parties and which had higher numbers of politically active Zionists, compared to communities where Jews supported non-ethnic parties. On the other hand, demographic factors and variation in levels of German oppression prior to the final liquidation of ghettos have no statistically significant relationship to ghetto uprisings' occurrence. The chapter also demonstrates that the vast majority of uprisings took place in the region that experienced "double occupation"—by the Soviets (1939-41) and subsequently by the Nazis (1941-4), and that the experience of Soviet rule was crucial for the emergence of Jewish resistance to the Nazis.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on the Jewish communities of Minsk, Kraków, and Białystok, respectively, during the Holocaust, as well as the behavioral strategies that members of these communities adopted. These three in-depths studies show that the behavior of the Minsk, Kraków, and Białystok Jews encompassed a wide spectrum of available strategies; that the choice of a specific survival strategy was rational and was based on the available credible (or perceived as such) information about the chances of survival; and that people who were more integrated into the larger non-Jewish society had a better chance of successfully escaping.

These chapters also show that local factors, especially local histories, mattered a lot for victims' decisions regarding the adoption of particular strategies. Thus, in Kraków the influx of the Jewish refugees from Germany in 1938 prompted a substantial number of the local Jewish population to try to escape when the war started. In Minsk, by contrast, the relatively benevolent experiences of the German occupation during WWI made many people reluctant to flee in 1941. In Kraków and Minsk, the local histories of relatively widespread Jewish integration into Polish and Russian/Belorussian societies allowed many people to successfully escape and hide among the non-Jewish population, while in Białystok—where the levels of Jewish integration and assimilation were historically low—few people chose evasion. Furthermore, the chapters also demonstrate that the patterns of collaboration, and especially resistance, were determined by the *political* institutions under which each community lived prior to the Holocaust—much more so than in the case of individual survival strategies (such as evasion, coping, or compliance) on which political factors had a weaker impact.

Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes my findings and proposes avenues for further research.

August 12, 1990, Khmel'nik, USSR

Every year on the second Sunday of August, the Khmel'nik ghetto survivors gather to honor the dead. On August 12, 1990, Israel G. came to Khmel'nik with his twelve-year-old grandson, which was Israel G.'s age at the time of the June 1942 Aktion. That afternoon Israel G. took his grandson to a small hill on the outskirts of the town, where the victims of the 1942 Children's Aktion had been buried. As they walked around the hill, Israel G. started sobbing. The grandson looked at Israel G. in amazement and disbelief. Never before had he seen his grandfather, a high ranking aviation engineer and air force reserve officer, crying. "Look at this place," Israel G. told his grandson. "This should have been my grave. This *is* my grave. Remember this place."

May 4, 2012, New Haven, CT

May 4 is Israel G.'s birthday. Twenty two years had passed since my first personal encounter with the Holocaust, back there in Khmel'nik with my grandfather. His testimony was the first one I watched when I started working on this project. I still do not really know what "remembering" entails, but at the least I can do my best not to forget.

Chapter 2: Literature and Theory

Genocide and mass killings involve numerous people, roughly divided into three subgroups: perpetrators, bystanders, and victims (Hilberg 1993).⁷ The members of all three groups have choices to make and strategies to adopt. As suggested in the previous chapter, contrary to popular belief, the behavior of individuals targeted by mass violence varies: they adopt different types of behavior, which sometimes changes over time. This variation in individual and collective behavior matters because it affects the unfolding of violence and its outcomes.

While Jewish behavior during the Holocaust cannot explain why the Holocaust happened, it can help us to better understand *how* it happened. “The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half, and six million people,” claimed Hannah Arendt (Arendt 2006). This statement is controversial, but its underlying logic is much less so—the Jewish behavior did have an impact on the unfolding of the Holocaust. If every ghetto had had an uprising, the process of killing would have been different simply because the cost of repression would have been substantially higher for the perpetrators. Had more people chosen to escape, the number of victims would have been lower. This does not mean that I accuse the Jewish victims of Holocaust of not rebelling or escaping, or directly or indirectly aiding the killing process. There is no moral hierarchy of reactions in my analysis.

⁷ For a more nuanced classification see Fujii (2010).

It is important to note that I make no normative claims regarding the choices of Holocaust victims. Instead, I argue that individual Jews acted as they did for a reason, and that understanding these reasons is of vital importance in understanding the Holocaust itself, as well as other events of genocide.

In this chapter I survey the genocide studies and the political violence literatures and their treatment of the behavior of civilians targeted by mass violence. I demonstrate that, quite surprisingly, the burgeoning comparative genocide literature as well as historical studies of the Holocaust and other cases of genocide has either largely overlooked this important variation or does not devote much effort to explaining it, instead concentrating on the macro-level explanations of genocide and of the perpetrators of violence.

As for the community-level, based on the typology developed by Scott Straus and myself (Finkel and Straus 2012), I show that the meso-level (the community level) is the least developed level of analysis in the comparative genocide scholarship, arguing that a focus on the community (in my case, the ghetto) level can improve our understanding of mass violence. I also survey the political violence literature and demonstrate that it also overlooks the victims' armed resistance to mass violence and that existing theories in the field cannot adequately explain the phenomenon of ghetto uprising and the variation in resistance patterns across the ghettos. Finally, I will propose both 1) a new classification of victims' behavior, and 2) a theory that links the behavior of the Holocaust Jewish victims to pre-violence national and local level political and social factors, specifically the political institutions under which the community operated, and the victims' level of political activism and integration into the larger non-Jewish society.

The Genocide Studies Scholarship and Victims' Behavior

In the beginning, there was Lemkin. Raphael Lemkin, a Poland-born American of Jewish descent, is the founding father of genocide studies. He coined the term and jumpstarted genocide research with his seminal 1944 text, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Lemkin 1944). Lemkin was also an international law scholar. This background, combined with the historical context in which the concept was introduced, steered the state-focused direction of genocide research for decades to come. First, at the core of the genocide scholarship is a rather abstract concept, defined by international lawyers, who tend to concentrate on the macro level. And second, for many years genocide research was dominated by the attempt to understand the atrocities committed by the heavily bureaucratized Nazi government during the Holocaust. The combination of these two factors was of great importance in leading scholars to adopt macro-level approaches in analyzing the key questions of why genocide takes place and what factors lead to genocide.

Moreover, in the modern world it is mainly state governments that have sufficient means and resources to commit genocide. As a result, the state is a natural level of analysis for social-scientific inquiry. Indeed, the main historical case studies for genocide research—Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the Holocaust, Cambodia, and Rwanda—seemed to justify this focus on macro factors: it was government policies and actions that provided a framework for the genocide, and government officials and semi-official agents conducted the killings. Those on the receiving end of genocidal violence—innocent civilians, many of whom were women, young children and old people, were perceived as completely powerless and passive.

On the rhetorical and polemical level, this perceived passivity has led to accusations, mainly in Israel, that the Holocaust victims “went like lamb to the slaughter.”⁸ Among the academics this image of passivity had slowed down the emergence of works analyzing Jewish behavior, and skewed the analysis toward a flurry of attempts to demonstrate that the Jews, rather than being passive, had almost unanimously engaged in what (mainly Israeli) scholars classify as *amidah* (standing up against the enemy), or non-armed resistance (e.g. religious resistance, spiritual resistance, passive resistance). Taken to its logical extreme, this scholarship eventually came to suggest that anything the Jews did to prolong their lives and not to be killed by the Germans can be described as resistance. For example, prominent Holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer defines *amidah* as

smuggling food into ghettos; mutual self-sacrifice within the family to avoid starvation or worse; cultural, educational, religious, and political activities undertaken to strengthen morale; the work of doctors, nurses, and educators to consciously maintain health and moral fiber to enable individual and group survival; and, of course, armed rebellion or the use of force (with bare hands or with ‘cold’ weapons) against the Germans and their collaborators (Bauer 2001).

The problem with this approach is that when very different types of individual and collective behavior, such as self-sacrifice within the family, a commitment to one’s professional duty, and armed rebellion are classified as belonging to the same category, even if it is quite plausible that they are driven by different motivations, our ability to analyze victim’s decisions and strategies becomes limited at best.

Scott Straus divides the genocide scholarship into two main groups (Straus 2007). Many key studies of the ‘first generation’ of genocide research, mainly from 1970-80s, sought to

⁸ Similarly, Bruno Bettelheim, a renowned psychologist and himself a concentration camp survivor, claimed that “Psychologically speaking, most prisoners in the extermination camps committed suicide by submitting to death without resistance.” This passage was not reprinted in later editions of his work (quoted in Fein, 1993, 61).

explain genocide by concentrating on structural factors, such as deep societal divisions (Kuper 1981), cultures of exclusion (Fein 1979), ethnic animosities, and economic conditions (Staub 1989). Others blamed mass killings on non-democratic regimes, emphasizing the connection between genocide and totalitarianism (Horowitz 1976) or autocracy with its concentration of power in the hands of few individuals, not restrained by appropriate checks and balances (Rummel 1994).

However, Straus notes that these studies suffered from serious shortcomings and their validity has been questioned. Authoritarian regimes are numerous while genocides are few, and the same argument can be made about cultures of exclusion and ethnic conflicts, not to mention deep social cleavages and hard living conditions (Straus 2007). From these and other critiques of the ‘first-generation’ studies, the ‘second-generation’ research emerged in the early 2000s. This research, while rejecting the substance of the previous findings, nonetheless continued to concentrate on macro factors and explanations. Thus, some scholars still view regime type as the critical cause of genocide, but reject the linkage between authoritarianism and mass murder (Mann 2005). For others, the specific regime type has no effect and the causes of genocides are modernity and the modern nation state (Bauman 2000; Levene 2005), elite choices (Valentino 2004; Midlarsky 2005), or ideologies (Weitz 2003; Sémelin 2007). Yet, while presenting new theoretical and empirical perspectives on genocide and mass murder, the second-generation studies were nonetheless characterized by the heavy focus on the macro factors and those who committed the violence. They did not address the behavior of the victims and sub-national variations.

In previous work with Straus, I suggest dividing the literature not by research waves but, borrowing from the literature on civil war, by different levels of analysis: the macro-, meso-, and

micro-level (Finkel and Straus 2012). The macro level, which encompasses virtually all the studies included by Straus in his first and second waves of research, focuses on the state and society level explanations. The works that focus on this level of analysis put forward several main explanations for the outbreak of genocidal violence: 1) inter-group relations; 2) regime type; 3) hardship and upheaval; 4) ideology; 5) leaders' strategy; and 6) modernity and development. Naturally, the works that study the macro factors and try to explain the outbreaks of genocidal violence, pay (and arguably for a good reason) only scant if any attention to the victims of genocidal violence after it breaks out. When the macro-level scholars do discuss the victims they usually try to come up with the attributes that the main victim groups (Jews, Armenians, Tutsis) share, discuss how these groups are perceived or imagined by the perpetrators (see, for example, Levene 2005), or view mass violence as an outcome of an interaction between the state and an ethnic movement or organizations that challenges it, such as the Rwandan Patriotic Front, the Armenian *Dashnaktsutyun*, or the Kosovo Liberation Army. According to these studies, mass violence is either the state's reaction the challenger's deliberate and calculated provocation (the moral hazard argument), or an attempt to deprive the challenger of support by targeting the local population (Valentino et al. 2004; Kuperman 2005; Grigorian 2005). How civilians targeted by mass violence behave after it starts, remains beyond the scope of these works.

The micro-level, which was pioneered by the works of Browning and Goldhagen on the Holocaust (Goldhagen 1996; Browning 1993), and Straus on Rwanda (Straus 2006), focuses on individual-level choices to participate in mass violence against civilians, with whom the perpetrators may have no prior individual conflict and who may in fact not be engaged in conflict at all. The micro-level literature puts forward several explanations for individual involvement in

genocides, such as ideological convictions (Goldhagen 1996), peer pressure (Browning 1993), and fear and insecurity (Straus 2006). However, with some exceptions, such as Fujii's study of Rwanda (Fujii 2009), variation in victims' behavior is not discussed by the micro-level scholars. To a large extent, this lack of attention to the victims derives from the questions in which this literature is interested: it makes little sense to analyze the victims when the goal is to solve the puzzle of understanding the motivations of perpetrators. However, the exclusion of victims from this scholarship remains a glaring omission. My claim in this work is that the guiding question of the micro-level scholarship should be slightly reformulated to "What makes people involved in and affected by mass violence behave the way they do?" as opposed to "What makes perpetrators of mass violence behave the way they do?" This reformulation allows for incorporation of the behavioral strategies of not only the perpetrators, but also of the victims, bystanders, and rescuers (Varese and Yaish 2000, 2005; Sémelin et al. 2010; Monroe et al. 1990; Monroe 2004, 2012).

Finally, there is the meso-level. At the broadest level, the meso-level is the space between national or international level factors and individual level ones. More specifically, meso-level studies typically focus on sub-national regions and communities (provinces, towns, and villages) or on specific institutions (such as political parties, civil society organizations, economic sectors, social or political networks, or military units). The attention to the meso-level is well warranted because, as the intra-state conflict literature has recently demonstrated in a very convincing way, sub-national and distinctively local factors substantially affect the unfolding and the outcome of violence (Kalyvas 2006, 2003; Wood 2003; Petersen 2001; Wilkinson 2006; Varshney 2002).

To be sure, the meso-level has not been completely overlooked by scholars of genocide in general or of the Holocaust in particular. Our understanding of the Holocaust has been vastly

improved by classic community studies, such as Jan Gross's *Neighbors* (Gross 2002a), studies of Einsatzgruppen and various Nazi institutions, and recent works, such as Christopher Browning's *Remembering Survival* (Browning 2010) and Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak's monumental study of the Warsaw ghetto (Engelking and Leociak 2009). Yet the principal goals of these studies were either to *describe* what happened in these communities, rather than provide theoretically-driven explanations or comparative perspectives, or to explain the calculus and behavior of key actors. Moreover, with their focus on explaining individual-level behavior, such studies belong more to the micro level.

With regard to the literature on mass killing and genocide, to date the main existing studies concentrating on the meso-level focus on three related questions: (1) what explains sub-national variation in the patterns of violence, in particular with regard to the occurrence, timing, or level of violence? (2) what explains variation in how different institutions (either governmental or non-governmental) affect or respond to the onset of mass killing and genocide? And (3) how do national and local actors and factors interact during a mass killing or genocide event? By and large, these studies point to the importance of local political histories, local political preferences, the actions of local elites, and pre-existing relations between would-be perpetrators and victims at the local level.

Building on the recent studies that focus on the meso-level (Straus 2006; Fujii 2009; Christia 2008; Longman 2010; Robinson 2009; Su 2011; Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011), Straus and I argue that concentrating on this level of analysis, where national level policies and decisions translate to individual actions on the ground, will provide the field with a better understanding of the causal chains and mechanisms of genocide. In other words, the meso-level is an essential link between the macro and the micro, without an understanding of which our

ability to analyze genocides will be significantly restrained for at least three reasons (Finkel and Straus 2012). First, unlike the macro-level scholarship that tends to select on the dependent variable, meso-level research often explicitly incorporates variation into the research design. Second, the analysis of sub-national units creates greater possibilities for large N statistical analysis, which in genocide studies is often constrained either by unit heterogeneity or by a small number of cases. Third, sub-national meso-level comparative analysis holds national level factors constant, and in so doing lends itself to identifying those factors that cause variation (Finkel and Straus 2012). This study, by focusing on the variation in the community-level Jewish resistance to the Nazis and by incorporating local factors and histories into the analysis of victims' behavior, thus pays greater attention to the meso-level and strives to improve our understanding of the Holocaust at this particular level of analysis. Such an analysis will fill a gap in the genocide studies literature, which does not pay sufficient attention to the behavior of the victims of violence and tends to concentrate on the macro and the micro levels of analysis. By focusing on the collective and individual victims' behavior, this study strives to move the research forward. Another goal of my research is increase the dialogue between the genocide studies and the political violence literatures.

Victims' Behavior and the Political Violence Literature

One of the most robust findings of the political violence scholarship is that mass murder and war are closely linked (Straus 2007). For example, Barbara Harff notes that all "episodes of genocide and political mass murder of the last half-century have been carried out ... in the context of internal war and regime instability" (Harff 2003). For the sociologist Martin Shaw, genocide is simply yet another form of warfare (Shaw 2003). Yet, quite surprisingly, the mass murder and civil war scholarships developed alongside each other without engaging in fruitful

dialogue or building on one another's insights and findings (Finkel and Straus 2012). One possible reason for this lack of communication is that each body of literature has searched for causes of the phenomenon it studied on the opposite ends of the government-civilians continuum. While genocide scholars have been interested in studying why and how governments massacre civilians, civil war scholars have sought to analyze why and when civilians and non-state actors rise up to challenge the government.

The case of genocide victims' armed resistance to the perpetrators is where these two literatures intersect. Open resistance to extreme forms of violent oppression, the historical record shows, is rare but not unprecedented. Uprisings and rebellion took place in Stalin's Gulag, slave ships, plantations in the American South, POW camps, and other highly oppressive environments (Maher 2010). Yet, why resistance materializes and how it evolves in the face of insurmountable odds remain understudied and largely unexplained (but see Maher 2010; Petersen 2001). Uprisings also took place in the ghettos. The number of ghetto uprisings is not large, but it is precisely because genocide is one of the most extreme forms of oppression and the power relations are so skewed in the favor of perpetrators that the analysis of ghetto resistance is important. Resistance to genocide and mass killing is a small but theoretically and empirically important class of violent interactions, which, as "outliers" and "anomalies", may lead to new theoretical insights (George and Bennett 2001; Staniland 2010; Rogowski 1995; Eckstein 1975).

The scholarship on revolutions, protests, and social movements has devoted much attention to analyzing popular uprisings and mass mobilization. In the context of the Holocaust, however, uprisings were (by necessity) undertaken by small, secretive and tightly-knit groups that rarely had more than a hundred fighters and even fewer weapons. As a result, virtually no ghetto uprising was a result of mass mobilization or popular protests similar to those discussed

by Timur Kuran (1991), Mark Beissinger (2002), and other scholars of social movements and contentious politics. Furthermore, the social movements literature, like the genocide studies scholarship discussed above, tends to concentrate on either the macro- or the micro-levels. The focus of the contentious politics scholars is largely on either the social movements emerges in a particular state in a particular time (Khawaja 1993, 1994; Lichbach 1987; Moore 1998; Loveman 1998; White 1989) or on what makes individuals to take part in high-risk activism (McAdam 1986; Nepstad and Smith 1999). As a result, this body of literature is thus of limited utility in understanding these events. Therefore, my main focus in this section will be on the political violence literature—a natural theoretical home for the analysis of violent uprisings and armed resistance to persecution.

Analytically, ghetto uprisings can be presented in terms of the standard scenario within the political violence literature: as a violent armed insurgency of members of an oppressed ethnic group against an incumbent occupying power. Even the clear imbalance of power between the Jewish victims and Nazi perpetrators is not that uncommon: indeed, it is roughly similar to what Stathis Kalyvas (2005) views as “irregular civil war.”⁹

At the same time, these similarities should not gloss over important differences between resistance to genocide and other forms of violent conflict. For example, as Jason Lyall notes, “[n]early all studies of civil war rest, either explicitly or implicitly, on the assumption that violence is the product of repeated interaction between strategic actors” (Lyall 2009). While the question of whether the actors in a genocide, especially the perpetrators, are being strategic or are driven by other psychological or pathological motivations is a matter of ongoing debate in

⁹ This perspective on the relationship between genocide and war is not new; the argument that genocide is simply another form of warfare was put forward by the sociologist Martin Shaw (2003). The ghetto uprisings, as such however, cannot be seen as a case of civil war if we use Kalyvas’s (2007, p. 417) definition of civil war as “armed conflict taking place within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities.”

the comparative genocide literature, it is clear that the interactions between the insurgents and the incumbents were not “repeated” during the Holocaust; the uprisings were crushed by the Nazis and their collaborators and did not transform into what Staniland (2010) calls a “sustained urban insurgency.”

Another potential difference between resistance to genocide and more conventional civil wars and uprisings is that civil war is often centered on control of territory and other goods associated with it (e.g. the state, natural resources, land, or symbolic sites), while genocide is about killing people because of their identity. However, such an argument would overlook the fact that there are “territorial” wars that nonetheless include a massive identity-motivated targeting of civilians. Furthermore, the Holocaust cannot be separated from the German vision of *territorial* and colonial expansion (Fein 1979; Lower 2005; Snyder 2010). The Final Solution was an outcome of the “cumulative radicalization” of persecution policies, rather than a preconceived plan to murder the Jews.

Ghetto uprisings challenge mainstream theories of political violence in several other ways as well. While the question of mass targeting of civilians has been extensively dealt with by scholars of political violence, the main foci have been on 1) why armed groups “handle and manhandle” civilians, as Humphreys and Weinstein put it (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Weinstein 2007); 2) which groups (or individuals) are targeted (Balcells 2011; Steele 2011; Kalyvas 2006); and 3) whether indiscriminate violence increases or decreases mobilization to already existing insurgent groups (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Lyall 2009). However, even the possibility that seemingly powerless civilians can fight back in the face of seemingly unbeatable opponents is only rarely discussed by scholars (for exceptions see Petersen 2001; Wood 2003).

This oversight belies the challenge that Jewish resistance and the variation in the emergence of uprisings across different localities presents to many influential theories of political violence. In irregular civil war, argues Kalyvas (2005), the weaker actor, fully aware of the asymmetry of power, refuses to directly face the stronger one. This argument definitely holds for the Jewish resisters who escaped the ghettos to the forests and fought from there. However, in ghetto uprisings the resisters decided to meet the vastly superior German forces head on, even though the option of exit to the forests was usually open to them. Similarly, ghetto uprisings cannot be explained by the Fearon and Laitin framework that focuses on state strength and rough terrain as the main predictors of insurgency (Fearon and Laitin 2003). During the period of ghetto uprisings, the strength of the Nazi state was by and large constant and thus cannot explain variation in the occurrence of resistance across different ghettos—the last ghetto uprising took place in October 1943, a year and a half before the end of the WWII. The presence of rough and inaccessible terrain, on the other hand, should increase the likelihood of Jewish partisan warfare outside the ghetto and *decrease* the likelihood of ghetto uprisings as ghettos were by-and-large an urban phenomenon and ghetto fighters did not enjoy the defense, provided by mountains or forests. Yet, a very large number of uprisings took place in Western Belarus and Wołyń (Western Ukraine)—the regions known for their thick forests and inaccessible marshes and swamps.¹⁰

Similarly insufficient are many other influential theories. The greed versus grievances (Collier and Hoeffler 2000) debate is hardly applicable to ghetto uprisings as greed appears to play no role in the seemingly suicidal decision to fight¹¹ and grievances (or, more precisely, the main grievance of being targeted for annihilation) were the same in all ghettos. Also inapplicable

¹⁰ A similar critique of the Fearon and Laitin framework was presented by Staniland (2010).

¹¹ But greed can explain individual strategies such as collaboration.

are explanations that focus of economic inequality (Boix 2008), an ethnic group's desire to control a state (Cederman et al. 2010), or and economic endowments or foreign patrons and funders: the Jews in Eastern Europe had no chance of controlling the state, no resources to loot, meager economic endowments and no foreign patrons.

The fact that these theories cannot be applied to ghetto uprisings obviously does not mean that these theories are wrong in general. My argument is much more modest: the study of an outlier can provide new theoretical perspectives and that some previously overlooked variables and factors could be playing a role in violent conflicts more generally. That the Nazi national-level policies were similar across different ghettos and regions, and that uprisings broke out in places which were almost hermetically sealed off and populated by the very same ethnic, religious, and linguistic group, makes the variation in levels of Jewish resistance especially important for understanding *internal* causes and mechanisms of uprisings and rebellions.

Drawing on the existing research on genocide and political violence, in the next section I put forward an explanation that links the Jewish individual and collective behavior during the Holocaust to the pre-war politics.

Micro-Level Analysis: Victims' Behavior and How the Past Matters

While in the previous sections of this chapter I have argued that the genocide studies literature has largely overlooked the variation in victims' behavior and that the main theories of insurgency and rebellion outbreak are hardly applicable to the case of ghetto uprisings, in this section I put forward my explanation for the variation in victims' behavior, building on existing scholarship on perpetrators and political violence..

Micro-level genocide scholars argue that the behavior of people involved in mass killings can be analyzed systematically, and often follow specific patterns (Browning 1993; Goldhagen 1996; Straus 2006). If perpetrators' behavior and motivations can be classified and analyzed, there is no compelling reason why the same tools of academic analysis cannot be applied to the study of victims' behavior and motivations.

My analysis of Jewish behavior builds on existing work. For example, Raul Hilberg suggested in his seminal and groundbreaking study the following typology of victims' reactions: resistance, alleviation, evasion, paralysis, and compliance (Hilberg 2003). However, Hilberg's framework does not explain why people adopt particular behaviors. Furthermore, whereas Hilberg claimed that paralysis and compliance were the most common responses, more recent scholarship has demonstrated that other strategies were much more widespread than previously assumed (Paulsson 2002; Tec 1993), and that apparent compliance and paralysis in fact involved numerous additional victim actions (Browning 2010). Hilberg's typology also does not account for the available, though politically and morally sensitive and controversial, option of collaboration (or at least cooperation) with the Nazis.

Another perspective on victims' reactions was suggested by Yehuda Bauer, who argued that victims' reactions were determined by a combination of the attitude of the local population to the genocide, the nature of the occupying regime, and the local tradition of victims' communal leadership (Bauer 1989). However, this framework cannot explain the variation in individual reactions and the in-country variation in community behavior. Finally, a number of psychologists and sociologists, such as Bruno Bettelheim, Anna Pawełczyńska, Terrence Des Pres, and Elmer Luchterhand discuss the victims' behavior and stress the importance of norms and social bonds for survival (Bettelheim 1960; Pawełczyńska 1979; Bettelheim 1980; Des Pres 1980;

Luchterhand 1967). These studies, however, focus on the camps' inmates, and are therefore strongly affected by the very special setting on which the analyses focus (Fein 1979). People were selected to camps on an individual, rather than community or family basis, and only a minority of Jewish victims actually experienced *life* in the camps—the vast majority was either killed locally, near their home town, or sent to the gas chambers immediately after the arrival to the camp. Furthermore, these studies do not try to classify the different types of behavior and do not address the motivation behind each behavioral strategy. By and large, they focus mainly on coping. In this project I propose a different typology of reactions that expands and improves upon the existing frameworks: collaboration, evasion, coping, compliance, and resistance.

Collaboration is cooperation with the enemy by either participating in or facilitating the process of killing or persecution. Collaboration can be of two basic types—public and open, such as in the case of Jewish Councils chairs, or private and secret in the case of paid informants. Individuals who collaborate with perpetrators might be enthusiastic or reluctant, and collaboration might or might not involve sharing the perpetrators' goals and ideals. Hilberg (1963), on the other hand, views the activities of the Jewish Councils and the Jewish Police as “compliance,” but there is a conceptual difference between not resisting deportation to the death camps and assisting the Nazis in rounding up other Jews.

For the Jews during the Holocaust, collaboration took mainly the form of joining the Judenrats or the Jewish Police, becoming one of the numerous *Kapos* (prisoner functionaries) in concentration and death camps, or being paid informers for the Nazi security apparatus. In addition, several ghettos had special institutions established to spy on other Jews. In the Warsaw ghetto, for instance, certified rabbi Abraham Gancwajh led the Office to Combat Profiteering and Speculation, which employed several hundred Jews and was “undoubtedly a Nazi agency in

the ghetto” (Engelking and Leociak 2009). Beyond the case study of the Holocaust, victims’ collaboration with the perpetrators includes the cases such as Tutsi members of the *Interhamwe* killing squads in Rwanda (Fujii 2009), or Bosnian Muslims who stole humanitarian aid from fellow Muslims and supplied it to the Serbs (Andreas 2008).

Emotionally and morally controversial (Arendt 2006; Engel 2009), collaboration is a rational strategy of survival like any other. Yet, precisely due to its sensitivity, collaboration as a rational strategy is almost completely overlooked in the literature on the Holocaust beyond the rare general analysis of the Judenrats and the Jewish Police (Trunk 1972; Weiss 1973, 1977), the discussion of selected notable Judenrate heads, such as Czerniakow, Rumkowski, Gens, Merin or Barasz (Corni 2002; Hilberg 1993; Bauer 1982; Yahil 1990), and the publications of various biographies, diaries and memoirs (Adler 1982; Perechodnik 1996; Czerniakow 1979; Friling 2009; Gombiński 2010).

Compliance means acting according to the rules and guidelines prescribed by the authorities without taking active steps to change one’s situation. While after the Holocaust the Jewish victims were often accused of compliance, passivity, and “going like the lamb to the slaughter,” for people who chose compliance this was a rationally adopted strategy, geared towards increasing the likelihood of survival.

Coping means confronting the danger and trying to survive and outlive the perpetrators without 1) leaving one’s community or country; 2) engaging in collaboration with or 3) resistance to the perpetrators. Coping, however, does not mean submissive compliance and passivity. It often includes breaking rules and laws by engaging in black market transactions, theft, smuggling and bribing, or taking various legal or illegal actions to improve one’s chances

for survival. The appropriate vocabulary for such a strategy, notes Browning, is not passivity but resourcefulness, adaptability, endurance, and ingenuity (Browning 2010). It should be noted that in various anthropological works, first and foremost those by James Scott, many tactics that I classify as coping, are viewed as non-violent, “everyday” or “hidden” forms of resistance (Scott 1992, 1987). In this study, however, as I will show later, I limit the definition of resistance to its organized and overt forms.

Evasion is an attempt to escape persecution by hiding, immigration or assuming false identity. This reaction is commonly identified in the literature. Tutsis desperately sought to secure Hutu identity papers (Fujii 2009), Armenians escaped the Ottoman Empire, or Jews hid outside ghettos or tried to pass as Poles, Germans, or Ukrainians (Paulsson 2002; Aizenstadt 1987). Indeed, recent scholarship suggests that evasion was more widespread than previously assumed. According to Gunnar Paulsson, close to thirty thousand Jews were hiding outside the ghetto in Warsaw alone; about five thousand were hiding in the Nazi capital city of Berlin (Paulsson 2002). In the Minsk ghetto, up to fifteen thousand Jews fled to the forests around the city.

Resistance is defined as involvement in organized activity aimed at harming the perpetrators of mass violence, their property and personnel. Resistance can be armed and involve violence of some sort, such as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Armenian defense of Musa Dagh, or the Tutsi armed resistance at the Bisesero Hills, or unarmed and non-violent, such as printing underground media and providing intelligence for perpetrators’ enemies.

In general, Jews confined to ghettos can be divided into three main groups: 1. People who would not make sacrifices for the larger group (e.g. the local Jewish community, the

Jewish nation, or the Polish or Soviet state) or other members of the community beyond their family, but would also not exploit the community or consciously harm other community members' chances of survival; 2. People willing to exploit the group and harm others' chances of survival to increase their own; and 3. People willing to make sacrifices for the group. People belonging to the first group are likely to choose the strategies of coping, compliance, and evasion; those belonging to the second group engage in private, and sometimes public, collaboration. Finally, members of the third group generally choose resistance and public collaboration.¹²

Which factors explain the adoption of a particular individual behavior? I argue that the precise strategy chosen was the result of two factors: 1) a rational decision making process, based on the available credible (or, more precisely – perceived as credible) information on the likelihood of survival; and 2) pre-genocide political and social factors, namely activism in political parties and organizations, and the levels of one's integration into the larger society. These claims lead me to the following hypotheses:

H1: The choice of behavioral strategy is affected by available credible (or perceived as such) information on the likelihood of survival.

An observable implication of this hypothesis is that changes in behavioral strategies would be preceded by and prompted by the appearance of new information on the likelihood of survival.

H2: The vast majority of Jews adopted coping as their behavioral strategy and did not change this strategy until the very end.

¹² I thank Andy Kydd for suggesting this classification.

Initially, when information about the Nazis' actions and intention is limited, coping is the most prudent strategy: at this stage, other strategies may appear to be either prohibitively risky (resistance and evasion) or morally questionable (collaboration). Only later, when new information appears and it becomes clear that coping is unlikely to ensure survival, alternative strategies (collaboration, resistance, evasion) may become more attractive for people who have the capacity to engage in them. For the vast majority of Jews, who are not presented with the opportunity to pursue other strategies, coping remains the dominant strategy until the very end.

H3: The choice of resistance and collaboration strategies was strongly affected by one's pre-war activism in political parties and organizations.

Why would people with previous political experience be more likely to engage in resistance and public collaboration, or in other words, be willing to make sacrifices for the community? The social movements literature has examined why people engage in high risk activism. Doug McAdam's analysis of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer project shows that people who engaged in high-risk activism had a history of prior civil rights activity and strong ideological commitment to the cause, had stronger ties to other people engaged in similar activities, and had greater number of organizational affiliations to groups engaged in civil rights activities (McAdam 1986). Another factor emphasized by McAdam was "biographical availability," namely the ability to devote the necessary time to the high risk activism and the lack of necessity to financially support a family. Later research, however, questioned the importance of biographical availability (Nepstad and Smith 1999) and emphasized the importance of relational ties. McAdam's findings are also relevant to my argument. First, people engaged in pre-war political activism were more likely to choose resistance or public collaboration because they had a history of prior activity aimed at helping, defending, and

promoting the community. Second, these people had stronger ties to other people engaged in helping or protecting the community. Third, these people possess the skills and experience that would be required for successful organization and mobilization while previous political ties and networks facilitate collective action (on the importance of social networks for mobilization, see also Gould 1991). Finally, these people were more visible than other members of the community, which made them more likely to assume (or to be assigned) leadership roles, especially when it came to public collaboration.

People who did not have a history of previous political activism therefore lacked the factors that make one more likely to take part in high risk activism. These peoples' main focus was on securing their personal survival and that of their families. They were not making sacrifices for the community, but did not harm or exploit others either. Finally, there were people who were consciously willing to increase their chances of survival by decreasing the survival chances of others. They engaged in private collaboration, such as being paid informers for the Nazi security service or members of the Jewish Police, helping the Germans to round up Jews for deportation to death camps in exchange for the promise of personal safety.

Observable implications of this hypothesis are:

- Among the members of Jewish Councils and the top echelons of Jewish Police, the majority will be people with previous political experience;
- Among the members of resistance organizations, the majority will be people with previous political experience;
- People engaged in underground political activity prior to the Holocaust will tend to join resistance organizations;

- Resisters and public collaborators will emphasize the well-being of a community or the needs of Communist or Zionist movements as the key motivation behind their actions.

H4: The choice of evasion as survival strategy is strongly affected by one's pre-WWII level of integration into the larger non-Jewish society.

The impact of interethnic integration or the lack thereof on violence has been noted by several scholars. As Varshney (2002) argues, interethnic engagement was instrumental in preventing community-level violence in India: the denser the social ties between Hindus and Muslims were, the less likely were riots to break out. Kopstein and Wittenberg find a similar pattern in their research on anti-Jewish pogroms in the summer of 1941—in places where the Jews and the Poles voted for the same party, the anti-Jewish violence was less likely to erupt (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011). As far as the individual level is concerned, Tammes notes that among the Jews of Amsterdam, there is a strong correlation between having relations with non-Jews and survival (Tammes 2007). In Greece, the more assimilated Jews of Athens survived in higher rates than the less integrated Jews of Thessaloniki (Mavrogordatos 2008). In Warsaw, those who didn't look typically Jewish and spoke decent Polish had better chances of finding shelter outside the ghetto (Paulsson 2002). This argument somewhat contradicts the findings of Kristen Renwick Monroe, who claims that people who rescued Jews during the Holocaust did so because they perceived the Jews as belonging to the same moral universe of humankind, and therefore felt obliged to help a fellow human being (Monroe 2012). If Monroe's argument is correct, then we should not observe any particular pattern in who gets rescued and/or successfully evades the Nazi persecution—the rescuers should be equally likely to help any Jew they encounter. This would be the null hypothesis.

The mechanism behind my hypothesis is simple. Virtually all Holocaust-survivor accounts point out that—all the Nazi pseudo-scientific attempts to clearly define a Jewish phenotype notwithstanding—in the occupied territories of Eastern Europe, the Germans could not tell a Jew from a non-Jew. To identify Jews who chose not to wear the identification marks, such as patches or armbands with the star of David, the German authorities had to rely on the local population. Thus, Jews who were more integrated into the non-Jewish society, and therefore knew the local culture and customs, spoke the language without an accent, and most importantly—had non-Jewish friends or acquaintances who were willing to help them by providing hiding places, documents, and information, had less chance of being denounced and therefore were more likely to choose the evasion strategy.¹³

The observable implications of this hypothesis are:

- The higher is one's level of integration (measured by the knowledge of the local language, traditions, and history and density of social ties with non-Jews) into the larger non-Jewish society the more likely he or she to choose evasion.
- People with low levels of integration into the non-Jewish society were more likely to choose coping over evasion.

H5. The choice of a particular survival strategy was affected by distinctly local factors and histories, namely the history of interethnic relations in the locality and the locality's socio-economic profile.

That the national-level factors and policies had an impact on the behavior of individuals involved in mass violence has been argued by a number of scholars (Straus 2006; Goldhagen 1996; Dumitru and Johnson 2011), but I hypothesize that the genocide scholars should also pay attention to distinctively local factors, relations, and histories, as they often shape the modes of

¹³ For the Warsaw ghetto, the evasion strategy is superbly discussed by Paulsson (2002).

pre-genocide political activism, integration, and the available information. This hypothesis builds on what Charles King defines as the “micropolitical turn” in the study of political violence (King 2004). The key insight of this quite substantial literature is that violence, as it unfolds on the ground, is shaped by both the national-level factors and cleavage and the distinctively local factors, relations, and histories (Kalyvas 2006, 2003; Wood 2003).

The observable implications of this hypothesis are:

- While the overall menu of possible strategies remains the same across cases, the distribution of strategies between community members will vary from locality to locality.
- In localities with a history of more peaceful interethnic relations the rates of evasion will be higher than in localities where the interethnic relations are toxic.
- In ghettos where the surrounding town provided more economic opportunities for ghetto residents, thus increasing the perception of ghetto usefulness for the German authorities, coping and compliance were more likely.

Micro-Level: Alternative Explanations

Several potential alternative and competing explanations for variation in collective and individual victim behavior during the Holocaust must be addressed before my analysis can proceed.

First, there is a possibility that choice of the survival strategy is determined by factors that I do not include in my hypotheses. The most obvious competing explanations are age, income, and education. It is quite likely that people who belong to certain age groups are more likely to choose a specific type of a survival strategy. For example, young people could conceivably be more likely to resist or escape; wealthy people might have more resources to bribe their way out

of the ghetto and pay others to hide them; educated people might be able to gather more information and interpret it in better ways than the non-educated people.

It is reasonable to expect that younger people will be overrepresented among resisters. Yet, the age variable can be controlled for by comparing people who are similarly young, but differ in their levels of pre-Holocaust political socialization and activism. The mere fact that only a minority of young Jews were engaged in resistance suffices to rule out this variable as the *key* explanation for choosing resistance.

Better education can lead to political activism, and therefore to a higher likelihood to choose resistance, as well as to a greater integration into the broader society and the choice of evasion as survival strategy. However, here the realities of Jewish life at the period prior to the Holocaust should be taken into account. Before the WWII, the Jewish population in both Poland and the USSR exhibited rates of literacy much higher than those of the non-Jewish population, but at the same time, the number of highly educated people among the Jews was quite small. In Poland, the ethnic quota, the *numerus clausus*, limited the percentage of Jews among university students to no more than 10%. In the Soviet Union, Jews enjoyed considerably more educational opportunities than in Poland, but educated Soviet Jews were concentrated in cities, while the majority of the Jewish population resided in small towns in rural areas. Furthermore, educated Jews were among the key targets of mobile killings squads, the Einsatzgruppen that operated in the Nazi-occupied Soviet territories immediately after the German invasion in 1941. In addition, in the interwar era of mass politics, high levels of political participation were not associated with higher educational level. Among the Jewish political youth movements, the number of people with high school and academic education was miniscule. Nevertheless, in my analysis I investigate which factors determine the variation in behavior of people with the same educational

level, and whether people with a similar educational level are more prone to choose a certain survival strategy.

Income is another factor that can be taken into account. However, the income explanation seems problematic for several reasons. First, after more than twenty years of the Soviet rule, and especially after the devastating collectivization policies and the end of Soviet New Economic Policy (NEP), the levels of economic inequality in the Soviet Union were small and therefore, different income levels can hardly explain the variation in outcomes. Obviously, some people were more affluent than others, but these differences were not even close to income gaps that existed in the non-communist states. In Poland, on the other hand, the levels of economic inequality were substantial. However, while there was a prosperous Jewish middle class and a rich, though very small, elite, the vast majority of Polish Jews lived in dire poverty. In Lwów alone, about a third of the Jewish community depended on food provided by charitable communal kitchens (Yones 2004). The situation in other places was not different. Furthermore, during the Holocaust, money could have been used to both improve one's living conditions inside the ghetto or to support a life outside it, and until the very end it was unclear which option was better or safer.

Despite this mitigating evidence, economic explanations deserve attention. If the economic explanation is correct, then people with different income levels should exhibit different levels of political activism before the Holocaust and adopt different behavioral strategies during the Holocaust. I assess whether this is the case throughout this project.

Meso-Level Analysis: Patterns of Resistance

With some notable exceptions (e.g. Su 2011; Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011; Dumitru and Johnson 2011; Straus 2006; Fujii 2009), two of the most overlooked features of almost any case of genocide and mass killing is the sub-national and local variation in both the unfolding and outcome of the killing process. During the Holocaust, nowhere was this variation more pronounced than in the patterns of Jewish collective armed resistance to the Nazis. While organized Jewish undergrounds existed in at least ten percent of all ghettos and more than thirty ghettos openly rebelled against the Nazis, in most ghettos no resistance attempts took place. Until now Holocaust scholars have not systematically addressed the roots of this variation.

Representative here is the approach of Yehuda Bauer, a prominent Holocaust scholar. In a recent work, Bauer discusses two similar neighboring communities, only one of which had an organized armed resistance to the Nazis. Bauer claims that “there is no hard and fast rule about this: in places where we would have expected resistance to crystallize, nothing happened. In places where resistance was a totally hopeless undertaking, it nevertheless took place.” (Bauer 2009) However, Bauer does not specify according to which criteria one should expect resistance to crystallize or fail to emerge, and when it should be expected to crystallize, if it does. Numerous other works simply discuss particular cases of armed resistance, first and foremost the Warsaw ghetto uprising, which overshadows all the other cases of resistance, without trying to compare different uprisings or propose a more generalized explanation of the Jewish armed resistance phenomenon and the variation in patterns of resistance across communities and regions. While there have been some sociological attempts to propose a more general framework (Einwohner 2009, 2007; Tiedens 1997), they neither use archival materials nor engage with any sources in languages other than English and, like most other works on this topic, they focus only

on three large ghettos, do not rely on archival materials, and do not engage with any sources in languages other than English.

Which factors explain collective Jewish resistance to the Nazis? At the meso-level, I test several hypotheses:

H6. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was affected by the demographic characteristics of the ghetto and the resources available to the Jewish community.

Reagan and Norton (2005) show that population size has a positive impact on the emergence of rebellions and therefore I hypothesize a positive relationship between the ghetto population and the likelihood of uprising. Another potentially important variable is the concentration of an ethnic group in one geographic area. Geographically concentrated groups, argues Weidmann, “seem to have a higher risk of violence because facilitated interaction between their members makes collective organization for violence more likely” (Weidmann 2009). In the case of ghetto uprisings, this argument might apply to both the ghetto population and to the pre-war percentage of Jews in a locality.

In addition, several scholars of social movements link the emergence of organized anti-government activism to the resources, available to people planning to engage in contentious political activities (Jenkins 1983; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Among the major resources crucial for the underground activism are information and weapons. Ghettos, as mentioned above, were either open or closed. Enclosure made it harder to obtain weapons and intelligence and therefore it is reasonable to expect a negative relationship between enclosure and the likelihood of and uprising.

H7. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was affected by the level of German repression.

According to numerous studies, there is a link between the level of repression and the likelihood of resistance. Several factors indicate the level of Nazi violence and oppression. In some localities German forces, first and foremost the mobile killing units (*Einsatzgruppen*), conducted mass shootings of the local Jewish population before the ghetto was established, while in others localities Jewish populations were spared. It is possible that these cases of previous mass killings would affect the likelihood of resistance. Finally, armed resistance and uprising require time to organize, acquire weapons and train, and therefore the duration that a ghetto existed should matter as well.

It should be noted, however, that there is no consensus regarding the *direction* of the link between the level of repression and resistance. As notes Maher, “depending on the study, increased repression increases mobilization, decreases mobilization, or has a curvilinear effect” (Maher 2010). Thus, I hypothesize the existence of a relationship between the level of German repression and the likelihood of uprising, but agnostic about its direction.

H8. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was more likely in places with higher level of support for Jewish parties before the WWII.

This hypothesis focuses on the political structure of the community before the Holocaust—the distribution of political power in the community, political and ideological preferences of community members, and the regime type under which community members lived prior to the Holocaust.

Reviewing different approaches to the study of violence, Gates (Gates 2002) notes that “[m]ost economic models of civil conflict ignore politics.” At the same time, until recently, even political scientists tended to ignore politics in its most basic form—voting in elections or

participating in political organizations as an explanatory variable. Several articles, all published in 2011, have focused on political identities and voting behavior. These factors, argue the authors, can explain direct and indirect violence behind the frontlines of the Spanish civil war (Balcells 2011), the patterns of forced displacement in Columbia (Steele 2011) and the occurrence of anti-Jewish pogroms in northeastern Poland in summer 1941 (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011).

There are a variety of mechanisms by which political identities can translate into resistance. For example, Varshney argues that, when motivated by “resisting nationalism,” groups and people are willing to endure very high costs to protect their dignity and self-respect (Varshney 2003). In the context of the Holocaust, it is reasonable to expect this Jewish “nationalism of resistance” to crystallize in places where Jewish parties had more support before the WWII. Therefore, I expect a positive relationship between voting for Jewish parties and ghetto uprisings. I also expect a negative relationship between voting for communist parties and ghetto uprisings, as Jewish communists saw their main goal in assisting the Soviet war effort and therefore were more likely to escape the ghetto and join the communist partisans, rather than fighting inside the ghetto as a part of *Jewish* resistance.

H9. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was affected by the type of the regime, under which the Jews lived.

An additional political factor that, according to Reagan and Norton can explain rebellion is regime type (Reagan and Norton 2005). The importance of regime type for the onset of mass killing was put forward in several influential studies in the comparative genocide literature (Rummel 1994; Horowitz 1976) and in a recent study of assistance to and targeting of the Jews

by local populations during the Holocaust (Dumitru and Johnson 2011). Before being subject to the Nazi occupation, the Jews of Central and Western Poland lived in unstable democracy, followed by a rather soft authoritarian government of Józef Piłsudski and his successors. The Soviet Jews were governed by the communist, totalitarian regimes of Lenin and Stalin. The Jews of Eastern Poland experienced both regime types. I expect the experience of living under a certain political regime to have an impact on citizens' individual and group behavior, in this case the likelihood of ghetto uprisings.

H10. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was more likely in localities with higher number of politically active Jews before the WWII.

A large number of works on political violence argue that insurgency is driven by a rational cost-benefit analysis and the expected material payoffs from violence. Yet, ghetto uprisings, as argued previously, hardly fit these analytical frameworks. Another line of argument stresses the importance of moral and psychological factors, human agency, preexisting social networks and organizational structures. Thus, Wood demonstrates that participation in the insurgency in El Salvador was motivated by identity-based, moral and emotional considerations, the “pleasure in agency” being the most important (Wood 2003). Psychological factors and motivations, such group worth and self-esteem (Horowitz 1985), dignity and self-respect (Varshney 2003), or ethnic hatred, fear, rage, and resentment (Petersen 2002) have been also emphasized by scholars as contributing to violence.

This line of argument can provide important insights into the phenomenon of ghetto uprisings. Against the background of marginalization and humiliation, people could have joined an uprising just to feel this “pleasure in agency” and to redeem their human dignity and self-esteem. Armed resistance, argues Marrus, was motivated by the desire “to defend the honor of

the insurgents and their people. In effect, this was a fight for the future, for the historical record being discussed in this paper” (Marrus 1995). “The dream of my life has risen to become a fact... Jewish armed resistance and revenge are facts,” wrote the commander of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, Mordecai Anielewicz, in his last letter. “We are fighting for three lines in the history books,” claimed one of the leaders of the Jewish resistance in Kraków, Aharon Liebeskind. Yet, while the Warsaw ghetto rebelled, the Kraków ghetto did not, because its strong Jewish underground preferred acting outside the ghetto. Even if we concentrate on people who took pleasure in agency, important variation still exists: numerous forms of agency and underground activism were possible.

Furthermore, while some outcomes can be achieved individually, others, such as an uprising, require collective effort. The decision to fight is not only a function of individual ideological beliefs, but also of preexisting social ties and networks (Costa and Kahn 2008; Gould 1995; Petersen 2001; Wickham-Crowley 1991). Therefore, I focus on the intersection of political beliefs and social ties—membership and activism in Jewish political organizations—arguing that the higher the *absolute* number of politically active people in the community (rather than the distribution of electoral preferences among the community members in percentages), the higher the likelihood of uprising is. I expect a positive relationship between the number of politically active members of Jewish (especially Zionist) parties and the likelihood of uprising. The focus on membership and activism in political organization is also warranted for another reason; it is *organizations*, not ethnic groups or nations, that fight wars and insurgencies (Gates 2002; Sinno 2008); from previous qualitative studies of Jewish resistance we know that pre-Holocaust political organizations usually were the nucleus around which the underground was formed (Engelking and Leociak 2009; Peled 1993; Porat 2010).

In the following chapters I test my hypotheses by analyzing the patterns of the Jewish collective resistance to the Nazis and by studying the survival strategies, adopted by Jews in the ghettos of Minsk, Kraków, and Białystok.

Chapter 3: Party Politics in Hell: Explaining Ghetto Uprisings during the Holocaust

What explains collective armed resistance to extreme forms of oppression? Open resistance to brutal oppression is rare, but not unprecedented. Uprisings, notes Maher, took place in Stalin's gulag camps, slave ships, plantations in the American South, POW camps, and other highly oppressive environments (Maher 2010). Yet, why resistance materializes and how it evolves in the face of insurmountable odds remain understudied and largely unexplained (but see Maher 2010; Petersen 2001). Throughout human history hardly any environment was more repressive and violent than the Jewish ghettos established by the Nazis during the Holocaust. This chapter, which focuses on organized armed Jewish resistance to the Nazis during the Holocaust, provides insight into the origins of such events.

Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis—the “war of the doomed”, as Krakowski (1984) calls it—was clearly not widespread and large-scale. Based on my dataset, I can identify only thirty one cases of ghetto uprisings and 120 ghettos (out of 1,126) in which there are extant data on underground resistance organizations. Furthermore, according to Alan Zuckerman's estimation, no more than 5-7% of Jews engaged in political or military action against the Nazis (Zuckerman 1984). The small number of events is unsurprising: there was a gargantuan imbalance of power between the Nazis and the Jews. Other victims of the Nazis, such as the Soviet POWs, “young men with military training who were subject to treatment at times as murderous and brutal as that meted out to the Jews,” (Marrus 1995) were (until the very end of the war) involved in even fewer such acts of resistance. On a global scale, an organized resistance to genocide has historically been rare: the case of Bisesero Hills is generally considered to be the sole such event that occurred during the Rwandan genocide and only a handful of such events occurred during the Armenian genocide.

At the same time, the variation in the location of the ghetto uprisings is striking. Twenty three of these uprisings were in ghettos located in Eastern Poland, a region occupied by the Soviet Union in September 1939 and, subsequently, by the Nazis in the summer of 1941. On the other hand, only four uprisings took place in the territory that was the pre-WWII Soviet Union. Thus, out of the 317 ghettos located in Eastern Poland, slightly more than 7% rebelled, whereas only 1.1% of the 360 ghettos in Central and Western Poland had an uprising. This difference is even more striking given the fact that Polish and Soviet Jews not only belong to the same ethnic and religious group, but also (with the exception of Galicia and Silesia) resided in the very same state—the Russian Empire—until only twenty years prior to the Holocaust.

What explains why some ghettos openly resisted the Nazis while other ghetto communities did not? Furthermore, why were there so many armed uprisings in the territory controlled by the Soviets in 1939-41, but so few in pre-war Soviet Union?

To answer these questions, I collected local level pre-Holocaust electoral returns from the communities in which the ghettos were established. I then matched the voting data with the data on various characteristics of the ghetto. Statistical analysis reveals that Jewish resistance was very strongly conditioned on pre-Holocaust political factors. Specifically, I demonstrate that the level of community members' political activism and the political institutions that existed prior to the Holocaust directly influenced communities' modes of resistance. On the other hand, demographic factors—the percentage of Jews in the community, the size of the ghetto's population, the duration of the ghetto's existence, as well as the variation in the levels of German repression prior to the final liquidation of ghettos—have no statistically significant relationship to the occurrence of ghetto uprisings. Finally, based on primary and secondary qualitative historical sources, I argue that the experience of two years of Soviet rule proved to be crucial for

the emergence of Jewish resistance to the Nazis. In Eastern Poland, Soviet repressions of non-communist political organizations forced these groups, especially the Zionist youth movements to initiate underground cells and organizations, which later facilitated the emergence of anti-Nazi resistance. In the USSR proper, on the other hand, two decades of the Soviet totalitarian regime were enough to completely eliminate citizens' ability to independently organize for collective action.

These findings indicate the importance of political identities and institutions—factors that have been understudied in the political violence scholarship, in determining the onset of violence. The case of Jewish ghetto resistance provides new theoretical insights into the bases for resistance, conflict and violence.

The hypotheses and the rationale behind each hypothesis are discussed in Chapter 2; here I briefly restate the hypotheses.

H6. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was affected by the resources available to the community.

H7. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was affected by the level of German repression.

H8. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was more likely in places with higher level of support for Jewish parties before the WWII.

H9. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was more likely in localities with higher number of politically active Jews before the WWII.

Data, Context, Definitions

Ghettos. On September 21, 1939, three weeks after the Nazi invasion of Poland, Reinhard Heydrich, the Chief of the Reich Main Security Office, held a meeting with several high ranking officials of the Nazi security apparatus and his adviser for Jewish affairs, Adolf Eichmann. The goal of this meeting was to discuss the occupation policy in the newly-conquered Polish territories. Concerning the fate of the Jews, Heydrich was quite explicit: ‘The Jews are to be concentrated in ghettos in cities, in order to facilitate a better possibility of control and later expulsion’” (Browning 2011). Although the process of ghettoization took several years to implement, eventually the majority of Jews in the Nazi occupied Eastern Europe was concentrated in more than 1,100 ghettos, i.e. strictly defined Jewish residential areas. It is important to note that while ghettos were not created in all localities in which Jews lived, the vast majority of towns and cities with a sizeable Jewish population did have a ghetto, if even for a short time.

There are four criteria, which the historian Martin Dean uses to define the ghetto: 1. resettlement and concentration of the Jewish population into an area only for Jews, 2. restrictions on entering and leaving the area, 3) existence of the ghetto for at least two weeks, and 4. reference to the area into which the Jews were resettled as ghetto or “Jewish Residential Area” in historical sources (e.g. contemporary documents, diaries, letters, or post-Holocaust testimonies). Dean further subdivides ghettos into the following types: open, closed, destruction, and remnant ghettos. As discussed earlier, open ghettos were the officially declared Jewish Residential Areas, which were not enclosed by any physical barrier (although any Jew caught outside the ghetto would face a severe punishment, very often being shot on the spot). Closed ghettos were surrounded by barbed wire, wooden, or stone fences. Destruction ghettos are ghettos that existed

for less than two months and were established to facilitate the destruction of the local Jewish communities by concentrating the Jews in one place prior to mass shootings or deportations to death camps. Finally, remnant ghettos were “established after a deportation or mass shooting, usually for [spared] Jewish craftsmen and their families.” Most often, among the spared were the doctors, pharmacists, tailors, cobblers, and providers of other essential services, especially when there were no non-Jewish craftsmen or professionals in town. For example, in the ghetto of Trembowla in Eastern Galicia, the Germans (temporarily) spared only two engineers, two doctors, and three schnapps brewers as needed specialists (Dean n.d., 2010).

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to present either the history of ghettos as a concept, the various perspectives on why and how the ghettos were established in Poland and the USSR (Cole 2003; Horwitz 2008; Friedman 1980; Lower 2005; Michman 2011; Spector 1990), or the history of daily life in ghettos and their internal structure and institutions (Corni 2002; Gringauz 1949; Sterling 2005; Trunk 1972). Sufficient for the purposes of this chapter is to clarify that, in contrast to labor or concentration camps (in which the Jews were incarcerated on an individual basis and into which people were brought from various localities and countries), ghettos were a situation in which the entire local Jewish community was confined in a clearly defined and bounded area. Although there were cases in which people from several communities were confined in one ghetto, the vast majority of ghettos had a “core” community, which encompassed the entire pre-war Jewish population of the locality. Furthermore, in ghettos the Jews had some forms of internal self-governance, such as the Judenrats (Jewish Councils), which were imposed by the Germans, and other social and political frameworks that developed autonomously from within the ghetto (Gringauz 1949; Hilberg 1981; Weiss 1973). For that reason, to determine the impact of pre-Holocaust factors on Jewish resistance, the ghetto is the most appropriate unit of

observation and I therefore exclude from my analysis uprisings in labor, death, and concentration camps. Also, it should be understood that the ghettos were the stage that immediately preceded the annihilation of the local Jewish population.¹⁴

My dependent variable is ghetto uprising, defined as a case of organized Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis *inside* the ghetto. The paper focuses only on *organized* armed resistance and excludes cases of spontaneous and individual resistance such as when an individual Jew killed or attacked a guard in order to escape. Obviously, ghetto uprisings were not the only form of organized armed resistance. In many ghettos underground resistance groups were established, but their plans and preparations did not materialize into open fighting inside the ghettos, because these groups either chose to escape to the forests and fight the Nazis in the ranks of the Soviet or Polish partisans, or the underground was uncovered and eliminated by the German security services. Although I did collect data on escapes to the partisans and underground resistance groups in the ghetto, these data are problematic. The available sources do not always allow distinguishing between cases when the escape to the partisans stemmed from an organized group effort and cases in which the Jewish escapees had accidentally encountered partisan squads and joined them. Furthermore, there can be a problem of underreporting since we do not know the identity and the hometown of numerous partisans who died fighting the Nazis. In addition, because anti-Semitism and the murder of ghetto escapees were not uncommon among Polish and even Soviet partisans (Bauer 2009; Slepian 2000), many Jews preferred to conceal their identity when joining partisans' ranks.

¹⁴ With the exception of four small ghettos, liberated by the Red Army during its winter 1941-2 offensive, and several ghettos in Poland, the population of which was resettled into larger ghettos, ghetto liquidation meant certain death for virtually all inmates.

The same problem of underreporting can affect the data on underground resistance—if all the members of the group were killed, either by the Nazi intelligence services, or during the liquidation of the ghettos before their uprising and/or escape plans were materialized, we are very unlikely to have data on this group’s existence. Ghetto uprisings, on the other hand, are much less subject to the problem of underreporting. Even when no Jewish sources and witnesses are available, the cases of armed resistance inside the ghettos were noted, reported and remembered not only by the German authorities, but also by the local non-Jewish population, non-Jewish partisans, and Allies’ intelligence agents, operating in the area. Even though the details of the uprising provided in the German or Allies’ documents might be of questionable quality (for ideological reasons German documents tend to substantially underestimate the number of their casualties)¹⁵ we can be confident that at least the mere fact of armed resistance is registered in at least one source.

For this project I have collected data on 1,126 ghettos established by the Nazis during the Holocaust. My dataset does not cover the ghettos established by Germany’s allies Hungary and Romania, because the dynamics of persecution and killings in Hungary, Romania, and the Soviet territories occupied by these states were quite different from the Nazis’ anti-Jewish policies. I have also excluded the only ghetto established by the Nazis in Greece (Saloniki) and the “showcase” ghetto of Terezin/Theresienstadt (pre-war Czechoslovakia), which was used by the Nazis for propaganda purposes and served as a place of confinement for various “privileged” Jewish groups and individuals. The dataset includes data on ghetto population, dates of establishment and liquidation, whether there was a mass killing of the Jews prior to the ghetto

¹⁵ The most striking evidence for this trend is the so-called “Stroop Report” on the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. According to the report, during the fighting in the ghetto Germans and their collaborators suffered less than 20 casualties (both dead and wounded), which is extremely unlikely given the scale and duration of fighting. A similar case of downplaying German casualties in Kraków is discussed in other chapters of my dissertation.

establishment, whether the ghetto was open or closed, pre-war census data on the Jewish community and data on various forms of Jewish organized resistance—underground resistance groups, uprisings and escape to the partisans. The dataset encompasses the territories of the pre-WWII Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and large parts of the European USSR. It is the first dataset that covers such a large number of ghettos; previous studies were almost exclusively qualitative and studied a very small number of cases.

The bulk of my data comes from the forthcoming vol. II of the *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, prepared by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). In preparing the ghetto entries, the authors were explicitly asked by the volume editor to include data on underground resistance and uprisings.¹⁶ For information that could not be found in the USHMM encyclopedia I collected data from several reference sources, first and foremost the *Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos during the Holocaust*, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust* and the Hebrew-language Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities (*Pinkas Hakehilot*). I gathered demographic data on various Jewish communities from the 1921 Polish and 1939 Soviet Census books, the list of pre-war Jewish communities in Poland,¹⁷ *Blackbook of Localities Whose Jewish Population Was Exterminated by the Nazis*, Mordechai Altshuler's *Distribution of the Jewish population of the USSR, 1939*, and numerous secondary sources and Jewish communities' Memorial (*Yizkor*) Books.¹⁸

¹⁶ Martin Dean, personal communication with the author.

¹⁷ <http://www.jewishinstitute.org.pl/en/gminy/index/1.html>

¹⁸ The dataset has several shortcomings. First, there is an eighteen year difference between the Polish and the Soviet censuses I am using. Unfortunately, the local level results of the Polish 1931 census seem not to have survived the war, and the data is available only at the *powiat* (similar to a county in the United States) level. What mitigates this problem is the availability of data on ghetto population, which can be used instead of census data (although the number of ghetto inhabitants fluctuated over time). Furthermore, when I analyze only the Polish subset of the data, the problem is substantially less acute as it affects all the ghettos in the subset in a more or less equal way. Second,

The data I collected clearly cannot account for all the aspects of ghettos' existence that may affect the occurrence of uprisings, such as the whims of local German administrators. Importantly, the data often do not allow distinguishing whether the German ghetto supervisors adhered to a "productivist" or "attritionist" philosophy. The "productivist" Nazi officials sought to exploit Jews' working power to facilitate the German war effort (and their own enrichment) and therefore were interested in providing ghetto inmates with at least the bare minimum of resources needed for survival; "attritionists" viewed ghettos as a tool to slowly annihilate the Jews by denying ghettos food, medicine, and other crucial services. Only in a handful of places, however, were German administrators appointed because of their adherence to a specific worldview and even the most ardent "productionists" were powerless when the order to liquidate the ghetto came from Berlin (Browning 2011).

1928 Polish National Elections Returns. Out of total 1,126 ghettos, 677 were established by the Nazis in the pre-WWII Poland; 360 in the territory, occupied by Germany in 1939 and 317 in Eastern Poland, which was conquered by Germany in 1941, after being under Soviet occupation for almost two years. For the Polish ghettos I have collected electoral data from the communities in which the ghettos were established. The data come from two main sources: the 1928 Polish national elections and the 1937 and 1939 elections to the Zionist Organization (ZO) Congresses.

Interwar Poland was not the most welcoming place for its three million Jewish citizens, roughly 10% of country's population. The Jews were subject to street violence and sporadic

both the Polish and the Soviet censuses are not without problems. In Poland, the number of Jews reported by the census is somewhat lower than their actual figure due to the wording of census questions. The Soviet 1939 census was conducted because Stalin was dissatisfied with the results of the 1937 census and had the chief census officials executed. The 1939 census results were falsified and about three million non-existent Soviet citizens were "invented." However, these additions were made mainly at the aggregate, not the local level, and the non-existent people were added to rural populations (Tolts 2006, p. 144), while ghettos were an urban phenomenon.

pogroms, economic boycotts, and institutionalized discrimination in the form of quotas (and sometimes bans) on admission to universities, the civil service, and the officer corps. Prime Minister Sławoj-Składkowski (1936-9) had even publicly endorsed an “economic war” against the Jews (Marcus 1983; Melzer 1997; Mendelsohn 1983; Rabinowicz 1965). As a result, numerous Jews pursued the exit option, immigrating to other countries. Others voiced their grievances and supported ethnic parties or the communists. However, the majority sought integration into the Polish political system and were willing to vote for parties that promised a chance for such integration (Kopstein and Wittenberg forthcoming, 2003).

The 1928 Polish elections took place two years after a coup led by Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the interwar Polish Republic founding father and the Chief of State (*Naczelnik Państwa*) in 1918-22. In 1922-26, the Polish political system was highly unstable. The first elected president, Gabriel Narutowicz, was murdered by a right wing extremist only five days after assuming office, and according to Kopstein and Wittenberg, the country was ruled

by a series of fragile and short-lived coalition governments ... In 1926, amid growing discontent with parliamentary government and street protests, Jozef Pilsudski and his supporters staged a coup d'état. Even after the military seizure of power, however, Pilsudski was not ready to break completely with democratic institutions. In 1928 Poland's second parliamentary elections were held. Pilsudski wanted these elections in order to gain a parliamentary majority for his pro-government bloc. The vote took place under the watchful eye of the state; nevertheless, by the standards of the day, the election was, for the most part, fair (Kopstein and Wittenberg, 2003, p. 100).

By virtue of coming from a moderate left-wing political background and not being anti-Semitic, Piłsudski was popular with Polish Jews, and this popularity translated into votes for his Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (BBWR). 49% of Polish Jews, estimate Kopstein and Wittenberg, voted for the BBWR. In 1922, 65% of the Jews voted for ethnic and

minorities parties, but in 1928 this figure dropped almost by half to only 33%. It can be argued that mainly those who prioritized Jewish identity and interests over the prospect of potential integration into Polish society and political system voted for Jewish parties in 1928.

The 1928 electoral results I collected allow me to determine the patterns of voting behavior and political preferences of the entire community, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Almost thirty national-level parties and dozens regional parties took part in the 1928 elections. Based on the classification proposed by Kopstein and Wittenberg (Kopstein and Wittenberg forthcoming, 2003) I divide the parties into several blocs: pro-government; socialist; communist; right; and Jewish. Some ethnic parties, such as the Ukrainian (Ruthenian) Party and several small and insignificant parties, such as the Union of Veterans and Handicapped are not included in any bloc. The election results were published at the locality level, so the electoral data corresponds to the data on ghettos. After grouping various parties into electoral blocs I calculate the percentage of vote for each bloc in a given community. It should be stressed again that the voting data encompasses the entire local community, and not only the Jewish voters. While we can be quite confident that only the Jews voted for Jewish parties, it is obviously not the case for the communists and the pro-government parties. Only a small number of Jews voted for communists, and even though the pro-government BBWR was the most popular party among the Jews, most of BBWR votes came from non-Jews (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2003).

I chose the 1928 election because it was the last free and fair election held in inter-war Poland, and because the 1928 electoral returns are used by other scholars studying the Holocaust (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011, forthcoming). Out of 677 Polish localities in which ghettos were established, I have electoral returns from 569. The results were not published for localities with

less than 500 eligible voters, and several ghettos were created in places that before the Nazi invasion were agricultural estates with no Jewish population.

There were four purely Jewish parties that contested the 1928 elections: the socialist anti-Zionist Association of Jewish Workers-Bund; the Zionist-socialist Poalei Zion; the Jewish National Union of Little Poland, which was dominated by the moderate Zionists from the former Austro-Hungarian Galicia; and the General Jewish National Bloc, associated with the religious-orthodox *Agudat Yisroel* (or *Aguda*) movement (Marcus 1983). The Bloc of National Minorities, although striving to unite and represent all the Poland's ethnic minorities was created and led by Yitzhak Greenboim, one of the leaders of Polish Zionists, and attracted numerous Jewish voters, especially the Zionists in the urban areas of Central and Eastern Poland (with the exception of Galicia), where the vast majority of ghettos were located.

In this chapter I follow Kopstein and Wittenberg's "not perfect, but reasonable" (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011) assumption that it was only non-Poles, and particularly the Jews that supported the Bloc of National Minorities. The Bloc of National Minorities was a loose coalition of groups and parties, established and led by the Zionists. While anti-Zionist Jewish socialists voted for Bund, those wishing to more fully integrate (or assimilate) into Polish society voted for various Polish parties, and the religious Jews supported the Aguda, it was the Zionist activists or sympathizers who were the Bloc's major Jewish support base. Being Zionist in interwar Poland did not necessarily mean that the person actively tried to immigrate to Palestine. According to Kopstein, "At this stage in its development, Zionism, rather than a clear call for emigration to a state that did not yet exist, was a new kind of assertive Jewish politics that demanded, above all, ethnic equality and national rights for the Jews as Jews. It signaled a clear unwillingness to integrate into the Polish national-building project as they were defined at the

time” (Kopstein 2011). But there were also Zionist activists, who prepared for immigration, underwent agricultural and paramilitary training, were organized in disciplined groups or actively supported such activities. The 1937 and 1939 ZO Congresses electoral returns allow us to analyze the numbers and the ideological preferences of these people.

1937 and 1939 Zionist Organization Elections. What the Polish national elections data does not provide is the detailed information on the distribution of power and political preferences among Zionists, who were one of the main (if not the main) political force among Polish Jews: the left wing *Poalei Tsion* contested the election, but other Zionist parties organized in Jewish electoral blocs or joined the Bloc of National Minorities. The data on Polish Zionists can be found in the returns of the Zionist Organization (ZO) Congresses elections. The Zionist Organization (currently the World Zionist Organization) was established in 1897 as an umbrella organization for the Zionist movement that sought the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The ZO Congresses were held every two years and the right to vote for Congress delegates was granted to every dues paying member of the ZO.¹⁹ The ZO used a proportional representation voting system and party lists to contest the elections. The elections, to the best of our knowledge, were free and fair. For this study I use the local level ZO Congress Electoral Commissions protocols from 1937 and 1939. These are the only existing local level protocols from Poland, and I found them at the Central Zionist Archives (CZA) in Jerusalem.²⁰ About 700 local electoral committees’ protocols from 1939 and 600 from 1937 are available at the CZA.

Qualitative studies of various ghetto uprisings demonstrate that the Zionists, especially the Zionist youth movements’ members, were one of the main driving forces behind ghetto

¹⁹ Only Jews were allowed to join the ZO.

²⁰ CZA, *Mahleket Irgun*, Folders S5/1703; S5/1773; S5/1774; S5/1801/1; S5/1801/2; S5/1801/3.

uprisings (Bender 2008; Cholawski 1980; Gutman 1994; Peled 1993) and therefore the ZO electoral data is of special importance for my study. Another advantage of this data is that it deals with the immediate pre-war period—the 1939 ZO Congress elections were held just a month before the Nazi invasion of Poland. The downside is that the data are incomplete—some protocols were destroyed during the Holocaust and did not reach the CZA. Furthermore, the right-wing Revisionist Zionists split from the ZO in 1935 to establish the New Zionist Organization (NZO) and therefore not all Polish Zionists voted in the ZO Congress elections. Unfortunately, neither I nor the archivists of the archive that houses the NZO files were able to find local-level data on the number of NZO members in Poland.

Ghettos were not established in all the localities that voted in the ZO elections, and there are places for which I have only the 1937 or 1939 elections results. However, the places for which I have data from both elections demonstrate an extremely high correlation between the 1937 and 1939 returns.²¹ Several protocols remained unidentified—the protocols are handwritten (in Hebrew), and the name of the locality is given in its Yiddish form, which is sometimes quite different from the Polish original. When the handwriting was impossible to decipher or when I was in doubt, I tried to identify the locality by looking for names of the electoral commission members at the Yad Vashem Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names. Given the proximity of elections to the Holocaust and the miniscule Jewish survival rates, the names were almost always there. Based on the 1937 and 1939 protocols I was able to identify ZO elections results for 469 out of 667 ghetto localities. Out of 198 ghettos for which I do not have the ZO elections data about fifty are from the Kraków region. Unfortunately, I do not have even one protocol from this

²¹ The correlation between the total number of voters in 1937 and 1939 ZO elections is 0.97. The correlation between the number of voters for the three main parties are: Bloc for the Working Land of Israel, 0.96; General Zionists A, 0.94; Mizrahi, 0.86.

area. Outside the Kraków region, for which all the returns are missing, I do not observe any systematic pattern that can explain the missing data; most likely, the elections were not held in these generally very small localities. The ZO elections results were never previously analyzed by scholars.

Three main parties took part in the ZO Congresses elections in 1937 and 1939: the politically moderate General Zionists A; the religious Zionist movement *Mizrachi*; and the socialist Bloc for the Working Land of Israel (*Blok Lemaan Eretz Israel Haovedet* - BWLI). BWLI was a coalition of several movements and organizations – The Laborers of Zion - Right (*Poalei Tsion - Yamin*) party, the *Hit'achadut* movement, which was essentially the Polish branch of MAPAI, the main Jewish socialist party and the precursor of the Israeli Labor Party, and the left-wing *Hashomer Hatsair* (Young Guard) movement. There were also two much smaller parties, General Zionists B and the right-wing Jewish State Party, but these two received only a few votes and therefore were omitted from my analysis. In 1939, two more parties took part in the elections (though they did not compete in the Galicia region), but received only a handful of votes and were omitted as well.

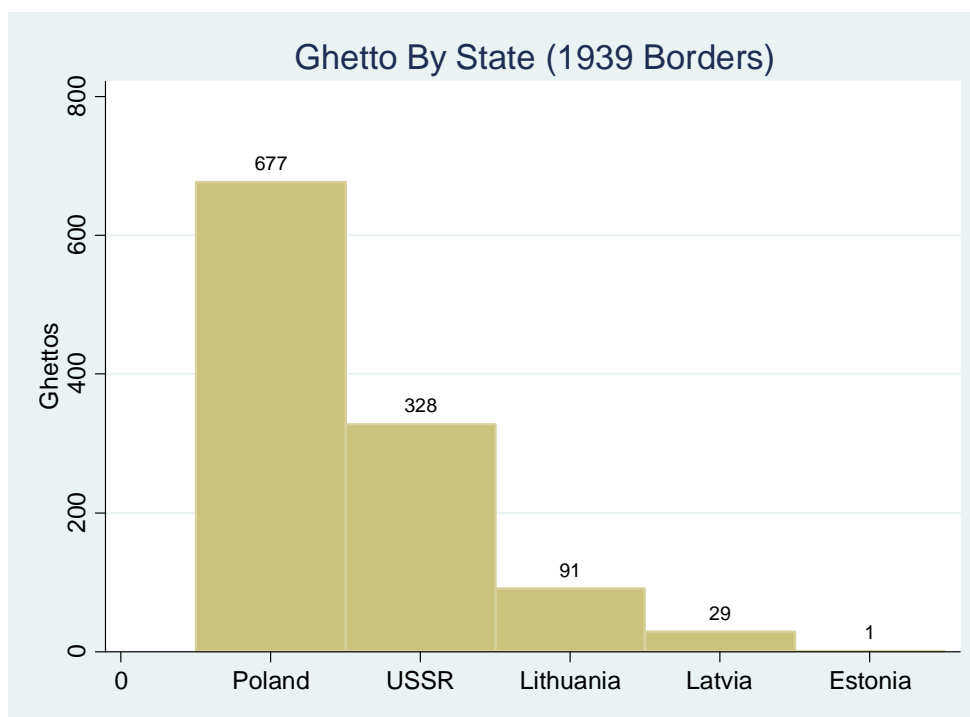
A typical page from Polish elections book and a typical ZO Congress elections protocol are in Appendices 2 and 3.

The Ghettos Universe

Before I proceed to the statistical analysis of my hypotheses, it is necessary to describe the universe of cases. This short overview of Jewish ghettos in the Nazi occupied Europe is especially warranted given the fact that my dataset is the first attempt to present and analyze all the Nazi-established ghettos during the Holocaust. The 1,126 ghettos covered in my dataset were

established on a large territory, spanning from the western parts of Poland, about 250 miles east of Berlin, to Nal'chik in the Northern Caucasus, not far away from Chechnya. The smallest ghetto (Obol' in the USSR) had about ten inmates; the largest (Warsaw) contained almost half a million Jews. In Belopol'e, Jews made up only 0.72% of the pre-war population; while Kamenka and Voikhovshtadt were purely Jewish settlements. The majority of ghettos, as Figure 3.1 demonstrates, were established in interwar Poland. Quite surprising is the relatively high number of ghettos established in the USSR because the Holocaust in the Soviet territories has generally been associated with mass shootings that did not involve ghettoization of the local Jewish population.

Figure 3.1: Distribution of Ghettos by State (1939 borders)



While many ghettos were destroyed very shortly after their establishment, numerous ghettos were allowed to exist for more than a year, and even several years (Figure 3.2). However,

there was a significant regional variation in the pattern of ghettos' existence, as Figure 3.3 clearly demonstrates. In the territories invaded by Germany in 1941, ghettos generally existed for a short period of time, being liquidated in a matter of months, if not weeks after their establishment. The most striking examples of these dynamics of persecution and destruction are Lithuania and Latvia, where Germans and their local collaborators killed the vast majority of the Jewish population immediately after the occupation of these territories by the German army.

Figure 3.2: Duration of Ghettos Existence (in Months)

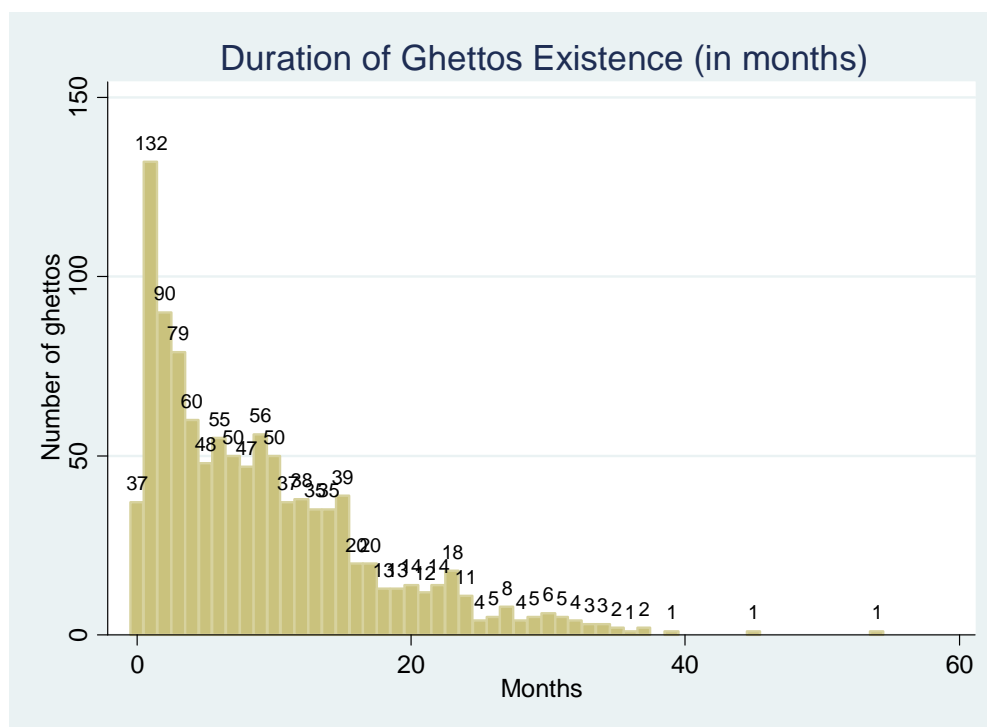
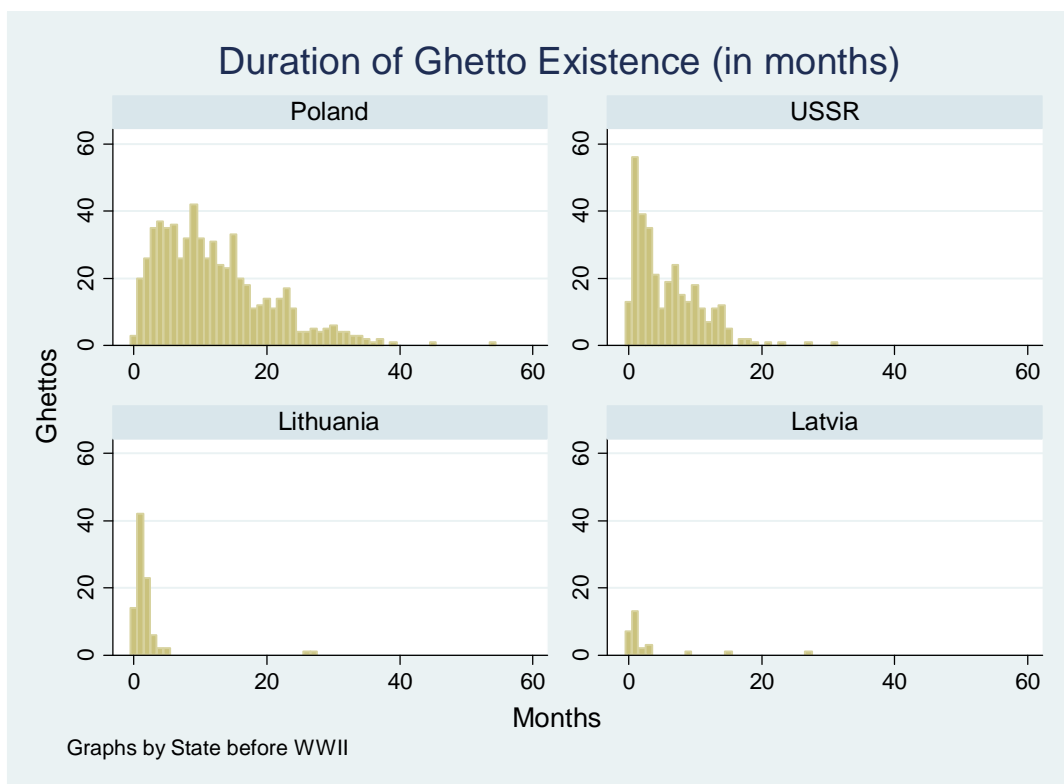


Figure 3.3: Duration of Ghettos Existence by State (1939 Borders)



The data also show that many ghettos were established during the very advanced stages of the Holocaust, Heydrich's orders notwithstanding (Figures 3.4, 3.5). Even in the Polish territories, which were occupied by the Nazis in 1939, the majority of ghettos were established only in 1941-2. The ghetto of Kopyczyńce, the last ghetto to be established by the Nazis, was set up in April 1943, several months after Stalingrad.

Figure 3.4: Distribution of Ghettos by the Year of Establishment

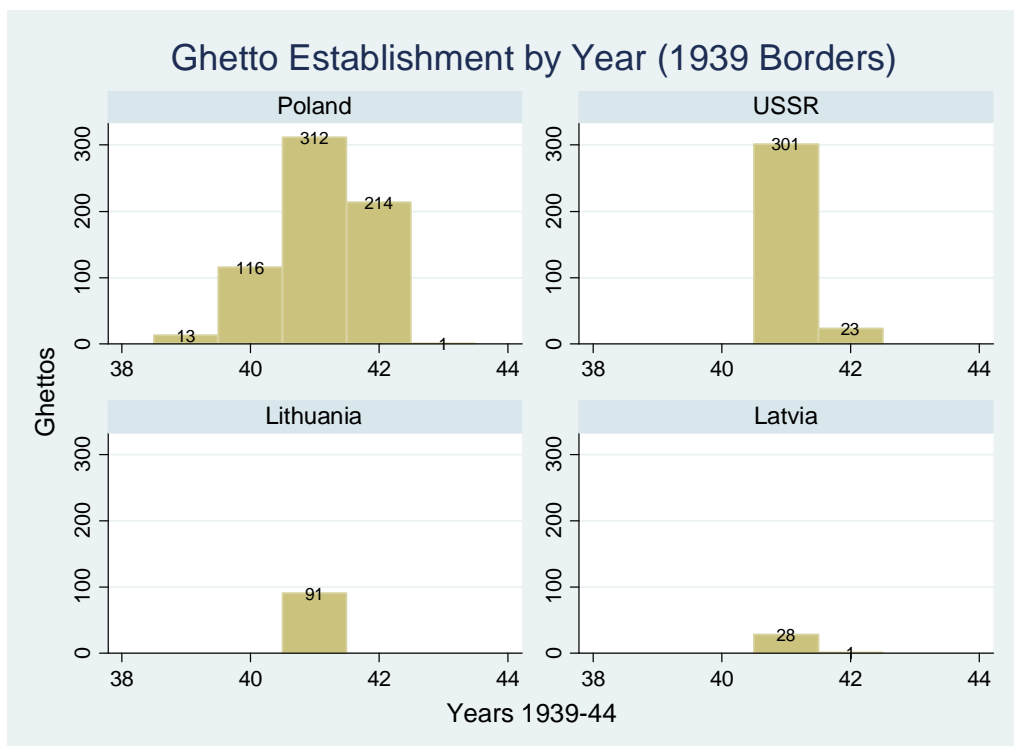
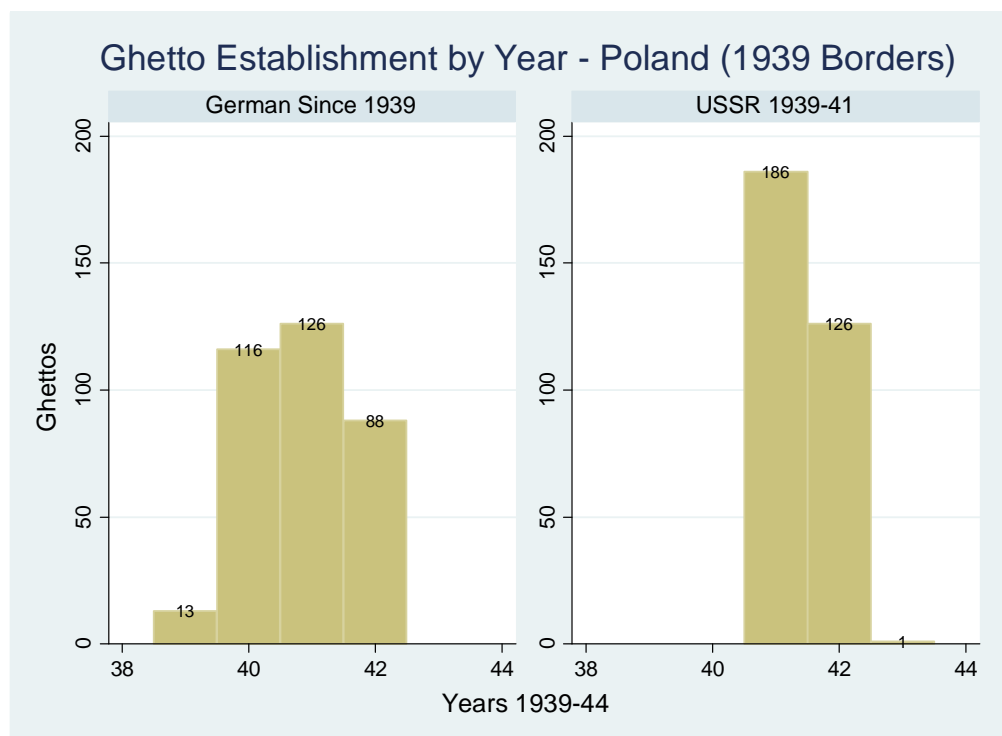
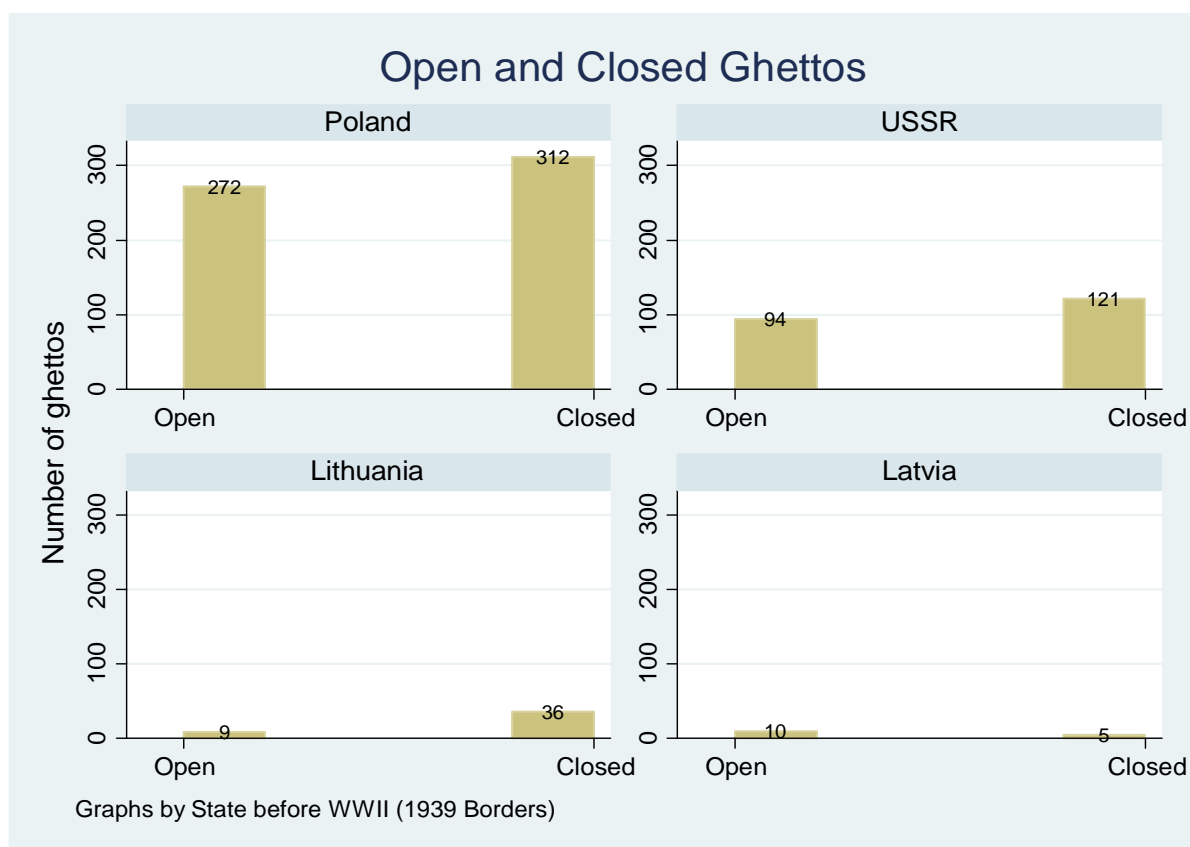


Figure 3.5: Polish Ghettos by Year of Establishment



Another surprising finding is the large number of open ghettos. While the popular image of ghettos during the Holocaust is that of a closely guarded area surrounded by a wall or a fence, the reality is quite different. It should be also noted that my dataset presents only a static representation of the ghetto's status: even if the ghetto was created as open, but enclosed before the final liquidation, the ghetto will still be coded as closed. Furthermore, it is possible that many of the ghettos for which we do not have data on enclosure were in fact open ghettos.

Figure 3.6: Distribution of Open and Closed Ghettos by State²²



While the research on Jewish ghettos during the Holocaust tends to focus on the largest ghettos, such as Warsaw, Łódź or ghettos in other major urban centers, these are outliers when the whole population of ghettos is considered. For a better understanding of Jewish ghettos,

²² I do not have data on whether the only ghetto in Estonia was open or closed.

Table 3.1 presents summary statistics of key variables associated with ghettos existence and the communities, in which these ghettos were established.

Table 3.1: Summary Statistics of Key Variables

Type	Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Demography	Pre-War Jewish Population (Census)	1,055	3,191.8	12,691	0	310,322
Demography	% Jews in the Community	930	38.11	20.8	0	100
Ghetto	Ghetto Population	1,079	3,239.47	16,405.27	10	460,000
Ghetto	Duration (months)	1,078	9.11	7.98	0	54
Ghetto	Mass Killing Prior to Ghetto Creation (Dummy)	1,126	0.231	0.42	0	1
Ghetto	Closed (Dummy)	859	0.55	0.497	0	1
Political Structure	Soviet 39-41 (Dummy)	1,126	0.39	0.487	0	1
Political Structure	% Pro-Government Vote	584	27.07	18.67	1.7	98.4
Political Structure	% Comm. Vote	584	4.85	11.4	0	79.2
Political Structure	% Jewish Vote	584	25.75	19.1	0	82.46
Political Structure	% Bund	584	1.57	3.33	0	19.17
Political Structure	% Minorities Bloc	584	12.65	13.14	0	67.4
Political Structure	% Aguda	584	4.68	6.54	0	43.75
Political Structure	% Poalei Zion	584	0.7	2.18	0	18.3
Political Structure	% Galician Zionist	584	6.13	13.38	0	82.46
Political Activism	ZO Voters (logged)	469	5.05	1.22	1.61	8.95
Political Activism	BWLI members (logged)	446	4.36	1.38	0	8.22

Method and Analysis

Thirty-one cases of Jewish organized armed resistance to the Nazis took place inside the ghettos. The vast majority of these uprisings were in the territory that had been interwar Poland. Three uprisings took place in Soviet ghettos and one in Latvia. In Lithuania, despite the existence of strong (and well researched) resistance movements in several large ghettos, no uprisings took place as these underground organizations opted for escaping the ghettos to the forests and joining the ranks of Soviet partisans.

Figure 3.7: Distribution of Ghetto Uprisings by State

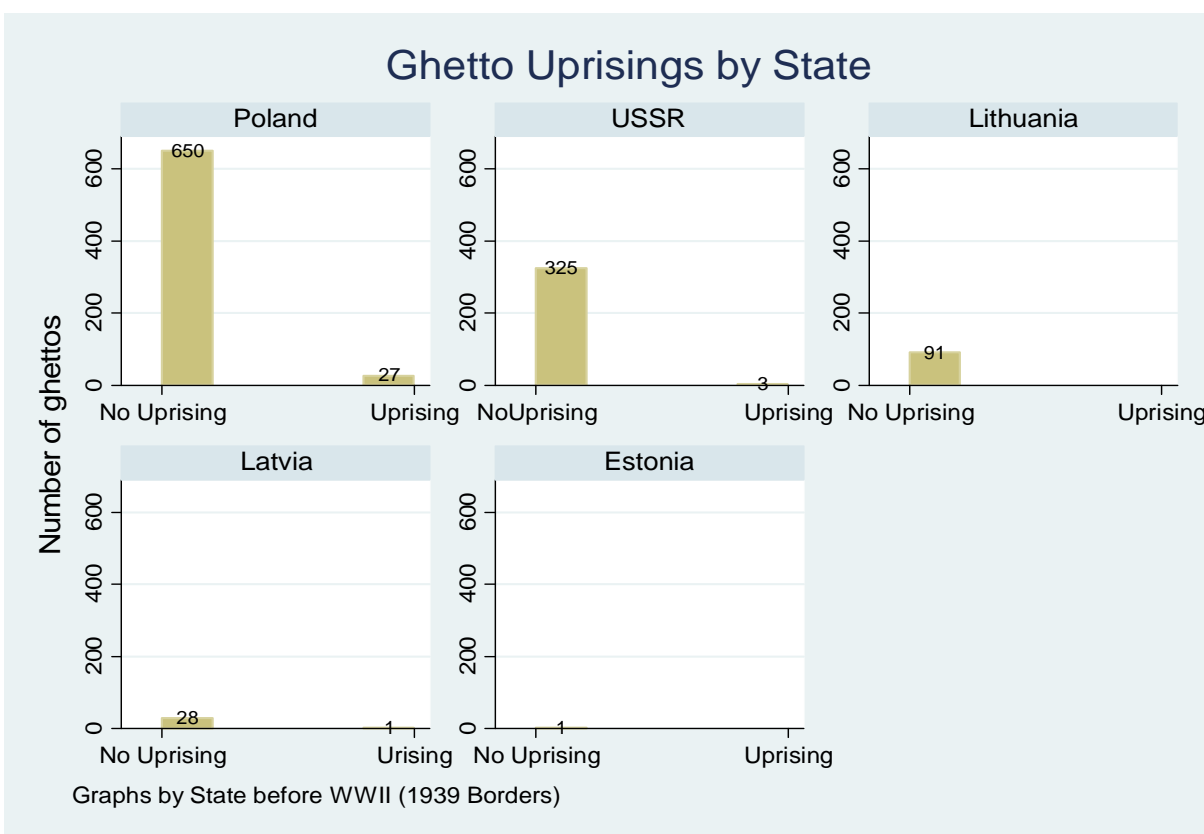
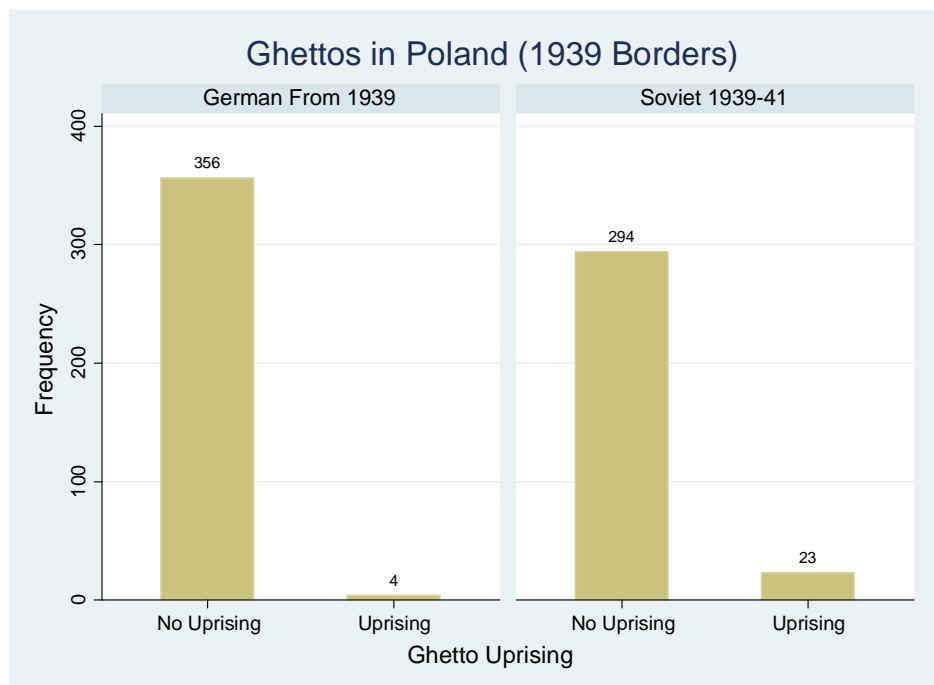


Figure 3.8: Uprisings in Ghettos, Located in pre-WWII Poland

Furthermore, as Figure 3.8 shows, even inside Poland there is a clear regional variation in the distribution of ghetto uprisings as twenty three of twenty uprisings took place in Eastern Poland, which was under the Soviet occupation in 1939-41. Whether the experience of almost two years of Soviet rule has an independent effect on the likelihood of uprising or there are other factors that are correlated with both the geographic location *and* the likelihood of uprising will be discussed later in the chapter.

More widespread was the phenomenon of underground resistance organizations in the ghettos—my dataset contains data on underground resistance groups in 120 ghettos. However, as explained previously in the paper, it is very likely that that in actuality the phenomenon was more widespread and my data underestimates the number of ghettos with underground resistance that for a variety of reasons did not translate into uprisings.

In this paper I use a logit model to evaluate which factors affected the likelihood of ghetto uprisings. Ghetto uprisings were rare events, however, and this poses a challenge for statistical analysis. As King and Zeng demonstrate, logistic regressions can substantially underestimate the probability of rare events (King and Zeng 2001). Therefore, as a robustness check, I redo the analysis using the “rare event logit” model.

In addition, it should be noted that in this paper I focus on why and where the uprisings took place, and do not analyze the specific timing of the uprisings. The reason for this is that there is no variation in the timing of uprisings—they were the last resort, taking place during the final liquidation of the ghetto, or what the Jews perceived as the final liquidation. On the timing of liquidation, obviously, the Jews had little to no impact because the decision depended on German internal policies, goals, desires, and notable dates, such as Hitler’s birthday. Therefore, after a decision to fight had been adopted, the exact date of the uprising was a function of German, rather than Jewish, actions. There were several cases in which the underground made preparations for an uprising that did not materialize, most probably because the liquidation of the ghetto followed too quickly to allow for preparation. We, however, do not know whether this uprising would have taken place even if the resisters were given enough time to prepare. There were also cases in which preparations for an uprising were made, but eventually the escape option was chosen instead.

As we see in Model 1 (Table 3.2), which analyzes the whole universe of ghettos, the estimated effects of the duration of ghetto existence, the previous experience of mass killing, and the status of the ghetto as closed were not statistically significant. On the other hand, the estimated effects of ghetto population and the percentage of Jews in the community before the Holocaust are positive and statistically significant and the results are robust to clustering by

German administrative units. With regard to the percentage of Jews in the community, there is a chance that the measurement is actually of the experience of Soviet occupation: in Eastern Poland (which also witnessed the majority of uprisings) Jews and Poles dominated the towns, while majority of the population—ethnic Ukrainians and Byelorussians—lived in the countryside. And indeed, in Model 2 (Table 3.2), when the experience of Soviet occupation is taken into account, the estimated effect of the percentage of Jews is not statistically significant and loses most of its already small marginal effect. The estimated effect of the ghetto population remains statistically significant and positive. Thus, H7 is not supported by the analysis, and only one variable, associated with the size of the ghetto (H6) is supported.

Table 3.2: Logit Analysis of Ghetto Uprisings: Ghetto and Demographic Explanations

Explanatory Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	Coeff. (Logit)	Marg. Effect (x100)	Robust SE	Coeff. (Relogit)	Coeff. (Logit)	Marg. Effect (x100)	Robust SE	Coeff. (Relogit)
Ghetto Population (logged)	1.014	1.63***	(0.004)	0.976	1.03	1.24***	(0.003)	0.99
% Jews in Community	0.237	0.038**	(0.0001)	0.023	0.013	0.016	(0.0001)	0.013
Duration (months)	-0.042	-0.068*	(0.0003)	-0.039	-0.019	-0.023	(0.0003)	-0.017
Mass Killing Prior to Ghetto Creation	0.438	0.791	(0.009)	0.452	-0.141	-0.163	(0.005)	-0.11
Closed Soviet 39-41	0.491	0.775	(0.009)	0.438	0.222	0.263	(0.007)	0.178
Constant	-12.427			-11.969	1.78	3.087**	(0.013)	1.685
Pseudo R2	0.201				-13.077			-12.455
Log-Likelihood	-93.507				0.252			
					-87.513			
N		687				687		

Notes: * $p < 0.1$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported for estimated marginal effects. Standard errors are robust to clustering by German administrative regions

To test all the hypotheses together, I analyze the Polish subset of the original dataset and match the data on ghettos with pre-war electoral returns. Table 3.3 reports the results of a logit model that includes all the variables I used in this chapter.²³ In addition, to know not only which variables have a statistically significant estimated effect, but how large this estimated

²³ The variable I do not use is the percent of Jewish vote because this variable is disaggregated to percentage of vote for specific Jewish parties.

effect is I estimate the percentage of change in odds or, in other words, by how many percent the likelihood of changes with the increase of one unit or one standard deviation of the independent variable when all the other variables are held constant at their mean.²⁴

After controlling for political identities and activism, the size of the ghetto population stops having a statistically significant estimated effect on the likelihood of uprising. The variables that do have a statistically significant estimated effect are: The number Socialist Zionists (BWLI supporters) in the community; The experience of the Soviet occupation in 1939-41; The percentage of vote for the Bloc of National Minorities in the community; The percentage of vote for the communists in the community.

At the same time, the size of the estimated effect is substantially larger for the first two variables. Thus, the increase of one unit in the logged number of BWLI members in the community increases the probability of uprising by 320%. In other words, if the initial predicted probability of uprising in a certain ghetto was 10%, an increase of one unit in the logged number of BWLI members in the community before the WWII increases the predicted probability of uprising to 32%. Location in the Soviet zone of occupation in 1939-41 increases the probability of uprising by 285.7%. On the other hand, the effects of the percentage of vote for the communists and the Bloc of National Minorities are very small. Additional model specifications are presented in Appendix 1.

An important caveat is in order. That there is a positive and statistically significant estimated effect of the number of politically active people on the likelihood of uprising does not mean that only the socialist Zionists rebelled or that individual socialist Zionists were more

²⁴ I do that by using the post-estimation commands, developed by J. Scott Long and Jeremy Freese (2006). Most specifically, I use the `listcoef` command in Stata.

likely than others to take part in uprisings. Making this claim would be an ecological fallacy. To determine the identity of the individuals engaged in resistance, further qualitative research is warranted. Qualitative research is also warranted to examine the causal chains and mechanisms that link ghetto uprisings to high levels of Zionist political activism before the Holocaust and the experience of Soviet occupation in 1939-41.

Table 3.3: Logit Analysis of Ghetto Uprisings: All Variables—Percentage Change in Odds

Variable	Increase Of		Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
	One Unit	One SD			
Socialist Zionists (log) ***	319.4	615.5	4.194	1.412	12.361
Soviet 1939-41*	285.7	-	3.585	0.779	16.482
% Vote Minorities Bloc*	4.5	70.5	1.045	0.993	1.098
% Vote Communist***	6.2	98.5	1.062	1.024	1.101
Ghetto Pop. (log)	58.5	72	1.585	0.620	4.045
% Jews in Community	1.9	39.2	1.018	0.981	1.057
Duration (months)	-0.3	-2.8	0.997	0.923	1.075
Closed	1.3	-	1.013	0.242	4.237
% Vote Government	1.4	25.9	1.014	0.979	1.050
% Vote Bund	-0.8	-3	0.992	0.846	1.163
% Vote Aguda	0.1	0.9	1.001	0.892	1.122
% Vote Poalei Zion	5.5	15.3	1.055	0.841	1.324
% Vote Galicia Zionists	2.2	34.9	1.022	0.963	1.083
Mizrahi Members (log)	11.3	19.9	1.113	0.691	1.790
Gen Zion. Mem. (log)	-25.8	-35.6	0.741	0.440	1.249
N = 309					
Pseudo R2= 0.348					
Log-Likelihood = -50.01					

Notes: * $p < 0.1$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$.

The Mechanism

The quantitative analysis of the ghettos dataset leads to several findings that I address in this section: Why were there so few uprisings in the Soviet ghettos? Why most uprisings were concentrated in an area that was subject to a double—Soviet and Nazi—occupation, and why were places that had higher numbers of active socialist Zionists more likely to rebel?

There are several possible reasons why there were so few ghetto uprisings in the territory of the pre-1939 USSR. One reason is that a very large number of ghettos were liquidated shortly after their establishment and the resistance did not have enough time to crystallize. Another possible reason is that in the Soviet territories—especially in what is now eastern Ukraine, eastern Belarus and the Russian Federation—Jews had many more opportunities to evacuate with the retreating Soviet forces, and many Jewish males were drafted into the Red Army. While Western Poland in 1939 and Eastern Poland in 1941 were occupied by the Nazis over the course of days and weeks, it took Germans several months to reach regions further to the East. Finally, the Nazi mobile killing squads, the *Einsatzgruppen* and other German units operating in these areas conducted numerous mass shootings that initially targeted Jewish males, and only later was the policy of mass killings expanded to the Jewish population as a whole. As a result of evacuation, conscription, and mass shootings there may have been too few potential resisters in the Soviet ghettos.

However, these explanations are only part of the story. As Figure 3.3 demonstrates, numerous ghettos in previously Soviet-occupied territories existed for well over a year; many of Jewish communities did not experience mass killings, and there was a substantial number of young males in the ghettos. Furthermore, underground resistance groups did emerge in Soviet

ghettos, indicating that the preconditions for revolt were present. At least twelve ghettos had underground resistance groups, and the actual number is almost certainly larger than this because the data on the Holocaust in the USSR are much scarcer than the data which is available on the Holocaust in Poland (Altskan 2005). At the same time, both in absolute numbers and in percentages, it is indisputable that there was more Jewish resistance in Poland than in the USSR. At least 20% of Polish ghettos had underground resistance groups, compared to only approximately 3.8% in the USSR; this difference is so substantial that it cannot be attributed to a simple underreporting. What is even more striking is that Polish and Soviet Jews not only belong to the same ethnic and religious group, but also (with the exception of Galicia and Silesia) resided in the very same state—the Russian Empire—until only twenty years prior to the Holocaust.

The key explanation for the difference in resistance patterns is the impact of Communist rule on Soviet Jews. First, the totalitarian and highly repressive Soviet system virtually eliminated Soviet citizens' capacity for independent collective action that was not led, mandated or approved by the state.²⁵ Therefore, upon Nazi occupation the general Jewish population in the USSR did not possess the knowledge, networks, or skills required for the organization of underground resistance. Jews who did have this knowledge and skills—those in the Communist Party and its youth movement (the *Komsomol*) activists—were too afraid to act without explicit orders from above. Furthermore, these Jewish communists viewed the ghetto underground not as *Jewish* resistance, but as a part and parcel of the broader *Soviet* struggle. Therefore, cooperation with and eventual escape to Soviet partisans were the key modes of underground activism in the Soviet ghettos.

²⁵ Roger Petersen (2001, p. 224) makes a similar argument in his discussion of rural communities in Soviet Ukraine and Belorussia.

Instructive in this regard is the history of the Minsk ghetto under Nazi occupation. Before the Nazi invasion, Minsk, the capital city of Soviet Belarus, had about seventy thousand Jewish inhabitants, roughly 30% of the city's total population. The majority of local Jews were unable to escape the city and were confined in a ghetto that existed for more than two years. Jews from neighboring towns and Germany were also brought to Minsk.

When Soviet rule over Minsk collapsed, many Communist Party and Komsomol (the Communist Party youth branch) activists, both inside and outside the ghetto, started contemplating the possibility of organizing underground resistance. Yet these activists were wary of acting without explicit orders from Moscow, and therefore refrained from establishing an underground resistance organization. Many of these activists argued that Soviet authorities must have left their underground representatives and cells in Minsk, and organizing resistance without these agents' orders would be an act of insubordination to the Party rule—a very serious crime in Stalin's USSR. In fact, no Communist Party agents and cells were left in Minsk by the Soviet authorities. Even when the communists in Minsk did eventually overcome their fear and organized an underground, they called it the Auxiliary (or Second) City Committee, thus recognizing the primacy of the nonexistent underground left by the Soviets. In the ghetto the underground organized earlier than in other parts of the city under the leadership of Hersch Smolar, a Jewish communist from Poland. Smolar, by the virtue of his previous political and underground work, possessed sufficient knowledge and experience to organize such activities; as a recent arrival to the USSR, he was less accustomed to the blind discipline of his Soviet comrades. When Smolar met with Isai Kaziniets, the leader of the just-evolving city underground, the first thing Kaziniets wanted to know was who gave Smolar the permission to act and start an underground organization. Smolar's honest reply—that he was not authorized

by anyone—convinced Kaziniets that Smolar was actually acting on orders from Moscow (which he obviously could not disclose) and this gave a final push to the creation of the city-wide underground organization in Minsk (Epstein 2008; Smolar 1989; Zhits 2000).

During the ghetto underground's existence it served as an important intelligence and supply base for the Belorussian Soviet partisans. All available weapons, materials, and manpower were funneled to the forests even as partisan leaders, fully aware of the ongoing massive murder of Jews, remained reluctant to admit Jews to their units (Slepyan 2000). For the Minsk ghetto underground leaders, an uprising was simply not an option as their priorities lay with aiding the Soviet partisans.

However, while the experience of Soviet rule decreased the likelihood of uprisings in the pre-1939 USSR, it increased this likelihood in Eastern Poland. Indeed, there was a relatively high level of resistance activity in Eastern Poland compared to the Central and Western parts of the country, which were under German occupation since 1939. To explain this apparent paradox, an analysis of the impact of the Soviet occupation in 1939-41 on Jews in these areas is necessary.

According to the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement, Germany and the Soviet Union agreed to partition the Polish state. Germany invaded Poland from the west on September 1, 1939, and Red Army followed suit from the east, invading on September 17. For the Jews of Eastern Poland, the arrival of the Red Army meant salvation from the Nazi rule, and many welcomed the Soviets with the feeling of relief and optimism. In the USSR, anti-Semitism was (at least officially) prohibited and numerous educational and professional venues that had been closed to Jews in Poland were now open. Many Jews flocked to newly created Soviet institutions and numerous young people joined the Soviet militia, becoming for the first time in their lives people

of authority (Barkan et al. 2007; Bauer 2009; Gross 2002b; Mick 2011; Pinchuk 1990; Levin 1995). While such activities were met with resentment by the local non-Jewish population, for Jews this empowerment, even if only temporary, was an extremely important experience that increased young Jews' self-confidence and also gave many of them paramilitary training.

At the same time all was not well in Eastern Poland. The nationalization of businesses led to substantial food shortages and long queues—unheard of events in pre-war Poland. Jews, the majority of whom were, before the occupation, self-employed craftsmen and owners of small businesses were especially hard hit by Soviet economic policies. Religion came under attack, Hebrew schools were closed, non-communist political organizations and parties were banned or voluntarily dissolved. Elites, intellectuals and other prominent members of the society (mainly Poles, but also Jews) were arrested, put in prison, murdered or deported to Central Asia. Jewish optimism quickly gave way to disillusionment and disappointment. However, for the majority the Soviet rule remained “the lesser of two evils” in comparison to Nazi occupation (Levin 1995).

Nevertheless, as a result of Soviet policies and repressions, several Jewish organizations, first and foremost the Zionist youth movements, such as Hashomer Hatsair and Dror, decided to organize underground cells (Kless 1999; Musial 2004). I argue that this decision proved to be of utmost importance for the Jewish resistance to the Nazi occupation. For many, the decision was not easy—Marxist Zionists were internally split on whether they could organize an underground resistance to the Marxist Soviet Union. “Can we, socialists, work in the underground in the USSR?” a Hashomer Hatsair member in Białystok wondered (Perlis 1987). Furthermore, underground activity meant the rejection of all the educational and professional opportunities open to Jews in the USSR, not to speak of the very real risk of being caught and imprisoned or

shot by the Soviet security services. Yet, true to the principle of operating “under any circumstances and under any regimes” (Kless 1999), Zionist youth movements survived, going underground. At the peak of its underground activity in the USSR, the Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatsair had at least thirty underground cells with 400-600 members in Eastern Poland overall (Levin 1995). Dror, another left-wing Zionist youth movement, had about six hundred underground members, spread over approximately eighty locations (Perlis 1987). Overall, about two thousand people were involved in the Zionist underground in the USSR (Levin 1995).

In military terms these Zionist underground cells were harmless and were explicitly not anti-Soviet. “Our goal was to simply preserve the organization, rather than fighting the Soviets,” noted one of underground organizers (Kless 1999). Somewhat ironically, one of the activities of the Hashomer Hatsair underground was the publication and distribution of (obviously illegal) leaflets and printed materials that praised the USSR. Yet the experience of the Zionist underground in the USSR (for which quite a few members paid with their lives and others were sentenced to long sentences in the Gulag) proved to be an invaluable training for the Jewish anti-Nazi fighters in 1941-44.

Mordechai Tenenbaum, one of the leaders of Dror and the commander of the Białystok ghetto uprising, referred to Zionist activities in the USSR as “our heroic period” (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). The poet Aba Kovner, one of the leaders of the Wilno young Zionists during the Soviet times and subsequently the driving force behind the ghetto underground, claimed that “What happened in Wilno [during the Soviet times] time had implication throughout the ghetto, implications [for what happened] in the forest, implications [for what happened] after the war, directly” (Porat 2000). The historian Dina Porat argues that the Soviet period should not be considered just a short interlude between the Polish and the German eras: “Here are the origins

of the ghetto uprisings” (Porat 2000).²⁶ In various places in Western Belarus, noted the historian Shalom Cholawski who studied the region, the Zionists underground under the Soviet became the basis for Jewish underground under the Nazis (quoted in Perlis 1987). Cholwaski is in a good position to make a judgment on this topic not only because of his academic credentials but also because of his experience as the leader of the Nieśwież ghetto uprising.

There are clear mechanisms by which the experience of Zionist underground work under the Soviets affected the later emergence and conduct of the Jewish underground under the Nazis. First, this experience created a body of personnel well-equipped and willing to assist in underground activities. In locations where the detailed data on the Jewish underground resistance to the Nazis exists, it can be clearly seen that people who were active in the Jewish anti-Nazi resistance gained their first underground experience in the USSR. This is true not only for Eastern Poland, but also some of the key figures of the Jewish resistance in other parts of the country. Thus, Mordechai Anielewicz, the commander of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, gained his first underground experience working with a Jewish underground cell in the USSR. The same is true for Yosef Kaplan, the first commander of the Warsaw ghetto underground and several other key leaders of Warsaw ghetto resistance (e.g. Tosia Altman, Yitzhak Zuckerman, and Shmuel Breslaw). People with Soviet underground experience were also active in the Będzin-Sosnowiec ghetto and the Kraków ghetto; Mordechai Tenenbaum, Edek Boraks, and Chajka Grosman were among the leaders of the Białystok ghetto resistance; Shalom Cholawski led the Zionist underground under the Soviets and the anti-Nazi uprising in his town of Nieśwież. A direct line of continuity from the underground under the Soviets to that under the Nazis has been

²⁶ In this passage Porat mainly refers to the smuggling of Zionist activists across the Soviet border and the cooperation between Zionist youth movements in this endeavor and later in the city.

established in Grodno, Krzemieniec, Lachwa, Mir, Świąciany and Baranowicze, among others. The empirical fact of personnel continuity dovetails with the reasonable expectation that people who were active in the underground in the USSR would continue their activities under a regime which was much more hostile to the Jews than the Soviet Russia.

Second, for many anti-Nazi resisters the experience of the Soviet underground was the first, invaluable lessons in the basics of conspiratorial works. Yitzhak (Antek) Zuckerman, a native of Wilno, started organizing the Dror movement underground in the Eastern Poland. “I had no experience in underground work, except from the vast literature I have read—memoirs of revolutionaries, and these did not really fit the new situation. I didn’t know where to start,” he recalled. While Zuckerman’s conspiratorial abilities were initially quite miserable, with time he learned that his initial conduct was “not a way to behave [in the underground],” a realization that enabled him to improve his skills (Zuckerman 1990). After his experiences in Eastern Poland, Zuckerman returned to help revive movement activities in Warsaw, later becoming one of the leaders of the Warsaw ghetto underground.

Zuckerman’s experience was not unique: initially, the conspiratorial skills of the Zionist underground were quite amateurish. “As the time passed, the habits and rules of clandestine activity became entrenched ... Members did not stop acquaintances on the street unless it was truly necessary. In several localities, impressive initiation ceremonies were introduced,” writes Dov Levin (1995). “Have to be careful (*tsarikh lehizaer*),” Mordechai Tenenbaum wrote in his diary in early 1943. “And again, conspiracy rules – as in Soviet times,” he added describing his attempts to minimize unnecessary contacts between the underground members (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). The experience with organizing a conspiracy evident in these quotations was not available to Jewish activists in Central and Western Poland, where the incipient anti-Nazi

Zionist underground did not have any experience with resistance work and was not aware of the most basic conspiracy rules. In the East, young Zionists had more time and opportunities to learn.

Third, the organizational structure and inter-movement cooperation begun during the Soviet occupation continued under the Nazis, assisting resistance activity. The Zionist underground in the USSR was generally organized by the principle of five-member cells (*hamishiyot*) who knew one another, but did not have contact with other cells of the leadership. While in practice such a structure was difficult to maintain, the desire to keep the five-people cells organizational structure was strong and the same organizational principle was adhered to in the ghetto underground. On the other hand, aspiring resisters outside Eastern Poland had to start from scratch, experimenting with models that were not always efficient, costing underground members their lives.

Zionist activists in Soviet-occupied Poland also learned to work together. In the pre-war period, notes Shlomo Kless, one of the leaders of the Hashomer Hatsair, the relations between the Zionist youth movements were quite strained; such competition was especially strong among movements that belonged to the same ideological camp as they were forced to compete for resources, members, and immigration certificates. However, Zionist activities in the Soviet Union, especially the smuggling of Zionist activists out of the USSR was one of cases in the Zionist youth movements worked closely together *as a movement* (Kless 1999). The cooperation was further enhanced in Wilno, where the leadership of the Zionist youth movements congregated with the establishment of *Koordinatsiia* (coordination)—a joint body that directed the youth movements' smuggling and immigration activities. Even though the attempts to achieve full merging between the two main left-wing movements—Hashomer Hatsair and

Dror—eventually failed, and there remained a certain mistrust between the movements throughout the whole period of their existence under the Soviet and the Nazi occupations, it was the Zionist underground in the USSR where the movements and their leaders learned to work together—an experience which came in handy when resistance to the Nazis was organized.

Fourth, the activities which Zionist movements organized served as vital preparation for resistance under the Nazis. While the Zionist underground in the USSR was not a military or military-oriented underground many of its activities provided a basis for more militaristic programs. For example, one of the first and main activities of anti-Nazi Jewish and non-Jewish underground throughout Europe was the publication of underground newspapers and leaflets. The Zionist youth movements had gained experience in doing so already in 1939 under the Soviets. Thus, the Dror movement published a newspaper edited by Yitzhak Zuckerman and readied for print by Mordechai Tenenbaum. Hashomer Hatsair published a newspaper called *Memaamakim* (From the Depths). In its first edition, this newspaper called on the local movement leadership to establish underground cells in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus. The paper was distributed in twenty localities in which the movement's most loyal members resided (Levin 1995). Another major focus of the underground was smuggling of people, money, and information in and out of the Soviet and German occupation zones. The same people (often young females) easily transitioned to smuggling weapons across the ghetto walls. Similarly, the Zionists' forgery experts switched from producing faked immigration certificates to producing fake German IDs.

The situation in the Nazi-occupied Poland differed substantially from that in the USSR. Ironically, the Jewish underground in Central and Western Poland started to crystallize later than in the Soviet-controlled parts of the country. There are several reasons for this phenomenon. The

Nazi authorities targeted the Jewish population as a whole, and therefore the members of political organization did not feel themselves more threatened than the rest of the Jewish population. During the initial stages of the German occupation coping or evasion seemed to be more prudent strategies than resistance. Furthermore, the Nazi regime was substantially more brutal than that of the USSR and hence resistance was way riskier in the Nazi-occupied zone. Unlike the Soviet authorities which targeted individuals and, in many cases, their immediate families, the Germans widely employed the collective punishment strategy and therefore any resistance effort put in grave danger not only the people who dared to oppose the occupiers, but also their entire communities. Finally, in contrast to the Soviet government, which repressed the non-communist political organizations, the Germans paid virtually no attention to Jewish political organizations and non-communist Jewish groups, first and foremost the Zionist youth movements, were eventually able, *de facto* if not *de jure*, to resume their activities in the Nazi-occupied Poland. Thus, when young Zionists in the Soviet-controlled Poland learned their first lessons in underground work, their comrades in the Nazi-occupied Poland provided educational and community services, which were badly needed by the Jewish communities and Jewish youths. By the time the Zionist youth movements in the Central and Western Poland realized that coping would not ensure survival and started organizing resistance, it was already too late. They lacked the experience and the knowledge that their comrades in Eastern Poland gained under the Soviets.

The manner in which these differences between Eastern and Central and Western Poland proved to be crucial for resistance can be seen when one analyzes the Jewish resistance in the Kraków, which was not subject to the Soviet occupation in 1939. The Kraków ghetto's main Jewish resistance group, called the Hahaluts Halochem ("Fighting Pioneer" in Hebrew) consisted

almost exclusively of members of the Zionist youth movements, the largest of which was the Akiva movement.²⁷ When the underground started to organize in late 1941 and early 1942, the movement and its members faced a serious problem of knowing next to nothing about underground work. “No sooner did two [underground members] meet than others would start joining them, and soon they would all walking down the street,”²⁸ wrote in 1943 Gusta Davidson Draenger, the wife of the Hahaluts Halochem leader Szymek Draenger (Davidson Draenger 1996). The movement leaders also knew that, by 1942 the time necessary for learning essential skills did not exist. Group members “were mere novices, facing the best-equipped and most thoroughly trained soldiers in the world ... The leaders were prepared to serve as privates to an experienced officer ... They searched for a leader with military experience because that was what they lacked. Their need for someone with military experience eventually led them to hook up (sic) with the Workers’ Party.” The Polish Workers Party (the official name of the Polish Communist Party at that time) used the young Jewish resisters for its own purposes, which did not include organizing a ghetto uprising. The young Zionists’ explicit goal was “fighting for three lines in history” to make the world know that the Jewish youth “did not go like lamb to the slaughter,” as Aharon Liebeskind, one of the organization commanders, put it in 1942. Yet, the Jewish resistance conducted their most important operation, the bombing of the German officers’ club, disguised as Poles. Additional parts of this operation involved raising Polish national banners over the Vistula bridges and laying wreaths on the destroyed monument of the Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz. Even though they fought to make the world know that Jews are defending themselves, their cooperation with and reliance on the Communists, forced the

²⁷ Not to be confused with the currently existing Religious Zionist Bnei Akiva movement.

²⁸ In the Eastern Poland, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Zionist underground members eventually learned not to do that.

Hahalutz Halochem members to conceal their true identity. Germans, Jews, and Poles were not supposed to know that these were the Jews who perpetrated these anti-Nazi activities.

Competing Explanations

In this section I evaluate potential competing explanations for the link between the voting for the BWLI and the location in the ‘double occupation’ zone and the likelihood of organized armed resistance to the Nazis. Specifically, I argue that this region’s diversity and the pattern of pre-war political mobilization and activism among Polish Jews make several of the most obvious (and theoretically grounded) competing explanations rather unlikely.

Self-selection into political groups. Perhaps the most obvious alternative explanation for the link between the support for the BWLI and the likelihood of uprising is that the voting patterns are simply a proxy for other unobserved variables. For instance, it is possible that certain types of people—those who were stronger, more determined, or more ideologically committed than others—self-selected into the Bloc or the Zionist youth movements that supported it. The available data suggest that this is not the case: joining a particular organization was determined by a host of idiosyncratic factors, not by ideological or other predispositions for one movement/ideology or another. As the historian Alina Cała notes, in the interwar period the Polish Jews were a very politically aware and active group. At the same time, the decision to which political organization to join and to which ideology to adhere “usually occurred as early as primary or secondary school, [and] was seldom motivated by conscious political choice. It was decided by peer pressure or by other, non-ideological considerations” (Cała 1994).

Anecdotal evidence from the hundreds of testimonies and memoirs I have read supports Cała’s argument. Jewish youths very often joined a movement not because they believed in its

ideology, but because they knew someone who was already a member, liked the movement personnel or simply happened to live near the movement's "nest" (*ken*). For example, Avraham Leibowicz, one of the leaders of the Kraków ghetto underground joined the Dror movement because he liked to play soccer and Dror was the only movement in town which had a soccer field (Friberg and Raban 1985). Hela R., a Jewish underground courier, claimed that ideologically she was closest to the right-wing Betar, but joined the center-left Akiva nonetheless (HVT-1822). Chajka Grosman, one of the leaders of the Hashomer Hatsair in the USSR and later in the Białystok ghetto resistance organization, said that she was always influenced by the ideas of social justice, but admitted that "it is hard to say that I joined the Hashomer for ideological reasons" (Shalev 2005). Yehiel Sedler from Białystok joined the Hashomer Hatsair simply because his house bordered the gymnasium courtyard in which the movement members used to meet (OHD-110(15)). Shlomo Sh. left the religious Zionist Hashomer Hadati and moved to Akiva because his sister joined the latter movement (HVT-3496). Similar examples are legion. Only rarely people who were active in the Zionist youth movements explained the decision to join a specific organization in ideological terms. Usually, a host of other factors determined the decision. Only later, after they had become a part of a movement, did the ideological education start.

Regional variation in the levels of militancy. It could be possible that the Zionists of Eastern Poland were more militant and radical than their counterparts in other parts of the country to begin with. The historical record suggests that exactly the opposite is the case. Galicia, one of the largest and the most populous regions of Eastern Poland (the Lwów, Stanisławów, and Tarnopol vojevodships), was a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire before WWI. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was known for its ethno-religious toleration and, as a result, the regions of Poland under

its control were considered substantially more moderate than the rest of the country. Indeed, the reason why the Zionists of Galicia had a separate list in the 1928 election was precisely because they considered the Bloc of National Minorities platform and rhetoric too militant.

The Eastern Polish region of Wołyń presents a good example of how Poland's political geography affected Zionist movements. In Wołyń, the members of the Hashomer Hatsair were too scared of the authorities to even publically celebrate the International Workers Day (May 1). Josef Kaplan, one of the Hashomer Hatsair leaders, was sent in 1937 to inspect the movement cells in Wołyń and was amazed by how much the movement members in the town of Sarny were afraid of the authorities (Maayan 1988). In comparison, in Western Poland Jews were not scared to publically protest, display political symbols, or parade on May 1. Nevertheless, in Sarny, where the Jews were scared to display red banners on May 1 1937, they rebelled against the Nazis in August 1942.

Empireal Legacies. Several scholars have noted the impact of historical legacies on various political outcomes, such as voting, corruption, economic performance, and violence (Darden forthcoming; Peisakhin 2012; Putnam 1993; Darden and Grzymała-Busse 2006). However, there was no common historical legacy in Eastern Poland—parts of the region had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while others had long been part of Russia. Given that uprisings were distributed equally across the East Poland regions, the historical legacies argument hardly holds.

Rough Terrain. The relationship between rough terrain, such as forests and mountains, and insurgency is one of the most consistent findings of the political violence scholars. And indeed, there are regions in Eastern Poland which are not easily accessible (e.g. the marshes of Wołyń or the thick forests of Polesie). Other regions, however, are quite easily accessible. Furthermore, the existence of inaccessible terrain should decrease—not increase—the likelihood of suicidal urban

uprisings as an exit option is more readily available. Moreover, forests and marshes also existed in the pre-WWII Soviet territories, where Jewish resistance members chose to escape, rather than rebel.

German Policies. The likelihood of uprisings also cannot be attributed to different German policies that could potentially vary from one German administrative unit to another. The territory of Eastern Poland was divided between four German administrative units which differed quite substantially from one another. The Białystok area became a separate administrative unit called *Bezirk Bialystok*; this region was intended to be eventually incorporated into the German Reich. Galicia was included together with most of central and southern Poland in the *Generalgouvernement*. While in Galician ghettos the Jewish underground was very active, in the rest of the Generalgouvernement this was not the case. Western Belarus and the Wilno region were part of the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, together with quite a few “Soviet ghettos,” which did not rebel. The same is true for Wołyń, which was in the *Reichskommissariat Ukraine*. Finally, it cannot be argued that the Jews of Eastern Poland had better information about what awaited them.

Information about German anti-Jewish Policies. Finally, it is possible that Jews in Eastern Poland knew about the persecution of Jews in German-occupied areas and therefore used their time under Soviet occupation to prepare for resistance against the Nazis. This explanation is unlikely for several reasons. First, most people in Eastern Poland believed that a German invasion (if it were to occur) could be stopped by Red Army; continuation of Soviet control was therefore perceived to be much likelier than German occupation of the region. Furthermore, while Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland suffered restrictions, the situation was largely tolerable for the majority of Jews; indeed, tens of thousands of Jewish refugees even

registered to return from the Soviet zone to the Nazi-occupied Poland. The main ghettoization drive in Nazi-occupied Poland took place shortly prior to the German invasion of the USSR and hence Jews in Eastern Poland had limited information about what the life in ghettos entails. It should be also remembered that the decision to kill all the Jews in the Nazi-occupied Europe was reached only in early 1942, and at that time the Jews in both parts of Poland were already in the ghettos.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I discussed a rare and unusual case of violent conflict—victims’ resistance to mass violence and extreme oppression. I argue that this class of violent events is important for several reasons. The focus on such unusual cases can present new and interesting theoretical insights into a much broader phenomenon of resistance and rebellion. The analysis of ghetto uprisings during the Holocaust demonstrates that there is a variation in victims’ reactions to oppression and the willingness to openly resist state-led mass violence. Armed resistance to extreme forms of oppression and violence is rare, but it nonetheless appears to be more widespread than it was previously assumed, at least in the case of the Holocaust. Furthermore, ghetto uprisings also demonstrate the importance of preexisting political factors—first and foremost the experience of membership in political organizations and regime type. These factors are largely overlooked by the literature on political violence, and my analysis suggests that the political structure of a community and the number of politically active citizens in a given locality can be powerful predictors of armed resistance.

The chapter also demonstrated the impact of political regimes on the emergence of armed resistance and its content. In the USSR, the twenty years of the Soviet rule completely

eliminated citizens' ability to organize for independent collective action. Therefore, the only Jewish resistance that did emerge was communist in its ideological orientation and focused on helping the Soviet partisans in the forests, rather than rebelling inside the ghettos. In the Nazi-occupied Poland independent Jewish organizations did exist, but in the initial stages of the occupation the German intentions were not clear, and the Nazi authorities' brutality made resistance too risky an undertaking. When it became clear that Jews are going to be exterminated *en masse*, the resistance did start to organize, but it was already too late and the resisters did have any knowledge or experience of underground work. Finally, in Eastern Poland, the Soviet repression of the existing non-communist Jewish political organizations drove several Zionist youth movements to the underground. When Eastern Poland was occupied by the Nazis in 1941, the determination to resist and underground experience were already present.

Chapter 4: Behind the Barbed Wire: Soviet, Germans, and Poles in the Minsk Ghetto

Introduction

“My con... conclusion in my life—people need, need, need be active, not to be like, like uh, like small animals, like kitten. They should go smart... Be smart and think about what, what is going on and do something. Not go to, to die.” In broken English, from her home in Detroit, Esther Lupian, née Kaplan, a Minsk ghetto survivor, did her best to convey to the interviewer the importance of being proactive and selecting among survival strategies. Yet, as Lupian’s own story demonstrates, the choice of survival strategy, while conscious and rational, depends on numerous factors, many of which are beyond an individual’s control. First, there is the issue of available and reliable information before and during the act. For most part, people in pre-war Minsk had a very vague understanding of the extent of Nazi anti-Jewish policies and did not escape immediately after the war broke out. In the ghetto, unlike many other Jews, Lupian’s family was aware of and had contacts with the underground and the Soviet partisans in the forests. The oldest child of the family, Grisha, only thirteen years old, worked for the Jewish underground and the Russian partisans as a liaison between the ghetto and the outside world. It was an extremely risky job that eventually cost Grisha his life. He was not chosen to perform this duty due to his intelligence or courage, but because unlike most children in the ghetto, Grisha simply did not look Jewish and did not provoke suspicion. Thanks to Grisha’s connections, Esther and her mother had no difficulty joining the partisans, and were immediately admitted into the unit. Not everyone was as lucky as Esther Lupian and her mother—numerous Jews were turned down, robbed, or even murdered by the Soviet partisans.

Though the family was aware of the partisans’ existence for a long time, they did not initially rush to join them. Only after it became clear to Esther’s mother that she could not escape

a death in the ghetto did she take to the forest. Before that, she did what she could to support the family inside the ghetto by taking various slave labor jobs. Here, pre-war Soviet policies affected her choices—she could not stay home taking care of the children because she was the sole breadwinner—Esther’s father was a victim of Stalin’s Great Terror and spent the war years in the Gulag (Liupian 2007).

Esther’s personal experience clearly demonstrates that even in the same family, people can and do adopt different survival strategies, that these strategies change over time, that available information regarding the likelihood of survival helps determine the adoption of a particular survival strategy, and that Jewish behavior during the Holocaust was to a large extent affected by the pre-Holocaust social and political factors.

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how Soviet policies and institutions shaped the behavior of the Minsk ghetto inmates, the information that those inmates had about the Nazis’ anti-Jewish measures, their survival strategies, and the nature of the ghetto underground. Furthermore, the behavior of Soviet Jews will be compared to that of other two groups of Minsk ghetto inmates—Jewish refugees from Poland, and Jews who were deported to Minsk from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia.

Data

The data on the Minsk ghetto is much sparser than the data on other large ghettos. First, only limited Holocaust-era data survived the war. Second, because the Soviet authorities silenced Holocaust-centric research for political reasons, no survivors’ testimonies were collected in the immediate post-war period. With the exception of Hersh Smolar’s history of the ghetto’s communist underground, nothing was published on the Minsk ghetto in the Soviet Union until

the late 1980s. Some survivors—those who were able to leave the USSR for Poland, Israel, and the USA were interviewed in the 1960-70s, but by the time Western and local scholars were able to record the experiences of survivors who continued to reside in the Soviet Union, only few of them were still alive.

In recent years growing attention to the Minsk ghetto has led to the publication of numerous memoirs, testimonies, and scholarly works by Western and local scholars. Almost all ghetto survivors who are still alive were interviewed by the main testimonies' collections projects, many of them more than once. The opening of the Soviet archives allowed scholars to access both German and Soviet documents on the Minsk ghetto, the communist underground, and the participation of Jews in the Soviet partisans' movement. The bulk of the data used in this chapter comes from published memoirs and testimonies of the Minsk ghetto inmates, most of them in Russian and Hebrew, and unpublished testimonies and interviews from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Oral History Division (OHD), and the Yale University Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies (HVT). Additional data comes from the Yad Vashem and Ghetto Fighters House archives in Israel, and from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum archive.

The data not without problems and several issues of reliability and representativeness should be taken into account. First, I do not base my analysis on a representative or random sample of the Minsk ghetto inmates. Survivors' stories are overrepresented in the accounts that I have analyzed. Even when the survivors discuss the stories and actions of those who perished, a bias may exist. Second, interviews were conducted and memoirs written decades after the Holocaust. Over the years, recollections become imprecise, details were forgotten, and the interpretation of the situation is influenced by the post-Holocaust knowledge and interpretations.

Many currently living survivors were children during the Holocaust, and their perspective was probably different from that of the adults.

A potential way to overcome this bias is to prioritize materials that were produced during the Holocaust or in the immediate post-Holocaust period. However, while the body of the Holocaust-era accounts and data is relatively large for the main Polish ghettos, such as Kraków or Białystok (which are discussed in the subsequent chapters), the situation in the Minsk ghetto was different. First, unlike in Poland where the regime allowed, at least to some extent, free expressions of opinions and ideas, the USSR severely punished dissenting opinions. In the atmosphere of Stalin's Great Terror of the late 1930s, people tended to keep their thoughts to themselves. Any expression of independent thinking could have easily led to a death sentence or long imprisonment, and therefore even keeping a diary was a very dangerous act. If the NKVD (the political police),²⁹ confiscated and inspected a personal diary, it could serve as a basis for indictment. Furthermore, during the war years, keeping a diary was no less dangerous than under Stalin. In the partisan units the diaries, when individuals kept them, were often censored, checked, and scrutinized by commanders for security reasons; sometimes names, places, or thoughts were deleted by officials who examined the diaries' content. "[I] categorically forbid ... criticizing commanders, even in your personal diary," scribed Petr Revenko, Lialia Bruk's partisan unit chief of staff, on her diary after inspecting it in October 1943. Besides this order, he also had other suggestions for Lialia, such as "brush aside your intelligentsia whining, and get a hold of yourself." The front page of the diary contains another note (from February 1944) written

²⁹ Here, following survivors' accounts, I use NKVD as a generic term to describe the Soviet political police, although technically, the NKVD, the Peoples Commissariat of Internal Affairs, was much more than just a political police force. Political police was only one of the NKVD's divisions.

by the unit political police representative. “Diary inspected. Well written.” From this we can gather that the diary was examined at least twice by different officials (Bruk and Bruk 2004).

Self-censorship was prevalent, particularly following the war. When the first survivor testimonies and memoirs were published in the Soviet Union, there was no mention of many significant details that depicted Soviet partisans and officials in unfavorable ways. The authors simply found it inconceivable to make such facts publically known (Gerasimova and Selemenev 2008). The history of the Minsk ghetto underground, written by its leader Hersh Smolar in 1946 in Moscow differs on many points from the history that Smolar wrote in the 1980s in Israel. All this, however, does not mean that the testimonies and memoirs cannot be used as a basis for rigorous analysis. First, when evaluated critically, juxtaposed against other testimonies, and triangulated, survivors’ accounts serve as an extremely important source of data on Jewish behavior in the ghetto. Even if taken many years after the event, Holocaust survivors testimonies tend to be remarkably consistent (Greenspan 2001). And even if specific dates and details are forgotten, for the purposes of my analysis, which focuses on evaluating general behavioral strategies, rather than precisely reconstructing a specific event, imprecise recollections can still be a valid source of information.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I will present a short history of the Minsk Jewish community before and during the Holocaust. Then, I will focus on the specific behavioral strategies that Minsk Jews adopted: collaboration, compliance, coping, evasion, and resistance. In addition, I will also discuss how available information and pre-Holocaust social and political factors shaped individuals’ adoption of either strategy.

Minsk Jews before the Holocaust

Minsk's Jewish community is one of the oldest in Eastern Europe. The first documented reference to the Jewish presence in the city is from the 15th century, when Minsk was part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is quite likely that Jews resided in the city even before that time. In 1495, after Jews were expelled from Lithuania, the Minsk community temporarily ceased to exist. Yet, in 1511 tax documentation reveals a renewed Jewish presence in the locality (Even-Shoshan 1975). Later, following the unification of the Grand Duchy with Poland, the Jews in Minsk (and the kingdom more generally) enjoyed various privileges, granted to them by the royal court and local magnates. As a result of the partition of Poland, Minsk became a part of the Russian Empire and was included in the Pale of Settlement—the western part of the Empire, where Jews were allowed to reside. In the late 19th century the Jewish population of Minsk was about fifty thousand and Jews constituted a majority of city's population (Even-Shoshan 1975).

Minsk's Jewish community enjoyed a vibrant religious, cultural, and political life. While the vast majority of Minsk Jews could hardly make ends meet and eked out a living as tradesmen, craftsmen, and manual laborers, the city also had a not large, but influential group of educated middle class professionals and a number of wealthy industrialists who dominated the local Jewish politics and promoted new and previously unknown political ideologies, such as the Zionism and socialism. Even though the Jewish community suffered pogroms, it also knew how to protect itself and strike back. Jewish self-defense organizations in Minsk consisted of representatives of two main groups—physically strong (and armed) butchers and carriage drivers (OHD-58(1)), and educated, middle and upper-class politically active men. Leo Goldberg, the offspring of a wealthy industrialist family, recalls how during a pogrom his father told the family that if needed, their servants would protect them. Then he took two pistols out of his pocket and went off to join the self-defense unit (OHD-58(2)). Jews from other towns, when visiting Minsk,

were astonished by how well the Jews in the city protected themselves, recalled a city resident David Zakai (OHD-58(1)).

In 1918, following the communist revolution in Russia and the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, German troops occupied Minsk and expelled the local Communist authorities. The experiences of a largely benevolent German rule, as I will show later in the chapter, played an important role in shaping perceptions about what the city's Jewish population should expect under the German occupation in WWII. Many Minsk Jews recollected how German authorities restored order, revived economic life, and allowed political parties to resume their activities after the short period of extremely disorganized and quite repressive Communist rule. Even when German military authorities later began limiting political freedoms, the situation was still much better than under the Communist regime. At some point, German authorities started arresting people on the streets and sending them off to forced labor camps; direct military rule was introduced at this time. The German commandant of the city, Captain Cuno Izraeli, was Jewish. After Germany's military collapse, a second but short-lived period of Soviet rule followed the German occupation of Minsk, later giving way to a Polish occupation. Jews recalled the eleven months of Polish rule in 1919-20 with horror as a period of forced labor, humiliations, lootings, beatings, and occasional murders of Jews by the Polish troops. Against the background of Polish and Soviet violence, the period of German control was remembered as a time of peace and stability.

In May 1918, elections to the Minsk Jewish community council were held. The socialists won about one third of the seats, Zionist and religious groups got the majority of the votes. In the 1920 elections, Zionists won the majority of the seats. Yet, the consolidation of Soviet rule after the withdrawal of Polish army from Minsk led to Jewish parties' swift demise. The socialist, anti-Zionist Bund merged into the Communist Party. The Zionist parties were allowed to exist

until the late 1920s and were closed and outlawed by the Soviet government in 1928. The persecution of Jewish political parties went hand in hand with the Soviet government attacks on Jewish communal and religious institutions. The Soviets closed synagogues and religious learning institutions; there were also a series of public trials of Jewish ritual slaughterers, rabbis, and circumcisers. Unable to continue their activities legally, some Jewish organizations ceased to exist, while others went underground. Until 1933, there were underground cells of the Zionist youth movements in Minsk, and Rabbi Zvi Neria provides a detailed account of an underground *yeshiva* (Jewish rabbinical seminary) that operated in the city (Rozin 1975; OHD-58(5)).

While politically repressive, the 1920s and 1930s were also a period of a booming Yiddish (though communist in content) culture and education.³⁰ In 1935-6, out of 42 schools in Minsk, 12 had Yiddish as their language of instruction (Rozin 1975). At the same time, the Soviet government also made upward social mobility and integration to the broader society possible for the Jews. Tsarist-era restrictions on entry to the public service, and ethnic quotas for Jews in the universities were removed, anti-Semitism became a criminal offence. Young Jews responded enthusiastically to these changes and during the interwar years the Jewish population of Minsk underwent substantial political and social changes which led to the decrease in the number of Yiddish-speakers, especially among the young Jews, and the greater integration of the Jews into the non-Jewish society. Thus, while according to the 1926 census, about 83% of Jews in Minsk listed Yiddish as their mother tongue, the number was down to only 57% in 1939 (Zhits 2000). Jews, only 6.7% of the Belarus population, made up about 20% of the Communist

³⁰ The Soviet “nationalities policy” was a combination of repression of all non-Communist political and social organizations, combined with promotion of culture, language, and education of non-Russian nationalities in their own language. These newly created cultures and literatures had to be “national in their form, and socialist in their content.” For a brilliant description of this process see Martin, Terry. 2001. *The Affirmative Action Empire*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press; and Hirsch, Francine. 2005. *Empire of Nations*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Party members, and there was a substantial Jewish presence in the Party apparatus and in public administration (Zhits 2000). Still, by the time of German invasion the demographic and socio-economic transition, even if substantial, was still far from complete. By 1941, the majority of Minsk Jews still belonged to the working and the lower middle classes, despite the presence of prominent Jewish individuals in medicine, jurisprudence, instruction, and engineering. For example, Jews constituted between 35 and 40% of industrial workers in the city, and were mainly employed in services and trade.

In the late 1930s Soviet policy towards the Jews underwent dramatic changes. Yiddish schools were shut down; many prominent Jews, as well as former political activists of the Zionists parties and the Bund perished during the Great Terror years of 1937-8. Despite the overrepresentation of Jews in the Party and the government lower and mid-level jobs, the number of high ranking Jewish officials was minimal, and decreased even further after the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and the subsequent Soviet-Nazi rapprochement. Another consequence of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was a full stop to any negative coverage of the Nazi Germany and its policies, including the anti-Jewish ones, in the Soviet media. I will show that as a consequence, many Soviet Jews were completely uninformed about what happened to their co-ethnics in the areas under Nazi control and, building on their memories from 1918, refused to leave the city after the war started.

In 1939, the Jewish population of Minsk was 70,998, or about 30 percent of the city population (Altshuler 1993). As a result of the German invasion of Poland, numerous Jewish refugees arrived to the city. The Polish Jews were treated with curiosity and suspicion—for twenty years the Soviet Jews were almost entirely isolated from the Jewish communities in

neighboring states.³¹ Although these refugees did provide some information on the Nazis' anti-Jewish actions, their stories more often than not were met with disbelief. However, several survivors do mention that they took refugees' stories seriously. Usually, people who believed the refugees tried to escape the city earlier than those who did not. The stream of refugees from Poland increased the Jewish population of Minsk, and it is estimated that by the time of German invasion about 85-90 thousand Jews resided there (Zhits 2000).

Minsk during WWII

Germany invaded the USSR on June 22, 1941. It was Sunday; many children were in summer camps or with grandparents outside the town. In Minsk, a grand opening of a huge human-made water reservoir, the Komsomol Lake (*Komsomol'skoe ozero*) was scheduled. Although the German attack started at 4 a.m., Soviet citizens did not formally learn about the war from the government until noon. Many survivors recall hearing about the war on their way to or from the lake opening ceremony. Soviet authorities urged the citizens not to panic and stay put. Most survivors' testimonies included recollections of relative normalcy from the first days of the war; citizens were not informed about the rapid German advance and the collapse of the Soviet defenses. Most people believed the Soviet pre-war propaganda's claims that the enemy would be swiftly defeated on its own territory and assumed that Soviet troops could already be approaching Warsaw or even Berlin. Almost no one outside the Communist leadership knew that German troops were advancing rapidly towards Minsk; the main thrust of the German attack

³¹ Instructive in this regard is a recollection made by Shalom Cholawsky, the leader of the Nieswiez ghetto uprising and a prominent Holocaust historian after WWII. In the 1930s Cholawsky worked as a teacher in Rakow, a small town less than 30 miles from Minsk, but on the Polish side of the border. Cholwasky recalls that when he first came to Rakow, it was dark, and he saw lights of a large city. It was Minsk, but he felt it was another planet (Cholawski 1973).

delivered by Army Group Center³² was aimed directly through Minsk towards Moscow (Speckhard forthcoming).

Everything changed following the first massive German air raid on June 24. Many people were killed, whole neighborhoods of wooden houses burned to the ground, and the government ceased to exist as the authorities quickly abandoned the city without notifying the population, let alone organizing an evacuation. At that point many Minsk residents, Jews and non-Jews, decided to escape to the east. They did not manage to get too far, though. Most chose to flee via the main highway to Moscow, and after several miles German paratroopers who had blocked the road stopped them and sent thousands back to Minsk. Some people were simply not allowed to escape. Margarita F.'s father worked in the city flour mill; he was not allowed to evacuate until the day before Germans entered Minsk. Margarita's father was one of the few who anticipated the Germans' brutality; as a Communist Party member, he also probably knew that he would be among the first to be targeted. Yet, by the time the Germans entered the city, it was already too late to leave. "What could he do? He [just] worried..." (HVT-3621).

In the city, chaos reigned as people who lost their dwellings and belongings frantically searched for shelter and food. Arkadii P.'s story evokes many survivors' experiences. Arkadii P. came to Minsk before the wars broke out to visit his family. His family's house burned down during the German air raid. After the raid, Arkadii P. went out searching for food, but the stores were closed. For Arkadii, as for many others in Minsk, the only way to get food was to loot. He describes finding an open store where people were taking supplies off the shelves. He had some moral qualms—after all, it was stealing, but eventually decided to go inside. What he could find

³² The invading German troops were divided into three Army Groups. Army Group North was tasked with conquering the Baltic States and Leningrad; Army Group South operated in Ukraine, and Army Group Center advanced towards Moscow through Belorussia and Minsk.

in the store by that time, was caviar and champagne. Everything else was already taken, so he helped himself with the bag full of caviar and champagne. “We traded champagne for potatoes. Potatoes and caviar—we had food!” (HVT-3619). While Arkadii’s testimony does not mention it specifically, many testimonies and memoirs mention the sweets factory, where looters emptied huge vats of molasses. Some people fell into the vats and drowned, but this did not stop others.

German troops entered Minsk on June 28, 1941. Immediately after occupying the city, around seventy five thousand Jews registered with the authorities (Hecker 2007). One of the first actions that the German authorities undertook was summoning Minsk’s entire adult male population to a camp at Drozdy, where they were kept for several days without food or water. Several hundred Jews were shot, while the rest were released to later be forced into the ghetto.

On July 19, German authorities ordered the establishment of a ghetto in Minsk. The official order permitted the Jews only five days to move from their homes into the ghetto; the German military later extended the timeframe for resettlement to two weeks. Jews could take only what they could carry to the ghetto (Speckhard forthcoming). Non-Jews who were residing in the designated ghetto area had to move out. German authorities also began requiring Jews to wear a yellow round patch, 10 centimeters in diameter, affixed to their clothing on the front and back. Leaving the ghetto without permission and not wearing the patch were both punishable by death. Although German authorities initially planned to erect a brick wall around the ghetto, this idea was eventually dropped and the ghetto was surrounded by five rounds of barbed wire instead (Yoffe 2003).

The allocation of living quarters in the ghetto was based on the “1.5 square meters per person” formula, and several families had to squeeze into one room. For example, Girsh K. and

four other people lived in a room of approximately 7-8 square meters (HVT-3593). “In the ghetto, we lived three families in two rooms,” recalls Anatoly Rubin, who was a child at the time. “I slept on the chairs, my mother and sister – two in one bed” (Rubin 1977). In Asja T’s apartment, eleven people lived in two rooms; twenty seven resided in Tatyana G.’s three-room apartment (HVT-3594; HVT-3595). At the initial period of the ghetto existence, the only “legal” way to obtain food was to join forced labor squads. Yet, the official daily food allotment (100 grams of bread per day and a watery soup) was hardly sufficient to sustain an adult working person so hunger was prevalent in the ghetto. “We lived on the brink of starvation. I do not recall even one day of being well-fed” (Rubin 1977). “In the ghetto, we had two main worries: how to get out of this situation, and what to eat tomorrow,” recalled Nina Shalit-Galperin (OHD-58(20)).

Repressions and seizures for forced labor started in mid-August 1941. Initially, the Germans assisted by the Ukrainian and Lithuanian auxiliary troops and the Belorussian police, seized men who were gathered on the central square of the ghetto, the Jubileinaia Square, beaten, and driven away. None of these captured males returned home. According to some sources, starting in late August women were also captured. About 5,000 people were seized and later executed during the August round ups (Yoffe 2003). The first large scale massacre took place on November 7, 1941—the October Revolution anniversary. Ghetto inhabitants knew that something was going to happen because skilled craftsmen, professionals, and members of the Jewish Council were taken to the “Russian” part of the city on October 6th in the evening. Yet, the scale of the killing that followed, which local Jews, building on their historical experience, called a “pogrom,” surprised everyone. The general assumption was that people would be simply

thrown out of their apartments and probably beaten—no one imagined a large scale shooting, in which thousands (10,000-12,000 is the estimated number) would perish.

At 5:30 a.m. German troops and their Ukrainian and Lithuanian auxiliaries entered the ghetto and cordoned off several streets. The inhabitants of these streets were loaded onto trucks, taken to the brick factory in Tuchinka, in the outskirts of Minsk, shot, and buried in huge pits. Very few survived the shooting. Some crawled out of the pits during the night and made their way back to the ghetto. Nina Shapiro engaged in a conversation with the German who guarded her group while they awaited execution. She was a pretty young woman, and the German subsequently decided to spare her. Nina told him that she has to take her son, who was in a different group, with her. “If you don’t leave in five minutes, you won’t leave at all,” the German said. Nina left her son and ran away (Yoffe 2003). The next Aktion was on November 20, and again, thousands were shot.

The Germans’ motivation for these killings was to create room in the ghetto for Jews who were being deported to Minsk from Germany and Austria. From November 1941 until October 1942, a total of nearly 24,000 Central European Jews were deported by train to Minsk. Those who were not killed immediately upon arrival were put into a separate area inside the ghetto – the so-called *sonderghetto* (special ghetto) that was separated from the rest of the ghetto by barbed wire. The first transport of German Jews arrived from Hamburg, so local Jews called the space in which they were settled the “Hamburg Ghetto.” These people, unlike the local Jews, wore a yellow Star of David on their clothes.

The next Aktion took place on March 2, 1942. More than 5,000 Jews, including 300 children from the ghetto orphanage lost their lives. Then, in April, several limited night Aktionen

were committed by Germans. In each of these nights, several hundred Jews perished – shot, beaten to death, stabbed, or burnt alive. On July 28-31 another wave of large scale killings took place in the ghetto. This time, in addition to shootings, the Nazi authorities also used the gas vans (*Gaswagen*), which the locals called “soul destroyers” (*dushegubki*) and “black ravens.” The ghetto hospital including all its patients and personnel, as well as the leadership of the Jewish Council and a large part of the Jewish Police servicemen were killed. After this Aktion, the ghetto was spared for just more than a year. During that time, realizing that the days of the ghetto were numbered, up to fifteen thousand Jews escaped the ghetto to the forests, where Soviet partisans had established their bases.³³ In August 1943, when the German army rolled back after the defeat at Stalingrad, German units once again surrounded the ghetto. People tried to find refuge in bunkers and hideouts, but these were often discovered by police dogs, or Jews who worked as informers for the German secret police. Many people were shot on the streets. Others were taken to the Trostenets camp nearby the city and killed there. By October 1, 1943 there were only about two thousand Jews left in the ghetto. On October 20-21 the ghetto was liquidated and its last inhabitants killed or deported (Yoffe 2003). On July 3, 1944, Minsk was liberated by the Red Army.

Information

Information on the likelihood of survival, especially if reliable or perceived as such, played an important role in determining Minsk Jews’ behavioral strategies. As mentioned above, Soviet Jews were cut off from reliable information on the Nazi anti-Jewish measures in Poland in 1939-41. “Some news reached us, but these were only rumors. The newspapers and the radio were silent. At that time the Soviet Union and Germany became close friends ... so the truth

³³ According to the available the vast majority of these people were not members of the underground.

about Nazis did not reach us,” claimed Aleksandr Galburt (Galburt 2003). Polish refugees provided one of the few sources of information on Nazi policies; they warned Soviet Jews about German atrocities and advised them to escape. But everyone hoped for a peaceful life and people did not believe them, recalled Margolina (Margolina 2010). On June 28 the German tanks were already on Leonid Okun’s street, but twelve-year-old Leonid, influenced by the Soviet interwar propaganda, still pictured Germans as weaklings with horns on their helmets.³⁴ He was quite surprised to discover that real Germans are “big, impressive, and well-groomed, in pretty black uniforms” (Okun’ 2007). Even the Germans themselves were genuinely surprised to discover how ill-informed Soviet Jews were about the Nazis’ anti-Semitism, and the persecution of Jews (Hecker 2007). By August 1941 Poland was already covered by a dense network of Jewish ghettos, yet in Minsk people often had no idea what the very word “ghetto” meant—some thought it is derivative of *get*—a divorce in Jewish religious tradition (Smolar 1989).

Minsk Jews consequently based their decisions on their preexisting knowledge of German behavior, which drew mainly on the period of German occupation in 1918. Leo Goldberg’s father, a wealthy industrialist before the Revolution, had close and thriving business relations with Germans in the pre-WWI period. He believed that Germans would not harm the civilian population, and thus did not flee. He and his wife were killed shortly after the German military occupied Minsk (OHD-58(2)). Joseph Gavi’s maternal grandfather, Kiva, owned a business before the Revolution, and lost his source of income under the communist rule. When the war started, he refused to evacuate: “I am not worried about the Germans. They were nice people during the occupation in 1918, certainly better than the Communists,” he claimed

³⁴ Leonid’s image was certainly influenced by the Soviet 1938 classic movie “Aleksandr Nevskii,” that depicted the victory, in 1242, of a Russian prince Alexandr over the German knights of Teutonic Order, who wore horned helmets.

(Jackson 2000). The fact that he was able to keep his business under the German rule during WWI, but lost it in the Soviet Union, determined his choice of behavioral strategy during WWII. He was killed in the ghetto. Nina Shalit-Galperin escaped from Minsk before the Germans captured the city. However, on their way to the east, people started talking about their experiences under the German occupation in 1918, and as life was “not that bad” then, it made sense to return to the city (OHD-58(20)). Albert Lapidus recalled how he lost his brother. When the November 7 Aktion started, Albert Lapidus’s mother, who had recently given birth to a baby boy, could not hide both children fast enough. Albert’s grandmother instructed her to hide with Albert and leave the baby outside, saying: “I remember well that in that [WWI] war Germans did not kill babies—leave him here, they won’t touch him—save Alik” (USHMM-RG-02.174). German soldiers killed the baby.

Some knew what to expect from their initial encounters with the German troops. A German officer, who did not realize Tatyana G. was Jewish, assured her: “You don’t know how good the life will be. We are just going to finish off *Juden und Kommunisten*,” so, being both communist and Jewish, she knew what to expect. Later, when she was already in the ghetto, a German soldier explicitly advised her to escape, telling her: “it will be very bad here.” Tatyana hesitated—she knew that the ghetto was a dangerous place, but had nowhere to go. Eventually, she left the ghetto for one night before the first major Aktion and shortly after that started working for the underground (HVT-3594). “*Juden kaputt* (Jews are done), you should run,” a middle-aged German officer warned Margolina’s family after offering them his soup ration (Margolina 2010).

Information was also crucial for coping with the situation in the ghetto, particularly when Jews desperately needed some good news to help them in their daily struggle. Radios were

forbidden in the ghetto; listening to news broadcasts, like any other transgression, was punishable by death. Tamara, Anatoly Rubin's sister, did not look Jewish and lived outside the ghetto, passing as Russian. She did so mainly in order to help the family obtain food, which was easier to achieve outside the ghetto. No less important, she brought news, publications, and rumors to the ghetto. When no news was brought from the "Russian" side, people in the ghetto made up news (Rubin 1977). "Regardless of education and intellect, here everyone consumed the same spiritual food – rumors," noted Albert Lapidus (USHMM-RG-02.174). Therefore, it is hardly surprising that there emerged a "news agency" called YIVO,³⁵ which stood for *Yidn Vil Azoy* ('Jews want it this way' in Yiddish). YIVO was a "narcotic that helped people hold out against the incessant German roundups in the ghetto streets ... The ghetto even saw the birth of a new profession of news broadcasters" who claimed that their fabricated good news helped entire families (Smolar 1989). The existence of such a "good news agency" is also mentioned in other sources (OHD-223(16)). Interestingly, a "news agency" with the same name is also mentioned in the Białystok ghetto, even though we don't have any evidence of connections between the two ghettos.

In addition, there was also an official German newspaper, called *Minsker Zeitung*, and there, as people had done with the Communist Party mouthpiece *Pravda* during Soviet times, people could get some reliable information by reading "between the lines." (OHD-223(16)) Given the importance of information, it is hardly surprising that one of the key areas of the communist underground activities was the distribution of leaflets with summaries of the Moscow radio news broadcasts.

³⁵ YIVO is also the *Yidisher Visnshaflekher Institut* (Yiddish Scientific Institute)—a well know Jewish history and culture research center, established in the inter-war Poland and currently located in New York.

Furthermore, information also had a symbolic value. David Taubkin recalled the first moments after the city liberation: “I was standing on the sidewalk, staring at tanks with a red flag on them, and crying. A military car stopped by me, and a man in uniform asked me: ‘Why are you crying? They [the Germans] won’t come back. What can I give you?’ And I, through tears, asked: ‘[Give me] a Soviet newspaper’” (Taubkin 2008). Reliable information on the course of war, it should be noted, was valued not only by Jews, but also by the Germans. Thus, a German officer Willy Schultz, who supervised a group of Jewish laborers from the ghetto, assigned one of them, a young woman named Elizaveta (Liza) Gutkovich, to listen to the Soviet radio broadcast and translate them for him (OHD-223(19)).

Information was crucial not only for adoption of a certain strategy, but also for moving from a presumably failed strategy to another that was more likely to result in survival. For that reason, one of the first actions of the Jewish partisan detachment, led by Zorin, was to pin leaflets to the electricity poles in the ghetto that said “Jews, save yourself, leave the ghetto—in the forest [we are] waiting for you!” (Cholawski 2001)

Fima Shapiro, fourteen years old, worked with his father in the German military mechanical shop. They didn’t plan to go anywhere from the ghetto, but one day a German soldier came to Fima’s father and told him: “Hitler said in his book that Jews have to disappear from the face of Earth. What are you doing here, what are you waiting for?” This short conversation made Fima and his father to reconsider their behavior and escape to the partisans (Davidova 2000). In Esfir Movshenson’s workplace, a German supervisor liked her, and explicitly told her to escape to the partisans or she would be killed. She escaped.

Arkadii Krsinsky and his father were the only members of their family to survive the July 1942 Aktion. His father’s five sisters and their families were killed in the ghetto. After that, it

became clear to them that “their chances of survival in the ghetto are equal to zero ... and only then the father finally decided to leave for the forest” (Krasinskii 2011). Similarly, Lev Pasherstnik tried to stay in the ghetto as long as he could, and decided to change his behavioral strategy, only when realized that the ghetto was about to be liquidated (Pasherstnik 2008). He escaped to join the partisans.

Information, or more precisely the lack thereof, also played a crucial role in determining the behavior of the German Jews. Many foreign Jews, notes Smilovitsky, had a totally false notion of what awaited them. The Nazis assured them that they were the vanguard of German colonization in the east (Smilovitsky 1999). When the first group of German Jews loaded the train to Minsk in Hamburg, they were told that the German secret police has assured the leadership of the Hamburg Jewish community that nothing bad would happen to the deportees in Minsk (HVT-688). “The local Jews told us: ‘You all are going to be killed,’ admitted Henry R., a deportee from Hamburg. But we said ‘It’s humanly impossible to kill everybody.’ They told us about the death of at least 35,000 Jews, killed thus far, but we couldn’t believe it” (HVT-688). Until the very end, German Jews were confident that they were going to be spared and that mass killings, resistance, and flight to the forest were “for the *Ostjuden* (Eastern Jews) and not for us” (Hecker 2007; Barkai 1989). Iakov N., a Soviet Jew, met a Jewish woman from Hamburg who was married to an ethnic German. Until the very end, this woman refused to believe that German Jews were going to be killed as well. “We tried to convince her,” he recalled, “but this woman refused to believe us—she was confident that she would be allowed to go back to Germany” (HVT-3614). At the same time, German Jews were also notified that if one of them escaped, the rule of collective responsibility would be applied and numerous inmates would be murdered. Knowing that they might be killed if someone else escaped, German Jews strongly disapproved

the attempts to leave the ghetto, and sometimes even took actions that prevented others from escaping.

Collaboration

In the Minsk ghetto, the main public collaboration bodies were the Jewish Council (*Judenrat*), and the Jewish Order Service (*Ordnungsdienst*), generally known as the Jewish Police. The *Judenrat* was established by the Nazi authorities to carry out German orders and policies, such as the registration of Jews in the ghetto, confiscation of Jewish property requested by the Nazis, taxation of the Jewish population, and provision of Jewish forced labor detachments to the Germans. The Jewish Police were tasked with keeping public order in the ghetto, but at later stages the Jewish Police also assisted the German authorities with spying on other Jews, betraying those planning to escape the ghetto, and hunting down the ghetto underground. In addition, Jews also served in the Special Operations Unit, which worked closely with the Nazi political police; the German Secret Services also had a network of paid Jewish informers inside the ghetto. I classify the leadership of the *Judenrat* and the Jewish Police as engaging in public collaboration, while individual informers and the Special Operations Unit rank and file were private collaborators. As collaboration is a morally sensitive and emotionally loaded and controversial topic, I stress once again that my treatment of collaboration is purely analytical and does not carry moral judgment. Collaboration, I argue, is as valid a survival strategy as any other.

Establishment of the *Judenrat* was one of the first actions of the German authorities in Minsk. The order to establish the *Judenrat* in Minsk was copied virtually verbatim from similar orders issued by the German authorities in Poland in 1939. However, in Poland and western parts of the USSR the *Judenrat* were mainly pre-war community leaders or other prominent Jews who

became chairmen and members of Jewish Councils. Due to twenty years of previous Soviet rule, the situation in Minsk was different. Jewish political and communal institutions did not exist, and Jewish communists were the first to be targeted by the German authorities; the appointment of such people to leadership roles was unthinkable. As a result, Germans had to experiment with the appointment of the Judenrat. The first Jewish Council head, Ilya Mushkin, was chosen simply because he happened to be the only person who spoke at least some German among a group of Jews who were randomly seized on the street (Zhits 2000).

The data on Mushkin is partial and contradictory. While most sources, including several Communists underground members, argue that Mushkin was not a politically active person before the war, some claim otherwise. Barbara Epstein, claims that he was a member of the Communist Party before the war, basing her contention on the testimony of Zelig Yaffe, the son of Moshe Yaffe, Mushkin's interpreter and successor as a Judenrat chair (Epstein 2008). According to Anatoly Rubin, who claims to be Mushkin's son's classmate, the first chairman of the Minsk Judenrat was "a public figure, trade union activist and official" (*obshchestvennyi, profsoiuznyi deiatel'*) (OHD-58(12)). Neighbor David Taubkin described Mushkin as "a poor man with loose white hair, he looked like Ben Gurion"³⁶ (Taubkin 2008). Unlike many other Judenrat leaders, Mushkin is widely regarded as decent, honest and morally uncorrupt person, who did everything he could to help the ghetto and its inmates.

Whether politically active or not, Mushkin was nonetheless a product of the Soviet system. This can be clearly seen in how Mushkin designed the Minsk Jewish Council. Not much is known about the Minsk Judenrat, but we do know that its internal structure was copied from Soviet institutions, and the names that were given to various departments were the same names used in the Soviet administrative apparatus. The registration office was called the *pasportnyi*

³⁶ The first Prime Minister of Israel.

otdel, the housing department - *zhilotdel*, and the welfare department – *sobes*, all names of Soviet bureaucratic bodies (Zhits 2000). Even the Jewish Order Service, generally known as the Jewish Police, in the Minsk ghetto was referred to as “*militsiia*” (the name of the Soviet law enforcement agency). Mushkin’s right hand, Moshe Yaffe, was a Polish Jew, who worked for a radio sets production enterprise that was moved by the Soviet authorities to Minsk from Wilno shortly after the city became part of the USSR. He was not involved in any type of political activity either in Poland or in the USSR. On the other hand, the first commander of the Jewish police, Ziamia Serebrianskii, was active in the Komsomol, the Communist Party youth branch. Yet, he was not a party or Komsomol official and shortly before the German invasion he had served time in prison for embezzlement of public funds (Gai 1991).

Shortly after their appointment, Mushkin and Serebrianskii began working with the underground. For Serebrianskii, his cooperation with the underground is even more intriguing given the fact that one of the key underground members, Anna Machiz, was the public prosecution investigator, who had incarcerated him on the embezzlement charge. Yet, Serebrianskii did not try to exact revenge, though he could have easily done so; Machiz would have been immediately shot by the German authorities if her pre-war position and membership in the Communist party became known to them (Gai 1991). Eventually, the Germans became aware of Serebrianskii’s connections with the underground and he was arrested and hanged. Mushkin also did not survive the war. He was arrested in February 1942, tortured and killed. Most likely, the arrest was not related to his connections with the underground as no further arrests of underground activists followed. According to one rumor, Mushkin was hiding a German serviceman who deserted the Russian front. According to another, he tried to bribe a German official to secure a release of a certain Jew from prison. At the same time, the chairman of the

Hamburg ghetto Judenrat, Dr. Frank was also arrested and beaten to death—he was also accused of bribing a German officer (Zhits 2000). Either the latter rumor is correct, or bribery was simply a German excuse for killing both leaders, if German authorities needed any excuses at all.

After Mushkin's death, Moshe Yaffe became the Judenrat chairman. He was killed by the Germans after warning the ghetto population about the German Aktion in July 1942. Following Yaffe's death, the Judenrat effectively ceased to exist, and the Jewish police, headed by Nahum Epstein, became the most powerful Jewish body in the ghetto. Epstein, who started his career in the Judenrat as the head of the Labor Office, was a young and well-mannered refugee from Poland. His closest associates—Weinstein and Rosenblatt—were from Poland as well, and according to some testimonies were related to the Łódź and Warsaw criminal world. Most ghetto survivors considered these leaders of the Jewish police and its Special Operations Unit to be traitors and Gestapo agents who hunted the underground and betrayed Jews trying to escape the ghetto to the Germans. According to some sources, Epstein's antagonism towards the communist underground was politically motivated—before the war Epstein was active in the Jewish right-wing Betar movement.

An important feature of the Minsk ghetto Jewish police was the domination of the Polish Jews in its ranks. The reason for that, argues Zhits, lies in the different social and political orientations of the Soviet and Polish Jews. The Soviet "Easterners" knew too well that taking the lead, as the Soviet saying went, was punishable (*initsiativa nakazuema*) and therefore did not seek to stick out. The Polish "Westerners," on the other hand, had no problem being first movers and, against the background of their small numbers in the ghetto, were substantially overrepresented both in resistance and in collaboration (Zhits 2000). An alternative explanation for this phenomenon is suggested by Galburt, who argues that "Westerners" were

overrepresented in the police simply because many of them were fluent in German (Galburt 2003). Support for this view can be found in the testimony of a Westerner, Reuven Liond. Szimon Katz, his neighbor in pre-war Poland, served in the Jewish Police. When Liond asked Katz how he ended up in there, Katz's reply was that the Germans simply caught him on the street and appointed him because he knew German (Liond 1993).

Overall, refugees' domination in the Jewish police was not unique to Minsk. Aharon Weiss, who studied the Jewish police in Polish ghettos, finds that Jewish refugees were overrepresented in this institution because the service in the police provided people who were cut off from their families, valuables and social networks of support with important sources of income and influence (Weiss 1973). Trunk also finds that many Jewish police servicemen were former Betar members, who capitalized on the movement's paramilitary nature and the training its members underwent (Trunk 1972). And even Epstein, who is widely seen as a traitor and an eager Gestapo agent, did not always betray his co-ethnics. For example, he helped Mikhail Treister escape from the Shirokaya camp and by doing that most likely saved his life (Treister 2008). While Polish Jews were overrepresented in the Jewish police, Soviet Jews served as well. Unfortunately, very little information on the Minsk ghetto Jewish police exists in the testimonies and archives, but based on the existing data we can identify several such people. They, argue the survivors, joined the police because they perceived the service as their best chance to survive the German persecutions, even if that required betraying other Jews, and they were quite explicit about their motivations (Gai 1991). Police actions against other Jews were not limited only to betraying the escapees and fighting the underground. Increasing one's chances of survival by serving in the Jewish police often meant decreasing the survival chances of others, even those who were not engaged in the underground work. Lazar T. had an aunt who claimed that the

biggest wish of her life was to see Rosenblatt go to the gallows because he had once confiscated all the things she had bartered outside the ghetto (HVT-3601). Abram Rubenchik was caught stealing vegetables from a plot and beaten up by a Hamburg ghetto policeman. He and his brother were so outraged that they decided to “pay this ‘Fritz’ back” and hit him with a stone. It is interesting to note here is the use of the term “Fritz,” which is a common Russian derogatory term used to describe Germans. Even though the policeman was Jewish and a ghetto inmate, for the Rubenchiks he was a German (Rubenchik 2006). Yet, the overall evaluation of the Jewish Police was usually quite balanced. “[They] were ordinary Jewish people, claims Vera S. “Some were good, some were bad—they just did their job” (HVT-3617).

While very few things are known about Mushkin and Yaffe even less data exist on Dr. Frank, the first chairman of the Hamburg ghetto Judenrat, as well as his five successors over quite a short period of time (Hecker 2007). Conversely, much more information is available on Karl Löwenstein, the first ghetto police commander. Löwenstein, the offspring of a mixed German-Jewish marriage and a Protestant Christian, was a decorated officer in the German Imperial Navy and an adjutant of the Crown Prince. Several months after his arrival to Minsk, Löwenstein was transferred to Theresienstadt, which was considered the ghetto for privileged people, where he survived the war. The story of a decorated German officer, leading the ghetto police, while uncommon, is not unique. For example, in the Zamość ghetto (Poland) the Jewish police was led by Alwin Lippmann, a famous German WWI pilot, and a wartime comrade of Hermann Göring, the number two in the Nazi hierarchy.

Compliance

Compliance was probably the least common survival strategy as it was virtually impossible to survive in the Minsk ghetto by faithfully following the German rules and regulations.

As Barkai points out, “according to all available evidence, Minsk seems to have been the most horrifying of all ghettos in the East—if such comparisons can be made at all” (Barkai 1989). This argument is only partially correct—although conditions in the Minsk ghetto were better than many ghettos that the Germans established in pre-1939 Belarus and Ukraine, the standard of living (or, more precisely, existence) in the Minsk ghetto was also substantially lower than in other large ghettos such as Warsaw, or Kraków (Zhits 2000). German Jews who were transferred to Minsk from the ghetto of Riga claimed that compared to Minsk, their life in Riga, which was miserable, hungry, and poverty stricken by any standard, was “like a fairy tale” (Barkai 1989). “I was in thirteen camps, including Bergen-Belsen, and Minsk was one of the worst,” claimed Henry R. (HVT-688). Even the German Jews, with their penchant for scrupulous obedience to laws and tight discipline, found it virtually impossible to survive without breaking the Nazi rules, but at the same time found it almost equally impossible to actually disobey orders.

For the Soviet and Polish Jews, however, almost no evidence can be found that they adopted compliance as the primary survival strategy. One of the possible reasons for the lack of testimony on compliance is selection bias—people who chose compliance had virtually no chance of survival.³⁷ The only sources of information regarding such people are their relatives and friends who chose a different course of action. Such people existed in the Minsk ghetto nonetheless. When Lazar T. decided to escape to the partisans, his aunt and uncle refused to join

³⁷ Another potential explanation for the lack of evidence is social desirability – even if people engaged in compliance and somehow managed to survive (which is extremely unlikely) they would be unlikely publically admit that. Yet, for the surviving German Jews this clearly was not the case as they did admit engaging in compliance, as I show in this section.

him. They told Lazar that they were staying where they were and following their destiny. If it was their destiny to die, then they would die. They stayed in the ghetto and died. Others did not believe in destiny, but did believe the Germans. An example of compliance is Leo Goldberg's grandfather, mentioned earlier in the chapter. His very positive previous experiences with the Germans led him to believe German claims that civilians are not going to be harmed. He refused to escape and was murdered. Gregory T. recalled marching, in a large group of Jews, back to the city after several days of internment in the Drozdy camp. "People say if we turn left, we will be shot. Others say – if we turn tight, we will be shot. But everyone keeps walking..." (HVT-3620)

In contrast to the Soviet Jews, among the German Jews compliance was the prevalent mode of behavior. While life in the USSR prepared people to get around rules and participate in informal practices, transactions, and networks (Lovell et al. 2000; Ledeneva 1998), German Jews (and Germans more generally) were known for their scrupulous (some would argue – automaton-like) obedience to rules and laws. "Russian Jews – they had Soviet training (*po-Sovetski naucheny*) that if it is forbidden, then it is in practice allowed (*esli nel'zia, to eto vse-taki mozhno*), while these [German Jews]—they obeyed laws like fanatics," lamented Samuil K., who suggested to a German Jew that they escape to the forest, only to be refused (HVT-3609). "The word 'forbidden' was a law for them," characterized the German Jews' behavior one of the "Soviet" inmates. "They were very disciplined, these Germans," added another (quoted in Hecker 2007).

The recollections of approximately twenty German Jewish survivors of the Minsk ghetto also support the claim that compliance was the modal behavior among their sub-group. None of their accounts mention hideouts, which existed in almost every house in the Soviet ghetto, let alone attempts to escape or hide, even when people knew perfectly well what was going to

happen. Henry R., from Hamburg, still finds it amazing “how people could take it – they just stood there waiting to be pushed in to the gas van. [They were] standing for hours in line to be loaded in to gas vans, knowing what gas vans mean.” Ms. Piva, an orphanage director, had three children. When the Germans came to take her children to the gas van, the only thing she did was to politely ask the soldiers to leave her one of children. Her request was denied (HVT-688). German Jews preferred not to break rules even when they had an opportunity to escape. We know of only five cases of attempted escape from the Hamburg ghetto. An additional reason for compliance was the principle of collective responsibility. “I once had a possibility to escape but I couldn’t do it, to take it on my conscience, because others would be punished,” said Henry R. Even knowing that all the Jews were going to be killed could not shake his principles. The collective responsibility principle, it should also be noted, was used in the Soviet Jews ghetto as well, but there it could not stop the stream of escapes and a frenzy of underground activism.

In the Minsk ghetto, those German Jews who survived made it mainly due to external factors rather than actively selecting a form of non-compliance. “My family was lucky—once the part of the ghetto where Jews from Hamburg lived was scheduled for destruction, but a German officer who was also from Hamburg, saved it. He was sent to the front as a punishment” (HVT-688). Chaim Bar’am, from Berlin, also tells how he gave up on what was perceived a great opportunity to increase one’s chances of survival. “In spring 1942 the German ghetto was required to provide fifty drivers. And being a driver—there are so many chances here ... I did have a driver license, but in 1938-9 the Jews were required to give them back and I’d never really driven a car ... so I did not see myself as qualified for the job.” (Bar’am 1980) Bar’am’s account is even more illuminating when compared to numerous stories of Russian Jews who, in order to survive, claimed they had various required skills, even though in practice they had none.

How did Henry R. manage to hold on? His source of hope was not the possibility of escape, no matter how distant and uncertain, but relations with fellow inmates and German supervisors. “You were at such a low point in your life that everything helps. Even if someone tells you: ‘you did a good job,’ you are happy.” But even Henry R., who refused to escape the ghetto, did also break the rules. The only time in the extensive description of his ghetto experiences where he mentions breaking rules is the story of his wedding party, for which his mother baked a small cake out of dried bread and put some marmalade on top of the bread. “Of course we stole [the marmalade]” (HVT-688).

Coping

The most common strategy that Minsk ghetto inmates adopted, was coping. Rakhil Rappoport’s motto—“I did everything I could, I did more than what can be done, and there is nothing else I can do”—is probably the best description of how people in the Minsk ghetto coped with the Nazi persecution and tried to survive no matter what (Rappoport 2008).

Coping was also a semi-official policy of the Jewish Council. Mushkin, while cooperating with the Germans, urged Minsk Jews just to carry on, and “not to make noise” (Zhits 2000). According to another testimony, Mushkin used to tell ghetto inmates: “We need to save [our] souls. Every day we are alive is like a gift from heavens” (Zhits 2000). This attitude of “not making noise” and working behind the scenes guided Mushkin throughout his term as the Judenrat chair. Although he cooperated with the underground, he was formally not a member of the resistance and his relations with it were concealed from Germans as well as from Jews (numerous underground activists included). In his relations with the German authorities, Mushkin also preferred to operate backstage and tried, probably more than once, to bribe the Nazi officials. When one such bribing attempt failed, Mushkin was arrested and lost his life.

In the ghetto coping meant first and foremost securing three essential things—food, work, and hiding places. Without each of these three, the chances of survival were miniscule. The ghetto population was divided into several categories that were relevant to obtaining these critical means of survival. First, there were those who worked and those who did not. Those who worked were regularly fed. Even if the rations these people received could hardly sustain a working adult, non-workers usually did not have even a bowl of watery soup, a slice of bread, or if lucky—rotten potato peels. Second, being outside the ghetto provided Jews with opportunities to trade with the non-Jewish population and to barter belongings for food, which was then smuggled into the ghetto to support the rest of the family. And most importantly, people who possessed work certificates and their immediate families were not killed by the Germans during the initial waves of shootings. Most privileged were the skilled workers, the *facharbeiter*. Having a much coveted skilled worker ID was, at least initially, perceived as one of the best ways to ensure survival.

Furthermore, workers sometimes were able to obtain various small things that made a huge difference in the ghetto, such as food leftovers, from their German supervisors. Vera B. and her friends worked at the German Air Force unit doing cleaning and washing. German pilots tried to help them, yet they were too afraid to speak to Jews directly. Eventually, the pilots came up with ways to help Jewish girls without arousing suspicion—for example, they brought dishes that still had plenty of soup in them and asked to have them washed. Vera brought the soup home and fed her little sisters. At her next workplace, another German helped Vera to smuggle salt to the ghetto, where she sold it (HVT-2744). A German soldier who was an avid philatelist approached Abram Astanshinskii at his workplace. He asked Astanshinskii to bring him Soviet stamps and in exchange gave him food (Astashinskii 2008). Arkadii T. befriended a German

supervisor in his workplace; the man always warned Arkadii when there was an Aktion in the ghetto (HVT-3597). Girsh K, a mechanical engineer, befriended a German who had also been an engineer before the war. This German treated Girsh as a colleague, and drew him a chart with all the gates and entrances to the Trostenets death camp near Minsk where Girsh was imprisoned (HVT-3593).

Sometimes, the help that Germans gave was not material, but moral. In the ghetto this emotional support mattered considerably. In April 1942, when Vera was cleaning the base for Hitler's birthday celebration, a German soldier approached her and said: "If one feels bad now, one might think that this bad mood will be forever. But this is not true." A different story, peppered with black humor, is told by Greenstein. His friend, an expert carpenter, made coffins for German officers. For him, forced labor was a source of joy, and the more he had to work, the happier he became (Greenstein 1968).

The imperative to find employment was grasped almost immediately by everyone. "All the supplies of food and soap are gone. And you have to live somehow. A job, as a fourteen year old without a profession, I won't get. That means that I am sixteen, and I am a cobbler. The documents, obviously, were burnt when my house caught fire. This is the only thing [in my story] that was true," recalled Mikhail Treister (Treister 2008). Working as cobbler, and learning the trade by producing high boots for the Germans provided Mikhail with an opportunity to steal from his workplace. According to his account, virtually everyone in his workplace appropriated leather, soles, and even boots. He sold or bartered some stolen boots for food, some he gave to friends who helped his family, and some went to the partisans (Treister 2008). Germans, it seems, were well aware of the widespread stealing and tried to do something about it. Their solution was simply to give every worker a pair of high boots and to make sure that people wore

only one pair of boots. The idea, recalled Lazar T., failed miserably as Jews simply started coming to work in the morning wearing slippers, and going home in the evening wearing boots (HVT-3601).

Not everyone was as lucky as Lazar T. and Mikhail Treister. Arkadii T. once stole canned food in his workplace. The German supervisors suspected him, and he was severely beaten. Yet, they did not find the food. There were weapons lying unwatched in the room, but Arkadii didn't touch them—at that time food was much more important to him (HVT-3597). Even worse was the situation with nicotine. People who smoked suffered the most because of the lack of cigarettes. “My mother was willing to give up everything she had—bread, food, for cigarettes,” admitted Esfir Movshenson (OHD-223(16)).

When work became one of the main modes of survival, losing the male in the household often meant starvation for the whole family. Vera S. remembers how during the summer 1941 round ups, the Germans were looking mainly for males. She thus did everything she could to hide her father because she understood that “he is the bedrock of our physical existence and survival” (HVT-3617). When there were no adult males in the household—either because they were killed early on, were fighting in the Red Army, or as with Esther Lupian's father, were imprisoned in the Gulag, women and teenage children had to sign up for work.

Sometimes, people were willing to go to great lengths to get a decent job. In the destitute, unsanitary ghetto, food and personal hygiene products were the most coveted items. Bartering extra clothes for food became the main occupation of many ghetto inhabitants. Asia Bresler and her husband bartered their soap for German Jews' clothes, even though they badly needed the soap. The reason was simple—the German Jews' clothes were more elegant, and gave the Bresslers' appearance a European flavor. This was important because Germans paid attention to

peoples' appearance when hiring for good jobs. Wearing the German Jews' clothes, Asia got a job that substantially improved her survival chances and was very happy with the result. "A feast during the plague," is the way she described her feelings (OHD-58(7)).

At the same time, the workplace could be a quite dangerous place; nothing protected Jews from humiliations and beatings by their German supervisors. Girsh K. was once taken by a German soldier to unload coal. For some reason, the German disliked Girsh, and ordered his co-worker to bury him under the coal. Girsh did not know how much time he spent there, but when he was uncovered, he was still alive. The German was very surprised. "I was alive, but by that time I was [black like] a Negro" (HVT-3593). Yet, he did not stop working as his job was his almost only chance to obtain food. Later, Girsh was sent to the Trostenets death camp near Minsk. When asked what his specialization was, he replied that he could do any task that was needed. As a mechanical engineer, he was able to fix one of the broken sewing machines in the camp dress-making shop. Realizing that having a good mechanic around would help them to produce more, and therefore to stay alive, the shop people bailed him out (*vikupili*)—by bribing the German commander to spare Girsh's life.

Obviously, survival through work depended to a large extent on the Minsk German authorities' willingness to continue exploiting Jewish slave labor instead of killing them. And here, much depended on Germans' self-interest. As points out Matthäus, as late as April 1943, several months after Stalingrad, the regional SS- and Police Chief Kurt von Gottberg complained "that even today there are German institutions in the region that think they cannot do without the Jew as a skilled worker" (Matthäus 1996).

Coping did not prove to be a successful survival strategy for the vast majority of Jews in the long run, but for some, having professional expertise allowed them to survive or to outlive

other Jews. “When I got to Minsk it was four hours after the first Soviet tanks had entered the city,” recalled the writer and a journalist Ilya Ehrenburg.

The first citizens I met told me there were some Jews still alive where the SD [German security police] was. I made my way there and found them in the SD forge. There were a few people in very poor physical condition. They told me how they had survived. The Gestapo had made use of the more experienced Jewish craftsmen for their own purposes ... There were 200 such specialists in Minsk; most of them, it seems, had been killed by the Germans as they were leaving. This dozen people knew what awaited them and, as soon as they saw the first signs of confusion among the Germans in Minsk five days before our soldiers arrived, they hid in an underground vault they had discovered beneath the SD yard. They stayed there for five days ... One of them was an Austrian Jew. [He] survived because a mechanic had been needed on the day he had been sent here. (Smilovitsky 1999)

The second most common coping strategy was barter. When it became clear that food rations, allocated to the Jews by the German authorities were insufficient even in terms of basic survival, Jews started trading their belongings for food. Here, those who lived in the designated ghetto area before the war were luckier than those who moved into the ghetto; they did not lose all their belongings while moving to the ghetto and thus had more to trade. Those who lived in other parts of the city had very few things to barter.

Barter was dangerous for the both Jews and non-Jews, because any contact between the two populations was strictly forbidden. A non-Jewish resident of Minsk recalled how she was whipped and severely beaten by a German soldier for talking to her pre-war Jewish friend nearby the ghetto border (Yoffe 2003). Yet, trade still flourished and a sustained black market emerged. “We made our living off bartering our aunt’s belongings for food. This was done with a constant risk of death, because it was necessary to approach the barbed wire, settle on a price quickly and make the exchange. When the German guard saw what was going on, he shot immediately—

obviously, at the person who was behind the barbed wire [inside the ghetto]” (Rubin 1977). The speed of the transactions provided people with numerous opportunities to cheat during these exchanges. Galina Davidova’s neighbor bartered a winter coat for a sack of flour. Too scared to open the sack on the street, she waited until she got home. Instead of flour, the sack was filled with sand. The coat, of course, was gone (Davidova 2000). Girsh K.’s sister of snuck out of the ghetto to trade a fancy new shirt for potatoes. In one house, a Belorussian woman gave her a handful of potatoes for the shirt, but when Girsh’s sister started bargaining over the price, the men in the house beat her up and took both the shirt and the potatoes (HVT-3593). Leonid Okun’s family sent him to the city to barter boots for food. When it became dark, he crawled under the barbed wire to the city. When he came back home, he discovered that instead of flour he was given whitewash. “My grandpa yelled at me, and others cried” (Okun' 2007).³⁸

Trade across the ghetto border even spilled over from the Soviet to the Hamburg ghetto. When it came to barter, the German Jews’ situation was worse than that of their Soviet co-ethnics. “They didn’t speak Russian, only German ... They had no acquaintances among the locals, so they could not barter things for food” (Rubin 1977). As a result, German Jews depended entirely on Soviet intermediaries who often charged very high prices. People in the *sonderghetto* resented what they perceived as the Soviet Jews’ greed, but could not do much about it. Reuven Liond started a “business” with a German Jew named Max, who was born in Poland³⁹ and later moved to Germany, so he knew some Russian. Max and Liond served as intermediaries in trades between the German Jews and the local non-Jewish population. Later on, Liond used his Belorussian trade contacts to arrange a gun and escape to the partisans (Liond

³⁸ After the war Okun’, a decorated veteran, went back to the house to settle scores with people who deceived him, but they were gone. He was told they escaped with the Germans.

³⁹ At the time it was part of the Russian Empire.

1993). Berta Malomed's mother, who had been a baker before the war, realized that it was possible to smuggle ingredients into the ghetto with the right connections, and opened a primitive bakery that used ingredients that were "arranged" by two German Jews—most likely smuggled into the ghetto or bought from German soldiers or officials (Malomed 2008).

While working and trading could help one to keep the body and the soul together between German killing sprees, surviving the Aktion required a very different set of preparations. Those who worked outside the ghetto were initially spared, so hideouts were mainly needed to protect the women, the children, and the elderly, or to save the family during a night raid or a random round up. "In the ghetto, the only topic for conversation is pogroms," remarked Iakov N. "People start thinking how to survive. They start building hideouts." (HVT-3614) The hideouts, called *malinas* ("a place to spend a night/to sleep" in Hebrew and Yiddish) were everywhere. Each house and apartment took measures to build one. Those who had their beds just above the entrance to the malina, were considered the luckiest (Margolina 2010). Hiding in the malina required total silence—any sound could lead to certain death. Women with small children often had a choice between leaving the hideout and strangling their crying babies. Older children knew how to remain quiet and motionless for hours. Abram Rubenchik describes how the first thing his family did after moving to a new apartment in the ghetto was to organize a hideout (Rubenchik 2006). Some hideouts were designed to house large groups of people over substantial periods of time. A group who entered a malina before the ghetto was liquidated in the fall of 1943 set record for longevity; they stayed hidden until the liberation in July 1944. At night, they occasionally crawled out to get some fresh air and food from a Belorussian woman who helped them. Many group members died, but thirteen, literally walking skeletons, survived to see the Soviet troops entering the city (Gai 1991).

There were also people who refused to hide. Joseph Gavi's maternal grandfather, Shaya, a deeply religious man, refused to hide in the malina with the rest of the family, and chose to stand in the doorway under the *mezuzah*, firmly believing that God would protect him there. He was killed while standing in the doorway of his home (Jackson 2000). Sometimes people sacrificed themselves to protect their families in the malina. In most such stories, elderly members of the family stayed outside to give the appearance that everyone was home rather than hiding. Sima Margolina and her family hid in a poorly disguised cellar during an Aktion while her grandparents decided to stay outside. "There are only two of us in the house," they told Germans and a Belorussian policeman who came to take them out to be shot. The Belorussian, who knew perfectly well that they were lying, nevertheless confirmed the old couple's words. The grandparents were killed in the backyard, quite probably by the very same Belorussian policeman; the rest of the family survived the massacre (Margolina 2010).

In the desperate struggle to survive, pre-war networks and contacts also played a huge role as people fell back on them when they needed support. In the ghetto, pre-work networks, local or professional, became important safety nets. "In the ghetto—people from outside Minsk stood separately," claimed Lazar T. who came to Minsk from the small town of Uzliany. "If people knew one another before the war, they tried to look after one another. And we, we tried to stick together with people from our own town" (HVT-3601). When he escaped to the partisans, he did this with a group of people from his hometown. While moving to the ghetto, many Jews also left their belongings to non-Jewish friends for safekeeping. Some were willing to help and risked their lives to support their friends in the ghetto; others simply took everything for themselves and refused to return survivors' possessions after the Holocaust. Many preferred trading with pre-war acquaintances.

Several survivors note the resurgence of the all-Jewish support networks in the ghetto and the desperate attempts, especially by the older generation, to reverse and undo the impact of the twenty years of Soviet policies and to create a Jewish community spirit in the ghetto. According to Esfir Movshenson, in the ghetto there was an informal, moral prohibition to speak Russian on the street. Jews who spoke Russian were reprimanded for not speaking Yiddish and abandoning their community and customs (OHD-223(16)). Ironically, these very qualities—the ability to speak flawless Russian (and Belorussian) and the familiarity with the non-Jewish customs and traditions allowed numerous Jews to escape the ghetto and survive the Holocaust on what the Jews called “the Russian side.”

The discussion on coping would not be complete without touching on one of the most sensitive topics in the literature on occupation and reactions to it—what is often called “horizontal collaboration” (see, for instance, Virgili 2002)—sexual relations between German serviceman and non-German, in this case Jewish, women. I, however, view these relations not as collaboration, but as coping. Sexual relations and affairs between Germans and Jews were strictly forbidden, but did take place nonetheless. Sima Margolina describes two such cases. In the ghetto, her neighbors were a young couple—Misha, a mechanic, and his wife, Frau Basia, as the Germans called her, who was employed in the German municipal office as interpreter. When Misha had night shifts, Basia was visited by Richard, a Gestapo man. Richard had a habit of entering the apartment and proceeding directly to Basia’s room without saying hello. He stayed there for the night, while other tenants went to bed in complete silence so not to disturb him. When Richard was around, Margolina’s aunt Nelli could not sleep—according to Basia, Richard was completely unpredictable in his behavior. Most likely, this relationship was imposed on Basia, who was not in a position to refuse.

In addition to Basia's story, Margolina recalls an affair that seems more consensual—her neighbors, Ania and Liza, befriended two German soldiers from Belgium. The soldiers started visiting Ania and Liza in the ghetto, while Margolina's cousin stood on guard, making sure that no one interrupted their meetings. One day the girls disappeared. After a while, Margolina learnt that the Belgians had succeeded in contacting the partisans and smuggling their girlfriends to the forest (Margolina 2010). The details of the story are corroborated by Samuil K., Margolina's cousin who stood guard for the girls (HVT-3609). Finally there is also a story of an affair between a German officer, Captain Willi Schultz, and the German Jewish ghetto inmate Ilse Stein, which eventually led to Schultz's desertion to the Soviet partisans in order to save Stein, her sister, and more than twenty other Jews. This affair will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. For young and attractive Jewish women, having sexual relations and love affairs with the Germans was sometimes a life-saving behavior.

Evasion

According to Hersch Smolar, approximately ten thousand Jews escaped the Minsk ghetto, mainly to the Soviet partisans' detachments in the forests. There were two ways to escape to the partisans—in an organized fashion, with a partisan guide, or individually, without knowing where the partisans were and whether they would be willing to let the ghetto escapees join the unit. Because the Minsk ghetto was surrounded only by a barbed wire fence, escaping was easier than in most other large ghettos (which were usually surrounded by walls). The main problem was to know what to do after fleeing. "To get out of the ghetto was not that hard, but where would one go after that? It was not that simple to get to the partisans," noted Anatolii Rubin (OHD-58(12)). And here, in pursuing the evasion strategy, pre-war factors often played a key role.

The existence of Soviet partisans in the forests around Minsk was an open secret in the ghetto. “Everyone in the ghetto knew there were partisans in the forests. People simply left the ghetto and roamed the countryside, looking for partisans,” recalled Vera S. According to Abram Rubenchik, “in the Minsk ghetto there was no household in which people did not talk about Staroe Selo, Lisovshchina and Skirmontovo”—villages in the so-called Partisans’ Zone that were closest to Minsk (Rubenchik 2006). “The name Staroe Selo became the most popular in the ghetto” (Greenstein 1968).

Yet, driven sometimes by anti-Semitism, sometimes by dispatches from Moscow that claimed the Germans were using Jews to spy on the partisans, and sometimes simply by the fear that women and children would hinder units’ mobility and fighting capabilities, many partisan commanders were wary of allowing Jews join their units (Slepyan 2000).⁴⁰ “In the ghetto, people heard about the anti-Semitism among the Soviet partisans, but refused to believe this because partisans were the only, the best hope for the dying people” (OHD-58(12)).

Successful escape required either established connections with the partisans, the ability to convince the partisans to let one join the unit (usually by coming to the forest armed or with supplies that the partisans needed), or being able to survive outside the ghetto without partisans’ protection. In the areas which the Germans controlled, Jews’ ability to survive outside the ghetto depended first and foremost on how well one could hide his or her Jewish identity from the local population, because Germans usually could not distinguish Jews from non-Jews. “When I started leaving the ghetto I always removed the patch. I wasn’t afraid of Germans—not that I wasn’t

⁴⁰ There were also cases when Jews were killed by anti-Semitic partisans even after being admitted to the partisan movement. Thus, a group of Jewish partisans was killed by the Polish Home Army unit, and even in Soviet units the killings of Jewish partisans by their anti-Semitic fellows and commanders were reported by many survivors. The most incredible of all is the story of Henryk Czaplinsky, a famous musician, who before the war was a Professor of Music at Kraków and Princeton University. After escaping to the partisans, Czaplinsky was arrested by the Soviet counterintelligence, and executed as “long-standing German agent” (Rosenblat 2004).

scared, but they just didn't recognize me as a Jew; they couldn't tell a Jew from non-Jew ... but I've always avoided encounters with Russian and Byelorussians, because often immediately after they saw me they started screaming "A kike, a kike!" (*Zhid! Zhid!*)" (OHD-58(12)).

To pass as a non-Jew required certain traits. First, people who did not "look Jewish" had a better chance of evading enemies. Anna S.'s cousin was hidden by a Byelorussian family – she had blue eyes and did not look Jewish, so the family agreed to take her in. Sima Margolina snuck out of her work brigade, removed her yellow patch and simply roamed the streets. One day she met an old woman who instructed Sima to follow her. "I see that you are Jewish," the woman told her. "You will go with me. I will save you. But remember, don't tell anyone that you are Jewish. Not even to my husband Kuz'ma. He, if drunk, can say something. Don't say anything to anyone, just forget who you are. You don't look Jewish—you have blue eyes, I will save you" (Margolina 2010). Thus, Margolina's survival was to a large extent facilitated by her non-Jewish appearance. Furthermore, one not only had to look non-Jewish, but also had to blend in with the local population. "In the Russian area one should be properly dressed with a decent haircut," claimed Lialia Bruk's mother (Bruk and Bruk 2004). Dying hair was also popular, recalled Nina Shalit-Galperin (OHD-58(20)). To some extent, gender also affected one's ability to pass as a non-Jew. It was harder for boys to pass as non-Jews, even if they had non-Jewish looks, because many Jewish children were circumcised. Children from families that were more integrated into Russian society and therefore more secular were in a better position than those from more traditional families.

In addition to a Slavic appearance, a flawless command of Russian, or, even better, Belorussian, was required. Those who spoke Russian with a Yiddish accent were in danger of being discovered every time they opened their mouth. Here again, people who were better

integrated into the broader society and were educated in Russian or Belorussian, rather than Yiddish schools, had an advantage. Lazar T. studied in a Belorussian school and spoke very good Belorussian. This, he admitted, helped him a lot outside the ghetto (HVT-3601). Sima Margolina was also fluent in Belorussian, which helped her in the village where she was taken by the elderly woman. Anatolli Rubin, who also escaped to the countryside, did not speak Belorussian, but his Russian was flawless and he spoke it without an accent (OHD-58(12)). The partisans' liaison who took Berta Malomed to the partisans was a teacher in the area's village school before the war and thus spoke Belorussian (Malomed 2008).

Finally, a faked ID was necessary. Alek, the son of Rubin's father's German⁴¹ friend, found a wallet with the passport and birth certificate of a Slavic man named Stepanov and gave it to Rubin. The combination of a passport, non-Jewish appearance, and flawless Russian allowed Rubin to survive the Holocaust even though he was circumcised. Yakov Etinger, a son of a famous doctor, was hidden by his nanny. The night before the November 7, 1941 Aktion, Etinger's nanny snuck into the ghetto, told the family that German troops were surrounding the area, and convinced them to escape and hide with her relatives (Etinger 2001). Later, Etinger's mother contacted a pre-war friend, a Byelorussian, and managed to get with his assistance a new passport, which stated that Etinger was his nanny's son, and therefore, a Belorussian. With this passport he escaped and lived with his nanny.

However, the ability to get a non-Jewish passport often depended on a person's non-Jewish appearance. Asja T. and her son were blond, so their pre-war neighbor (who was also her classmate in school) managed to get her a certificate that her house has burned down, meaning that she did not have any documents. With this certificate Asja T. was able to get a new passport

⁴¹ The friend was a Soviet citizen of German ethnicity.

and to successfully pass as a Russian (HVT-3595). Eventually she was sent to Germany as a Byelorussian forced laborer.

Asja's story also demonstrates that in addition to a non-Jewish appearance, pre-war connections were critically important. Vera B. escaped the ghetto to the partisans' zone without any connections with the underground. No unit was willing to take her in; the partisans were willing to take in unarmed males, but not females. She initially felt completely lost. However, in one unit she met a friend from university who helped her to stay around and she was later taken to the safe area (HVT-2744). Lazar T. and his father escaped to the area where their family lived before moving to Minsk. "Dad asked around, and after a couple of hours we were in the partisan unit." (HVT-3601) Sam F. and his friend hid in a forest not far from Minsk after escaping the Iwie ghetto. Before the war, his friend's father had a mill in the area, so the peasants knew the family and were willing to help.

Many wanted to escape to the partisans, but could not do so because they had to take care of small children. Khasia Pruslina, an underground member, went to college with a certain Orlov, who worked in the city administration education department. The underground contacted Orlov and he agreed to provide Jewish children with faked documents, and to enroll them in orphanages outside the ghetto. The underground even had a special group that coordinated activities that saved children (Gebeleva 2010). One of the children who were placed in the orphanage was Pruslina's daughter. For the child, this was an opportunity to survive, while Pruslina could devote herself entirely to the underground work. Shortly before Minsk was liberated the girl was taken by the German authorities from Belarus to be Germanized. She was put in an orphanage in Germany, later to be placed with German foster families, and only several years after the war could Pruslina finally locate her daughter (Pruslina 2010). Miriam Tokarski

decided to leave his daughter in the Russian area no matter what. “She is a pretty blond girl, and speaks Russian well, maybe someone will take mercy on her.” (Tokarski 1975)

While some were able to survive passing as non-Jews, for the many this option was not feasible due to their Jewish appearance, Yiddish accent, or the lack of trustworthy friends in the right places. For these people, escaping to the partisans became the only chance to survive the Holocaust. However, for those who had no connection to the underground (these people will be discussed in the next section) this was not an easy task. Most people knew about the underground, but only a few were able to contact it (Greenstein 1968). Many survivors mention people who tried to reach the partisans but either could not find them or were not admitted to the unit and had to return to the ghetto. Some went back to the ghetto to take their families out. Solomon Khomikh escaped to the partisans from the ghetto three times. Each time he came back to get his mother and sister to the forest, but failed. Esfir Movshenson wanted to escape but had no idea how to go about leaving (OHD-223(16)). “Everyone thought only about how to escape to the partisans to stay alive,” said Vera S. (HVT-3617) “Everybody left to the partisans so I also left. Escaping to the partisans was our only hope to survive” admitted Arkadii T. (HVT-3597).

Others, knowing that partisans are more likely to admit people who come to the forest with weapons, did everything they could to arm themselves. Reuven Liond used his business contacts outside the ghetto to obtain a gun. Others tried to find any weapon they could. Samuil, Sima Margolina’s cousin, managed to find a turret machine gun cartridge, and started spreading rumors in the ghetto that he had weapons in the hope of being contacted by the partisans. The problem was that turret machine gun bullets were not needed in the forest, where partisans had only light weapons. After her uncle escaped to the partisans, Nina Shalit-Galperin also started looking for ways to get to the forest. “Anyone who had connections escaped,” she claimed. A

person she met in the ghetto told her that if she brought a pair of leather jackboots to the partisans' commander she would be admitted to the unit. She immediately bought the boots on the black market (OHD-58(20)). Raissa Khasenyevich came to the forest with a typewriter (Epstein 2008). Vera B. stole salt at her workplace and smuggled it to the ghetto. With the money she earned she hoped to buy a grenade (HVT-2744).

But even in these scenarios, social connections could compensate for the lack of proper underground work credentials or weapons. Berta and Lialia Bruk were able to get to the partisans because their former maid worked for the underground. Although unarmed, they were admitted because Berta Bruk was a physician (Bruk and Bruk 2004). Reuven Liond, a refugee from Poland, and the partisans courier were from the same small town (Liond 1993).

Some, unable to get what partisans needed, gave up on the idea. "I didn't have the connections that would allow me to join groups that left to the forests. And who would agree to go there with me? Too overtly Jewish was [my] miserable appearance ... I was a danger not only to myself, but also to anyone walking with me" (Rappoport 2008). Others were saved by a stroke of pure luck. Leonid Okun' was charged with leading people who were linked to the underground to the forest. Once he was told by his commander to get Dr. Lifshitz out of the ghetto. However, he made a mistake, and instead of Dr. Lifshitz, a male surgeon, he brought Dr. Lifshitz, a female gynecologist. This mistake saved Dr. Lifshitz and her family, but cost Okun's mother, sister, and her family their lives. Okun' had planned to bring them to the forest, but his commander was angry with him, and refused to even discuss the issue. When Okun' finally got his commander's permission, he discovered that his family was no longer alive—someone informed the Germans, and they were executed.

The situation improved when Jewish partisans' detachments, especially Unit 106 under the command of Zorin, were established. Zorin's unit had a family camp where Jewish women, children, and elderly people were placed, and where no one was turned down due to their lack of weapons. But even then, many Jews were still reluctant to leave the ghetto. When in 1943 Iakov N. and his group escaped to the forest, one of the first people they met was Hersh Smolar, the former head of the ghetto underground. The first questions Smolar asked them were: Why are there so few people in your group? Do people still not understand that the ghetto is being liquidated (HVT-3614)? Sometimes, it took a German for a Jew to escape. Anna Karpilova's friend Riva was told that she needed to escape to the partisans by her German supervisor, who even promised to get her a gun (OHD-223(17)).

Among the German Jews, we know of only five cases of attempted escapes from the ghetto. Only two were successful. In one case, a Jew from Czechoslovakia succeeded in joining the partisans with the help of the underground. Unlike most residents of the Hamburg ghetto, this man knew a Slavic language and therefore could communicate with the partisans. The second, most well-known case of successful escape is that of Captain Willi Schultz and Ilse Stein. Schultz, a forty-six-year-old German officer supervised Jewish workers in the former Soviet Belorussian Government House, which during the war housed various German military headquarters. Chaim Bar'am described Schultz as anti-Semitic sadist (Bar'am 1980). Elizaveta Gutkovich, who worked in the Government House boiler room, also mentions being beaten by Schultz. One day, after an Aktion in the Russian part of the ghetto, a group of German Jews started working in the government House. "Shultz went to look at German Jews, and suddenly stopped by one young woman and shook her hand," recalled Gutkovich. "And I think to myself: 'That has never happened before—Shultz shaking hands with a Jew.'" Gutkovich, who spoke

German, befriended the young woman, eighteen-year-old Ilse Stein from Frankfurt. Shortly after that Stein was appointed by Schultz as the foreman of German Jews, and Gutkovich became in charge of the Soviet Jews and Stein's deputy.

Eventually, Willi Schultz admitted to Gutkovich that he was in love with Ilse and wanted to save her. When Schultz's friend, a military pilot and a former communist, came to Minsk, it was suggested that they all should cross the front line and fly to Moscow. The plan fell through when the pilot was sent to the front line. In 1943, after Stalingrad, Schultz assigned Gutkovich to listen to Soviet radio broadcasts and translate them for him. Unfortunately, a Gestapo agent caught Gutkovich listening to the radio. As this was an offence punishable by death, Gutkovich decided to immediately escape to the partisans with the help of another co-worker, a Belorussian who had connections to the underground. Realizing that he would not be able to save Ilse alone, Schultz asked Gutkovich to take him and Ilse with her. Working with the underground, Gutkovich and Schultz were able to arrange a truck, weapons, and a permission for a group of twenty five Jews to leave the ghetto in order to load coal in a train station nearby Minsk. The next day a German officer and twenty six Jews escaped to the partisans. Schultz and Stein flew to Moscow. After several months, Schultz was taken away by the Soviet secret police and died shortly after that (OHD-223(19)).

A more general question that arises from the massive escape to the partisan units is whether such an act would be more properly described as resistance, rather than evasion. As I demonstrate in this section, and will show further in the next, there were two primary types of people who escaped to the partisans: 1. those who did it in an organized fashion and for whom the escape to the forest was a continuation of their anti-Nazi struggle in the ghetto; and 2. those who escaped without having previously been in the underground. These people escaped to the

forest first and foremost because they perceived it as the best chance for survival. These people also tended to escape later, in 1943, when partisan units were already well organized and controlled large swaths of territory in the forests surrounding Minsk. While these people fought German troops after being admitted to partisan units, fighting Germans was an outcome of their flight to the forest, rather than its cause. Instructive in this regard are the ways in which Minsk ghetto survivors discuss revenge.

Former members of the underground and partisan groups frequently cite revenge as a motivation for action in their testimonies and memoirs. Yet, an important distinction appears within this group: People who were active in the underground often cite revenge and the desire to get pay back for the destruction of family, friends, and the Jewish community, as their reason for joining the partisans; People who were not involved in the ghetto underground reference revenge in their narratives only after they have joined the partisans. For these people, survival and evasion were the key motivators; revenge, even if important, appeared only later, when given the opportunity to exact it. This finding, however, should be taken with a grain of salt—it is possible that underground members were driven by the desire to highlight this particular aspect of their activities, and that both the desire to fight and the desire to survive were equally important. At the same time, when people say that they escaped first and foremost to survive, thus not highlighting the heroic aspect of their actions, they might do so simply because they are humble.

Jewish partisans' revenge consisted of killing as many Germans as possible. While killing German soldiers in combat blended revenge and military necessity, the vengeance component was most explicitly manifested in partisans' treatment of German POWs. German soldiers, when captured, often begged for mercy, or show photographs of wives and kids. For

Jewish partisans who were often the only survivors in their families, such actions aroused resentment instead of compassion; German POWs' fates were especially bleak if taken prisoner by a Jewish unit. In Zorin's Jewish partisan unit, Germans were "torn to pieces, beaten to death. We didn't even waste a bullet on them," admitted Leonid Okun' (Okun' 2007). When Arkadii Krasinskii's unit ambushed a Belorussian collaborationist police patrol and captured a German soldier who accompanied them, one member of the unit, who lost a wife and three children in the ghetto, grabbed a saw and literally took the German soldier, who was still alive, apart (Krasinskii 2011). Jewish police servicemen, were also sometimes killed if they escaped to the forest, especially if they had worked in the notorious Special Operations Unit. Jewish police rank and file who were not known as avid collaborators were spared.

At the same time, Jewish survivors do not talk about exacting revenge on Byelorussians who mistreated, deceived, or betrayed them. The most explicit exception to this rule is Leonid Okun'. As discussed above he was deceived by a Belorussian family that gave him whitewash (instead of flour) in exchange for boots. Later, his mother gave all the valuables the family still had to a Byelorussian woman who promised to lead Leonid, still a child, to the partisans. The women took Leonid to the forest and abandoned him there. Luckily, the partisans' patrol found him. After the liberation in 1944 Leonid, fifteen years old at that time, insisted on joining the Red Army and became the youngest Soviet soldier to be twice awarded one of highest military decorations—the Order of Glory.⁴² He returned from the front with a clear intention to shoot the people who had mistreated him, but they were gone. Interviewed for the WWII veterans testimonies project in 2007, he was still very upset that while he was able to exact his revenge on the Germans, the Belorussian offenders went unpunished. Okun's story also highlights the

⁴² Three Orders of Glory decorations were equivalent to the "Hero of the Soviet Union" – the highest military decoration.

general trend, discussed in this section—escaping to the partisans independently, without having proper underground connections, was an extremely costly and risky endeavor. Okun' survived by luck. Many others did not. Underground members, on the other hand, had a much better chance of reaching partisans' detachments. Who these underground members were, will be discussed in the next section.

Resistance

The Minsk ghetto was a hub of resistance. Yet, the Minsk ghetto underground differed substantially from the Jewish underground in other large ghettos in terms of its composition. In the Minsk ghetto, the underground was almost purely Communist.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, early 20th century Minsk had community-based Jewish self-defense structures, and before the 1917 Revolution, the Minsk Jews' support for the communist ideology was very limited at best. As late as early 1920s, Zionism was the most popular ideology among the city Jews, and until late 1920s a Zionist underground, though a numerically small one, operated in the city. In other chapters of my dissertation I have shown that the support for Zionist parties in the locality and the existence of a Zionist underground under the Soviet rule were the main factors that explained the prevalence of ghetto uprisings in Eastern Poland. The experience of Minsk suggests what might have happened in Eastern Poland had it been in the Soviet Union for more than just two years; in Minsk, the twenty years of Soviet policies and the purges of the late 1930s, in which many former Zionist and Bund activists were targeted, were sufficient to make any types of non-communist underground untenable.

Almost immediately after the city was occupied by the German army, numerous small and uncoordinated underground initiatives emerged. They were directed mainly by young,

idealistic Communist Party youth branch members, and low-level Communist Party officials—the Communist Party’s elite fled the city before the German takeover. As notes Epstein, in August and September 1941 members of these groups “tended to use the word ‘resistance’ rather than ‘underground’ to describe their activity, because they belonged to informal, autonomous groups, and for the moment were not thinking of going beyond that” (Epstein 2008). Anatolii Rubin recalled his sister’s behavior in the ghetto: “My older sister, she went out, distributed leaflets... I remember, young people would gather in our house, and they, with their Komsomol training, organized, sang anti-fascist songs, went out to various missions. They also probably had guns because I remember they once brought home liquid gun grease, and I thought it was oil, so I poured it into a bottle and put somewhere. And they—they were searching for this oil” (OHD-58(12)). Mark Taits, a teenager, and his two friends got together to save Soviet POWs. When the ghetto was not yet surrounded by barbed wire, Germans marched columns of POWs through it. The POWs were lightly guarded, so Taits and his friends opened the front door of one of the buildings along POWs route, and this allowed some of them to sneak out of the column to the building. Mark and his friends gave POWs civilian clothes, and showed them the way to the forests (Taits n.d.).

Lialia Brik was a high school student; she just finished seventh grade. Her father was an engineer who worked for the NKVD, the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs. Lialia writes in her wartime diary that immediately upon moving into the ghetto she started organizing her Jewish classmates “to harm the German.” However, it proved to be impossible to organize the boys. Unfortunately, she is silent about why she was not able to accomplish this task (Bruk and Bruk 2004). Semion G.’s brother Aron, who escaped from a POW camp, forged a German passport and started to organize an underground group. Aron taught his brother and other members of his

group how to use weapons, and explained to them how they were going to escape the ghetto. The day after the first major Aktion (November 1941), they went to the partisans. Aron's group was independent of the wider city underground, and he used his pre-war connections and friendships to recruit people he trusted. Luckily for the group, their leader had military training that helped them to organize and escape to the forests to fight the Germans (HVT-3613).⁴³

Seventeen year old Masha Bruskina was a devoted communist.⁴⁴ Initially she lived with her mother in the Minsk ghetto, but later on moved to the Aryan side, dyed her hair and assumed her mother's maiden name, Bugakova. According to Nechama Tec and Daniel Weiss, she probably joined the anti-German resistance a few weeks after the start of the occupation. Volunteering as a nurse, Masha cared for wounded Soviet soldiers, assisting in their escapes by smuggling civilian clothing, medication, and even a camera for the preparation of false identity papers into the hospital. When prisoners were healthy enough, other members of the resistance led them into the forests" (Tec and Weiss 1997). It was a poorly coordinated initiative of devoted communists who had all the intentions to resist but lacked the sophistication and experience needed to conduct underground work. This may be one of the reasons why so many were captured and executed by the Germans. It is to their credit that no one, so far as is known, gave information under torture (Tec and Weiss 1997). As we see, many independent cells operated in Minsk, but they perceived themselves as ad-hoc groups, and none dared to establish a more permanent organizational structure or declare itself a formal organization.

⁴³ There is no data on whether Aron G. was politically involved before the war.

⁴⁴ According to some sources, Bruskina was also a group leader in the Communist Party's school-age children branch (*pionervozhataia*). However, the majority of sources, including the testimony of Vera B., who lived with Bruskina in the same house before the war, do not mention this.

Older Communist cadres also thought about resistance. However, as disciplined Party members they could not bring themselves to create any organizational structure without an explicit order from the Party leadership. Furthermore, they were confident that before leaving the city, the local Communist Party bosses must have ordered some trusted members to stay in the occupied city in order to organize resistance. Creating an independent underground while lacking elite sanction would be tantamount to insubordination and usurpation of other peoples' privileges. And as experienced Communists, they knew only too well the fate of those guilty of insubordination. The attitude of communist refugees from Poland, who had worked for many years in the underground, was different. Less accustomed to the rigid party discipline rules, these people were willing to act unsupervised by Party elites. Furthermore, they had firsthand experience in such matters.

Among the (originally) Polish communists was also Hersh Smolar, a leading member of the Polish Communist Party, who had many years of underground work under his belt. After escaping from Białystok to Minsk, Smolar found himself in the ghetto, living under the name of Efim Stoliarevich. In the ghetto, Smolar encountered other Communist Party cadres, whom he had met before the war—Notke Wainhoiz and Yakov Kirkaeshto, under whose leadership with Smolar a small underground organization was formed. Later, Smolar was also put in touch with another group of communists, led by Nohum Feldman. There were only “Easterners” in this group. While Feldman and his associates were determined to fight the Germans, they did not think of themselves as an organization—they made decisions only as individuals and these decisions concerned only their individual actions. They did not feel they had the authority to establish any form of organizational structure simply because they were not authorized to do so by the Party. As discussed above, when Smolar told Feldman about his group, the first thing

Feldman wanted to know was: “What do you mean you formed an organization? *Who gave you the right to do that?* Who gave you the order to form an organization?” (Smolar, emphasis in original). Shortly after this encounter, Smolar managed to meet Isai Kazinets, an informal leader of a group of young communists in the so-called “Russian” part of the city. Although Kazinets was Jewish, he had a faked passport and his Jewish origin was unknown until after the war. Like Feldman, Kazinets wanted to know who authorized Smolar to act. Smolar’s reply was “a mute gesture”—he pointed to his heart. Yet, Kazinets, a disciplined Party member, simply could not imagine that someone would start an underground without having the authority to do so. Ironically, this misinterpretation contributed to the establishment of the city-wide underground. Smolar, who was thought to be a high-ranking Communist official, unable to reveal his true status, was surprised to discover that he was assigned a *nom de guerre* Skromnyi, “Modest” in Russian. Still confident that the Soviet government’s authorized agents operated somewhere in the city, Kazinets decided to name the underground the “second,” or “supplementary” City Committee. The “first” Committee, of course, did not exist.

How was the Minsk ghetto underground structured and what were its goals? The available data is somewhat contradictory, because Smolar wrote the history of the underground twice—in Moscow in 1946, and then in Israel in 1980s. In the first version, the organization consists of only Communist Party and Komsomol members and its key goal is to fight the Germans as a part of the larger communist anti-Nazi struggle. In the second version, saving the ghetto from destruction and leading Jews to safety in the forests appear as the key goals, and membership in the underground is open not only to Communist Party members, but also to former Zionists and Bundists, if they were recommended by trusted members. Following Zhits, who compared the two versions, the 1946 version appears to be closer to the truth—in the

summer 1941 the underground could not have tried to save the ghetto from destruction because at that point the decision to exterminate the Jews was not yet made by the German leadership (Zhits 2000). Furthermore, the ghetto underground leadership made an explicit decision not to rebel in the ghetto.

Initially, the ghetto underground's leadership consisted of Smolar, Wainhoyz, Kirkaeshto, and Feldman. Later, Kirkaeshto and Wainhoyz were killed in a random round-up, but new members joined the underground leadership. One of them was Mikhail Gebelev. Gebelev, like other underground leaders was a devoted Communist. In 1924 he was already secretary of the Komsomol in his hometown of Uzliany. In 1937-9 he studied in the Belarus Communist Party School of Propagandists, and worked as the Communist Party propagandist before the war broke out. Another prominent underground member, Israel Lapidus, worked before the war at the Communist Party district committee (*obkom*). When the war started, he joined the Red Army as a political officer. When German troops surrounded and wiped out his unit, he came back to Minsk and joined his family in the ghetto (USHMM-RG-02.174). Ziana Okun', Khaia and Matvei Pruslin (siblings)—all Communist Party members and activists before the war, were also prominent in the underground activities. The underground adopted the organizational structure of *desiatki*—groups of ten members, where the rank and file knew only the members of their group. We know the identity of all *desiatki* leaders, as well the names of many of the more than three hundred underground rank and files. Virtually all the leadership and prominent members of the resistance were Communist Party and Komsomol members (YVA-6503113; YVA-6487478; YVA-7837514). Yet, not all the ghetto Communists automatically joined the ranks. Membership in the underground was limited to a trusted circle of Communist activists. Before the war, Tatyana G. was a secretary of the Komsomol cell at her factory. Still,

she was able to join the underground only because she was friends with an underground member. She had blond hair and did not look Jewish, and was thus assigned to be Mikhail Gebelev's personal liaison. Tatyana was lucky—many people, including the Party members, tried to find the underground, but failed.

Thanks to Smolar's experience, the ghetto underground had much better conspiracy rules than the underground outside the ghetto. Astashinskii, who was an underground member, admits that initially he had no idea that the underground was led by Smolar and Gebelev (Astashinskii 2008). On the other hand, the city underground, and especially its Military Council, was either ignorant of or actively ignored the most basic conspiracy rules. They located their headquarters across the street from the German security services building, demanded to be provided with secretaries, and kept paper records of their meetings schedules. It is hardly surprising, then, that the city underground was eventually uncovered and its leaders killed by the Germans.

One of the key goals of the ghetto underground was to assist the incipient partisans' units in the forests. "The winter was hard for the residents of the ghetto," note Ehrenburg and Grossman in their *Black Book of Russian Jewry*. Yet, despite catastrophic conditions in the ghetto, the underground set out to help the partisans with warm clothing and medicines. Essential medical supplies, testifies the ghetto hospital physician Anna Karpilova, were shipped to the forest whenever possible. Karpilova was technically not a member of an underground, but received instructions from Smolar, and gave the underground everything it requested (OHD-223(17)). The ghetto hospital also became the informal underground headquarters after Smolar started working in the hospital boiler room. Germans, scared of infectious diseases, refrained from entering the hospital and Smolar made full use of this fact. Mark Taits, a doorman in the

ghetto hospital noted: “I didn’t know what Smolar did there; I just knew that no one was allowed into the boiler room – there Grisha [Smolar] was the boss” (Taitz n.d.).

Another task of the underground, argue Ehrenburg and Grossman, was the creation of a special fund to help needy Communists (Ehrenburg and Grossman 2002). This task, however, is not mentioned in other accounts and it is unclear whether and how it was implemented. Yet, this indicates the basic party-focused orientation of the underground not only in terms of ideology, but also in prioritizing groups who were eligible for material assistance.

Although the underground operated inside the ghetto, its members saw themselves as participants of a Communist, rather than Jewish, endeavor. Khasia Pruslina received a fake passport from Smolar and was ordered to organize an underground cell in the Russian part of the city. She was the only Jew in her cell. “I was of a much better use [for the underground] on the Russian side,” claimed Pruslina (Nikodimova 2010). The choice to be in the ghetto or outside it was purely instrumental—a person was posted where he or she could contribute more to the city underground as a whole. Had she been told to go back to the ghetto and expose herself to the German killings, she would have done so.

After partisan units had been organized around Minsk, the underground started smuggling trusted operatives into the forests. At this point, it was impossible to get to the partisans without being active in the underground. Even the underground members’ families did not receive preferential treatment. In the Aktion of March 2, 1942, Gebelev lost his father, siblings, and their families. Could he have saved them? According to Gebelev’s daughter Svetlana, he could, as he had access to the fake and blank passports and identification forms that the underground used. He also could easily smuggle the family out of the ghetto. His relatives, according to some accounts, did ask Gebelev to help organize their escape to the partisans. He

refused. For Gebelev, the cause of the underground trumped the wellbeing and even the survival of his own kin. “Going to the partisans is a privilege one has to earn,” Gebelev once told an acquaintance, who asked for assistance in leaving the ghetto (Gebeleva 2010).

Underground activism affected the entire family of the resistance fighter. Children, even if not actively involved in the underground work, were not shielded from its dangers. Frida Reizman’s father led an underground weapons assembly squad. “I often slept on grenades and pistols because they were hidden underneath my mattress” (Reizman 2005). Genia Zavol’ner’s family lived in one house with several families of Jewish refugees from Poland. One day Germans broke into the house—they searched for a young man who was connected to the partisans. They arrested one of the Polish Jews and left. This person was not seen again. Later, Zavol’ner found out that the underground member the Germans were after was her older brother. The Polish Jew was innocent—he was simply mistaken for his neighbor (Zavol’ner 2004).

Often underground activism consisted of private initiatives of the organization’s members. Girsh K. was a Communist Party member who lectured Communist Party history before the war. Working for the underground, he distributed Soviet propaganda materials and agitated among the Soviet POWs. In addition, he individually sabotaged sewing machines in his workplace (HVT-3593). A similar limited activism was also practiced by those who wanted to contribute to the struggle, but did not know how because they did not possess the required connections. Samuil K. simply shirked in his workplace. “For us it was the only method of revenge. We didn’t have any others.”

Some were lucky to join the underground despite not having the necessary Communist credentials. “In every household people are talking about the underground, but no one knows

how to get in touch with it. This is especially hard for us, Jews from Poland. People are wary of us because many Polish Jews serve in the ghetto police and behave cruelly towards the population,” wrote Yakov Greenstein (Greenstein 1968). Eventually, he and his wife were able to find and join the underground. Greenstein’s memoir is one of the very few that explicitly discusses the collective choices made within the underground. Sara, an underground activist, once told Greenstein: “In the ghetto, our only option is ... the struggle of people, sentenced to death, and in the forest we can do great things and assist the Red Army to expel the invaders-murderers from our land” (Greenstein 1968). For the underground, any violent action inside the ghetto was simply not an option. Discussing the Jewish collaborators, Greenstein argues that “we could have killed the traitors any time we wanted. We didn’t do it because a terrorist action could have harmed our ability to carry out our duties” (Greenstein 1968). This strategy contrasts sharply with that of the Jewish undergrounds in many Polish ghettos, where killing Jewish collaborators became a priority. Yet, the possibility of internal ghetto rebellion appears in Greenstein’s account. “If we had no other option, we would have thought about doing something in the ghetto,” he argues. However, an approval from the Soviet partisans was required for such a rebellion to take place, for “any action in the ghetto that is not approved by the higher command will be perceived as provocation” (Greenstein 1968). This is probably the only time when a ghetto uprising is explicitly mentioned by a Minsk ghetto underground member, and it is indicative that this option is voiced by Greenstein, a refugee from Poland and a Zionist in his political convictions (Porat 1997).

Some scholars, however, see the Minsk ghetto underground as more Jewish than Communist. “During the war,” argues the historian Dina Porat, “[Jewish Communists] began to see their connection to and responsibility for the Jewish people as more important than their ties

to the Party outside the ghetto” (Porat 1997). While I disagree with Porat’s claim that in the ghetto, the “Jewish” component of these peoples’ identity trumped the “communist” one, it is undeniable that both played an important role in the decision making process, if only because the war experiences of Jewish Communists differed from these of their non-Jewish comrades. The Minsk ghetto underground, while ostensibly Communist, did invest efforts in saving Jews qua Jews, especially after it became clear that the ghetto days were numbered. The main expression of this attempt to save as many Jewish lives as possible was the creation of the Jewish partisan detachments that, unlike the non-Jewish units, had both military and civilian components. The most important of these detachments was “Unit 106,” commanded by Shalom Zorin, who escaped the Minsk ghetto to the forests in late 1941. The unit consisted of a large family camp, where Jewish children, women, and males who were unfit for combat—mostly the Minsk ghetto escapees, were placed, and a fighting unit that protected the family camp and engaged in other missions.

It is useful to compare Zorin’s unit with a similar partisan detachment that was organized by Tuvia Bielski and his brothers. Unlike “106,” which consisted mainly of Soviet Jews, Bielski’s unit, which later became the subject of Nechama Tec’s sociological study (Tec 1993) and a Hollywood movie, was composed mainly of Jews from Eastern Poland. The structure of both units was similar, and they shared the same goal—saving as many Jews as possible. Both were part of the Soviet partisan movement. Yet, despite these similarities, there were important differences between the two units. “Our commander Zorin was more communist than Jewish, while the Bielski brothers were just the opposite,” remarked Arkadii Krasinskii (Krasinskii 2011). According to Okun’, in Bielski’s unit Communist political commissars were no more than a decoration—in practice, the detachment was independent. If mistreated by other partisans, the

Bielksis were willing and able to strike back. “They had ‘sharp teeth’ and first-class cutthroats (*otbornye rebiata-golovorezy*), Polish Jews who did not suffer from excessive sentimentality.” Though he tried to keep a degree of independence in his relations with the partisans’ movement command, Zorin was more constrained in his actions. Okun’, Zorin’s personal messenger, recalls several cases where Zorin was deceived by other units or where he was not informed about German troops operating in the area, but had to “suck it up” (Okun’ 2007).⁴⁵ Also, even though saving Jewish lives was a stated goal of Jewish partisans, Jewish partisan commanders were sometimes as brutal with their subordinates as with their non-Jewish counterparts. According to Liond, Lapidus, one of the Jewish partisan commanders, ordered the execution of another Jewish partisan, Mishka Baran, for a minor offense—Baran refused an order to carry a milk jar (Liond 1993).

Conclusions

The Minsk ghetto, the largest ghetto in pre-1939 USSR, was different from other major ghettos in several respects: It was surrounded by barbed wire, instead of by a brick wall, making contact with and escape to the outside world substantially easier; There were partisans operating in the forests surrounding Minsk, only about fifteen miles from the ghetto; The provision of food and the standards of living were much worse in Minsk than in other ghettos. And finally, the Nazi killings, though as brutal as anywhere else, started comparatively early. All these factors, in combination with the pre-WWII political and organizational experience of the ghetto Jews are important in explaining why Jewish behavior in Minsk differed from that in other ghettos—evasion was more widespread and compliance was limited to a very specific segment of the population. Yet, there was also variation in Jewish behavior among Minsk Jews. The underlying

⁴⁵ It is also possible that Zorin simply had a softer character and therefore was amenable to pressure from above, but the available descriptions of his personality do not support this claim.

causes of this variation were similar to those that determined Jewish behavior in other places. The difference between the behavior of Jews in Minsk and in other ghettos stemmed from the interaction between these underlying causes and the local socio-political, in this case Soviet, environment.

First, as I have shown, all behavioral strategies were geared towards achieving one key goal: survival. Yet, the choice of a particular strategy was affected by pre-Holocaust political and social experiences and available information. In the informational vacuum that pre-war Soviet censorship of war-related news created, people had to fall back on previous relevant experiences in what was perceived as a similar situation—the German occupation in 1918. Looking backward, it seems strange that Jews preferred to stay put, simply waiting for the Nazis to come and sometimes welcoming their arrival. From these peoples' perspective, though, this behavior was sensible given their previous experience with the Germans. I have also shown how information was crucial to changing behavioral strategies, thus demonstrating how even under conditions of genocidal violence, behavior is guided by a rational decision making process.

In Minsk, as everywhere else, Jewish resistance to and collaboration with the Nazis was shaped by previous political institutions and experiences. Politically active people tended to resist, and even more so than in other ghettos. Public collaboration, on the other hand, and contrary to my initial argument, was not dominated by pre-war political activists. This behavior, however, was a direct outcome of a combination of both Soviet and Nazi policies, rather than of internal Jewish processes. First, as the Soviet regime eliminated internal Jewish political and communal life, the only politically active Jews were Communists. For these people, the locus of their activism was Soviet society as a whole, and their Communist beliefs trumped their

Jewishness. Finally, the Nazi authorities simply did not allow Communists to assume any leadership roles.

My analysis of Jewish behavior in the Minsk ghetto also supports arguments over the importance of socially integrating minorities into the larger societies (Varshney 2003; Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011; Paulsson 2002; Tammes 2007). People who were better integrated into the Belorussian and Russian societies had better chances of survival, especially if they chose evasion. Integration, however, does not mean assimilation. Even those who preserved their Jewish identity, but nonetheless could speak flawless Russian or Byelorussian or who had many friends among the non-Jews, had better chances of survival than those who did not. Idiosyncratic factors, such as having blue eyes or blond hair, certainly helped as well.

A similar interaction between the universal desire to survive, rational decision making, and local political institutions and experiences also shaped the Jewish behavior in the ghettos of Kraków and Białystok. But, as I will demonstrate in the next chapters, the political institutions in the Polish Kraków and Białystok, which was initially in Poland and then occupied by the Soviet Union, differed from those of Minsk, and therefore the Jewish behavior in these ghettos, especially the patterns of evasion, collaboration and resistance, differed as well.

Chapter 5: Three Lines in History Books: The Jews of Kraków under Nazi Rule

Together with the ghetto of Warsaw, the Kraków ghetto is widely known thanks to Steven Spielberg's blockbuster film *Schindler's List*, which won seven Academy Awards in 1993. As it happens, Oscar Schindler operated in Kraków, a major Polish city located in the southern part of the country. He was a German businessman and a devoted Nazi before the war, who then saved the lives of more than a thousand Jews who were employed in his enamel factory. The movie brought the experiences of the Kraków Jews under the Nazi occupation to worldwide attention, but in fact the Kraków ghetto differed substantially from other ghettos, and not only because of Schindler and his rescue efforts.

Compared to many other ghettos, and viewed against the background of the Jewish experiences in Minsk, arguably “the most horrifying of all ghettos in the East,” (Barkai 1989) the Kraków ghetto was almost an island of normality, stability, and sometimes even happiness. Unlike the vast majority of Polish cities (with the possible exception of Warsaw), Kraków also had a large number of Jews who chose the evasion strategy and hid outside the ghetto among the Polish population. The Kraków ghetto also had a very strong and determined underground resistance movement that, according to its leader, fought for “three lines in history” to let the world know that the Jewish youth did not go “like lamb to the slaughter.” Yet, this movement decided not to rebel inside the ghetto; instead an important component of their largest anti-German action was raising white and red Polish national banners on the bridges over Vistula, and laying wreaths on the destroyed monument of the Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz.

In this chapter I will demonstrate that while the overall conditions and the history of the Kraków ghetto differed substantially from those of other ghettos, at the micro-level, the

individual behavioral strategies adopted by the Kraków Jews were driven by the same logic and factors that determined the behavior of the Holocaust victims in the other ghettos in this study. I will also show how the historical experiences of Kraków, which for many years was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, shaped the behavior of the city's Jews under the German occupation, the information available to them before the WWII, and their expectations. I will discuss how the Austro-Hungarian policies that allowed better integration of Jews into the general society shaped the willingness and the ability of many Kraków Jews to choose the evasion strategy, thus supporting the arguments for the importance of social integration of minorities (Varshney 2003; Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011; Paulsson 2002; Tammes 2007). Finally, I will demonstrate that the city's underground Jewish resistance was heavily dominated by people who were politically active prior to the Holocaust, and that their lack of *underground* activism before the WWII determined their decision to choose not to rebel inside the ghetto.

Data

The data on the Kraków ghetto is extensive, but somewhat biased. Quite surprisingly, despite the availability of numerous sources, there is no English-language in-depth study of the city Jewish community during the Holocaust. Scholarship on the Kraków Jews during the Holocaust focuses mainly on two specific areas—the rescue efforts of Oscar Schindler (almost exclusively in English), and the Jewish underground resistance (almost exclusively in Hebrew). The *Schindler's List* story, which acquired global fame after the release of the movie, paved the way for a flurry of memoirs, general interest (non-scholarly) books, and in-depth historical studies. Yet, the Schindler story, while undoubtedly important and inspiring, is hardly representative. Out of about seventy thousand Kraków Jews, slightly more a thousand were the

so-called Schindler Jews. At the same time, Schindler Jews are a very large portion of the several thousand Kraków survivors, and therefore this story features prominently in survivors' accounts.

A second, well-researched aspect of the Holocaust in Kraków is the Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis. The reasons for scholarly interest in the resistance are several. First, even though there was no rebellion in the Kraków ghetto, the Jewish underground in the city did engage in a series of high-profile violent actions against the German authorities, culminating in the bombing of the German officers club, in which a number of German servicemen were killed and many more injured. The research on the topic was also greatly assisted by the fact that a number of underground fighters managed to survive the Holocaust and could be interviewed. Furthermore, scholars of the Kraków ghetto resistance have access to a unique primary source—a diary-memoir written by the one of the leaders of the underground, Gusta (Justyna) Davidson Draenger, in a German jail. That one of the most prominent Israeli Holocaust historians, Arie Bauminger, was the brother of Hszek Bauminger, a key figure in the ghetto underground, also contributed to the research on the topic (not least by Bauminger himself). However, even though the key studies of the Jewish resistance in the city—a doctoral dissertation and subsequent book by the Israeli historian Yael Peled, provide important data on the Holocaust in Kraków, these works were never translated to English and therefore remain inaccessible to the vast majority of scholars. Furthermore, similarly to the Schindler Jews, the resisters were only a small minority among the Kraków Jewish community.

In addition to the stories of the Schindler Jews and the interviews of the underground resistance fighters, the chapter is based on several dozen published and unpublished memoirs of the Kraków ghetto inmates, Holocaust-era materials, such as diaries and letters, and more than eighty videotaped survivors' testimonies from the Yale University Fortunoff Video Archive for

Holocaust Testimonies (HVT)—overall, more than a hundred life stories of members of the Kraków Jewish community.

The data is not without problems, however, and several issues of reliability and representativeness should be taken into account. First, I do not base my analysis on a random sample of the Kraków ghetto inmates. As mentioned earlier, one specific group—the Schindler Jews—is heavily overrepresented among the survivors, but I am aware of this bias and try to manage it by not extrapolating from the experience of the Schindler Jews to the rest of the community. Second, interviews were conducted and memoirs written decades after the Holocaust. Over the years, recollections became imprecise, details were forgotten, and the interpretation of Holocaust experiences was influenced by the post-Holocaust knowledge. Thus, it is hardly surprising that virtually all the testimonies collected after 1993 mention Schindler even if a person has never worked in his factory and was not affected by Schindler’s rescue efforts. In other testimonies, post-Holocaust meanings and symbols dominate how a person narrates and understands his or her Holocaust experiences. A striking example of this phenomenon is Iaakov W., who refers to the members of his work brigade, mostly people with connections to the ghetto elite, as *jobnikim*—a pejorative term out of Israeli military jargon, used to describe non-combat-unit soldiers (HVT-3249).

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I will present a short history of the Kraków Jewish community before and during the Holocaust. Then, I will focus on the specific behavioral strategies that Kraków Jews adopted: collaboration, compliance, coping, evasion, and resistance. Finally, I will also show how available information and pre-Holocaust social and political factors shaped individuals’ adoption of each strategy.

Kraków Jews before and during the Holocaust

The Jewish community of Kraków is one of the three oldest Jewish communities in Poland. In 1305, Kraków became the capital of the newly reunited Kingdom of Poland and it is during this period that we find the first references to a Jewish community in the city: in 1304, municipal documents first mention a *Judengasse*, or Jewish street. After a fire in 1494 destroyed parts of the city including the Jewish quarter, the king ordered the Jews expelled from Kraków and resettled in Kazimierz, a suburban town on the other bank of the Vistula River. After that until the nineteenth century, there was no Jewish community in Kraków proper, although several families continued to live in the city. Jews did not feel that they truly had left the city, and still called themselves, now settled in Kazimierz, the Kraków community (Petersen 2008). During the sixteenth century, the Kraków community developed into a center of Talmudic learning and scholarship. After the third partition of the country in 1795, when Poland ceased to exist as an independent state, the Jews of Kraków and Kazimierz came under the rule of the Habsburg Empire, which was much more benign to its Jewish subjects than the neighboring Russia.

The period of late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries was an era of major transformation for the Kraków Jewish community. Even though the city managed to preserve its ghetto⁴⁶ until 1867 (Wróbel 1994), eventually the Austro-Hungarian Empire granted its Jews full citizenship rights and eliminated the institutionalized anti-Jewish discrimination in fields such as education, employment, and residence. As a result, many Jews embraced the Polish and German languages and culture and assimilated into the larger society. Unlike in other parts of Poland, the Jews of Kraków, even those belonging to the ultraorthodox religious groups, often used Polish

⁴⁶ Here I refer to ghetto in the medieval sense of the word as a separate Jewish quarter of the city, where the Jews were forced to reside.

and/or German as their first language, and many did not even understand, let alone speak or write Yiddish.

In 1900, Kraków Jews numbered 25,000, representing twenty eight percent of the total population. The majority of Jews were engaged in commerce and crafts, but at the beginning of the twentieth century Jews were also well represented in the professions. Thus, in 1910, Jews constituted seventeen percent of city's engineers, twenty percent of physicians, and fifty two percent of the lawyers (Wróbel 1994). Politically, these relatively high degrees of assimilation drove many Jews towards liberal Polish nationalism and as Wróbel writes, "in the last decades before World War I, a group of Jews ... participated in various organizations working for the resurrection of Poland. Several hundred Jews fought in Joseph Pilsudski's Polish Legion after 1914" (Wróbel 1994).

Another major political force were the Zionists. Under the leadership of a charismatic rabbi, Ozjasz Thon, Zionism became the most popular political ideology among the Kraków Jews, not least because the Polish population was by and large less than enthusiastic about the Jews' assimilation. Yet, even if Jews failed to fully integrate into Polish society, in Kraków they were more assimilated than in the rest of Poland. Thus, the first Zionist periodicals were published in Polish, rather than in Yiddish or Hebrew. Even the socialist, anti-Zionist Bund, widely known for its strong attachment to the Yiddish language and culture, published its Kraków journal in Polish. The city, notes Martin, "deserved its reputation as a center of Polonized Jewish culture" (Martin 2008).

The collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918 paved the way for the establishment of the independent Polish state. Because of the Austro-Hungarian policy of ethno-religious tolerance, the political culture of Kraków was much more moderate than that of the former Russian parts of

Poland (Melzer 2001). Yet, even this culture of relative tolerance and political moderation did not prevent anti-Jewish pogroms in 1918, which were met with Jewish armed self-defense, organized under the command of former Austrian officers. Another hotbed of anti-Semitism was Jagiellonian University, which, even if less of a stronghold of extreme nationalism than some other universities, was the scene of three weeks of anti-Jewish violence in 1931 (Galas and Polonsky 2011).

In the interwar years, note Galas and Polonsky, Kraków was conservative, largely pre-industrial, and was dominated politically by the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and various other pro-government parties (Galas and Polonsky 2011). The right-wing, virulently anti-Semitic National Democrats had only a meager following in the city. In 1931-39 the city mayor was Mieczysław Kaplicki, a Jew who had converted to Christianity, and the city garrison commander was Bernard Mond, the only General of Jewish origin in the Polish Army. Among the Kraków Jews, Zionists were the dominant political force, followed by the ultra-orthodox religious party Agudat Yisrael. In the Zionist camp, the moderate General Zionists claimed the largest following, and the Akiva youth movement, affiliated with the party, was the largest among the Jewish youth organizations in the city.

According to the 1931 census, the Jewish population of Kraków was about fifty-seven thousand, twenty-six percent of the city population. In reality, the number of Jews in the city was larger, but because the census used mother tongue to determine ethnicity (there was no ethnicity/religion question in the census), many Jews who used Polish as their first language were classified as Poles. In 1935, an unofficial estimate was that there were about seventy thousand Jews in Kraków, almost thirty percent of the population. Forty-five percent of Jews were employed in trade (Jews were approximately sixty percent of the city's traders), and thirty

percent were employed in industry and crafts (Melzer 2001). Jews also played an important role in medicine and other professions. Almost sixty percent of the Jewish work force was self-employed, and only about a quarter was employed in manual labor jobs (Peled 1989).

The Jewish community of Kraków was not only informed about Hitler's anti-Jewish policies, but was also directly affected by them. In October 1938 the German authorities decided to expel Jews who did not possess German citizenship. The German decision was a reaction to the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs' decree that the passports of Polish citizens residing abroad had to be re-validated by 29 October 1939, and those who failed to revalidate their passports would lose the right to return to Poland. In late October, the German police rounded up seventeen thousand Jews throughout the country, many of whom resided in Germany for decades or were even born there, and drove them across the border in the vicinity of the town of Zbąszyń. Because the Jewish community of Kraków was one of the largest in the German-speaking world, virtually every Jewish family in the city had relatives or acquaintances among the deportees who flocked to Kraków, producing a housing crisis. The vast majority of the survivors' testimonies mention these refugees, who were housed with survivor's families, or were assisted in other ways. There were thirteen children in Dawid R.'s family, who took in a refugee from Frankfurt, managing to squeeze fifteen people in two and a half rooms; twenty five people lived in Regina L.'s house, many of them refugees (HVT-1047; HVT-1786). While the Jewish community mobilized to help the refugees, the Kraków Jews also became directly exposed to first-hand accounts of the German anti-Jewish persecution, and this had a substantial effect on the Jewish behavior during the early stages of the war. The family of Alex G. housed a refugee who urged them to escape from Poland because "Hitler is going to come and life will be tough." (HVT-1327) Refugees from Germany lived for two years in Celina S.' house, and therefore she knew

what to expect from the Germans (HVT-86). Similarly, Leopold P. testified that “We knew what Hitler had up his sleeve for the Jews” (HVT-433).

Kraków and its Jews during the Holocaust

German troops invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. While some Krakowites sensed the coming tragedy and made frantic preparations, for the majority the beginning of hostilities came as a complete surprise. Unlike many Polish towns, Kraków was spared heavy bombing and was practically unaffected by the fighting. On September 6, 1939, German troops entered the city. When the war started, many Jews, especially young males, fled to the eastern part of the country, but most were outrun by the advancing Wehrmacht units and had to return. The city castle, the Wawel, the historical seat of the Polish kings before the throne was moved to Warsaw, became the residence of Hans Frank, the head of the General Government—the newly created administrative unit that encompassed those parts of pre-war Poland that were not annexed either to Germany or the USSR. The city name was changed to Krakau.

The persecution of Jews began almost immediately after the city occupation. “We didn’t know what hit us,” recalled Rosalie S. (HVT-737). During the first days of Nazi rule anti-Jewish measures took mainly the form of looting stores and apartments, random beatings and sometimes murders, and roundups for forced labor. “With the pre-war Polish anti-Semitic violence everything was known and clear, but with the Germans you just didn’t know what to expect,” lamented Chawka R. (HVT-1831). With the consolidation of German control over Kraków, the persecution of Jews took a more organized and bureaucratized form. On September 8, 1939, all Jewish enterprises were required to be marked with a Star of David and Jews were removed from breadlines. In late October, Hans Frank, the highest German official in the occupied Poland, ordered the Jews to be subject to forced labor. In November and December virtually all Jewish

educational institutions were shut down (Sinnreich et al. forthcoming).

In late September, a Jewish Council (Judenrat) was established under the leadership of Prof. Marek Bieberstein. In November 1939, a census conducted by the Judenrat counted 68,482 Jews in Kraków and several suburban communities. Starting December 1, 1939, all Jews above the age of twelve were required to wear a Star of David on their right arm. In January and February 1940, Jewish businesses were seized and transferred to Aryan “trustees” (*Treuhandler*), who were Germans in the case of the largest and most valuable businesses, or Poles and Ukrainians for all others.

Another major blow to the Kraków Jewish community came in April 1940, when Frank ordered the expulsion of the city’s Jews in order to make his seat the “most Jew-free city” in the occupied Poland. The *Wehrmacht* generals complained bitterly that they had to live in buildings where the only other tenants were Jews (Crowe 2004), and Frank found it unacceptable that the “representatives of the Reich should be obliged to meet Jews when they enter or leave the house, and ... that it is absolutely intolerable that thousands upon thousands of Jews should go slinking around and occupy apartments in the city which the Führer has granted the great honor of becoming the seat of a high Reich Authority.” Thus, the vast majority of Kraków Jews were to be removed from the city and only about 10,000 were to remain as indispensable skilled workers. Initially the Jews were urged to leave voluntarily, but in July 1940 the forcible removal of the Jewish population of Kraków commenced. By the beginning of October, the Jewish population of the city had declined by about fifty percent, but many managed to return to Kraków after the expulsion. During the expulsion Aktion, Bieberstein attempted to bribe the German officials to increase the number of Jews permitted to stay in the city, but was arrested and sentenced to

eighteen months imprisonment.⁴⁷ Following Bieberstein's arrest, Artur Rosenzweig was appointed the Judenrat chair.

On March 3, 1941, the German authorities announced the establishment of the Jewish residential district, a ghetto, in the poor Kraków suburb of Podgórze. Jews had until March 20, 1941, to move into the ghetto, which lay on the left bank of the Vistula River. The relocation period was later extended to the end of April 1941, when the last Jews were moved into the ghetto. Initially, fifteen thousand Jews resided in the ghetto and another 2,500 officially lived outside the ghetto boundaries. In April 1941, the ghetto was enclosed by a wooden fence and a 9.8 foot high brick wall. In the ghetto area, all Polish signs and public inscriptions had to be replaced with Hebrew (Crowe 2004).⁴⁸ The confinement of a large number of people to a small area created an acute housing crisis in the ghetto. The allocation of housing space was by windows—four people per casement window. Because many rooms had more than one window it was not uncommon for eight or more people to reside in one room (Pemper 2008). Dora R. lived with nine other people in one room (HVT-1230). Erna R. and her family of five lived in a kitchen (HVT-1381). Approximately 60 percent of the ghetto residents worked outside the ghetto walls, in various factories, at the airfield, or cleaning offices for German officials. In October and November 1941, small suburban communities were incorporated into the city and an additional five thousand Jews living in these places (many of them were Jews, previously expelled from the city) were forced into the ghetto (Sinnreich et al. forthcoming).

Even though the ghetto was crowded, food was in short supply and living conditions

⁴⁷ It is instructive here to recall the fate of the chairs of the “Russian” and “German” Minsk ghetto Judenrats, who were also arrested for allegedly trying to bribe a German official and lost their lives—Mushkin was executed, and Frank (the Head of the German Jews Judenrat, not to be confused with Hans Frank) beaten to death and died after several days.

⁴⁸ The sole exception was the *Pod Orlem* (Under the Eagle) pharmacy, the only non-Jewish business in the ghetto.

were harsh and humiliating, Kraków Jews enjoyed relative safety until the summer of 1942. The first mass deportation to the Bełżec death camp took place in June 1942 following the registration of the ghetto Jews and the distribution of ID cards to those who were considered useful workers. The lucky bearers of the ID cards (*Kennkarten*) were allowed to stay in the ghetto; others (approximately seven thousand) were deported. According to the Nazi authorities, the deportees were sent to a labor camp in Ukraine and it took some time for the Kraków Jews to discover what the “deportation to the East” meant in practice. A week after the first deportation, a new roundup took place in the ghetto. During this roundup, Rosenzweig refused to carry out German orders and as a result was dismissed, replaced by a much more malleable Dawid Gutter, and sent with his family to the death camp. The next major deportation Aktion took place on October 28, 1942, when at least six thousand Jews were sent to their deaths, and another six hundred were killed on the spot. Following this Aktion, the ghetto was reduced in size and subsequently divided into two sections: Ghetto A for those who were able to work and Ghetto B for those who were not. The final liquidation of the Kraków ghetto began on March 13, 1943. The able-bodied from Ghetto A, at least eight thousand people, were marched to the Płaszów labor camp. The remaining Jews were either murdered in the ghetto or transported to Auschwitz, where all but 15 men and 26 women were sent straight to the gas chambers (Sinnreich et al. forthcoming).

The Płaszów camp, established in 1942 under the authority of the SS, was originally a forced-labor camp. It was located on the site of the old Jewish cemetery, and Jewish gravestones were used as construction materials. Later during the war Płaszów became a concentration camp where thousands of inmates (mainly Kraków Jews) were worked to death. The camp inmates were employed in several workshops and factories, and some of them, like Schindler’s Emalia

factory, were actually located outside the camp. Płaszów was commanded by the SS officer Amon Göth, who took special pleasure in personally killing the inmates on a daily basis, often for the minor offenses or for no reason at all, and was considered a sadistic monster even compared to his SS counterparts. Towards the end of the war Göth was imprisoned by the German authorities for embezzlement, and after the German defeat was put on trial and executed. In 1944 following the rapid Soviet advance, the camp was dismantled and the prisoners were transferred to other concentration camps or murdered in Auschwitz. More than one thousand Jews were rescued by Oscar Schindler, who transferred his Jewish employees and some additional camp inmates to Brännlitz (currently Brněnec in the Czech Republic), where the group stayed until the liberation in May 1945.

Information

Information on the likelihood of survival, credible or perceived as such, played a key role in the Kraków Jews' choice of behavioral strategy from the very beginning of the war. As mentioned earlier, the city was swamped with Jewish refugees from Germany who were more than willing to share the stories of the Nazi anti-Jewish measures with anyone who cared to listen. In addition, unlike the Jews of Minsk, who knew only what the Soviet government told them, the population of Kraków had access to external sources of information, and no less important—the linguistic skills to understand this information. Thus, in addition to conversations with the refugees, many people in the city, especially those who spoke German at home or were schooled during the Austro-Hungarian period, carefully monitored German radio. Some, such as Leopold P., David R., and Frederic B. even went as far as listening to Hitler's speeches (HVT-433; HVT-1047; HVT-2016). Therefore, it is hardly surprising that when the war started many people, first and foremost young males, decided to leave Kraków and escape to the eastern part

of the country. Undoubtedly, one of the causes for this mass exodus was a desperate call by the Polish government to all able-bodied males to flee to Eastern Poland where the Polish Army was to be reorganized after the initial defeats—but testimonies and memoirs only rarely (see, for instance, Nelken 1999) mention this government call as the reason for escape. Virtually all the Jews who fled to the east did so because they believed that the Germans were going to target young males, while the females and the children had no reason to fear for their safety.

The sources of this expectation are hard to trace. Rosalie S., David R., and Solomon S. testify that there was a rumor going around town that young Jewish males would be targeted (HVT-737; HVT-1047; HVT-1696), and Solomon S. goes even further, saying that the rumor was that the males will be in fact used as human shields by the Germans. Because people who cited this rumor were of different ages when the war started, lived in different parts of the city and belonged to different social strata, it is safe to conclude that the majority of the Kraków Jews (if not all of them) were exposed to it. Thus, it is not so surprising that many people tried to flee the city, as civilians usually do during armed conflict. What is more surprising is that there were people who opted to stay put.

While some of those who preferred to stay in Kraków cite purely material or logistical reasons for their decision, many say that their behavior was shaped by their prior experiences with the Germans. The closer their relations with Germans, the less likely Jews were to escape. On September 4, the German Army Commander, General Walther von Brauchitsch promised in a public speech that Polish Jews had no reason to fear for their fate; on September 11 posters were hung all over Kraków that were signed by von Brauchitsch, which assured the population that German conduct would be in accordance with international law (Peled 1989). While the

whole population of the city was exposed to these announcements, some people had more reason to believe their veracity.

Quite typical in this regard is the story of Luna K., whose father was an officer in the Austrian army during WWI and had strong pro-German sympathies. “[He felt] a tremendous affinity to Austria,” recalled Luna K. The family exposure to German culture went beyond her father’s military service in that many of her relatives also studied in Germany. Furthermore, her father disliked the Jewish expellees from Germany and claimed it was Germany’s sovereign right to expel Polish Jews who lived there. When the German army occupied Kraków, a high-ranking German officer came to visit the family—this was Luna K.’s father best friend from WWI. After this visit, the father told Luna K. that “all the [horror] stories about the Germans are just propaganda” (HVT-1095). A similar story is told by Leon K., who remembered his life under Austrian rule as peaceful and pleasant, and the Germans as “nice and cultured,” much better than the Poles. Leon K.’s family was aware of the persecution of the Jews in Germany, but dismissed them as isolated actions of a bunch of hoodlums. “In a way, [the parents] were happy” when German troops occupied the city (HVT-3106).

In the family of Menachem S., German was the first language. When the war started, it was possible for them to escape, but his grandfather decided that the family would not leave Kraków. The grandfather’s rationale was that he knew the Germans his whole life, and considered them “the best people in the world.” For him, all the rumors about the anticipated German atrocities were just that—rumors (HVT-152). For William S., Germany was “the door to culture,” and he knew that the Germans are “the smartest people, the cleanest people in the world,” so he refused to leave Kraków (HVT-2397). In the family of Mietek Pemper, whose father and uncle fought in the Austrian army, the Germans were referred to as “honest

Michels,”⁴⁹ and Hitler was considered an aberration that would soon be over. When the refugees from Germany tried to convince him to get out of Poland, because Hitler was going to attack the country, he viewed such prognoses as “panicky exaggerations” (Pemper 2008). “Germans are civilized people. If they conquer Poland, how bad can it be?” explained Sonia W.’s mother regarding her decision not to flee Kraków (HVT-1430).

A similar logic guided the behavior of the family of Ada A., who was a granddaughter of an Austrian army captain. By the time of the German invasion, her grandfather was already dead, but her grandmother was still with the family, and convinced the relatives not to escape “because in WWI only the men were affected; this all does not concern us, children and women.” When German soldiers came to search for valuables in her apartment, she expected them to salute the portrait of Ada’s grandfather in the Austrian uniform and kiss her hand, and was genuinely surprised when this did not happen. “And little by little, we understood that grandma was not right, it is not like WWI, it is a different kind of a war” (HVT-1546). The family of Rosalyn O. was also unprepared for the changing nature of warfare. Rosalyn’s father, an officer in the Polish Army, was taken prisoner by the Germans in 1939. Knowing that as a wife of an imprisoned officer she was protected by the Geneva Convention, Rosalyn’s mother did not hide and did not try to get a job. She was deported to Belżec and gassed. The father of Alexander A., also a Polish army officer, was a POW. During a selection in the ghetto, Alexander’s mother showed the relevant parts of the Geneva Convention to the SS officer who conducted the selection. The officer hit Alexander’s mother, who was eventually deported to the death camp (HVT-945; HVT-3642).

⁴⁹ Here, “Michel” is just a generic term used to describe an average German.

Reena F. cites her grandparents' experiences during the WWI as the main reason for the family behavior during the first days of the WWII. The grandparents, recalled Reena F., always talked about WWI and about Reena F.'s uncle, who was killed fighting in the Austrian Army. Based on these past experiences, the family's baseline assumption was that there would be little food, but people would survive (HVT-1118). David R.'s father also looked back to the WWI and did not believe that the Germans were capable of killing people on a massive scale. When David's brother nonetheless escaped to Eastern Poland, the father did not prevent him from coming back (and possibly even suggested to him to come back) to the Nazi-occupied Kraków (HVT-1047). Elsa D. also reasoned that the war in 1939 would be like the war in 1914, and expected long and painful trench warfare around major cities. Thus, while most Jews escaped to Lwów in Eastern Poland, she chose to flee to the countryside.

Overall, however, unlike in Minsk, where the Jews were almost completely cut off from any reliable sources of information and therefore did not take any steps to escape until it was too late, in Kraków, the situation was very different. Only few a people believed that the Polish military with its heavy reliance on infantry and cavalry would be a match to German panzers. For example, Henry S. admitted that the German army looked very different from what he imagined. Unlike the Polish military, it was well organized and modern. He said, "When we saw the Germans we knew the war will be lost because Poland fought a medieval war" (HVT-3380). It was clearly understood by most that the only way to stop the German rapid advance was immediate French and British intervention on behalf of Poland. "England and France both took pity on us and declared war against Germany. Perhaps this really will be over soon" (Nelken 1999). A rumor that the British and French took over the city and were defending it also

prompted some not to leave Kraków (HVT-429). When people realized that the soldiers in unknown uniforms are actually Germans, it was already too late to escape.

The value of information did not diminish when things settled down after the initial period of turmoil and uncertainty. Unfortunately, reliable information was very hard to come by, and therefore during the first months of the German occupation the incipient underground focused mainly on transcribing and distributing the BBC broadcasts (Pemper 2008; Peleg and Ben-Tsvi 1987). When Meir B. and his friend got together in the ghetto they immediately discussed what they heard on the BBC. Yet, the underground leaflets and transcripts of the BBC broadcasts, sometimes called *gazetki* (little newspapers) could reach only a limited number of Krakówites. The majority had to rely on rumors. “Everything was from rumors,” recalled Moshe B. (HVT-1832). “We were chasing desperately after any news, we drank thirstily any piece of information from secret broadcasts or from the underground press, and even from the official Polish language newspapers, which we called ‘the abominable press’,” described the situation Mordechai Ben-Tsvi (Peleg and Ben-Tsvi 1987). Later during the war, the information on the German defeats was what kept many people going and helped Jews to continue to cope with the situation and not to lose the will to survive. “Any half mile of [Russian advance] was like music to our ears. It gave us hope that we would be eventually liberated,” recalled Henry S. (HVT-3380). “Every day there were discussions about the [General Governor] Frank’s latest speech or the current war communiques; from these observations chances of survival were evaluated” (Pankiewicz 1987). Finally, information, even if horrific and untrue, sometimes strengthened peoples’ resolve and willingness to carry on no matter what. The best example of this phenomenon is the story of Ida L., who recalls occasionally receiving soap in her food rations in the ghetto. The soap, however, looked strange and left white marks on her skin. Later, says Ida

L., she discovered that this soap was produced from Jews' body fat. The realization of such horrors strengthened her resolve to survive to tell the story (HVT-2461). The sad and ironic twist to this story is that scholars of the Holocaust currently agree that the production of soap from Jewish fat is a myth, a rumor that originated in the death camps. Yet, this horrific rumor did eventually help Ida L. to survive.

Information sometimes was also crucial for changing behavioral strategies. Leon K.'s parents' happiness with the German occupation of the city ended immediately after his father, together with some other prominent Jews, was sent to a camp. Even though the family did not suffer in the ghetto because Leon's father had left them "plenty of money," his arrest prompted Leon K. to try to smuggle his family to Hungary (HVT-3106). Ludwig B. had a relative in the underground, who informed the family that the ghetto was going to be liquidated. Immediately after receiving this information Ludwig's mother arranged for heavy-duty wire-cutters, cut the barbed wire and escaped. The family hid until the city was liberated by the Red Army and survived. Heszek Bauminger, who managed to smuggle himself to Kraków after spending some time in the German-occupied Eastern Ukraine and witnessing the mass killing of Jews by the German mobile killing units, was able to use this information to mobilize his friends in the still safe Kraków to organize an underground resistance organization.

The importance of information can be also clearly seen when we analyze the behavior of the Kraków ghetto inmates during the deportations to death camps. Initially, argue the survivors, no one knew what the term "deportation to the East" meant, and the German authorities invested considerable effort in spreading rumors, mainly through their Jewish collaborators, that the deportees were being sent to Ukraine, where they would work in labor camps and agriculture. "No one imagined that those who were deported were being killed," recalled Henry T. (HVT-

1703). “We knew that Auschwitz was a *concentration* camp [rather than death camp], but what was going there we had no idea,” claimed Solomon S. (HVT-1696). Ida L. believed that Auschwitz was “a special camp for older people.” (HVT-2461) Regina L., as most other Jews in the ghetto, believed that she was being sent to a labor camp in Ukraine, and worried more about her family members who stayed nearby Kraków, hidden with a Polish peasant, then about her own fate. Yet, prior to boarding the train, Regina was told by a Ukrainian guard that she does not need new shoes and water because she is going “straight to the oven.” Regina and her sister jumped off the train and survived (HVT-1786). In her case, it was new and unexpected information, received from a person who certainly did not plan to help her, which prompted a change in her choice of strategy.

Only later on did the news about the real nature of “deportation” start trickling into the ghetto. Many tried to get information from non-Jewish friends and Polish railroad workers. Frederic B. even hired a Polish woman to follow the trains with the deportees. The woman came back and reported that the trains enter the forest and then all the traces of the people who rode them disappear (HVT-2016). Bruno (Bronisław) Shatyn heard a similar story from the Polish railroad workers he knew—the trains enter a station, the German crew takes over the train and drives it to unknown destination, to which the Polish railroad men are not allowed. The cars return empty and thoroughly cleaned (Shatyn 1985). The Polish peasants in the area reported the existence of a huge crematorium and a strong smell of burning flesh in the air. Yet, even then many people in the ghetto tried to convince themselves that the stories of mass killings not true and a rumor that there were secret armament factories operating in the forest, to which the trains with Jews were bound, circulated in the ghetto (HVT-1703). The final confirmation came from Dr. Brachner, a Kraków dentist, who hid in the Bełżec camp latrine, filled with human

excrement, and after several days managed to escape the camp and make his way back to the ghetto (Crowe 2004).

After the first wave of deportations, their true meaning was very hard to disguise, and this prompted many Jews to secure their existence in the ghetto by finding employment, building hideouts, or escaping. Ida L. recalls that she knew perfectly well that if deported, she would have no chance, so she escaped to the Płaszów labor camp which seemed to provide its inmates with better long-term survival chances. That the Kraków Jews eventually learned the true meaning of deportations is best exemplified by the story of the Schindler Jews transferred from Płaszów to Brännlitz. While the males were taken directly to the new camp, the females were sent first to Auschwitz for registration and delousing. Pushed into the showers, the women were confident that they are going to be gassed. “But instead of gas, there was water!” recalled Edith W. about her sense of fear and subsequent relief (HVT-2956).

Unlike in Minsk, where most killings were conducted locally, only a few miles from the ghetto, in Kraków the realization of the German genocidal plans came with a delay and the precise data regarding German policies and intentions was much harder to come by. The German authorities were less than forthcoming about their long term plans and employed a large network of paid Jewish agents, who spread false rumors and tried to convince Jews that they didn’t have to fear for their fate. On the ground, the initial signals were conflicting as well. Whereas many Germans were cruel, most soldiers and officers were polite and not violent. Miriam Peleg recalled that the first group of the Wehrmacht soldiers she encountered were nice and polite, so even the initial actions of the “blacks” (the SS) could not shatter the Jewish optimists’ illusions about their security under the new regime (Peleg and Ben-Tsvi 1987). Richard Stern was beaten by some SS men, but immediately after that was given a ride by a group of rather friendly

German soldiers (Stern 1995). Else D. had a German tenant in their apartment who constantly told the family that the German authorities are not going after Jews like Else D. and her mother, and that they were going only after “other Jews.” Else D.’s family did not really know who these “other Jews” were, but knowing that they were not among them made the family to feel more secure (HVT-3036).

Collaboration

In the Kraków ghetto, the main public collaboration bodies were the Jewish Council (Judenrat), which was later replaced by the Jewish Commissariat, and the Jewish Order Service (*Ordnungsdienst*), generally known as the Jewish Police. The Judenrat was established by the Nazi authorities to carry out German orders and policies, such as the registration of Jews in the ghetto, the confiscation of Jewish property requested by the Nazis, the taxation of the Jewish population, and provision to the Germans of Jewish forced labor detachments. The Jewish Police were tasked with keeping public order in the ghetto, but at the later stages also assisted the German authorities by spying on other Jews, betraying those planning to escape the ghetto, and hunting down the ghetto underground. In addition, Jews also served in the Civil Affairs Unit, which worked closely with the Nazi political police; the German Secret Services also had a network of paid Jewish informers inside the ghetto. I classify the leadership of the Judenrat and the Jewish Police as engaging in public collaboration, while individual informers and the Jewish Police rank and file were private collaborators.

In the previous chapters I argued that people with previous political experience would be overrepresented among the public collaborators. In the case of Minsk, this prediction turned out to be largely incorrect mainly because the only politically active people among the Minsk Jews were the communists, and for the German authorities it was unimaginable to appoint communists

to leadership roles. In Kraków, the Jews had a vibrant multi-party political scene, and therefore the city is a better case to test my prediction, but as I will demonstrate, distinctively local factors also affected the patterns of collaboration in Kraków.

After the German troops occupied Kraków on September 6, the remaining Polish city authorities called prominent Jewish citizens to volunteer for the Judenrat, and on September 17 it was announced that an interim Jewish Council was established, headed by Prof. Marek Bieberstein and his deputy, Dr. Wilhelm Goldblat. The list of the Judenrat members was drafted by the leading figures in the Jewish community and later on approved by the German authorities (Weiss 1973). However, the situation in Kraków was complicated by the fact that due to the city's importance in Polish political life, many Jewish politicians from Kraków also held important national level positions and therefore went into exile together with the Polish government. Such was the case of the leader of Kraków Zionists (which were the dominant political force among the city Jews), Ignacy Schwarzbart, who spent the war years as one of the two Jewish members of the Polish National Council in London. Some other politicians, fearing that they would be the first to be targeted by the Germans, escaped to Eastern Poland. Yet, even though many leaders had escaped, and the list of the Judenrat members should have been created virtually from scratch, the data collected by Yael Peled indicates that at least eight out of the initial twenty four Judenrat members were active in Jewish political and social life. For ten out of twenty-four members we can clearly establish their political affiliation, meaning that these people's political past and present were known to all. Out of these ten, eight were active in various Zionist parties. Because we do not have reliable data on all the Judenrat members, it is very likely that the actual proportion of the politically active people was in fact higher. Here it would be also important to note that in Kraków, unlike many other places, the allocation of seats

in the Jewish Council was *not* based on party quotas—a situation which would make the claim that politically active people tended to be overrepresented in Jewish Councils trivial and lacking any analytical value (Peled 1989).⁵⁰ As for Prof. Bieberstein, the Judenrat chair, not much data is available on him, but according to some sources he was a member of the (elected) Jewish Community Council before WWII (Peled 1989).

Prof. Bieberstein's tenure as the Judenrat chair was rather short—as mentioned previously, during the expulsion of Jews from the city he attempted to bribe German officials to increase the number of Jews permitted to stay in the city, but was arrested and sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment. Bieberstein was replaced by Artur Rosenzweig, a lawyer, and the former secretary of the Kraków city bar. During the deportation Aktion of June 1942, Rosenzweig failed to provide the Germans with the expected number of deportees, and paid for this act of insubordination with his life. The Jewish Council was dissolved and replaced by the Commissariat, headed by Dawid Gutter.

The difference between the two bodies was more than simply terminological. While the Judenrat was initially selected by the Jews and did its best to represent the Jewish population of Kraków and to protect their interests, the Commissariat was directly appointed by the Nazi security services and saw its main role as strictly obeying the German orders no matter what. From the initial twenty four Judenrat members, the Commissariat membership was reduced to seven, but authority was concentrated in the hands of Gutter, who before WWII was a traveling salesman from the city of Tarnów, about fifty miles from Kraków.⁵¹ We do not have any data on Gutter's pre-war political activism or preferences. The pharmacist Tadeusz Pankiewicz, the owner of the only non-Jewish business that was allowed to operate in the ghetto, recalls a

⁵⁰ Detailed information on the Judenrat members on which data is available can be found in Peled (1989).

⁵¹ According to other sources he was originally from Silesia.

conversation with Wilhelm Kunde, one of the SS officers in charge of the ghetto, in which Kunde explained that Gutter was appointed for purely practical and psychological reasons. “[Dr. Rosenzweig] was not a dependable man; he did not care to and could not work like ... Gutter” (Pankiewicz 1987). It seems that the Germans were not disappointed by the new Kommissar, who did not only obediently follow their orders, but also tried to copy the Germans in his external appearance. Thus, Gutter wore a dark gray uniform with a hat that resembled that of the Gestapo men, and an armband, on which it was written in Gothic letters: “*SS- und Polizeiführer im Distrikt Krakau—Distriktjudenrat*” [The Office of SS- and Police Chief in District Krakau—the District Judenrat] implying that Gutter saw his position and authority as stemming from that of the District SS and Police Chief and that he considered himself to be in charge of all the Jews in the Distrikt Krakau. Gutter’s personal secretary was Dr. Samuel Streimer, who before the war was a diplomat in the Polish Embassy in Berlin. Both men were considered by the Kraków Jews as smart, obedient to the Germans, and corrupt.

What is interesting about the Kraków ghetto survivors’ testimonies and memoirs is an almost complete absence of references to or discussions of the Judenrat. This neglect is perfectly understandable simply because the Judenrat—even if it tried to assist the ghetto Jews by organizing medical services, social welfare, and employment opportunities—was the weaker of the two main governing bodies in the ghetto. “The ghetto was in the hands of the so-called Jewish militia,” as Frederic B. (HVT-2016) summarized the situation. “The ghetto was administered by the Jewish police, it was like a *kehile*,”⁵² recalled Henry T. (HVT-1703).

The Kraków ghetto Order Service was initially organized under the auspices of the Judenrat, but soon became the most powerful institution in the ghetto. Initially the Jewish Police

⁵² “*Kehile*” was the Jewish religious community in the interwar Poland, which was responsible for providing the Jewish citizens of the locality with essential religious and social services.

consisted of forty servicemen, the vast majority of whom were unpaid volunteers who lived off the business opportunities (mainly bribes and smuggling) made possible by their status and connections. In December 1940, however, the Jewish Police already had 130 servicemen, many of whom were members of the intelligentsia, who lost their pre-war income sources after the banning of Jews from most professions (Weiss 1973). The organization was headed by Symche Spira, a religious, impoverished glazier. Lacking any formal education, he spoke both Polish and German poorly, but compensated for his lack of linguistic and intellectual skills with zealous obedience to the Germans. Spira started his career in the ghetto as a low-level clerk in the Judenrat, and when the Jewish police force was organized, applied to be transferred to the unit. He was immediately liked by the German authorities and was quickly promoted. According to Kunde, “the selection was made for psychological reasons. If [the Jewish Police chief] position were filled by an intelligent, well-educated man, coming from a different social strata, he would be lost and completely out of place. Instead of working with us [the Germans] he would only make our job more difficult” (Pankiewicz 1987).

Various sources confirm Spira’s image as unintelligent, uneducated, and psychologically unstable, but a very proud and determined person who did not speak proper Polish or German, but was obsessed with external signs of power and status. A constant source of mockery was Spira’s white uniform that made him look like “a dictator of some South Sea Republic” (HVT-2016). “Probably an admiral in the German Navy did not have as much gold on his head as he had,” joked Ludwig B. (HVT-2303). “He dressed himself in a white uniform with gold insignias—an imitation of Herman Goering—and looking like a circus clown ran around the streets yelling things which nobody could understand” (Staner 1999). According to some sources, Spira was promised the position of the Tel Aviv police chief after Germany occupied

the city. Thus, every morning Spira rushed to hear the most recent updates about the North African theatre. Indeed, in Kraków the relations between the German authorities and the Jewish Police were closer than in most ghettos. When Spira married off his daughter to a Jewish Police serviceman, SS and Gestapo officers in charge of the ghetto took part in the ceremony. On the one side of the table were the uniformed German officers; on the other were renowned Talmudic scholars in traditional Jewish garb. The transformation that the Spira family underwent after their swift rise to power was noted by many. After being incarcerated in the Prokocim labor camp, Iaakov W. succeeded in escaping back to the ghetto, but the Jewish Police were not willing to let him in. Finally, Iaakov saw one of his childhood best friends in a Police uniform, and begged for help. The friend was Symche Spira's son who refused to even talk to Iaakov. "I couldn't understand that," admitted Iaakov W., "We grew up together, kindergarten together, school together, and now he doesn't talk [to me]" (HVT-3249).

The Jewish police were widely resented in the ghetto. They were "very good helpers to the Germans. Not so good to us, Jews, but very good helpers to the Germans," recalled Aneta W. (HVT-2696). Edward S. went even further, claiming that in some respects the Jewish Police were worse than the Germans (HVT-1876). In Płaszów "we were beaten from three sides: from the Germans, from work, and from the Jewish police," complained Max H. (HVT-2913). According to another Płaszów inmate, it would have been better if Germans, as cruel as they were, administered the punishment (usually beatings) rather than members of the Jewish police (HVT-1832).

In addition to keeping public order in the ghetto, the Jewish Police focused on uncovering people who tried to escape the ghetto, hunting down those who smuggled food into the ghetto, and fighting the Jewish underground. "If you saw in the movies people jumping from roof to

roof—I did that. I jumped from building to building,” recalled Joseph B. his attempt to escape from the Jewish Police people who tried to catch him for smuggling food into the ghetto (HVT-2832). The Jewish Police also arrested one of the leaders of the ghetto underground, Aharon (Dolek) Liebiskind, but he was able to scare them away and escape after showing his gun—in Kraków, as in other ghettos, the Jewish Police did not carry weapons.

Numerous sources agree that membership in the Jewish Police carried a social stigma. Erna R.’s father joined the police because he thought it would be the best way to provide for this family, but was unable to force himself to stay in the service (HVT-1381). Ida L.’s brother-in-law joined the Jewish Police but he resigned after two days when realized what his duties entailed (HVT-2461). Sonia W. also had a brother-in-law who contemplated joining the police, but his fiancée, Sonia’s sister, refused to let him join, even though by joining he could temporarily helped his parents (HVT-1430). William S. was asked to join the police, but refused because in the police “you had to be nasty to other people, and I couldn’t do that” (HVT-2397).

In addition to the common servicemen, the Jewish Police had its political police, the so-called Department of Civil Affairs (*Zivilabteilung*), a small, seven-man strong unit directly connected to the Gestapo. Most, if not all of these people were before the war professional informers, and they simply continued their professional occupation under the new rulers. Finally, the Gestapo also employed a wide network of informers, whose responsibility was to spy on the ghetto Jews, to provide the German security services with the information they sought, and to uncover hiding Jews during and in between deportations.⁵³ One of these people was Danek Redlich. When the war started, Redlich escaped to the East, where he made a living as an informer for the Soviet NKVD. When Germany invaded the USSR he returned to Kraków and

⁵³ For a (most probably incomplete) list of informers see Pankiewicz (1987, 37).

started working for the Gestapo. After the war, he continued doing what he did best, informing on regime enemies to the Communist political police (Taubenschlag 1998).

How the presence of such informers affected the Kraków Jews can be learned from the story of Erna H., whose chances of hiding among the Poles were higher than average. She had false documents, spoke flawless Polish, and because she happened to attend Catholic school, knew religious rituals and prayers. Furthermore, the priest in the school she attended was the secretary of the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Sapieha, and had the connections and the willingness to hide Erna in a convent. The only thing that stood between Erna and successful evasion of the Nazi persecution was Stefania Brandstatter, a Jewish female informer who combed the monasteries searching for hiding Jews. Eventually, Erna H. had to abandon the idea (HVT-2914).

Why did these Jews collaborate with Germans? Hardly anyone did so for ideological reasons—there were no Nazis among the Jewish collaborators. For a tiny minority of professional informers, this was precisely what they did for a living before the Holocaust. But for the vast majority, including Spira and Gutter, their key motivation was the belief that collaboration increased the chances of survival. “Not infrequently one could hear Spira brag: ‘Nobody else but Spira will survive the war; everybody else will perish, but Spira will live’” (Pankiewicz 1987). “Some [Jewish Police members] were promised survival in exchange for devoted service,” notes Chwalba (Chwalba 2011). These people thought that if they collaborated and faithfully followed orders they and their families would survive, point out Henry T. and Moshe B. (HVT-1703; HVT-1832). “It is hard to explain what hunger, poverty and the will to live can do to people,” argued William S. (HVT-2397). The vast majority of these people did not survive, though. Some were killed because they knew too much, others perished when their

services became unnecessary, and several of the most notorious informers were hunted down by the underground. Trying to secure personal survival, these people took a part in the destruction of their own community. At the end of the day, they failed.

Unlike in the Minsk ghetto, in Kraków we do not have virtually any evidence of affairs and sexual relations between the German soldiers and officials and Jewish females.⁵⁴ This is even more surprising given that many Jews in the city, young and attractive females included, were fluent in German, and that until 1941 there was no ghetto in the city and Jews and Germans had numerous opportunities to meet one another on the street or in a workplace. The most likely explanation for this situation is that Kraków, the General Government capital, was swarming with police and security service agents, which made violations of the racial purity laws substantially harder, and punishment for such a violation much more likely. Furthermore, the city was located not far away from Germany proper, and had a large and thriving German community and therefore more compatriots to socialize with. In Minsk, on the other hand, the German community was quite small, and consisted almost exclusively of males, so if a German soldier or official wanted to socialize or have a sexual affair with a woman who spoke the same language, Jewish females were the most likely (if not the only) choice.

Compliance

For the Kraków Jews, very little evidence can be found that they adopted compliance as survival strategy after the initial period of the German occupation when the anti-Jewish measures, such as looting and beating, could have been viewed as temporary excesses. Still, this should not mean that people who chose compliance did not exist at all. One possible reason for

⁵⁴ Some sources do mention an affection of the Płaszów camp SS NCO towards a female Jewish inmate, though I could find no evidence of sexual relations between the two. When Göth learned about this, he ordered the guard to kill the woman. The guard complied.

the lack of data on compliance is selection bias—people who chose compliance had virtually no chances of survival, unless they changed their behavioral strategy.

Some people relied on the history of Jewish survival throughout centuries, anti-Semitic violence and discrimination notwithstanding. When the ghetto was established, Else D. and her family did not try to escape or hide. “We were optimistic—what else can [the Germans] do? Jews lived before in ghettos” (HVT-3036). Here it should be recalled that a ghetto existed in Kraków for centuries and was officially abolished only in 1867, so the word itself did not evoke especially negative connotations. Jews complied with similar regulations in previous centuries, and there was little reason not to do it again.

There were also Jews in the city who believed that the German authorities had a legitimate right to issue orders, and these orders ought to be obeyed by the subjected population. “I said—we lost the war, the conqueror has the right,” recalled Max H. (HVT-2913). Later, however, as I will demonstrate in the next section, Max H. adopted a very proactive behavior that helped him and his wife survive even though Max H. did not have a highly needed profession or personal connections.

Some followed the rules because they feared the consequences of disobedience or regarded any attempts to escape or work around the rules impossible. Pearl Benisch’s father did not escape Kraków when Germany invaded Poland and did not allow Pearl’s brother to flee to the east. “You cannot outrun the Wehrmacht,” he claimed (Benisch 1991). Others believed that to stay put and not engage in risky behavior was the wisest strategy. Maria B. asked her father why they didn’t escape even though they had the money to do so. “I went through WWI, and then had to start from the beginning. I am not going to do that again,” her father’s replied (HVT-2879).

When the family of Erna R. moved to the ghetto, she asked her grandfather: “what are we going to do in the ghetto?” Her grandfather’s reply was: “We can always pray” (HVT-1381). Julian M. recalls how one day in Płaszów the Jews were divided into two groups. His friend reached a decision that the second group was better, and tried to convince Julian to switch to the other group. Eventually, the friend transferred to this second group, but Julian M. refused to request a transfer and stayed in a group to which the Germans assigned him. “What is in the book of life for me, it will be,” he thought (HVT-890). Miriam H. was urged by her sister to escape, but refused because she decided that she “will experience what the children and the old people are experiencing” (HVT-1737).

Sonia W. recalls an Aktion that took place during the Jewish High Holidays. “The whole ghetto knew that there was going to be a big transport. It was Yom Kippur. People fasted, people prayed.” It can be argued, however, that what from our perspective can be seen as compliance (building hideouts might have been a more prudent strategy than fasting), from the point of view of the people who prayed, they were not engaging in compliant behavior. Fasting and prayers, unfortunately, failed to save the Jews from deportation. “[The Aktion] happened anyway. And after that most people I knew stopped fasting” (HVT-1430).

Irene F. tried to convince her parents to get false papers. Her father, a lawyer who worked for many years in Germany, objected, and said she was crazy. Her parents, according to Irene F., were very legalistic (HVT-947), and such blatant a violation of the laws was inconceivable for them. Overall, however, after the first wave of anti-Jewish measures, and especially after the creation of the ghetto, in which living conditions were harsh, compliance stopped being an attractive strategy. Coping and evasion became the norm.

Coping

The Jews could not be lions because they did not have an army, but they had to be “foxes on the lookout for hidden opportunities ... What we had to do is to save as many lives as possible,” Mietek Pemper wrote in his memoir (Pemper 2008). Pemper was one of the key figures in the Schindler’s list saga. His words summarize quite well the most common behavior strategy of the Kraków Jews, namely coping. In this section, I discuss the coping strategies adopted by the Kraków Jews and demonstrate that they were also often shaped by pre-Holocaust ties and experiences. I will also show that while people with higher levels of integration into Polish society had an advantage when it came to evasion, coping with German persecution inside the ghetto was easier for people who before the war had closer connections with fellow Jews.

Like in other ghettos, coping was also a semi-official policy of the Jewish Council, which organized social welfare and essential public and community services inside the ghetto, such as cleaning and garbage pickup, orphanages, soup kitchens for people who had little to no ability to provide for themselves (there were also special soup kitchens for the Jewish intelligentsia, which suffered enormously from the expulsion of Jews from the professions), old people homes, and medical services, including hospitals. The Judenrat leadership also believed it was best to prolong ghetto existence by making the ghetto economically useful and valuable for the Germans. “We have only one way to save ourselves, and this way is work,” claimed the ghetto Kommissar Gutter (Peled 1989). In Płaszów, Mietek Pemper, the proactive and dexterous Jewish secretary of the camp commander, went to great lengths to convince his boss to switch the camp production from textiles, which were an important, but dispensable contribution to the German war effort, to armaments, which were a crucial contribution, and thus decreased the likelihood of the camp’s liquidation. In this, the Kraków ghetto was not different from most other ghettos which subscribed to the “salvation through work” philosophy. This strategy was eventually

doomed to failure, but in Kraków it allowed more than a thousand Jews to survive until the moment they were taken under the Schindler's wing and survived the war. Other ghettos did not have their Schindler, alas.

On the individual level, coping meant first and foremost securing two essential things—work and food. In this Kraków differed somewhat from the Minsk ghetto, where mass shootings started almost immediately after the German occupation of the town, and therefore hideouts were also an essential part of a successful coping. There were hideouts in the Kraków ghetto, but they appeared only relatively late and were not that common. In this regard, Kraków was much closer to the Białystok ghetto, which will be discussed in the next chapter, than to Minsk. Unlike the Belorussian ghetto, which was arguably the most horrible of all the ghettos in the East (Barkai 1989), living conditions for the majority of the city's Jewish population were quite tolerable, at least until the deportation. "The first month in the ghetto we felt a certain amount of relaxation because the immediate danger had passed," recalled Helen R. (HVT-2236). The ghetto had a café, a cabaret, and a stand-up comedy show. There was a semblance of normal life (HVT-2016).

"We are healthy and have enough to eat. I believe that we will survive. ... We do eat almost like before the war," wrote Dola Stark to her brother in December 1940 (Browning et al. 2007). Some families even had enough food to keep pets in the ghetto (Gross 1986; Pankiewicz 1987), something completely unimaginable in Warsaw or Minsk where even the rats were eaten. "Initially life was not that bad at all ... It was difficult, but I never went hungry," recalled Alexander A. (HVT-3642). Tushia Z., on the other hand, recalls being constantly hungry. The reason was that her father did not have a job. The father, a well-known journalist, lost his source of income and was ill-suited for physical labor. Even though Tushia was employed, her salary was insufficient to support the entire family (HVT-3175). Furthermore, having a job often could

hardly help one to obtain food, because the wages were extremely low, the official food rations were insufficient, and the black market prices extremely high. “The [official] rations were not enough to live on, but too large to [make one] die,” recalled Henry E. (HVT-1250). “It was a bit too much to die but not enough to really live,” echoed Mieczyslaw Staner (Staner 1999). The main value of employment was that it was considered the best insurance policy against expulsion during the first period of the German occupation and deportation to the death camp after 1942. “You had to have a job. If you tell the Germans that you don’t have a job, they either kill you, or send you away,” argued Victor L. (HVT-2928).

Not everyone could find a job, however. Some were simply too young or too old, others did not have the necessary skills. The Kraków Jews came up with several ways to overcome this problem. One such way was to simply have a fake work card (HVT-2928). Another was to try to increase or decrease one’s age. The mother of Aneta W. knew that people who did not work would not survive, so she “raised” Aneta’s age and arranged for her to work in her workplace. To make Aneta look taller, and therefore more fit for work, her mother also made Aneta wear a coat with a high hood (HVT-2696). Reena F. falsified her birth certificate to make herself older so she could work and would get a permit to stay (HVT-1118). Halina S. was told by her mother to sneak into a labor camp and say she was sixteen (HVT-2747). While young people tried to look older, old people did their best to appear younger. Dr. Ludwig Zurowski, a Polish physician, supplied Tadeusz Pankiewicz’s pharmacy with hundreds of liters of hair dying liquid. “The old and gray who were considered useless for labor and therefore most in danger of extermination became, due to the proper cosmetics, ‘*arbeitsfähig*,’ fit for work” (Pankiewicz 1987).

In special danger of expulsion and later on, deportation and killing were the members of the intelligentsia and those employed in the provision of services which became unnecessary

under the new regime. Mietek Pemper, knowing that he was physically not fit for manual labor quickly learned German stenography. Max H. was a beautician before the war, a profession that could hardly contribute much to the German war economy. Realizing that, Max took a risk of volunteering to work as barber in the epidemic hospital. As a hospital employee, he was spared deportation until the very liquidation of the ghetto, while virtually all other Jewish barbers were expelled from the city in 1940 (HVT-2913). Leopold P., a high school teacher, lied about his profession, and was allowed to stay in the ghetto (HVT-433). Victor L., who knew nothing about electricity, claimed that he was an electrician nonetheless (HVT-2928). David W. registered as a mechanic even though he had no idea what mechanics really was or what mechanics do (HVT-1246).

Henry S., who was eventually deported to from Kraków to Auschwitz, was only sixteen years old and did not have a profession. “But under such pressure the brain works miracles, so I invented a profession that would make it stupid for them to kill me: an apprentice gunsmith.” He was spared and sent to work in the weapons shop. “Of course, I had no idea what I was talking about, and many others did not have any idea as well,” he recalled. “But fortunately, there were some professional gunsmiths among us. I learned very quickly” (HVT-3380). Victor P. claimed he was an orderly because he was told that no medical students were needed in Auschwitz. Yet, after surviving the initial selection Victor P. put his knowledge and education to good use. Initially, he volunteered to work as translator for the camp registrars. He volunteered to translate from Modern Greek because he learned Ancient Greek in high school. After that he translated from Dutch because he knew German. And then from French even though he knew almost no French.⁵⁵ The quality of the translation was terrible, but Victor P. did not care because it was an

⁵⁵ His job was to translate the rules of the camps to the newly arriving prisoners’ the rules of the camp.

easy and safe job. Finally, because of his knowledge of German, and medical education, he managed to get work in the infirmary, and in Auschwitz the difference between an ordinary prisoner and one who worked in the infirmary was “greater than between Rockefeller and a bum” (HVT-2887).

Such cases were quite exceptional, however. More often than not to find employment or to improve their lot people had to rely on their pre-war ties and networks, and here relations with other Jews were more important than those with Poles. Meir B., a university student, majoring in history, applied for the necessary worker ID, claiming that he was a metal worker. The certificate had to be vetted by a German official assisted by a Jewish police man who happened to be Meir’s classmate. He was asked about different types of iron, but because his father owned a store for iron pots and kitchen utensils, Meir was able to pass the test (HVT-3199). Raymond F.’s brother-in-law served in the Jewish police, and arranged for his sister to find employment in the *Plaszów* kitchen, which was a much coveted position (HVT-1595). Iaakov W. was able to get assigned to a relatively convenient work detail because he knew Symche Spira’s family (HVT-3249). “If you knew someone who knew someone in the employment office, you were alright,” said Anna N. (HVT-588).

Another major concern was food. Edith W. had “several primary things to think about”: what she would have for dinner, what she would eat for breakfast, and how not to die (HVT-2956). For many, the only way to obtain food was from the black market. “We lived off buying and selling whatever we could find,” recalled Alexander A. (HVT-3642). David R. did not look Jewish, and had Aryan papers, so his father started sending him to different towns to work as a go-between, assisting Jews from different places in business transaction (HVT-1047). Isaak W. spoke German flawlessly, so he also worked as a go-between, connecting Jews from the ghetto

who wanted to sell their belongings with a German who was interested in buying what they had to offer (probably to resell it later) (HVT-2958). Leopold P. described his occupation as a freelance black market agent. “I was running around the ghetto, trying to smuggle food. I looked Aryan, I spoke flawless Polish, I was strong” (HVT-433). For William S. smuggling became a family business. “My mother and I talked about the best way to smuggle” (quoted in Plotkin 2005). Ida L. stole plastic from her workplace and sold it on the black market (HVT-2461). Julian M. worked in the lamp factory outside the ghetto. One of the ingredients that were used for lamp production was a certain type of poison, which Julian stole, smuggled into the ghetto and sold to people who preferred suicide over deportation. Another, more popular poison called Luminol, was very hard to get in the ghetto. “Only people with the right connections got it,” he notes (HVT-890). Victor L. sold cigarettes on the black market with the help of an SS man (HVT-2928). In addition to the black market, food could be obtained through connections. The brother of Moshe B. worked in food distribution, so he helped him with extra food from time to time (HVT-1832). Raymond F.’s sister worked in the kitchen, so the family did not starve (HVT-1595).

Finally, another major priority for many Jews was to find employment in Schindler’s factory. That Oscar Schindler took good care of his Jews was well-known in Kraków. “In Płaszów there was only one real hope [for survival]—Schindler,” claimed Henry S., who applied for employment in Schindler’s factory, but was sent to Auschwitz instead (HVT-3380). Schindler gave people hope and encouraged them, and this gave his workers the power to carry on. “Schindler was like a father and a mother,” claimed Leopold P. (HVT-433). “Schindler promised us that as long as we work for him, we will survive,” recalled Edith W. Initially, however, her friends did not believe him, for “how can you believe a German?” But Edith had

confidence in Schindler and was not disappointed (HVT-2956). Naturally, people were willing to invest considerable efforts in becoming a *Schindlerjuden*. Some used bribery, but for others social ties and pre-war connections paved the road to rescue. Marcel Goldberg, a notoriously corrupt Jewish policeman who played an important role in putting the Schindler List together was Leon K.'s schoolmate, so Leon was included on the list. According to Leon, he did not pay for that and no one was taken off the list to make a room for him. The cousin of Else D.'s husband worked in the Płaszów employment office, and arranged for his family to be on the list (HVT-3036). Goldberg was a friend of Rosalie S.'s father, so she was sent to the Schindler's camp, and "it was like heaven" (HVT-737). The brother of Roman F. was a secretary in the Płaszów camp office and succeeded in getting the family on the list. However, shortly before the camp was liquidated his brother was killed by the Germans because he knew too much. Having lost their main protector, the family was immediately taken off the list by Goldberg and Roman F. ended up in Auschwitz. Iaakov W., who spent several days in the Schindler factory sub-camp of Płaszów, described the people who were there in very negative terms. According to Iaakov W, they were people with connections (*proteksionerim*); many from the Jewish high society of Kraków. These people disliked Iaakov W. and made him feel very unwelcome there (HVT-3249).

The stories of bribes and corruption are never pleasant; especially when one's inclusion on the list more often than not means the death of someone who was not as lucky or endowed with connections or money. Yet, as I discuss in Chapter 2, coping is an *individual* survival strategy, which, as Primo Levi aptly argues, was employed in a situation that was outside the traditional moral universe and therefore cannot be treated by applying the usual yardsticks of moral judgment. "It was a war for existence, and we had to fight to fight it on both fronts –

against the Germans and against Jews in the barracks,” is how Iaakov W. summarizes the situation (HVT-3249). Jacob H. said he did not ask and did not expect anyone to help him (HVT-1078). “Everyone concentrated on his own survival,” attested Josef R. (HVT-3180). “You did not trust anybody,” admitted Miriam H. (HVT-1737). At the same time, it was almost impossible to survive without external help in critical moments, and the larger one’s support network, the easier it was to endure life in the ghetto both politically and psychologically. And psychologically, assimilated Jews suffered more in the ghetto.

For assimilated Jews, the ghetto presented an additional difficulty of the loss of a social circle of friends and acquaintances. While many social Jewish organizations, first and foremost youth movements, intensified their activities in the ghetto and provided their members with an extraordinarily rich and vibrant (even if materially poor) social life, those who did not belong to Jewish organizations before the war felt isolated. Because all Polish-language signs and public inscriptions in the ghetto had to be replaced with Hebrew, this has also added to the feeling of loss and alienation (Crowe 2004; Pankiewicz 1987).

In their long and vibrant correspondence with an uncle in the US, teenagers Genka and Lusja Wimisner do not mention any friends, and most likely they did not belong to any Jewish groups (Browning et al. 2007). Erna H. came from an assimilated family and considered herself “a very good Pole.” She found life in the ghetto strange and harsh not least because she “was not used to living among Jews.” The experiences of these young women contrast quite sharply with the accounts of people of their age who were part of Jewish organizations before the Holocaust and usually found life in the ghetto emotionally and intellectually stimulating. Moshe B. and his friends engaged in mock trials of Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* heroes (HVT-1832). Sonia W. studied Latin and philosophy and claimed that she got “one of her best educations in

the ghetto” (HVT-1430). Religion and Jewish education flourished in the ghetto (Crowe 2004). Assimilated Jews were by and large not a part of these processes. For many of them, the only possibility to socialize was to get together at Pankiewicz’s pharmacy, which became an informal social club for the Jewish educated class.

A discussion of the coping strategy would be incomplete without also mentioning the overall impact of the Nazi policies on the family structure, which was often turned upside down as a result of the external shock of occupation. After Jewish males lost their businesses and the source of income, youngsters and females became the main providers for their families. “My father became like a child. He just cried all day. I made all the decisions,” recalled William S. (HVT-2397). Reena R. found a job in a factory, but her husband remained unemployed and had to stay home to do all the cooking (HVT-1118). In an ironic twist of fate Anna N. found employment in her father’s former business, working for the new, Aryan owner. As a needed worker, she was allowed to stay in the city, while her father was expelled (HVT-588). Many families became separated. Victor L. had to bribe the guards to visit his fiancée in the camp (HVT-2928). Once Rosalie S. left Płaszów with her work detail and did not return. She and her co-workers were taken to a train station and sent to the armament factory at Skarżysko-Kamienna. She had no way to notify her husband where she was taken. “One day I came up and Rosalie was gone,” recalled William S. “I became wild, I don’t know how they didn’t kill me then... They tried to calm me down, they beat me... The next transport I saw, I ran to it because I thought they will send us to the same place [where Rosalie was]. But they sent us to Auschwitz” (HVT-2397).

Evasion

The exact number of the Kraków Jews who escaped, or tried to escape Nazi persecution is difficult to estimate, but the qualitative evidence suggests that the number of people who opted for the evasion strategy was unusually high in Kraków, probably higher than in any other place in Poland with the exception of Warsaw, where about twenty-eight thousand Jews hid outside the ghetto walls (Paulsson 2002). The reasons for this unusually high number of escapees were the proximity of the city to the border, and even more importantly, the higher levels of Jewish integration into the larger non-Jewish society than in the rest of the country.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, escape was widespread among the Kraków Jews, especially males during the first days of the WWII. Most escapees tried to reach Lwów, the other major urban center in Galicia and a home to a large, hundred-thousand-people-strong Jewish community. Unfortunately most people were outrun by the advancing German troops and forced to turn back to Kraków. Some, however, managed to reach Eastern Poland, which in the meantime was occupied by the Soviet Union. To their surprise, many found the living conditions under the Soviet regime quite harsh. “When I arrived in Lwów, the stores were almost empty... From time to time, a store would sell a half-pound of sugar per person or another such rarely available product; otherwise we could not buy anything ... [It] was much, much easier to obtain red or black Beluga caviar and dried smoked herring than it was to get bread, oil, or sugar,” recalled Malvina Graf (Graf 1989). “No food, no supplies, and only the pictures of Stalin everywhere,” recalled Al B. (HVT-2831). “Everything here in the East was alien to me, particularly the Red Army in their ungainly long coats. I was afraid of Soviet soldiers, although they sang beautifully,” wrote Halina Nelken in her diary (Nelken 1999). Celina R.’s father, a very educated man, did not like the Russians and considered them “too primitive” (HVT-3131). Stanislaw Taubenschlag, the son of the Dean of the Jagiellonian University Law School, also

escaped to Eastern Poland, where his mother's family owned one of the largest mills in the country. After the Soviet takeover, however, the mill was swiftly nationalized, and the family was left without its main source of income (Taubenschlag 1998). Victor P. was a medical student in Kraków, and he hoped to continue his education in Lwów, but was denied admission because he was not born in the territories annexed to the Soviet Union (HVT-2887).

Not surprisingly, when in 1940 the Soviet authorities announced that those who came from German-occupied Poland could register to return to their homes, numerous Jews immediately signed up to go to the German-occupied area (Graf 1989). The predicament these people had to deal with was that the Germans were less than enthusiastic to admit more Jews into territories under their control, and the Soviets viewed those who preferred German rule over the communist paradise as potential, if not actual traitors and spies. As a result, the majority of the Jewish refugees were deported to Siberia and Central Asia, where most were able to survive the war years, albeit in very harsh conditions. Some, however, were able to smuggle themselves back to Kraków. Celina R.'s grandfather "paid a fortune" to bring the family back to Kraków. "It was a big mistake, but we didn't know that yet" (HVT-3131). The mother of Aneta W., who spoke fluent German, registered as an ethnic German, seeking repatriation and managed to bring the family back to Kraków. Pretending to be a German was an extremely dangerous behavior, but this was their only chance to get back home (HVT-2696). The father of Saul C. was drafted into the Polish army when Germany attacked and ended up in the Soviet POWs camp in Lwów. Saul's mother wanted the family to join him in the Soviet territory, but he refused and smuggled himself back to the German-occupied Poland (HVT-2077). Victor P. managed to obtain false identification papers and simply boarded a train to Kraków. His main fear was that he might be recognized by fellow passengers as a Jew. His solution for this predicament was quite simple—

because he studied in the Polish (rather than Jewish) school and knew all the anti-Semitic slogans, Victor started an “anti-Semitic propaganda” tirade on the train. People applauded him and he got to Kraków safely (HVT-2887).

Not everyone left, however. Maurice S. was hiding in the woods to avoid deportation to Siberia. When the German troops invaded the Soviet Union he was in the woods once again. “I developed a special talent,” he joked. “[I] developed a habit of hiding. It was funny ... No, actually it was not funny.” Only after the Germans occupied Eastern Poland did he decide to come back to Kraków, but he was caught by the Germans outside the ghetto without a permit. The rule in such cases was execution, but his brother-in-law happened to be a high ranking official in the ghetto, so he was released (HVT-1947). Irene F. was born in Berlin, where her father was a successful lawyer before moving to Kraków. Her family knew perfectly well what the Nazis were capable of, so even when it became possible to register to return, her father was among those who refused preferring the economic hardships of Soviet rule and the danger of deportation to Siberia to life under the Nazis (HVT-947). Bruno Shatyn, originally from Przemyśl, a town divided between the German and the Soviet occupation zones, went to great lengths to bring his wife to the Soviet side of the border (Shatyn 1985). In December 1939 Dola Stark wrote her brother in the US that she was seriously contemplating going “to Uncle Tolstoy” (Browning et al. 2007).

Escape to the Soviet zone, even if the most common, was not the only way to evade Nazi persecution. Many people tried to leave Poland altogether. This option, however, was available mostly to people who had either the means or the connections to do so. Joseph Hollander owned a travel agency, so when the war started he was able to quickly get a Romanian transit visa and escape to Italy. From there, via Portugal, he and his wife reached Ellis Island, but because they

did not possess valid immigration documents, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service did its best to have the Hollanders deported back to the Nazi-occupied Poland. After a long legal battle, Hollanders were eventually allowed to stay in the US. Joseph Hollander's next task was to rescue his family. Initially, Hollander's relatives tried to get to the US. "Many people have registered themselves for emigration overseas. In order not to blame ourselves later we are thinking about doing the same," Hollander's brother-in-law wrote him in August 1940. Some family members even started taking English language lessons (Browning et al. 2007). Unfortunately, when the family registered for immigration to the US, they discovered that their waiting list numbers (not quota numbers)⁵⁶ were 43,711 and 43,712, meaning that years would pass until they would be considered for inclusion in the immigration quota list. Yet, while the US was probably the most coveted destination, the desire to escape Poland was so great that it did not really matter for people where they went. When Hollander managed, through his travel agency connections, to provide his relatives with Nicaraguan papers, the family was overjoyed. "Mania cries from happiness. Dawid got into a state of euphoria and out of joy he hit me under the rib," wrote Joseph's sister Dola on December 1, 1940 after receiving the papers from the Nicaraguan Consulate. It played no role whatsoever that the family members knew next to nothing about Nicaragua. A week after receiving the papers they were still trying "to locate the place on the map" and "have been consulting the dictionary to learn about the language and the people" (Browning et al. 2007). Unfortunately, the German authorities did not allow the family to exit Poland, and they all perished. Zipporah S.'s family was luckier than most Jews in Kraków because they happened to have Turkish passports—many years before the war the family moved to Poland from Turkey. However, the passports were no longer valid and could not protect them

⁵⁶ Immigration was guided by "country quotas" according to which only a certain number of immigrants from each country was allowed into the US.

in Poland, so the family decided to leave the country altogether. The grandparents, hoping that the Turkish passports, even if expired, would help them to cross the border simply boarded a bus that went to Hungary. They were caught on the border and shot. The rest of the family then decided to cross the border by foot with a local guide and succeeded to evade the German border patrols.

As the venues for legal immigration were extremely limited, most people who crossed the border did this illegally. This was an extremely risky undertaking that required, in addition to courage, considerable amounts of money and therefore was available to relatively few people. Celina S. had a Polish family friend who helped her to get false Polish papers. Another friend of her father's assisted her in illegally crossing the border to Slovakia. Then, through Hungary and Romania she managed to get to Palestine in 1944, when the war was still in full swing (HVT-86). Nusia A. also managed to get to Palestine through Hungary and Romania before the war was over (HVT-87). Immediately after his father was arrested by the German authorities and sent to a concentration camp, Leon K. made an (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to smuggle his mother and sister to Hungary. He could do that because his father had left considerable amounts of money behind (HVT-3106). Louise J., discussing her relatives' attempt to smuggle themselves to Hungary, also mentions that they could do that only because the family possessed considerable amounts of money (HVT-1142).

Another much cheaper option to leave Poland was to go to Germany. Paradoxically, it was much safer for the Jews to hide as Polish forced laborers in Germany, where very few people could recognize them as Jews, than in Poland with its large number of paid and voluntary informers who were more than happy to denounce hiding Jews to the authorities. For those hiding in Germany having non-Jewish looks was a bonus, not a requirement. Yet, people who

were better integrated into the Polish society had better chances of succeeding. To go to Germany, one did not have to look Polish, but had to speak Polish.

Recognizing this fact, Victor P. even started a “business,” smuggling Jews to Germany. He would find Poles who were ordered by the German authorities to go to Germany as forced laborers, take their IDs, and arrange for Jews who spoke flawless Polish to go in their stead. Because it was declared by the German leadership that Berlin was “free of Jews,” he decided that it would be the safest place to send his clients. The only problem for him was the Allies’ massive air raids on Berlin, so while arranging his brother’s transfer to Germany, Victor had to take special measures to make sure his brother would be employed in a relatively safe suburban neighborhood (HVT-2887). Some people got to the German Reich independently of Victor P.’s smuggling enterprise. Anna N. spoke Polish without an accent, so after she managed to get false papers, she signed up to go to Austria as a Polish laborer, where she worked as a maid in the family of a high ranking Nazi official. “It was the ideal way to get away,” she recalled. In Vienna, which had many people from all over the former Habsburg Empire, including Southeastern Europe, “my looks were OK” (HVT-588). “The writing was on the wall,” recalled Alex G. He looked too Jewish so staying in Poland was out of question for him. Instead, he obtained false ID papers and volunteered to go to Germany. He and his future wife ended up in Vienna where they had a comfortable life which included visits to the famous Vienna Opera. “[Life in Vienna] was beautiful, beautiful” (HVT-1327). Irene F. was told by a Polish family that helped her to escape the ghetto that she was too dark for Western Poland, where people are mostly blond and have blue eyes, so she decided that the best way to hide would be to go to Germany as foreign laborer (HVT-947). Sara W. signed up for work in Germany immediately after receiving her Aryan papers (HVT-2955). Sylvia F. escaped the Płaszów camp because she

could not bear the conditions there and volunteered to go to Austria. She survived the Holocaust, but her memories of Vienna are less pleasant than some of the other escapees because she felt she was in constant danger of being exposed. In the concentration camp she at least did not have to pretend to be Polish (HVT-121). Some ended up in Vienna by a pure stroke of luck. Once, Alex G. and his wife saw a woman whom they immediately recognized as Jewish. It turned out that the woman was also from Kraków. During an Aktion, she managed to escape from the ghetto (she simply approached the ghetto gate and a German policeman let her out) and went to the railroad station where she encountered a group of drunk German soldiers, returning from the Eastern front. The soldiers, probably not realizing what they are doing, suggested taking her to Vienna with them and hid her when the train crossed the German border. Reaching Vienna they became more sober and abandoned their Jewish companion. Miraculously, the lady managed to survive the war in Vienna even though she looked typically Jewish and had no documents (HVT-1327).

Even if people did not go to Germany, working for the German authorities was sometimes perceived as the road to safety. Thus, Miriam Peleg recalls a young, Jewish-looking lawyer named Henryk Margulis who managed to get a job in the German regional administration (Peleg and Ben-Tsvi 1987). Bruno Shatyn found his relatives jobs in the German Forestry Service and the local Employment Office (Shatyn 1985). Regina L.'s sister worked for the German Red Cross (HVT-1786).

The majority of Jews choosing evasion, however, stayed in Poland and preferred to be as far as possible from the German authorities. To successfully hide among the Poles, one had to have at least some money to obtain false documents, not have too Jewish an appearance and habits, and have Polish friends because people who were hiding outside the ghetto most often fell

back on their previous social ties. Furthermore, while money and non-Jewish looks were important, they could be compensated for by pre-war connections. And here people who were better integrated into Polish society and had more social and professional contacts with the Poles had better chances of survival.

False documents were not cheap, and the quality of falsification varied greatly. Thus, more affluent people had a better chance of acquiring “good” documents. Yet, this was not a fool-proof strategy because even very costly and well forged documents could sometimes present those who carried them with problems. Some problems were purely aesthetic: Miriam Peleg recalls a Jewish woman who felt deeply offended when she got an ID with the name of Helena Zajac, which means “hare” in Polish (Peleg and Ben-Tsvi 1987). Natan Gross’s uncle’s new name was Durakowski, “durak” means an idiot in Polish (Gross 1986). Irene F. obtained a birth certificate and high school transcript with the name of Danuta Milewska. “It bothered me that the girl was an F-student,” she recalled (HVT-947).

Others problems were more substantial. For example, some Polish surnames sounded too similar to Jewish surnames and therefore put the people who used them in unnecessary danger. Some places of birth, initially quite popular, became too dangerous to be put on the ID. Before the German invasion of the USSR it was considered a wise strategy to list Eastern Poland as the birthplace on false documents because it was assumed that even if people who carry these IDs get arrested, the local archives in the Soviet zone of occupation would be impossible to check. This strategy collapsed after the German invasion of the USSR and people who were supposedly born somewhere in Ukraine or Belarus were exposed to double danger—first, the veracity of their documents could be checked against the originals in local archives, and their level of knowledge about their supposed birthplace could be easily tested (Peleg and Ben-Tsvi 1987).

Money, however, was not the only way to obtain false documents. Victor P. was given the papers of his Polish classmate, a cavalry officer who was killed during the war. When it became clear that he could not use these documents because he looked very different from his friend, another Polish couple gave him the documents of their missing son, who happened to resemble Victor. He didn't pay a penny for either of these IDs (HVT-2887). The friend of Celina P.'s parents, a deeply religious Polish woman, managed to get her false Polish documents (HVT-86).

Those who did not look Jewish had a certain advantage. "[I looked like] eighteen carat German, and many Germans like fourteen carat Germans," joked Marcel W., and his non-Jewish looks helped him survive with Aryan papers (HVT-463). Hela R. had "beautiful blond hair," and because of this she was the courier for the Jewish underground (HVT-1822). David R. was blond and spoke good Polish, so it was not hard for him to pretend to be a Pole. His father bought him Aryan papers (HVT-1047). The family of Aneta W. was split—her mother and brother did not look Jewish and escaped to the Polish part of the city, while Aneta W. and her father, who had typical Jewish features, stayed in the ghetto (HVT-2696). Frederic B. also did not look Jewish and this helped him to escape. Many people in the city knew him, but no one denounced him to the Germans (HVT-2016). Josef R. recalls that it was possible to find a hiding place for his mother, who did not look Jewish, but they failed to get a hiding place outside the ghetto for other members of the family (HVT-3180). Maria B. was once urged by a Pole: "Take your armband off; you don't look Jewish, why don't you hide between us" (HVT-2879)? The father of Regina L. refused to wear the armband—an Austrian army veteran, who spoke perfect German and did not look Jewish, he had no reason to fear being caught (HVT-1786). Miriam Peleg grew up in the countryside, a daughter of one of the very few Jewish farmers in the area; she spoke flawless

Polish and did not look Jewish. Yet, what convinced her to obtain Aryan papers was an encounter with her brother's friend Mordechai Ben-Zvi who moved around Poland with a bicycle registration permit as his only document (Peleg and Ben-Tsvi 1987).

Having non-Jewish looks was a benefit, but people managed to survive even if they looked Jewish. Some, as mentioned previously, went to Germany or tried to find employment with the German authorities. Others used cosmetics to hide their Jewish appearance. "My mother dyed my hair blond," recalled Sonia W. Yet, this was only a partial remedy as her "hair was acceptable, but the nose was not" (HVT-1430). To cover typically "Jewish" noses people had to pretend they suffered from a toothache and wrap their face in a scarf (HVT-2303).

Even circumcision, which put many hiding Jewish males in extreme danger, could be "cured." Prof. Jan Lachs, a renowned gynecologist and expert in the history of medicine managed to come up (possibly by consulting old medical treatises) with a procedure that if applied for several months made it impossible to detect past circumcision. The procedure, notes Pankiewicz, was commonly used in the ghetto (Pankiewicz 1987). Not speaking proper Polish, it appears, was at least as dangerous, or possibly even more dangerous, than looking typically Jewish. Chawka R., a courier for the Jewish underground, recalls how she accompanied Antek Zuckerman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw ghetto resistance, during his visit to Kraków. Zuckerman "looked like a Polish nobleman—tall, blond, with a thick moustache. But with Polish he had a problem" because he spoke with heavy Yiddish accent. The courier's job was to accompany Zuckerman and to assist him in situations which might require verbal contact with the Poles (HVT-1831). Lola A. did not look Jewish, but was nonetheless too scared to be on the street without the armband because Poles would recognize her as a Jew by the way she spoke.

She went to public school and her Polish was good, but she came from the Jewish part of the city, and this had an effect on her accent (HVT-3077).

More important than money or appearance were the social connections. Stanisław Taubenschlag came from a totally assimilated family and did not even consider himself Jewish. Knowing that he could count on numerous Polish friends, he chose evasion, obtaining false documents by the name of Count Kozłowski. Because the family cut off their ties with the Jewish community, very few Jews could recognize him on the street, and most Poles, even those who knew him, considered him one of their own. Yet, sometimes Taubenschlag's family's prominence in Polish society put him in danger—once he was denounced by a former student of his father's, whom he had failed on an exam (Taubenschlag 1998). According to Taubenschlag, shortly after that, this person was liquidated by the Polish underground. That, however, was a rare occurrence—only very rarely did the Polish underground take action against people who denounced Jews. At the same, another former student of Taubenschlag-senior, who worked for the Gestapo, did not betray Stanisław when he was denounced and arrested in Warsaw. While Taubenschlag's level of integration into the Polish society was exceptional, the story demonstrates a much broader phenomenon.

Shmuel Rothbard and his sisters were hidden by their father's friend, an officer in the Armija Krajowa, the Polish nationalist (and generally quite anti-Semitic) underground (Rotbard 2000). Before the Germans introduced compulsory IDs, Hela R. used her Polish girlfriend's high school diploma while traveling as a Pole (HVT-1822). Helen R.'s sister arranged for their mother to hide with Polish friends (HVT-2236). Leon L.'s best friend, a Pole, helped his younger brother during the war even though this friend's parents were very anti-Semitic (HVT-2929). Leon himself hid with his father's non-Jewish friends after he jumped off the train to the death camp.

The Polish friends of Max H. used to throw him food over the barbed wire (HVT-2913). Rosalyn O.'s Polish friends helped her when she was in the Płaszów camp. Henry E.'s brother-in-law was a manager of the Catholic Church movie house, and was able to hide in a convent (HVT-1250). When Joseph B. was hiding outside the ghetto, a Polish woman who washed floors in their house brought him food (HVT-2832). Rena R. hid her daughter with their Polish maid (HVT-521). "Thanks to my father we had many Polish friends. If not for Polish friends I would have not survived," claimed Victor P. (HVT-2887). Yet, not only did his father's friends help Victor P. As mentioned earlier, in addition the family of his classmate gave Victor their son's ID, and arranged for new documents when it became clear that the documents they gave him were of little value. A prison guard, who happened to be another Polish classmate, assisted him in getting out of prison when Victor got arrested for black market activities.

"We knew many Polish people in Kraków," recalls Regina L. Her brother's friend, who served in the Polish Police, helped Regina's mother and sister-in-law to go into hiding after they escaped the ghetto. The maid of Regina parents' friend hid her and her sister. In this case, however, the help was conditional on a promise that they convert to Christianity after the war. Yet, having friends was sometimes not enough. Even those who knew many Poles and spoke perfect Polish often were helpless and therefore vulnerable when it came to religion. Once Regina L. was asked about the day of the saint after whom she was named. She did not have an answer, and realized that not knowing such basic a thing might expose her non-Christian origins. Regina immediately bought religious texts and made sure she and her sister know the prayers by heart (HVT-1786).

Finally, Kraków had a branch of the Polish Council to Aid Jews, more widely known under the code-name *Żegota*, which was affiliated with the Polish Government in Exile. The task

of Żegota was to assist Jews in hiding with money and documents, and not surprisingly the Kraków Żegota office was one of the most active. The organization operated in Kraków from late 1942 and assisted hundreds of Jews in hiding. What is more important for my argument is how this organization started operating in the city. Initially, the Polish effort to help Jews in hiding originated with several activists of the Polish Socialists Party (PPS) who organized to help Jews whom they knew or who were members of the PPS (Peleg and Ben-Tsvi 1987). The importance of political identities and affiliations can be also seen the story of Żegota's successful attempt to save Michał Borwicz, a well-known writer and journalist from Kraków, who was imprisoned in the Janowska camp in Lwów. When Borwicz was finally located and approached by Mordechai Ben-Zvi, a Żegota emissary, the first thing Borwicz wanted to know is which party wanted to save him (Peleg and Ben-Tsvi 1987).

The discussion of evasion cannot be complete without also mentioning a case of clandestine German support of the Jewish evasion efforts. Lieutenant Oswald Bousko,⁵⁷ originally from Vienna, was a German police officer in Kraków. In his youth Bousko became a devoted Nazi and, according to Pankiewicz, “considered Hitler a God.” After the German takeover of Austria, his views of National Socialism underwent a dramatic change and he became a fierce opponent of the German regime. The main focus of his anti-Nazi activism was assisting the Kraków ghetto Jews and many owe their lives to him. In the summer of 1944, fearful of being sent to the frontline, Bousko deserted, but was eventually court-martialed and executed (Pankiewicz 1987).

The most unusual story of evasion that does not fit neatly into any analytical framework is that of Menachem S., born in 1938. He came from a wealthy and politically prominent family,

⁵⁷ Mentioned in some sources as Bosko.

which later became instrumental in Oscar Schindler's rescue efforts. Smuggled into Płaszów, he stayed there until it became clear to his parents that all the children in the camp were going to be soon deported to their death. It was decided that Menachem would be safer outside the camp even if he would be alone. A friend of Menachem's father suggested that Menchem should go to a brothel, located not far away from the camp. "A customer of good standing at this organization," he felt that people at the fringes of the society, the prostitutes, were more likely to feel sympathy towards a Jew, also an outcast. Menachem, too young to realize that he was living in a brothel, was for many years convinced that he was hiding in a hospital. After several months the brothel was closed by the Germans, so Menachem joined a gang of homeless children who roamed the streets until he was taken in by an old Polish woman. During his months in hiding Menachem strictly observed several rules—first, never to take his pants off, because he was circumcised, and never tell anyone his name, as it was immediately betray his Jewish identity (HVT-152).

Resistance

In this section I will demonstrate that the Jewish resistance in Kraków was dominated by people who were politically active before WWII, and that the lack of underground experience prior to the German occupation (as compared to Białystok and other ghettos in Eastern Poland) strongly affected the patterns of resistance in the city.

Anti-Nazi resistance groups started to organize in Kraków shortly after the German occupation of the city. However, these were predominantly Polish groups, the members of which were engaged in distribution of anti-German propaganda, underground newspapers, transcripts of the BBC broadcasts, and intelligence gathering for the Polish government in exile. Some Jews

did take part in these activities, but the number was small. First, Jews were not welcomed in many of these groups, and even if people wanted to contribute to the resistance effort, they did not have the proper contacts or connections. Marcel W. was a Polish patriot, and wanted to join the underground, but had no idea how to do that because he did not have proper contacts (HVT-463). Mietek Pemper was a member of an underground group and thanks to his typing abilities took an active part in the production of underground leaflets (*gazetki*). Pemper's underground activism was short-lived, however—he resigned when anti-Semitic diatribes started to appear in the publications he helped to produce. Miriam Peleg, who had Aryan papers, was active in the underground organization of the Polish Socialist Party, which was known for its religious and ethnic moderation, but eventually assistance Jews in hiding became the main focus of her underground work for the PPS and the Żegota.

Why did Jewish resistance crystallize later than that of the Poles? First, in the initial period of the Nazi occupation, a very large number of Jewish males, the natural manpower reservoir of underground resistance, including the community leaders, were outside Kraków—some managed to escape to the Soviet zone of occupation, and those who were outrun by the Wehrmacht and had to turn back needed time to return to their homes. Second, in the initial stages of Nazi rule, the Jewish community was completely overwhelmed by the random beatings, looting, and roundups for forced labor, which were directed mainly against the able-bodied males. During this initial period, the most prudent strategy for the Jewish males was not to leave their homes. This, obviously, also did not help the creation of resistance organizations. And finally, in the grand scheme of things, there were no reasons to resist, as explained by Moshe B., an astute observer of the Jewish life in Kraków during the Holocaust and later during his career as an Israeli Supreme Court Justice (HVT-1832). The Poles lost their state and

experienced a major act of national humiliation. In Kraków, Polish national humiliation was felt even more strongly than in other places when, for example, Wawel, the city castle and the historical seat of Polish kings became the residence of the German General Governor, and the Jagiellonian University was closed by the Germans and its faculty arrested and sent to concentration camps. For the majority of Jews the situation was different because they did not feel an extremely strong emotional attachment to a *polity* in which they suffered institutionalized discrimination. In this new situation the most prudent mode of behavior seemed to be coping and evasion. Only when the German persecution of Jews intensified did people, especially young Jews, start contemplating resistance.

Two Jewish resistance organizations emerged in Kraków—*Iskra* (“Spark” in Polish) and the Fighting Organization of the Jewish *Halutz*⁵⁸ Youth (*Organizacja Bojowa Żydowskiej Młodzieży Chalucowej*), more widely known as the *Hahalutz Halochem* (“Fighting Pioneer” in Hebrew). The emergence of both organizations can be directly traced to their leader’s first-hand experience of Nazi persecution.

“One evening I hear a knock on my door,” recalled Shlomo Sh., who later became one of the *Iskra* commanders. “It was Heszek Bauminger, he told me that he was my instructor in the youth movement, but it took me some time to recall who he was” (HVT-3496). Both Shlomo Sh. and Heszek Bauminger were born in religious Zionist families and both were active in the religious-Zionist *Hashomer Hadati* youth movement, where Bauminger was the instructor (*madrach*) of a group to which Shlomo Sh. belonged when he was twelve. Both left the movement—Shlomo Sh. moved to Akiva because his sister was there (and later left the movement for the splinter Akiva B), while Bauminger became Marxist and joined the Hashomer

⁵⁸ Halutz is “pioneer” in Hebrew. The term refers to the early Zionist immigrants to Palestine.

Hatsair. When the war started Bauminger became the leader of the Hashomer Hatsair Kraków branch. He was drafted to the Polish army and became a POW, but eventually made his way to Eastern Poland, where he worked as truck driver for the Red Army. According to most sources, during his stay in the Soviet Union, Bauminger abandoned socialist Zionism and became a communist.⁵⁹ Unlike most refugees, he took Soviet citizenship, and when Germany invaded the USSR, joined the Red Army. In the fall of 1941, Bauminger once again became a POW. He managed to escape the POW camp, and returned to Kraków, witnessing on his way home the mass shootings of Jews in the Soviet Ukraine. Bauminger reached Kraków before the first major wave of deportations to the death camps, and even though most Jews at that time did not fear total extermination, he knew quite well what the Germans were capable of. The final confirmation of the Nazi killing policies came from a meeting, in summer 1942, with a member of the Hashomer Hatzair from Warsaw, who managed to escape from the Treblinka death camp. At that point it became clear to all that the June 1942 deportations meant death and that an underground resistance organization was needed.

Initially Iska consisted of Bauminger, Shlomo Sh. and several of their friends. Because neither Bauminger nor Shlomo Sh. were active in Jewish youth movements at that time, the recruitment was based on personal ties and incentives, and there was no political party/movement membership precondition. Some were former members of the Zionist youth movements, and some were simply “desperate Jewish youths” (Peled 1989). “We started to organize people in groups of five (*hamishiyot*) and to convince someone to join we would tell him that if he brings four more people he would become a group leader” (HVT-3496). The Iskra membership was open in terms of political affiliation. At the same time, even though pre-war

⁵⁹ Shlomo Sh. says that while he does not know whether Bauminger was a member of the Communist Party, he is certain that Bauminger did support the Communist Party and its cause.

political activism was not a requirement for membership, the majority of the organization's members were active members of various political organizations, mainly the Communist Party and the Hashomer Hatzair. Based on the recollections of the few Iskra members who managed to survive the Holocaust, Yael Peled reconstructed the organization's roster. The roster is probably incomplete, but most likely it captures the majority of the Iskra members, because the organization was relatively small. Only one third of the Iskra fighters did not take part in the activities of political organizations prior to the Holocaust (Peled 1989).

In addition to Bauminger, a key role in the Iskra activities was played by Gola Mire. Mire was born to a religious family, but became active in the Zionist Socialist Hashomer Hatzair. Her devotion to the movement was so high that when her parents immigrated to Belgium, she refused to join them because the movement needed her services. In the early 1930s, however, her political views became even more radical and she was expelled from the Hashomer Hatzair. Mire joined the Polish Communist Party that was at that time outlawed in Poland and took an active part in its underground work. In 1936 she was put on trial for organizing a strike in one of Lwów's enterprises and sentenced to twelve years in prison. When Lwów was occupied by the Soviet Union, Mire was released from jail. At that time, Mire also met Bauminger, who had lived in the city for some time (Peled 1989). Following the German occupation of Eastern Poland Mire moved to Kraków where the Communist Party, now called the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) resumed its underground activities in January 1942 (Peled 1989). In Kraków, Mire managed to renew her contacts with Bauminger and become an Iskra headquarters member. Under her and Bauminger's leadership, Iskra, initially an independent Jewish organization, eventually merged with the PPR armed wing, the *Gwardia Ludowa* (GL, People's Guard). For the rank and file Iskra members, the main goal was to fight the Nazis, and they did not care whether they were

doing it “under the red [Communist] or blue-white [Zionist] banner,” recalled Cesia Frymer, but for Bauminger and especially Mire this question was much more important. “Gola was a declared communist and she always pushed for action. She was [both] in the PPR and with us,” explained Shlomo Sh. (HVT-3496).

To Mire’s dismay, however, the PPR was unpopular among the local population, and had almost no weapons. Iskra, even though it was more active than the PPR, was mainly engaged in small-scale acts of sabotage and nighttime stealth attacks on drunken German soldiers. To conduct a high profile action, the help of a second, much larger Jewish organization was needed. Luckily for Mire, the Hahalutz Halochem needed Mire as much as she needed them.

Hahalutz Halochem originated from Akiva, the largest of the youth Zionist movement in Kraków. As befits the city’s tradition of political moderation and relative tolerance, the movement was non-radical and non-Socialist in its political outlook, rejected violence and focused mainly on cultural and educational activities. Akiva had more than a thousand members in Kraków, many of them of middle class, Polish and German-speaking families. In the immediate pre-war years the movement cooperated closely with Irene Harand, an Austrian anti-Nazi and human rights activist. Numerous of Harand’s publications were reprinted in the Akiva newspaper, edited by one of the movement leaders, Szymek Draenger. Shortly after the city was occupied by German troops, Draenger and his wife, Gusta Davidson Draenger, were arrested by the German security services and imprisoned in the Tropa labor camp. In late 1939 the couple was released, but the experience of the camp left a tremendous impression on Draenger and his wife. When Draenger returned to his movement activities in 1940, it was crystal clear to him that the Jews had no chance of survival if they continued being passive, and he often shared this

opinion with other Akiva members (Peled 1989). Yet, at this stage the movement and its leaders did not think about armed resistance. Instead, they prioritized smuggling as many people as possible out of Poland with the eventual goal of bringing them to Palestine (Peled 1993).

Another top priority for the movement was to continue its educational activities, which became even more important after Jewish students were forbidden to attend schools and receive formal education. The focus on education was not unique to the Kraków Akiva branch; most mid- and large-size youth movements held educational activities. But in Kraków, the activities of Akiva were more noticeable because the movement led the clandestine education effort. Finally, the older movement members tried to continue the preparations for agricultural life in Palestine's *kibutzim*, and the movement received permission to operate an agricultural farm in Kopaliny, not far away from Kraków, where many movement leading activists eventually moved. The bucolic life in Kopaliny was quite pleasant, because the movement members were spared the crowdedness and food shortages of the ghetto. The Kopaliny farm existed from December 1941 until August 1942 and it was in Kopaliny where the decision to resist was reached. As the news about mass killings and deportations started reaching the farm, the understanding that something needed to be done to counter the Nazi policies became stronger and stronger, but the movement leaders were reluctant to make the final decision because none of them had any underground or military experience (Peled 1989). The threshold was finally passed when it became clear that not only individual lives, but the very existence of the movement was under existential threat. "We didn't anticipate such unrestrained savagery," claimed Aharon (Dolek) Liebeskind, one of the movement leaders. "We won't survive. At least not as a movement ... Individuals may survive, not the movement" (Davidson Draenger 1996). As the realization of the new conditions became more widespread and as more new information on the German policies appeared, the previously

chosen strategy of coping appeared less and less tenable. The decision to form an underground movement was reached. When the Kopaliny farm was liquidated by the Germans, its residents relocated to the ghetto and started organizing the resistance.

Initially the Hahalutz Halochem underground encompassed only the Akiva members, but later other Zionist youth movements, such as Dror and the Hashomer Hatzair joined the organization. The core, however, were the Akiva people. Unlike Iskra, which recruited members on the basis of personal ties, in the Hahalutz the movement membership rules were strictly applied. Alex G. went to school with Szymek Draenger and was his friend. He heard about the resistance, but did not know who they were or how to contact them (HVT-1327). Dolek Liebeskind, another leader of the Hahalutz, was Natan Gross's relative and Dolek's wife was his classmate. Yet, he was never part of the underground (Gross 1986)—most likely because he was a *former* Akiva member. Moshe B., had connections to the underground, but was never part of it. He was in the *Hanoar Hatsioni* movement. The organization's roster is available. Out of ninety four members only six were not members of the Zionist youth movements. One of these six was a physics teacher who prepared explosives and three additional non-youth movement members belonged to the Young Jewish Writers' club with which the resistance cooperated.

As an underground organization, Hahalutz encountered several related problems. First, its members had no idea whatsoever about the basics of underground work. "This policy of secretiveness created great anxiety among the conspirators, because the demands of a secret military organization were in direct contradiction to the ideals that had nourished the movement in the past. They had been a youth movement completely dedicated to non-violence and cultural activities, and now, practically overnight they had to make this tremendous leap of transforming

a nonviolent cultural group into a military organization,” wrote Gusta Davidson Draenger (Davidson Draenger 1996). The movement leaders and rank and file understood perfectly well that they were violating the conspiracy rules but kept violating them time after time. “No sooner did two [underground members] meet than others would start joining them, and soon they would all walking down the street,” admitted Gusta Davidson Draenger. “They knew that it was not safe to meet in large groups, and that it was a problem, but they couldn’t do anything about that—emotionally they couldn’t keep distance from one another,” recalled Shlomo Sh. (HVT-3496).

The second problem was that the movement lacked people with military experience. “They were mere novices, facing the best-equipped and most thoroughly trained soldiers in the world ... They never acted like officers and were not eager to lead their young followers into the furnace. The leaders were prepared to serve as privates to an experienced officer ... They searched for a leader with military experience because that was what they lacked. Their need for someone with military experience eventually led them to hook up with the Workers’ Party” (Davidson Draenger 1996). The connection to the PPR was established through Gola Mire, who happened to be related to Dolek Liebeskind’s wife. The Hahalutz members relied on the PPR, which promised the organization help with hideouts during deportations, weapons and other forms of assistance. Yet nothing was delivered and the organization became disappointed with the PPR. When Hahalutz contemplated the idea of sending people to the forests and establishing bases there, the PPR promised to provide the Jewish fighters with a Polish guide. The guide abandoned the group shortly after their arrival to the forest, and the attempt to send people to the forest ended in a fiasco. At this point Hahalutz cut its ties with the PPR, but Mire, whom the organization leaders knew and respected as an accomplished underground fighter, still was able

to convince the two Jewish underground organizations to join forces and conduct a major anti-German operation, which later became known as the Cyganeria bombing.

As the preparations for the operation moved forward, and the attempts to obtain weapons intensified, mainly by attacking drunken German servicemen, the German security services and their collaborators in the ghetto Jewish Police made an attempt to eliminate the movement. Dolek Liebskind was captured by the Jewish Police, but managed to escape by scaring off the officers who arrested him with his gun. After that incident it became impossible for the movement to remain inside the ghetto. On 25 November 1942 the last meeting of the Akiva members took place in the ghetto. In this meeting, which later became known as “the last supper,” Liebskind outlined the resistance goals. “We are fighting for three lines in history,” he announced, to make the world know that the Jewish youth “did not go like lamb to the slaughter.” After that meeting the underground members left the ghetto and dispersed in hiding places throughout the Aryan side of the city. The operation the movement was working on was scheduled to take place in less than a month.

The most paradoxical thing about the Cyganeria bombing is that while the people who conducted it wanted to make the world know that the Jews were fighting back, the operation plan was to conduct the operation disguised as Poles (even though there was not a single Pole among the fighters). Furthermore, in addition to bombing several German coffee houses and a cinema frequented by German soldiers, the plan was to raise Polish national banners over the Vistula bridges and to lay wreaths on the destroyed monument of the Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz. Neither Germans, nor Jews, nor Poles were supposed to know that it was Jews who killed Germans in Kraków.

The reason for the Jewish organization's desire to present the bombing as conducted by Poles was the fear for the safety of the ghetto residents. Well aware of the German collective responsibility policy, Hahalutz and Iskra leaders feared that if the Germans realized that the bombing was conducted by Jews, the ghetto would be liquidated. To openly fight as Jews, they had to wait until the final liquidation of the ghetto, as this was the case in all the ghetto uprisings. Furthermore, several people tried to talk the Hahalutz out of acting outside the ghetto disguised as Poles. In fall 1942, Dror, a socialist-Zionist youth movement, joined the Hahalutz Halochem, and Avraham Leibovicz (alias Laban) joined the organization's headquarters. In September 1939, Laban escaped to Eastern Poland and worked in the Zionist underground in the USSR. Laban did have underground experience, and could have been the leader that Akiva was looking for, but by the time he joined the Hahalutz leadership, the organization was already working with Mire. Furthermore, Dror historically had a relatively small following in Kraków. Had the majority of the city's Zionist youth movements members belonged to Laban's organization, a ghetto uprising would have been the natural choice for the underground, but this is a counterfactual suggestion only. Laban also had connections to the Warsaw ghetto Jewish underground, which tried to talk the Hahalutz leaders out of acting outside the ghetto and urged them to prepare for the armed defense of the ghetto when it would be liquidated by the Germans. Yet, Mire, frustrated with the PPR's lack of success and eager to answer Stalin's call for "people's resistance," pushed for immediate action *as Poles*. "The timing [of the operation] was to a large extent determined by Gola Mire who pushed for action here and now," recalled Shlomo Sh. (HVT-3496). Antek Zuckerman, one of the Warsaw ghetto underground leaders even made his way to Kraków to make a final attempt to convince the Hahalutz to abandon its

plans. His timing couldn't have been worse—the bombing was scheduled for the day after his arrival but Zuckerman did not know that (Peled 1989; Zuckerman 1990; HVT-1831).

On the evening of December 22, 1942⁶⁰ the fighters of the Hahalutz and Iskra bombed the Cyganeria coffee house, packed with Germans, killing a number of Germans and wounding many more. The exact number of Germans killed is unclear, and the estimates range from seven to seventy. The most widely cited estimate is twelve (see, for example Galas and Polonsky 2011) and the nature of the attack makes this number seem plausible. The bombings of other targets failed. The severity of the operation was such that the German authorities had to inform Hitler about the bombing on the Christmas day (Crowe 2004). Unfortunately for the Jewish underground, it was betrayed from inside and most fighters were swiftly arrested. Liebeskind was killed in a shootout with the German police. Zuckerman was wounded in the leg, and had to escape back to Warsaw, bleeding.

Even though the German authorities were well-aware of the real identity of the people who conducted the bombing, the belief that the ghetto would be liquidated in retaliation proved to be incorrect. Furthermore, the Germans did what they could to conceal the mere fact of the attack, and only on May 20, 1943, five months after the bombing, did the *Krakauer Zeitung* report it. At the same time, the assumption of both the Jews in the ghetto and the Poles on the Aryan side was that it was the Polish underground fighters who bombed the Cyganeria. One rumor went even further, claiming that the Russians parachuted their special forces into the city. From the PPR point of view, the operation was a success. According to Józef Zająć, the commander of the Gwardia Ludowa in Kraków region, the only shortcoming of the bombing was that it was done by the Jews (Peled 1989). For the Jewish underground, on the other hand, the

⁶⁰ According to some sources – December 23.

situation was desperate—a large number of resisters were arrested and thrown into the Gestapo Montelupich prison, both organizations were decapitated, and the credit for the operation went to the Poles. So high was the fear that no one would ever know the truth that Hella Rufeisen-Schüpper, an underground courier who lived outside the ghetto on Aryan papers, was scared that she might be the last living person to know the truth about the Cyganeria bombing. As a result of this fear, she revealed her Jewish identity to a random Polish co-traveler on the train from Warsaw and begged him to tell the true story behind the bombing if he managed to survive the war. Needless to say, it was an extremely risky choice—revealing one's Jewish identity to a stranger, even a trustworthy looking one, could have easily cost Rufeisen-Schüpper her life (Rufeisen-Schüpper 1990).

Miraculously, some of the arrested underground members managed to escape on the way to being executed. They joined forces with those who succeeded in avoiding arrest, and continued operating in the forests around Nowy Wiśnicz, thirty miles from Kraków. Some were killed by the Germans, other were targeted by the Polish nationalist underground Armia Krajowa. During the final liquidation of the ghetto, a group of twenty underground members got together in a bunker. Yet, even then they decided not to violently resist and made a desperate attempt to escape the ghetto. They failed (Weiss 1973).

A number of underground members managed to survive until the liberation in the forests, and some hid in the city. The night after the Cyganeria bombing, two Hahalutz members, Elza Lapa and Szymek Lustgarten knocked on the door of Franciszek N.'s apartment and asked to stay for the night. Coming for a night, they left after about a year. Franciszek N. and his family were members of the Polish underground, and it was clear to them that Elza Lapa and Szymek

Lustgarten were also fighting against the Germans. And second, “they looked very pitiful; they were frightened and cold ... It would be inhuman not to let them in,” recalled Franciszek N. (HVT-3177)

Obviously, not every Akiva member joined the underground. Some were simply not invited because they were considered too young for underground work. Ida L., who belonged to the Akiva younger cohort, recalled how she and her friends were getting together, singing and chatting. Only later did she learn that in the other room older members conspired against the Germans (HVT-2461). Frederic B. and William S. were invited to join, but refused. The former did not believe it was possible to fight the Germans who had spies everywhere, the later had a family to take care for (HVT-2016; HVT-2397). Almost certainly there were also others who refused. Not every person with a history of political activism was underground but the claim that the underground was dominated by politically active people certainly holds for Kraków.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter analyzed the behavior of the Kraków Jews and the choices they made during the Holocaust. As I demonstrated, the city experience under the Austro-Hungarian Empire shaped the modes of Kraków Jews’ behavior during the Holocaust in several ways. First, because Kraków had one of the largest Jewish communities in the German-speaking world and many members of the community had relatives or acquaintances in Germany, the Jews of Kraków were well informed about the Nazi’s anti-Jewish policies and this prompted many to try to escape to the East. If they had not been outrun by the German army, the number of the Kraków Jews who survived the Holocaust would have been substantially larger. I have also demonstrated that people who belonged to the German culture were less likely to escape because their expectations

were shaped by previous, more pleasant experiences with the Germans. Also, due to the Austro-Hungarian policies that promoted the integration of Jews into the larger society, many Jews had Polish friends who were willing to help them to survive the Nazi persecution, and people who were better integrated into Polish society had a better chance to successfully exploit the evasion strategy. Among those who chose or were forced to adopt coping as their main survival strategy, people who had a wider social support network among the Jews, were better equipped to deal with the situation they found themselves in. Finally, I have also demonstrated that in Kraków the Jewish underground was dominated by people with previous political experience and showed how the lack of previous underground experience shaped the resistance organization's mode of behavior. In the next chapter I will demonstrate how pre-Holocaust political factors and social ties affected the behavior of Jews in Białystok—a city that, like Kraków, was in Poland until 1939, and like Minsk, belonged to the Soviet Union in 1939-41.

Chapter 6: Under the Spell: The Jews of Białystok during the Soviet and the Nazi Rule

The ghetto of Białystok was among the largest ghettos established by the Nazis and the second largest in the territory that was subject to double occupation—by the USSR in 1939-41 and then by the Nazis in 1941-44. It remained intact when all the large ghettos in Poland besides Łódź were already liquidated and it witnessed a rebellion, second in its scope only to the Warsaw ghetto uprising. For these reasons, the Białystok ghetto is a good case study for the analysis of Jewish behavior during the Holocaust. In addition, unlike Minsk or Kraków, in Białystok the level of Jews' integration into the local Slavic society was extremely low and interethnic relations in the city were hostile and violent. Thus, the analysis of the Białystok ghetto demonstrates how relations between the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors shaped the strategies adopted by Jews during the Holocaust. Finally, the Białystok ghetto allows the researcher to evaluate the impact of the two years of the Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland on Jewish behavior under the Nazis. As in the two previous chapters, this chapter will also demonstrate how the behavior of the Białystok Jews was shaped by distinctly local political and social histories, and relations and interactions in pre-WWII Poland and under Soviet rule.

Data

The data on the Białystok ghetto is extensive. One of the most invaluable data sources is the ghetto underground archive, the so-called Mersik-Tenenbaum Archive, which includes, among other things, the personal diary of Mordechai Tenenbaum, the commander of the ghetto uprising, as well as many other important documents. The thirty two protocols of the Białystok ghetto Judenrat meetings allow for better understanding of the activities, strategies, and the mindset of the people who were engaged in public collaboration with the Germans. While the

number of Białystok ghetto survivors is not large, among the survivors are people who had first-hand knowledge of numerous aspects of the ghetto life, such as Hadassa Levkowitz, a personal secretary of the Judenrat acting chair Ephraim Barasz, and Chajka Grosman, one of the leaders of the ghetto resistance. The Białystok ghetto has also been analyzed by several historians. The most detailed of these works is the Ph.D. dissertation and subsequent Hebrew and English language books by the Israeli historian Sara Bender (Bender 1997, 2008).

In addition to the materials from the Mersik-Tenenbaum Archive, the bulk of this chapter's data comes from two main sources—the Yale University Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Oral History Division. Additional data comes from several Israeli archives—the Ghetto Fighters House archive, the Massuah archive, the Moreshet archive, and the Jabotinsky Institute archive—overall more than seventy testimonies, as well as published memoirs and numerous archival documents from the Holocaust and immediate post-Holocaust era in English, Russian, Polish, and Hebrew languages.

Obviously, the data have certain limitations. The Judenrat members were certainly aware of the fact that they might be spied on by the Gestapo and its informers and probably chose their words very carefully or avoided certain topics altogether. In addition, among the underground members there is a tendency to glorify (and whitewash) one's party or movement and belittle the others. Over time, survivors' recollections became imprecise and are increasingly influenced by the post-Holocaust knowledge, symbols, and interpretations.

Many Białystok survivors spent at least some time in Auschwitz. Virtually every one of them recalls being selected to stay alive by the Angel of Death, Dr. Mengele, while the description of the scene closely resembles the established Auschwitz iconography. This is

possible, though highly unlikely that each one of them underwent selection by Mengele at different times in different blocks of the camp.⁶¹ Sara L. who resides in the US, describes her pre-Holocaust household, which was very religious, as a “nice conservative Amish family” (HVT-1928). Lipa A., an Israeli, tells the interviewer that he used to sneak out of the ghetto on the Burma Road (*derekh Burma*)—a secret road constructed by Jewish troops during the 1948 war to bring provisions to the besieged Jerusalem. These biases should be acknowledged and in my analyses of these sources, I have considered them. Overall, however, the available data present a very detailed picture of the Białystok ghetto and its inhabitants during the Holocaust.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I will present a short history of the Białystok Jewish community before 1939, under Soviet rule in 1939-41, and then under the Nazi occupation in 1941-44. Then, I will focus on the specific behavioral strategies that the Białystok Jews adopted: collaboration, compliance, coping, evasion, and resistance. Finally, I will also show how available information, the experience of the Soviet rule and the pre-Holocaust social and political factors, as well as the city’s local history shaped individuals’ adoption of different survival strategies.

Białystok Before 1939

Settled in 1320, Polish King Jan III Sobieski awarded Białystok in 1703 to Count Branicki, who immediately welcomed Jews to the city. After the third partition of Poland in 1795, Białystok became part of the Prussian kingdom and the capital of its New East Prussia province. Under Prussian rule, Jews promptly embraced German culture and learned the language (Kobrin 2010). However, the process of local Jews’ Germanization was not complete

⁶¹ On the same point see Browning (2010).

because in 1807, Białystok came under the control of Russia, and remained in the Romanovs' Empire until the end of the WWI.

The first textile mills in Białystok were set up in early 19th century by Saxon soldiers— weavers by profession—who settled there after the Napoleonic wars. Eventually, however, Jewish manufacturers started to dominate the booming local textile industry (Bender 2008) and Białystok earned the status of the “Manchester of the North.” The Białystok population swelled and in 1897 Jews were about 75% of the city’s residents. Białystok was the “Jaffa of Lithuania,” described one observer (Kobrin 2010). The economic domination of the Jews over the city’s economic life was uncontested. By the late 19th century, 89% of the city’s businessmen and 65% of the industrialists were Jews.

An uneasy mixing of people and languages, with “Jews, Russians, Poles, Ukrainians and Lithuanians taunting each other” (Kobrin 2010) on the city streets gave rise to the most important attempt to create a world language. A Białystok Jew named Ludwig Zamenhof was the inventor of Esperanto, a language that was quite popular throughout the world in the first half of the 20th century.

In the early 20th century, the socialist Bund and the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) dominated the city’s political landscape (Kobrin 2010). Białystok was also an important Zionist center, and Rabbi Mohilever, one of the early leaders of Religious Zionism, was the city rabbi. In 1906 the Jews of Białystok suffered one of the bloodiest pogroms in modern history. Between 70 and 110 Jews were murdered;⁶² close to seven-hundred wounded. The pogrom was carried out mainly by Russians, some of whom were brought to the city by local authorities with the explicit task of “beating the Jews.” Poles by and large refrained from taking part in the violence (Bender

⁶² Kobrin (2010) writes of eighty-eight dead.

2008). The Jewish self-defense organization made desperate attempts to fend off the mobs, but failed because the attackers were actively supported by the police and the army.

During WWI the city was occupied by German troops. “Jews welcomed the Germans as their liberators and emancipators. Freed from tsarist restrictions, Jews embraced the German occupying force” and a Jewish “cultural renaissance” took place in the city. This pro-German attitude took place notwithstanding the fact that during the fighting the invading German forces bombarded the city, uprooted thousands, and set fire to hundreds of homes (Kobrin 2010). A noticeable outcome of the fighting was a swift and substantial decrease in the city’s Jewish population during and after the war years.

In the first Jewish community (*kehila*) elections in 1918, socialist parties came atop, winning twenty out of seventy seats. Zionists came second with nineteen seats, and Orthodox parties won eighteen (Kobrin 2010). So strong was the socialists’ power that in 1919 the kehila leaders refused to welcome the US Jewish diplomat Henry Morgenthau who visited the city because he was a representative of a capitalist state (Kobrin 2010).

The Białystok area was contested after WWI, and its status was not clearly defined until the early 1920s. During the Polish-Soviet war the Soviet troops captured the city only to be driven back by the Poles. Eventually, the Polish government decided to annex the region. Many Białystok Jews were hostile to the Polish state and a proposal was made to conduct a plebiscite that would determine the fate of the city. Numerous Jews wished the city to be either annexed by the Soviet Union, or to become part of Lithuania, or even to be declared a special international zone. The local Yiddish newspaper argued against the annexation of Białystok by Poland, and this, naturally, enraged the local Poles. The city’s Polish media constantly deployed the image of

Jewish-Communists (even though the actual number of Jewish Communists in the city was quite small) and portrayed the Jews as a “devious, subversive entity, dangerous to the stability of the new Polish nation, and lethal to Polish Catholic society” (Kobrin 2010).

In terms of residential patterns and the ties between the communities the city was extremely segregated. Jews tended to reside in the city center, while the Poles lived in the outskirts and the adjacent rural communities that were incorporated into the city boundaries to decrease the percentage of Jews. In 1921, almost seventy-seven thousand people resided in Białystok. Of these, 48.4% were Jewish. In 1936, out of one-hundred-thousand people living in the city, Jews constituted 42.6% (Bender 2008).

The Jewish population was mainly working class and poor. After being cut off the vast Russian market, the city’s textile industry faced an acute crisis. “In 1921 forty percent of local workers were unemployed; even those with jobs often only worked three days a week” (Kobrin 2010). In subsequent years the economic situation improved, but the city and its Jewish community was unable to fully recover from the crisis. The Spanish civil war helped the textile industry in the mid and late 1930s, notes Ralph B., because the city’s factories produced uniforms for both sides (HVT-801).

Even though the Jews were no longer a majority in Białystok, they still dominated local economic life. In 1928, Jews owned 78.3% of city businesses (Bender 2008). In Białystok, recalled Harry Bass, the Poles used to say “the land is ours, but the properties and the businesses is (sic) Jewish” (Bass 1983). Interethnic relations in the city were tense. “Growing up in Białystok I saw how Poles hated Jews and how Jews hated and feared Poles,” noted Charles Zabuski (Zabuski and Brott 1996). The situation in the Białystok suburban communities was, by

and large, no different. “Unfortunately, the vast majority of Christian Poles simply weren’t interested in having anything to do with Jews. There was, for example, nothing in the law that said we had to live in the ghetto. It was just that the local Polish Christians would have never tolerated the physical integration of our communities,” recalled Michel Mielnicki from Wasilków (Mielnicki and Munro 2000). The Jews, at the same time, were mainly uninterested in having anything to do with the Poles. In Białystok, notes Bender, there was less assimilation than in other places, even among the educated (Bender 2008). The vast majority of Jewish children studied in Jewish educational institutions; only a very small minority attended state schools (Bender 2008). The Jews were harassed in Polish schools, and several testimonies and memoirs state that Jews were simply afraid to even enter the Polish neighborhoods (Goldshmidt 1991; HVT-98).

At times, ethnic tensions escalated into riots, in which numerous people took part. Shalom Zvuluni, one of the leaders of the Hanoar Hatsioni youth movement in Białystok describes a riot that took place in the city when the annual *Lag Ba-Omer* parade of the Zionist youth movements happened to take place on Sunday. The parade route was supposed to pass by a church and the Zionist youths were advised to change it out of fear of violence, but they refused. As expected, when the parade reached the church, the Jews were attacked by Polish mob, which started beating them. Jewish porters, butchers and carriage drivers from all over the city rushed to defend their co-ethnics and dispersed the Poles. One Polish soldier was killed, and an unknown, though a substantial number of rioters were wounded.

The last Białystok Jewish community council elections were held in 1938. The representative of the anti-Zionist socialist Bund won the council presidency, but was vetoed by

the government, and a Zionist candidate was appointed instead. The engineer Ephraim Barasz became the general manager of the community (Bender 2008).

The German army occupied the city on September 15, 1939, two weeks after the outbreak of the war, and controlled it for one week. During that period the Jews were subject to sporadic beatings, humiliations, and even some murders. Because the city was located in the territory that, according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was assigned to the Soviet Union, several days after the Germans occupied Białystok, Soviet planes flew over the city and dropped leaflets in which the local population was notified about the forthcoming “liberation of Western Belarus from the Polish yoke.” On September 22nd the German troops left, and the Red Army marched into the city.

Białystok under the Soviet Rule

The Red Army entered Białystok to be greeted by jubilant and cheering Jewish crowds. The Soviet tanks were “bombarded with flowers,” recalled Abraham Vered (Vered 1988). It was the Day of Atonement, which in the Jewish religious tradition should be devoted to prayer and fasting, but as many survivors noted, the entrance of the Red Army turned the day of fasting into a holiday. Soviet rule was welcomed by almost every Jew, including staunch anti-communists. Nachum Grosman, a wealthy industrialist, put a red banner on the balcony of his house (Shalev 2005). The father of Lipa A., also a businessman, was extremely happy when the Red Army took over the city because it meant that there will no German or Polish anti-Semitism to suffer from. Losing his business was a small price to pay for such a happy eventuality (HVT-1842). “The Soviet Army came in and truly liberated us,” recalled Irene S. (HVT-98).

One of the first things the Soviet servicemen did after securing control over the city was to go on a wild shopping spree, emptying the stores and buying virtually everything they could find. “We used to joke that the Russians liberated us, they liberated us from butter, from sugar, from milk, from meat,” Michel Mielnicki described the first days of the Soviet rule (Mielnicki and Munro 2000).

Shortly after the Soviet takeover, the city was declared the capital of Western Belorussia, and elections to the Western Belorussia Supreme Soviet were held. Even though the elections were completely rigged and tightly monitored by the Soviet officials who flocked to the city, many young Jews, especially those belonging to the left-wing groups and organizations, enthusiastically participated in the election campaign (Berkner 2001; Vered 1988), arousing the resentment and bitter sarcasm of many Poles, who overnight lost their prominence (and their state). Unsurprisingly, the elected Supreme Soviet unanimously expressed the wish of the liberated people of Western Belorussia to join the “Soviet family of nations,” and the territory was promptly annexed to the USSR. The period of Soviet rule was rather short (less than two years), but eventful and consequential because it completely reconfigured and reshaped the social and political structure of the city and its Jewish community.

Not every Jew in Białystok, however, was happy with the Soviets even during the euphoria of the late September 1939. Anna Lincoln’s father, a factory owner, feared the Soviets no less, and possibly even more than the Germans. “‘Communists in Białystok,’ said father slowly. ‘That’s a problem. Hm, hm, hm, yes that’s a real problem’” (Lincoln 1982). Anna Lincoln’s father’s worries proved to be well-founded. His factory was requisitioned, and Soviet officers were quartered in his apartment. Eventually, the family decided to avoid an imminent arrest and deportation by escaping to the still independent Lithuania, and from there to the US.

Others resented both occupiers equally. “Poland was gone, again divided up between two evils, the Nazis and the Soviets. We were trapped” (Iwry 2004).

One of the main problems that the Soviet authorities had to confront was the presence in the city of tens of thousands Jewish refugees who flocked to Białystok from the Nazi-occupied Poland, creating acute housing and food shortages. “Only green, unripe apples are plentiful,” is how one refugee described the food supply situation in the city (Bender 2008). Synagogues, schools, and public buildings were converted to sleeping halls, but there was still not enough space to accommodate everyone who reached the town. “The conditions were horrible,” recalled Alexander H., a refugee from Łódź. For some time he had to sleep on the streets before moving to a smaller town (HVT-3438). Irving Ch. also escaped from Łódź after being beaten by German soldiers. He was sleeping in a synagogue because there was no other place available in the city. Realizing that nothing positive awaited him in Białystok, he registered for work in the Russian hinterland and ended up in the Siberian town of Omsk (HVT-2816). The families of Dora and Moshe Frank and of Yizhak Cohen were recruited to work in the industrial city of Magnitogorsk in the Urals (Frank and Frank 1946; Cohen 1946).

While some decided to move further east, others were so disappointed with the conditions in Białystok, and with Soviet rule in general, that they chose to escape back to the Nazi-occupied Poland. Henry N. escaped to Białystok from Warsaw when the city was occupied by the German troops. He worked in a *kolkhoz* (collective farm), but life was tough there. People who came from western Poland kept explaining that life was not that awful under the Germans, so he smuggled himself back to Warsaw (HVT-445). Felix F. also escaped to Białystok from Warsaw, but after some time his mother sent a Polish smuggler to bring him back. He got arrested trying to cross the border and was sent back to Białystok (HVT-1287). Fiszal G., also from Warsaw,

returned home when he sensed that the danger was over and life in the German-occupied Warsaw was normal (HVT-3153). His was mistaken.

Eventually the Soviet authorities decided to solve the crisis by presenting the refugees with a choice between accepting Soviet citizenship or registering to move back to the German-occupied zone. According to Sara Bender, about half of the refugees refused Soviet citizenship. Some managed to return to the German zone on their own, but the majority were arrested by the Soviet security services and deported to the Soviet interior, where most survived the war. After the deportation of the refugees, the economic situation in the city substantially improved, noted Moshe Goldshmidt (Goldshmidt 1991).

Those who stayed, as well the local Jewish population, received Soviet passports. Often the passports came with specific clauses or paragraphs. The most widespread was Paragraph 11, which was applied to “former businessmen, owners of shops or landed property, and bankers as well as quite a few who did not know exactly what their ‘crime’ was.” The main implication of the paragraph was the prohibition to live within one hundred kilometers from the border and in the central cities of Western Poland (Pinchuk 1990). In addition, the Soviet authorities tried to cleanse the city of unreliable and subversive “elements” such as political activists, religious figures and many members of the professions. Especially hard hit were the Bund and the Zionists. “I was a known Zionist as well as the director of the Jewish gymnasium, and therefore [was] in line to be gotten rid of. I began planning my escape,” recalled Shmuel Iwry (2004). The father of Celina H. happened to be born in Germany and therefore got deported to Siberia. The rest of the family was allowed to stay in the city (HVT-2521). “The political people, the rich people—they were sent to Siberia. This was a miracle. They were the lucky ones,” said Sara L.

after the Holocaust. Ironically, by targeting people, deporting or incarcerating them in the Gulag, the Soviet authorities happened to save the lives of thousands Polish Jews.

In addition to targeting people they did not trust, the Soviet government also completely reformed the social and economic life of the Białystok Jews. Private enterprises were nationalized; synagogues and prayer houses were converted to clubs and warehouses; Hebrew schools were forced to switch to Yiddish (or Russian) and communal and political organizations were disbanded. Saturday became a regular working day, which meant that most religious Jews had either to desecrate the Shabbat or to face unemployment (and potentially deportation).

The Soviet regime, however, did not only punish and deport people. For many, Soviet rule brought numerous tangible benefits, such as employment, universal health care, access to secondary and academic education and opportunities for upward social mobility of which the Jews were deprived in Poland. Furthermore, in the USSR anti-Semitism was a criminal offence, and for the first time in their lives the Jews did not have to fear the Poles. “Schooling was good; everything else was bad, but schooling was good,” recalled Jay M. (HVT-430). “Anti-Semitism disappeared, many things opened up for us, the Jews ... There was work for everybody suddenly,” remembered Joe D. of the Soviet years (HVT-1678). “Everybody was happy. At least there was a job for everyone,” said Leon F. (HVT-2903). “We were so persecuted under the Poles, and under the Soviets we were not persecuted that much,” compared the two regimes Zvi Yovin (OHD-110(11)). “The Russians didn’t force us to do anything, with one exception, of course—we had to be communists,” summarized the Soviet policy Avraham K. (HVT-3639). The father of Bernice S. lost his banking business, and one of her brothers was deported to Siberia but she still considered life not that bad because she was able to finish high school and

was admitted to Leningrad State University. “It was quite a happy time. Of course, I didn’t realize the tragedy that happened to my parents” (HVT-1336).

Many young Jews embraced the new regime, some enthusiastically, some less so. Abraham Vered remembered the moment when he became a member of the Komsomol, the Communist Party youth branch, as the happiest moment of his life (Vered 1988). Before 1939 Shmuel Goldberg was a member of the Zionist Hashomer Hatsair, but during the Soviet occupation switched to the Komsomol “to adjust to the new conditions” (OHD-110(13)). Aharon Lach remembered vividly how one of his instructors (*madrich*) in the Hashomer Hatsair switched to the Komsomol (OHD-110(4)). Some went even further and started informing on their former comrades. So pervasive was the phenomenon that during the war the Jewish underground decided that “[I]t is an imperative, if [we] survive, *to put to death all the Jewish traitors in the service of the Russians or the Germans*. That doesn’t mean that the underground is against the Soviet regime as such, but the ‘*Zionist turncoats who escaped to the Bolsheviks*’ (zionim mumarim) ... *are responsible for an exceptionally large number of [losses in] human lives*” (emphasis in original). Later, however, the document stated that it was decided that in the case of those who served the Soviet authorities, the decision on whether and how to punish such people would be made on a “case by case” basis (Anonymous n.d.).

Many others, however, clung steadfastly to their previous political beliefs. Chajka Grosman, the leader of the Hashomer Hatsair in Białystok left the city and moved to Wilno, where many other activists of the youth Zionist movements congregated, while the activists who remained in the city decided to continue operating in the underground. For the Marxist Hashomer Hatsair, known for its traditional sympathy to the Soviet Union the decision to go underground was a very tough one. “Can we, as socialists, be in the underground in the Soviet

Union?” one Hashomer Hatsair activist wondered (Perlis 1987). The movement members decided that they could. The establishment of the Hashomer underground was a local initiative of several members, recalled Aharon Lach. Initially, the underground members were meeting in groups of ten to fifteen, but later reorganized to small groups of less than five. Their goal was mainly to preserve the organization, its ideology and structure rather than harming the Soviet Union (OHD-110(4)). The socialist Dror and the right-wing Betar movements also had underground cells in the city (Zuckerman 1990; Bender 2008).

The Soviet deportations, as well as the political, social and economic reforms were detrimental to a large number of Białystok Jews, many of whom saw their businesses nationalized, synagogues closed, and parties disbanded. At the same time, even some who did not benefit from the educational and social advancement venues offered by the new regime still appreciated the basic fact that Soviet rule was better than the German regime. By preventing German rule over Białystok, the Soviets “commuted a death sentence to life imprisonment,” a popular joke went. On June 22, 1941, when Nazi Germany invaded the USSR, the Jews of Białystok came to realize how true this joke was.

Białystok and its Jews under the Nazi Occupation

The Germans troops entered Białystok on June 27, 1941. Immediately upon their arrival in the city, Police Battalions 309 and 316 and Einsatzkommando 8 started massacring the local Jewish population. Many were shot in a public garden, and around eight hundred were herded into the Great Synagogue which was set ablaze. Only a handful managed to escape with the help of the Polish janitor. “I always thought he was a bad guy. As a child I used to play near the synagogue and he chased us away. But he was an angel,” recalled Leon F. (HVT-2903). The father of Rachel Lachower was one of the lucky few who managed to escape from the

synagogue. He came home with a burnt hat and never talked about the experience (OHD-110(23)). On July 3rd and July 12th additional shootings took place. In two weeks about seven thousand Jews had perished.

On Sunday, June 29, 1941, the German authorities ordered the establishment of the Judenrat. The city rabbi, Gedaliah Rosenmann, was appointed the Judenrat chair. On July 26, 1941, the creation of the ghetto was announced. The Germans ordered the Jews to construct a 2.5-meter (8.2-foot) high wooden fence, topped with barbed wire, around the ghetto. “On August 1, the main gate, on Jurowiecka Street, was closed on its forty-three thousand inhabitants” (Bender forthcoming). In September 1941, following German orders, about five thousand Jews were expelled from Białystok to the small town of Prużany (Bender 2008).

In July 1941 the city became the capital of the *Bezirk* (district) Białystok, a separate German administrative unit. The *Bezirk* was placed under the authority of Erich Koch, the *Oberpräsident* and *Gauleiter* of East Prussia who governed the territory from his seat in Königsberg. It was initially intended to incorporate the District into the German state, but even though the German mark was introduced as the regional currency and a border between the district and the rest of Poland was erected, the plan was never implemented. Throughout the war, the District remained a separate administrative unit which was neither fully annexed to the Reich, nor placed under the authority of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories or the General Government (the Nazi administrative unit that encompassed the central and southern parts of pre-war Poland).

The Judenrat, de-facto led by Ephraim Barasz, adopted the “salvation through labor” strategy and argued that the ghetto’s survival depended on transforming it into a productive

source of cheap labor for the Germans. This strategy, notes Bender, “likely prolonged the life of the Białystok ghetto.” In October 1942 the plan to deport twelve thousand Jews from Białystok was forestalled by the German authorities on grounds that extolled the ghetto’s contribution to the German war effort. When the Germans began on November 2, 1942 to liquidate almost all the ghettos in Distrikt Białystok, the Białystok ghetto was sealed temporarily, but remained untouched (Bender forthcoming).

Life in the ghetto was harsh and many survivors recall being constantly hungry. At the same time, unlike in many other large ghettos, in Białystok the Jews did not die from hunger and there were no epidemics that decimated the Jewish population of other cities. But the ghetto was overcrowded, with the allocation of living quarters was based on the “three square meters per person” principle. Sixteen people lived in the Felicja N.’s apartment (HVT-1874); five members of the Mielnicki family lived in one room, and their two-bedroom apartment housed three families (Mielnicki and Munro 2000). Chana Birk shared a room with five other people (OHD-110(8)). Thirty people lived in the Lipa A. apartment (HVT-1842).

The ghetto underground resistance started to organize in the fall of 1941 and encompassed virtually the whole spectrum of pre-war political movements and organizations. In December 1941, the communists established the first underground organization, known as the Anti-Fascist Committee. In August 1942 the communists, the Zionist-socialist Hashomer Hatsair and a faction of Bund joined forces and created the Front A organization. In January 1943 a second resistance block, known as Front B, was organized. It consisted of Dror, Hashomer Hatsair (which also remained a member of Front A), Betar, Hanoar Hazioni, and a Bundist group which had not joined Front A.

On February 4, 1943, the Gestapo notified Barasz of a plan to deport 17,600 Jews from the ghetto, but eventually the number of deportees was reduced to 6,300. The Aktion, which began on February 5, 1943, lasted for the whole week. About 8,000 Jews were rounded up and sent to the Treblinka or Auschwitz death camps; another 2,000 were killed on the spot (Bender forthcoming). After the deportation, about thirty thousand Jews remained in the ghetto.

In late July 1943, Himmler ordered the plan to liquidate the ghetto. Barasz was kept in the dark about the deportation until the evening of August 15 when he was summoned to a meeting with the Gestapo officials and notified that the next morning the ghetto inhabitants would be transported to Lublin. Early on the morning of August 16, 1943 Barasz ordered the ghetto Jews to assemble at the deportation point. The underground started a rebellion that morning, but it was put down by the German troops.

Over the next week twenty five thousand Jews were sent from the ghetto to death camps; those chosen for work were sent to labor camps in the Lublin area. On August 21, about 1,260 ghetto children, many of them orphans were sent to the Theresienstadt ghetto. According to a rumor, they were expected to be sent to Switzerland and exchanged for German POWs. The exchange plan failed, and from Theresienstadt the children were shipped to Auschwitz and gassed (Bender forthcoming).

The remaining one thousand Jews, including Barasz and Rosenmann, were kept in the city in the “Small Ghetto” until early September 1943. When the Red Army liberated Białystok on July 22, 1944, the only Jews in the city were a small group of women living on Aryan papers. Overall, only several hundred Białystok Jews survived the German occupation.

Information

Similar to other places, information on the likelihood of survival, credible or perceived as such, played a key role in the Białystok Jews' choice of behavioral strategy from the very beginning of the war. Unlike in Kraków, which was swamped with Jewish refugees from Germany who gave firsthand accounts of the Nazi's anti-Jewish policies, in Białystok the knowledge of the German anti-Jewish measures came mainly from newspapers and other media sources. The Białystok Jews read about the refugees, but did not meet them in the city, recalled Leon F. (HVT-2903). Furthermore, the troubling news from Germany was somewhat mitigated by the history of local Jews' rather positive encounters with the Germans.

The family of Michel Mielnicki's mother came from the part of Poland that belonged to Germany before WWI. The mother taught her children German, and based on her memory of German troops saving Jews from a pogrom during or immediately after WWI, she dismissed any reports regarding German anti-Jewish policies (Mielnicki and Munro 2000). When the Nazi troops occupied the hometown of Avraham K. (a small community nearby Białystok), older Jews who remembered the Germans from the WWI did not believe that Jews would be harmed and convinced the rest of the community that they had nothing to worry about. Therefore, when the announcement to gather on the main square came, the family of Abraham K. decided to obey and not to hide. Together with the rest of the town Jews, they were taken outside the town and shot. Avraham K. was among the few who managed to survive (HVT-3639). The father of Ewa Kracowska, a well-known doctor, was taken away by the Germans during the first days of the occupation and shot. Kracowska's mother, who came from the previously German part of Poland, spoke German and held the Germans in high regard. For a long period of time she hoped that her husband was still alive because she could not imagine that the Germans were capable of killing physicians (OHD-110(5)). At the same time, several people who before the war had

witnessed the Germans' actions did fear them. Ralph B. happened to be in Czechoslovakia when German troops marched into the country. The first thing Ralph B. did after returning to Białystok was to write a letter to his uncle in Chicago and ask to sponsor his immigration to the US. Unfortunately, his quota number made Ralph B. eligible for immigration only in 1942, and by that time he was already in the ghetto (HVT-801).

German troops occupied Białystok for one week in 1939. While the Jews were harassed, beaten and sometimes even killed, the German actions, quite traumatic for many people, were nonetheless perceived mainly as local wartime aberrations rather than as part of a more general strategy. "It was the army that was in power, not the SS, so not much happened" (HVT-2903). Under Soviet rule, information about the German policies in Central and Western Poland came from two main sources—the refugees, and the Soviet media. The refugees flocked to the city in the fall of 1939, but later on, after discovering that life under the Germans was harsh, but tolerable, many returned to their hometowns. The local Jews, obviously, did note that there were many people who preferred going back to Germany rather than staying in the USSR. According to Avraham K., "we knew that Jews are suffering, that they live in ghettos, but there was no mass murder yet" (HVT-3639).

The second source of information was the Soviet media which, following the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement and the subsequent cooperation between Hitler and Stalin in redrawing the map of Europe minimized and silenced any negative coverage of Germany. "[T]he Russians ... started publishing the *Bialystoker Stern*, a new Soviet-controlled 'Jewish' newspaper with a communist orientation. Because of the Russian-German peace pact, the paper deliberately concealed the Nazis' treatment of Jews," recalled Charles Zabuski (Zabuski and Brott 1996). "Only through the grapevine were people in Białystok able to learn that "Polish Jews in German-

occupied Poland were being humiliated, tortured, and murdered,” he added. The grapevine, certainly, did not reach everyone and its credibility was questionable.

In 1939, several people were warned by the Germans, but could not do much. During the brief German occupation of the city, Yekutiel S. became friends with a German officer who came to Yekutiel S.’s house to get food. One day the officer told Yekutiel S. that “the Russians are coming; it will be good for you Jews. But we will be back,” he added (HVT-3823). Sheima L. was in the Polish army in 1939 and became a POW. Once he asked a German guard what life in Germany was like for Jews. The soldier, who helped Sheima L. and knew about his Jewish identity, replied that “if we win [the war], there will be no life for the Jews in Germany.” When in the Białystok POW camp the Germans registered Jewish POWs, Sheima L. recalled what the guard told him and did not reveal his Jewish identity. The Jews who registered were beaten and taken away to a pit where they were held for several days” (HVT-3616).

After the first wave of German killings in June-July 1941, many Jews started realizing what might await them, but at that time the majority felt that it was already too late to escape. After watching the Great Synagogue burn, Abraham O. decided to hide when the ghetto was created. Many of his friends went to the woods, but the conditions there were harsh and they were forced to return. His decision was not to escape but to build a hideout in his house in the ghetto (HVT-189). Given the very high number of hideouts in the ghetto, it is safe to assume that others reached a similar conclusion.

Chaim Mielnicki from the suburban community of Wasilków was temporarily saved during the first days of the war precisely because he had credible information from trusted sources. During the time of Soviet rule he collaborated with the Soviet security services and had

reasons to fear for his life. As his son recalled, “in late afternoon of 24 June [1941], Father’s gentile friend ... appeared unannounced at our door with word that the name of Chaim Mielnicki was number one on the death list of the local Polish fascists ... Father knew enough about [his Polish friend’s] contacts to believe him.” The very same day Chaim Mielnicki fled the town and moved to Białystok (Mielnicki and Munro 2000).

When the ghetto was established and sealed, the information about what was happening in the outside world became one of the most valuable commodities in the ghetto. Even though no newspapers were allowed into the ghetto and listening to radio broadcasts was a major offence that could easily cost the person his life, news did reach the ghetto. Virtually every political movement in the ghetto had its own radio, notes the historian Szymon Datner, and not surprisingly one of the first actions of the underground was the distribution of the London and Moscow radio broadcasts transcripts (Datner 1946). Moshe Goldshmidt’s mother worked as a janitor in the train station. She supplemented her income by collecting cigarette stubs and newspapers that the German soldiers left on the trains. The demand for the newspapers was staggering (*itonim nihtefu miyad*) (Goldshmidt 1991). People knew “how to read between the lines in German newspapers,” noted Ewa Kracowska (OHD-110(5)). When Harry Bass went to the Aryan side to engage in black market activities he smuggled into the ghetto both food and a Polish newspaper (Bass 1983).

Politics became one of the main discussion topics in the ghetto, many survivors recalled. During the February 1943 Aktion, Abraham O., who worked as engineer in a textile factory, which protected him from deportation, brought there several rabbis whom he wanted to save. “We were sitting there talking politics,” he recalled (HVT-189). “A Jew, who was a ‘political junkie’ told a German officer before being put on a train [to Treblinka]—me you took, but

Stalingrad—forget about it,” wrote Mordechai Tenenbaum shortly after the February Aktion (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). Indeed, one of the key reasons for why the liquidation of the ghetto in August 1943 took everyone by surprise was precisely because the ghetto Jews were well aware of the political and military situation on the Eastern and Western fronts. The Soviets were rapidly advancing; the German troops were defeated in North Africa; American and British forces landed in Sicily, and Mussolini was removed from power in Rome. Life looked promising for the ghetto inhabitants (Datner 1946).

Not every piece of news that circulated in the ghetto was correct. Rumors were prevalent and oftentimes affected peoples’ behavior. After the February Aktion, the ghetto was filled with rumors that were optimistic “up to the point of being idiotic,” wrote Mordechai Tenenbaum (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). The father of Chana Birk was taken away with many other males after the Germans occupied the city and never came back. “There were rumors that here [the males] return, so I came out to the road with a cup of tea for father to greet him, for if he comes back, he might be thirsty ... [T]here always were rumors. Later we learned that they are no longer alive” (OHD-110(8)). There also has emerged a “good news agency” called YIVO, which stood for *Yidn Vil Azoy* (‘Jews want it this way’ in Yiddish), noted Sergei Berkner (2001). Interestingly, the existence of the “good news agency” named YIVO was also recorded in the Minsk ghetto, although it is quite certain that no connections existed between these two ghettos.

Available information determined the behavior of not only the ordinary ghetto inhabitants, but also of the leadership. Barasz, the Judenrat chair, relied heavily on the information he received from his German contacts and was willing to spend considerable amounts of money to bribe people who could provide him with the data he needed. “It is amazing how reliable the information Barasz possessed was,” notes the historian Nachman

Blumental (1962). This information also included secret German documents concerning the ghetto, and Barasz was convinced that when and if the order to liquidate the ghetto came, he would be warned in advance. After the February Aktion, based on the German documents he was exposed to, Barasz told Tenenbaum that the ghettos of Łódź and Białystok would remain intact until the end of the war. Tenenbaum did not believe that, but others did (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). Among those who did believe was Barasz himself. He reassured Tenenbaum that his German contacts had never lied to him on important matters and that he had every reason to trust them. The belief in the veracity of this information led Barasz to try to crack down on the underground, which was preparing for an uprising, and was perceived by Barasz as endangering the ghetto's existence. When the orders of ghetto liquidation arrived from Berlin and no one in the city administration notified Barasz until the very last moment, the Judenrat leader was completely devastated and shocked, testified his secretary (OHD-110(22)).

The appearance of new information has led people to change their behavior. Most clearly this can be seen in the case of the February Aktion and its immediate aftermath. Jay M. learned that people who worked in certain industries were exempt from deportation and immediately applied for a job in such an industry (HVT-430). Irene S. opened a private school in the ghetto but after the February Aktion closed it and started looking for a job in a factory (HVT-98). A relative of Luba Olenski owned a kindergarten in the ghetto. By February 1943 she closed her business and found a job in a factory because it was perceived to be a wiser strategy to get employment as "essential" worker (Olenski 2006). Lisa Shtrauch heard people talking about Treblinka, and started looking for connections (*protektsiya*) inside the ghetto to get a work permit (OHD-110(12)). The cousin of Jack R. worked in one of the ghetto factories. One day the cousin's German foreman approached him and told him that there was a plan to kill all the Jews.

The cousin told Jack R.: “I can’t escape; I have a family, but you—why are you staying in here?” Jack R. escaped the ghetto and survived the Holocaust (HVT-1516).

Contemporary sources of information were not the only ones that were valued; people tried to analyze their current situation by looking at comparable situations from other places and periods. For the Białystok Jews during the Holocaust such a comparative case was the Armenian genocide. From the underground archive documents and testimonies we know that “Forty Days of Musa Dagh,” a novel by the Austrian author Franz Werfel that described an Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire which successfully defended itself against the Ottoman troops, was read by the underground members. “The ghetto should be our Musa Dagh,” one underground member claimed during a discussion about the choice of resistance strategy. According to Barasz’s secretary, he also read this book to better understand how to behave (OHD-110(22)). We do not know what conclusions he reached after reading it.

Information about mass killings not only affected how people behaved, but was also a valuable commodity the Jews wanted to produce and preserve. This is probably the main reason for why the ghetto underground archive was established and why Barasz and Tenenbaum spent considerable efforts updating it and including as much information and evidence as possible. Immediately after Barasz learned about the killing of Jews in the Treblinka death camp, he sent the information to Tenenbaum to be included in the archive. “Barasz sent me documents and pictures found in the clothes that arrived to the ghetto from Treblinka. I am walking with them the whole day; I cannot be separated from them for even a moment. I think my pocket is burning ... Awful, terrifying,” wrote Tenenbaum in his diary on January 29, 1943 (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). Felicja N. did not look Jewish, spoke good Polish and had friends in the countryside.

After the February Aktion people urged her “to escape if only to tell later what we lived through” (HVT-1874).

The most horrifying story about the production of evidence is the story of the *Sonderkommando* 1005—a group tasked with destroying the evidence of Nazi crimes by opening mass graves and burning the corpses. The Jews selected for this job had to open mass graves around the city, to take out the bodies and to burn them so no traces of the Nazi killings would be left. “From the very first days we decided that we must do whatever we could to make known to the world what was happening here,” a *Sonderkommando* member testified. “Once a German walked up to me and said: ‘You won’t be alive anyway. Even if you should survive and tell someone about this, they won’t believe you.’ That statement had a huge impact on me. I decided to do everything possible to preserve some traces of our work. I kept my eyes on the gendarmes surrounding us and seized the moment whenever something distracted them. At that instant I would take a hook and toss a corpse’s hand, a rib, or a skull into a hole and cover it with sand. My comrades did the same” (Ehrenburg and Grossman 2002).

Did the Jews of Białystok know the fate that awaited them? Survivors’ testimonies and memoirs are very consistent in this regard—only a few people knew about gas chambers before early 1943, and virtually everyone knew after the February Aktion. In late 1942 we “didn’t know much about Treblinka,” recalled Avraham K. (HVT-3639). According to Leon F., nobody in Pruzany, where about five thousand Białystok Jews were deported in 1941, knew about the extermination camps (HVT-2903). In late 1942 Harry Bass knew that Germans killed people—he witnessed the killings in the city, but had no idea about the gassing (Bass 1983). When Michel Mielnicki’s mother heard that they were going to be deported to a labor camp (in reality they went to Auschwitz), she believed and was optimistic. “At least we are going to have our daily

bread, and soup, and things like that. They are not going to let us starve in a *labor* camp,” she said (Mielnicki and Munro 2000). Even Barasz had no idea where the people deported during the February Aktion were taken. According to his secretary, Barasz thought that this Aktion would be similar to the deportation to the Prużany ghetto and when he learned about Treblinka he became very depressed. “But what could he do, what could he say?” (OHD-110(22)).

The situation changed after the February Aktion. According to Zvi Yovin, people knew what Treblinka was and that Treblinka was death (OHD-110(11)). By August 1943 Ralph B. had “some ideas and fragments about Treblinka” (HVT-801). Yekutiel S. did know about Treblinka, even though he did not have any idea about the Majdanek concentration and death camp, where he ended up (HVT-3823). Rachel Lachower was spared and sent to the labor camp. “In Majdanek, until they opened the shower [we] did not know whether it would be water or gas,” she recalled (OHD-110(23)). Even the children “knew perfectly well what Treblinka was,” and asked whether they should jump off the train, recalled Hadassa Levkowitz who was sent with the ghetto orphans to Theresienstadt ghetto (OHD-110(22)). After arriving there, the children refused to enter the showers, crying “don’t kill us, we are also Jews!” The local Jewish personnel, who did not know about the gas chambers, were dismayed and confused (Rabinovici 2011).

Among the Białystok ghetto underground archive documents there is a letter (in Hebrew) written by the underground member Cipora Birman on March 4, 1943. In this short letter Birman asks for assistance in locating her sister. The letter is short and worth quoting almost entirely.

I would ask to find my sister. Her residence place is Jerusalem, the address I do not know. Her family name now is Shoshana Fink.

To send her my regards. From the family I have no news. I was at home last time only under the Soviets. For sure [they are] no

longer alive. I will also not be [alive], in a week, maybe in a month.

I very much wanted to meet her. For minutes at least. Alas. Shalom to her (Birman 1943).

The Jews of Białystok knew that deportation most certainly meant death. For that reason their behavior during the last day of the ghetto's existence, when the vast majority quietly went to the deportation place as stipulated by the Germans and the Judenrat, is even more puzzling.

Collaboration

In the Białystok ghetto, the main public collaboration bodies were the Jewish Council (Judenrat), and the Jewish Order Service (*Ordnungsdienst*), generally known as the Jewish Police. In addition, the ghetto also had a number of private collaborators who were German security services' informers. Some of these informers had long lasting relationships with the Gestapo, while others informed on fellow Jews on an ad-hoc basis, mainly during the February Aktion.

The Białystok ghetto Judenrat had to collaborate with the German authorities in numerous ways and through various actions which were detrimental to the well-being and eventually the survival of the local Jews. The Judenrat urged people to faithfully comply with German orders, organized people into forced labor detachments, tried to fight the smuggling of products into the ghetto, and compiled lists of people who were to be deported from the ghetto. Barasz, the Judenrat leader, also reneged on his promise to inform the ghetto underground about the liquidation of the ghetto, during which it stood by and watched the ghetto population being led to death camps. At the same time, the Judenrat had also worked tirelessly and until the very last moment—quite efficiently to save the ghetto and its inhabitants. The Judenrat leaders, noted

the historian Nachman Blumental, had a vision, a grand strategy, and they chose to stick to it no matter what (Blumental 1962). They did as much as they could. They failed.

The Białystok ghetto Jewish Council, the Judenrat (or as it called itself—the *Yidenrat*) was established by the Nazis in late June 1941, immediately after the German occupation of the city. There are no documents describing exactly how members of the Judenrat were selected, but evidence from the Judenrat meeting protocols allow us to reconstruct the process with a high degree of certainty. Following Heidrich's 1939 instruction to establish Jewish Councils in the occupied territories, the Nazi military authorities summoned the city chief rabbi Gedaliah Rosenmann, and appointed him the Judenrat chair. The selection of Rosenmann is hardly surprising—because the Jewish communal institutions were dismantled by the Soviets, in June 1941 the rabbi was the only acting Jewish public figure in the city (besides the Jewish communist officials, whose appointment was out of question).

After being appointed, Rosenmann was tasked with selecting other Council members. Initially, the number of Judenrat members was twelve, and was later increased to twenty four. Selecting the other Council members, Rosenmann made two crucial decisions. First, he sent his beadle (lay employee of the synagogue) to former Jewish community leaders who were still in town and urged them to join the Judenrat. Those approached by the beadle could not refuse an explicit request from the highly respected religious authority, and agreed to join the Jewish Council even if they had reservations about the participation in the work of this body. Second, realizing that his advanced age and limited administrative abilities and experience would prevent him from effectively leading the work of the Jewish Council, Rosenmann appointed Ephraim Barasz, the former general manager of the Białystok pre-WWII Jewish Community Council to be

his deputy and the acting chair of the Judenrat. This decision proved to be crucial and shaped the life of the Białystok ghetto during the period of its existence.

Ephraim Barasz was born in 1892 in the small town of Wołkowysk to a middle class Jewish family, known for its ardent support of the Zionist cause. Barasz was educated in Germany, where he got a degree in mechanical engineering. His main field of activity, however, was Jewish communal and political life. In his native Wołkowysk, Barasz became the president of the Jewish Trade Bank and headed the local Jewish community council and the Zionist Organization chapter. In 1934 his career received a substantial boost when he was invited to join the Białystok Jewish community council as its director (general manager). In his political beliefs Barasz was a devoted left-wing Zionist, and sent his oldest son to study in Palestine, where he later became one of the first fighter pilots of the IDF. His middle son was shot by the Germans during the first days of the Nazi occupation, and the youngest son joined Barasz and his wife in the ghetto. While Barasz was asked to lead the Judenrat mainly due to his administrative knowledge and capabilities, his fluency in German and familiarity with German culture helped as well. After Barasz's appointment, Rosenmann, the de-jure Judenrat chair, assumed a largely ceremonial role. The Judenrat meeting protocols show that he used to open and close the meetings but hardly ever took part in the deliberations or made decisions. This was Barasz's domain. The contacts with the German authorities were also left to Barasz. One of the very few exceptions was during the first days of the occupation, when the Great Synagogue burned. The German military governor demanded that Rosenmann sign a declaration that the burning was done by the retreating Soviet forces. At gunpoint, Rosenmann had no other choice but to sign. Immediately after that, the Germans demanded that Rosenmann and the Judenrat pay ransom for males who were rounded up (and at that time already shot) during the first days of the

occupation. The collection of the ransom—five kilograms gold, one hundred kilograms silver, and two million rubles (Bender 2008) was of the first Barasz's tasks.

As mentioned previously, most, if not all Judenrat members were known public figures in the city's Jewish community. According to the Judenrat member (and before the war—the editor of the city's main Jewish newspaper) Pejsach Kaplan, almost 100% of the Judenrat members were people previously engaged in public activity (*askanei tsibur*). Even if Kaplan's assessment is somewhat exaggerated, the available data do show that the substantial majority of the Judenrat twenty-four members were publicly and politically involved people before the war (Shilhav 1961). The Judenrat employees came mainly from the intelligentsia simply because these people could not find any other source of employment and found it difficult to endure physically demanding manual labor in various ghetto factories. This also explains the large size of the Judenrat and the skyrocketing employment figures—from six hundred in January 1942 (and it was already claimed then that the number was three times larger than what was really needed) to 2,201 in July 1942 (Shilhav 1961). Unlike industrial workers, the Judenrat clerks did not receive salaries, but were compensated for their work in kind and received increased food rations. The exceptions were the Jewish Police and houses managers, who received salaries.

The dismantling of the Jewish communal institutions by the Soviet authorities affected not only the mode of the Judenrat members' selection, but also the initial stages of its activities. Unlike in Kraków, in Białystok the Judenrat could not rely on the infrastructure of the pre-war Jewish institutions because these did not exist. Thus, even to get the most basic office supplies it had to appeal to the population to donate theirs to the Judenrat (Shilhav 1961). Later, however, things normalized and the Jewish Council and its leaders started working tirelessly to secure the well-being of the ghetto and its inhabitants.

Throughout the existence of the Białystok ghetto, Barasz emerged as its undisputed leader. He often did not seek advice from the Council, and was not accountable to it. Initially the frequency of Judenrat meetings was high, but it declined towards the end of the ghetto's existence, when the Council meetings were very rare. Barasz also tightly controlled information flows and was practically the only one with the access to the German authorities. According to his private secretary Hadassa Levkowicz (at that time—Shprung), there was only one phone in the ghetto, and she was required to be near it all the time. Shprung was explicitly forbidden to leave the phone unattended lest someone use it without Barasz's knowledge and approval. The distribution of office space in the Judenrat building also indicated this institutional hierarchy—Shprung shared a room with the formal Council head, Rabbi Rosenmann, while Barasz enjoyed his own office (OHD-110(22)).

As with most other Judenrat chairs, Barasz saw his main goal in securing the survival of “his” ghetto and he had a clear vision of how to do it. He had a two-pronged strategy of 1. Fostering good relations with the local German authorities; and 2. Making the ghetto so indispensable for the German war effort that its liquidation would become unthinkable. Having graduated from a German university, and being fluent in German, Barasz knew how to approach the local German authorities. Some officials, who were known in the ghetto as “good Germans” helped Barasz out of human decency, personal sympathy, or patriotic feelings, because they recognized the importance of the ghetto production to the war effort (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). Others were bribed. Leaving the ghetto for conferences with the German authorities, Barasz often took with him jewelry, diamonds, gold watches or money as a gift to the official whom he visited. Hadassa Levkowicz, Barasz's secretary, recalled how he instructed her to bribe

the German officials with expensive Oriental rugs: “You just come to the office and put it down on the floor” (OHD-110(22)).

In his dealings with the Germans, Barasz achieved numerous important successes. First, he was able to prevent the establishment of the ghetto in the most rundown part of the city. Later, during the expulsion to Prużany he negotiated a substantial reduction in the number of deportees. He was also able to secure a steady supply of adequate food and medicine to the ghetto, which made the situation in the Białystok ghetto substantially better than in virtually all other large ghettos. So high was the level of trust between Barasz and some local German officials that they even shared with him official, secret documents concerning the ghetto. The close relations between Barasz and the German authorities were well known and realizing that he would be given reliable information, many Jews made a habit of gathering by the ghetto gate, waiting for Barasz’s return from his meetings with the Germans, and predicting the future by his facial expression.

The second component of Barasz’s survival strategy was to make the ghetto as useful to the German war effort as possible. “The factory is our shield,” he claimed during a Judenrat meeting (Shilhav 1961) and urged the ghetto Jews to do everything they could to make the ghetto productive. At the peak of its productivity, the ghetto manufactured more than five hundred different items, from shoelaces to saddles to mechanical equipment. The Judenrat even organized a special exhibition that highlighted the ghetto’s production and they invited German officials who visited the city to it. The ghetto laundries washed the soiled uniforms of the whole German Eastern Front, and according to a very popular story, an Ordinance Corps general from Königsberg notified the authorities in Berlin that if the ghetto were liquidated, he would close his office because there would be no one to make boots and sew uniforms (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff

1984). The “salvation through work” philosophy was not unique to Barasz; many Judenrat leaders adhered to it. Yet, due to the city’s historical status as a large industrial center, in Białystok the implementation of this strategy was easier than in most places.

Barasz’s belief in his chosen strategy was unequivocal. When he learned about the ghetto Jews’ attempts to use “weapons of the weak” he was outraged. “Trucks, assembled by the ghetto workers end up without breaks, wheels, or headlamps,” he lamented during a Judenrat meeting (Blumental 1962) and urged the Jews not to shirk on their duties. In addition, lest the Germans get the impression that the ghetto was composed of people with comfortable lives, consuming luxury items, the Judenrat urged mothers not to use baby carriers painted in bright colors (Blumental 1962), closed front door entrances to the restaurants, and on January 18, 1942 prohibited selling tobacco, cacao, pastry, meat, and fish in the ghetto markets and stores (Blumental 1962).

The relations between Barasz and the underground should also be viewed against the background of his adopted strategy. A devoted left-wing Zionist, Barasz certainly sympathized and respected the resistance efforts of the left-wing Zionist youth, with which he had many things in common. Both Chajka Grosman of the Hashomer Hatzair (in her memoirs) and Mordechai Tenenbaum of Dror (in his wartime diary) describe very close and cordial relations with Barasz, who helped them with documents, permits, living and office space, and money. Some meetings of the underground leadership took place in the Judenrat building, and Barasz’s adjutant and his bodyguard were members of the Dror movement and the underground. However, personal sympathies and a shared Zionist ideology were not the only reasons for Barasz’s close relations with the underground. Barasz’s secretary recalls that he respected the underground members, but did not believe in the practicality of resistance and its ability to bring

about salvation (OHD-110(22)). For Barasz, the underground was a constant threat to his strategy so he chose not to alienate the underground and if not control it entirely, then at least to be informed about its activities. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the Zionist Barasz urged the Zionist Tenenbaum to find a compromise and unite with the communists, who hated the Judenrat leader and viewed him as Nazi collaborator (Bender 2008; Shalev 2005). When the communist underground killed a German serviceman in a shootout by the ghetto fence and when there was an explosion in the communists' weapons lab, Barasz had to invest considerable efforts in calming down the Germans and making sure no reprisals against the ghetto Jews would be ordered. Therefore, a united underground that kept him informed was preferable than the divided one that did not. Barasz also promised Tenenbaum to keep him informed about all developments regarding the ghetto's fate. Yet, immediately prior to the liquidation of the ghetto, knowing that the underground was going to rebel, and still clinging to faith in his ability to save the ghetto at the very last moment, Barasz reneged on this promise and did not inform the underground about the orders he received, thus depriving the resistance of several crucial hours of preparations.

Barasz's strategy almost worked. He was able to keep the ghetto intact when most other ghettos were liquidated. Among the large Polish ghettos, only Łódź outlived the ghetto of Białystok. Barasz mistakenly believed that he could rely on his German contacts and that he would be informed if something was going to happen to the ghetto. As a rational person he simply could not imagine that the Germans would destroy a ghetto that contributed so greatly to their war effort. The German authorities in Berlin were also aware of the local officials' attempt to shield the ghetto from destruction; as a result they had to bring Odilo Globocnik, the SS commander of the Lublin district, to Białystok to lead the deportation operation because they did not fully trust the local cadres (Bender 2008).

While Barasz believed that the “salvation through work” strategy was the best chance to save the ghetto as a whole, he also believed that such behavior would lead to his death. He had no doubt that the Germans were going to lose the war and more than once told his secretary that he expected to be executed when the Soviets come back (OHD-110(22)). He was also well aware of the fact that his conduct was often heavily criticized by Jews, especially the Jewish communists, and resented by the Poles. In public meetings with the ghetto population he addressed this point and reassured the ghetto population that they had no reason to fear because the attitude of any further regime towards the Jews would be guided by high politics, and not by what the Jews did (Blumental 1962). As for himself, he was willing to sacrifice his life to save the community.

In addition to the Judenrat, the Białystok ghetto also had a Jewish police, or as it was officially called, the Order Service. In many ghettos, the police were de-facto independent from, and often more powerful than, the Judenrat (Weiss 1973). But in Białystok, the Jewish Police were subordinate to the Judenrat and its leader, and with the exception of several servicemen (discussed later in the chapter), did not try to gain independent power. There were about two hundred Jewish Police members in the Białystok ghetto and their mission was to keep public order, patrol the gates, and ensure the Jews’ compliance with the German authorities’ instructions, such as the curfew hour and blackout of windows. Unlike the Judenrat clerks, the Police members were paid regular salaries. “The first wave of the people who joined the ghetto police were criminals. A group called ‘The Black Hand’ terrorized and blackmailed people. They were purged, however, and the second wave of joiners were the members of the intelligentsia, a lot of mama’s boys who believed it was safer than doing other work,” recalled Charles Zabuski (Zabuski and Brott 1996). Contrary to this view, Lipa A. described the Jewish police as “the best

young people in the ghetto” (HVT-1842). Although seemingly contradictory, these two statements are not mutually exclusive. Among the first wave of recruits to the Jewish police were Pfenigstein, who served as the police superintendent, and Grisha Zelikowicz, a low ranking serviceman. Both actively engaged in extortion, blackmailing of rich Jews and informing on ghetto inhabitants to the Gestapo. Pfenigstein, who acted independently, was neutralized rather quickly and killed by his German masters who did not look favorably on his clandestine attempts to amass personal wealth (Bender 2008). Zelikowicz and his collaborators in the Jewish police turned out to be a more serious threat because they had an ambition to gain control over the Judenrat financial department and probably even to oust Barasz. However, Zelikowicz was also outsmarted by Barasz and his allies, and ended up in the Gestapo jail. Yet, even Zelikowicz, who was considered “the most negative personality in the ghetto,” even by people whom he assisted, was capable of compassion when it came to people he knew. The father and the sister of Lipa A. were among the deportees to Prużany. Lipa’s mother, who was friends with Zelikowicz’s sister tried to bribe him to obtain the family return to Białystok. Zelikowicz helped and refused payment for his efforts (HVT-1842).

After the arrest of Zelikowicz and his group, the Jewish police ranks were purged of 10% of their members, who were discovered to be corrupt and prone to bribe taking, extortion, and racketeering. The remaining 90% continued their service but were constantly urged by their superiors not forget that “[t]he ghetto is not forever. A day will come when we will meet our brothers without the [police] cap” (Blumental 1962). It is unclear what the direct effect of such pep talk was, but during the February 1943 Aktion the behavior of the Jewish police members was by and large exemplary because they refused to take part in rounding up fellow Jews, leaving the dirty work to the Germans. Unable to discover the Jewish hideouts themselves, the

Germans were forced to recruit individual collaborators, who tried to save their lives by betraying other Jews.

The *mosrim* (literally “givers away” in Hebrew and Yiddish) became the plague of the Białystok ghetto during the February Aktion because they were extremely effective in discovering the hideouts. “Three soldiers are going with an old lady—an informer. Five Germans—a lad leads them—an informer,” wrote Mordechai Tenenbaum (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). As a compensation for their services, the Germans gave the informers a document stating that “this Jewish traitor is exempt from the transport” (Bender 2008). The fear of the *mosrim* was so high that when Jack R. and his friend went out of their hideout to search for food and accidentally discovered a bunker with hiding Jews, the people in this bunker wanted to kill them. Their lives were spared only because among the people in the bunker was a lady from Jack R.’s hometown, who knew his family (HVT-1516).

After the Aktion, a witch hunt started in the ghetto and informers or suspected informers were lynched by the outraged mobs. “It was a death penalty” if someone betrayed a hideout, recalled Avraham K. (HVT-3639). Some informers were identified by the members of the Jewish police, who could walk freely around the ghetto during the Aktion and therefore saw the *mosrim* at work (HVT-1842). However, it was “enough to walk on the street and someone would call you an informer from behind to be killed. No one asked, no one interrogated. Just kicked them to death” (HVT-3639). A friend of Avraham K. killed his girlfriend after discovering that she betrayed a hideout to the Germans. “He was from a family of butchers, so he just took out a knife and killed her” (HVT-3639). Zvi Yovin was a teenager at that time and he vividly remembered taking part in the lynchings (OHD-110(11)). The graves of the *mosrim* were desecrated (OHD-110(22)).

Yet, despite their deadliness, the actual number of private collaborators was rather small. In the Białystok ghetto, the public collaboration of the Judenrat was substantially more consequential. And while Barasz opted for collaboration, from the ghetto Jews he demanded compliance.

Compliance

As discussed in the previous section, Barasz's survival strategy of making the ghetto indispensable for the Germans heavily relied on the Jews' willingness to follow orders and support the Judenrat efforts for any act of open insubordination would make the German question the usefulness of keeping the ghetto intact, and its inhabitants alive. Thus, compliance was demanded from the Jews by Barasz on more than one occasion. According to the ghetto leader, only by fulfilling Germans' and his orders could the Jews survive the war.

"Our goal is one: to save our lives until the end of war," claimed Barasz during a Judenrat meeting on March 22, 1942. To achieve this goal, the Jews had to "1. Follow the orders one hundred percent; 2. Be useful [to the Germans]; 3. Behave in ways that would satisfy the German authorities" (Blumental 1962). In a meeting with the ghetto population on April 5, 1942 Barasz urged the Jews "faithfully and entirely fulfill the government demands." When the Jews did not follow the rules, he felt outraged and helpless.

It should be noted that for the Białystok Jews, the demand to comply with the orders and policies of an alien and rather hostile power was not new—they experienced that under Soviet rule. Yet, there were several crucial differences between compliance under the Soviets and under the Germans. The compliance with Soviet authority was perceived as the "lesser of two evils," as Dov Levin calls it (Levin 1995) and those who complied could reasonably expect certain rewards such as employment, welfare benefits, education, social mobility, and most importantly—

physical survival. Even though Barasz and the Judenrat tried to present a causal link between compliance and survival, the veracity of this link was far from being certain. Furthermore, it was extremely hard to survive in the ghetto by faithfully following all the German rules and instructions. Even though the food rations in Białystok were much better than in most big ghettos, they could ensure only the very minimal subsistence level. In order not to be constantly hungry, more food, and therefore illegal black market trade, was needed.

Because it was extremely hard to survive by faithfully following the German rules and regulations, compliance became the least common survival strategy throughout the ghetto's existence. In the testimonies and other sources I was unable to find any reference to people who opted for total and blind compliance throughout the ghetto existence. At the same time, on the crucial day of the ghetto liquidation, August 16, 1943, compliance was the modal behavior. Even though by that time virtually everyone in the ghetto knew about death camps and gas chambers and understood that deportation most likely meant death, thousands upon thousands of the ghetto Jews streamed to the deportation point as ordered by the Judenrat. The underground hoped that the Jews, realizing that they have nothing to lose, would join the rebellion. But they were bitterly disappointed. "They closed their ears to our appeals," lamented Grosman after the war (Grosman 1965). Only a very small number joined the uprising and few hid in the bunkers. The vast majority quietly went to the trains, scheduled to take them to the gas chambers of Treblinka.

Why did so many people comply with the deportation order, not trying to resist and escape? One of the main reasons was the shortage of alternatives. As will be discussed in the section on evasion below, for most people this option was closed simply because they did not have the required looks, knowledge of Polish language, and connections. The Aryan side was hostile and unwelcoming. "Did you think about saving yourself?" asked an interviewer of one of

the survivors during the discussion of deportation. “There was nowhere to go,” the reply was (OHD-110(23)). The resistance option seemed similarly unrealistic. Whereas the underground fought for collective honor, most people focused on personal wellbeing and refrained from joining a suicidal battle that was waged several blocks away.

Finally, even more important was the fact that during the two years of the ghetto’s existence, the local Jewish population got used to relying on Barasz’s leadership, guidance, and judgment, and in the most crucial moment followed the Judenrat’s instruction to quietly comply with the deportation. It is quite likely that many went to the deportation point believing that Barasz would take care of them wherever they might end up, or simply felt lost and powerless when Barasz’s grand strategy collapsed so miserably and suddenly. “It is important to remember,” notes Bender, “that for two whole years the ghetto has been under Barasz’s spell, believing that work would save them. This fact explains why, during the evacuation, the underground had so little popular backing” (Bender 2008). Some, recalls Irene S., believed that because the Białystok ghetto was so productive, the announced deportation would be to labor camps, rather than to the death camps. “The Germans are running low on slave labor, they are now forced to use Jews,” the logic went (HVT-98).

The tragedy of Barasz and the Białystok ghetto as a whole was that the relative success of the “salvation through labor” prevented the majority of the Jewish population of Białystok from being able to react to a sudden change of fate. In the most tragic moment of the ghetto’s existence, Barasz’s repeated calls to faithfully comply with the all the German orders were finally answered by the Jews of Białystok.

Evasion

Unlike in Minsk, where up to fifteen thousand Jews had escaped to the forest, and Kraków, where hundreds of Jews hid in and around the city (Peleg and Ben-Tsvi 1987), the number of the Białystok Jews who chose evasion is miniscule. Among those who tried, only a handful survived. Partly, this situation can be attributed to the ghetto characteristics—it was much easier to escape the Minsk ghetto because it was surrounded by barbed wire, while there was a fence around the ghetto of Białystok. Yet, the Kraków ghetto was surrounded by a combination of brick wall and wooden fence and this did not seem to prevent the Jews from escaping. Furthermore, like in Minsk (and unlike in Kraków), there were large and thick forests not far away from Białystok, and until the very end of the occupation, the German presence in the countryside was minimal. Despite the existence of physical barriers, it was possible to escape and many people did go out of the ghetto to trade with the local population. Some survivors explicitly stated that they could have fled the ghetto, but decided against this option. The lack of widespread evasion in Białystok, I will show, should be attributed not to topographic factors or the physical barriers created by the Germans, but to socio-political factors—the city's history of interethnic relations and the level of Jews' integration into the broader non-Jewish society.

As I demonstrated in previous chapters, several things contributed to successful evasion. First, money was often needed to pay for hiding places. Second, a non-Jewish external appearance was an advantage because people who looked Jewish stuck out on the streets and were easier to identify. However, even more important than being rich or not looking Jewish was the level of integration into the larger non-Jewish society: the ability to speak the local language, familiarity with Christian culture and traditions, and most crucial—social ties and friendships with non-Jews. Many Jews in Białystok were poor, but the city's Jewish community also had a substantial middle class and a number of wealthy people. Undoubtedly, many lost significant

portions of their wealth as the result of the Soviet policies, but the fact that the ghetto had thriving restaurants and cafes, and that many quite expensive products were smuggled into the ghetto speaks for itself. Furthermore, we have no evidence that the Jews in Kraków or Minsk looked less Jewish than their co-ethnics in Białystok. It might be argued, however, that because Kraków is located further more to the south, a large number of Poles in that city had black hair and dark eyes, and therefore it was easier for the Jews not to stick out. This argument has some merit, but Minsk is located further north of Białystok, meaning that according to the same logic Minsk would be an even more difficult environment for evasion than Białystok. Therefore, I argue that it was not the geography but the level of integration that explains why so few Białystok Jews chose evasion.

As I showed in the previous sections, Białystok was an ethnically polarized and segregated city where, as one Jewish survivor puts it, “Poles hated Jews and ... Jews hated and feared Poles” (Zabuski and Brott 1996). Only a small percentage of Jewish kids attended Polish schools, and therefore most had virtually no non-Jewish friends and didn’t speak the language of the state in which they resided. In the home of Yehiel Sedler, Yiddish was spoken, and Polish was a “foreign language” (OHD-110(15)). Chana Birk attended a Jewish school where Polish was taught only several hours a week, “like English in Israeli high schools” (OHD-110(8)). Zvi Yovin spoke only Yiddish and Hebrew at home, and his Polish was very weak (OHD-110(11)). In many educated families the situation was not different. Tuvia Cytron was a doctor, from one of the most prominent Jewish families in the city. He knew German much better than he knew Polish even though he lived most of his life in the Polish state (OHD-110(6)). In the family of Abraham P. Russian was prioritized over Polish (HVT-2942). Overall, very few Jews in the city, and mainly only those from middle and upper class families, spoke proper Polish. A relative of

Luba Olenski was the director of an elite kindergarten before the war. Building on her work experience, she opened a kindergarten in the ghetto. There, she taught in Polish rather than Yiddish and this automatically put her in the category of “intellectual” (Olenski 2006).

Even the Jews who knew Polish still had few, if any, non-Jewish friends. Quite telling in this regard is the case of Ewa Kracowska. Her father was a doctor and earlier in his life was an officer in the Polish army; the family considered itself “assimilated.” The family members spoke Polish at home and attended Polish schools. Yet, these schools were Polish only in their language of instruction, because all the students were Jewish. Ewa had no non-Jewish friends. They didn’t even have non-Jewish neighbors—in her building only the night guard and the street sweeper were Poles (OHD-110(5)). The only Poles in Moshe Goldshmidt’s neighborhood were the janitors and the street sweepers (Goldshmidt 1991). Given such a high level of residential segregation it is hardly surprising that Jews feared even to enter Polish neighborhoods (Goldshmidt 1991). In Białystok Jewish students didn’t walk alone in the parks. “Was I intimidated [to walk in the parks]? I absolutely was!” recalls Irene S. (HVT-98). Mixed neighborhoods did exist, but they were rare and there the Jewish children were often harassed by the Poles (Berkner 2001). Even the families that in most other cities would have considered themselves integrated into non-Jewish society did not perceive themselves as such in Białystok. The father of Henry Bass was the secretary of the Białystok chapter of the Polish Army veterans’ organizations, and therefore had numerous contacts with Poles. Yet, according to him the family was “maybe [at] a footstep to the Gentile community,” and certainly not a part of it (Bass 1983).

The toxic ethnic relations between the Jewish and Polish communities in Białystok proved to be detrimental to the survival chances of many Jews after the German occupation of the city. In purely practical terms, it was possible to escape the ghetto. Many people went out to

work in the factories, others engaged in smuggling. If it was possible to smuggle cows across the ghetto fence (Zabuski and Brott 1996), humans could certainly get out as well. The problem was not to escape to the Aryan side, but to survive there. The Aryan side was not only perceived as threatening and hostile but really was, and much more so than in Minsk and Kraków.

After the February 1943 Aktion, Joe D. knew that the end was near and tried to find a way out. He failed. “[T]he Polacks [sic] would not save us,” he lamented after the war (HVT-1678). Some people tried to escape after the February Aktion, recalled Lipa A., but it was “intolerable outside” (*bahutz haia bilti nisbal*) (HVT-1842). “And who would take you in? ... There was no way of escaping unless you had money or could buy Aryan papers,” argued Irene S. (HVT-98). Given that Irene S. was one of the few who spoke good Polish and had Polish acquaintances, her remark is a very good indication of how desperate the things really were. Furthermore, even money could not always buy a way out. Before the ghetto liquidation, Menachem Rivkind’s aunt wrote him from Białystok regarding her plans to hide on the Aryan side and stated that she doubted that “they [the Poles] will want to help, and despite considerable effort, no place has yet been found.” Rivkind was a wealthy industrialist, a son-in-law of Rabbi Rosenmann, so money was probably not a problem for his family. Yet, they could not find a place to hide (Bender 2008).

Nevertheless, despite the tremendous difficulty of escaping the Nazis in such a hostile environment, some Białystok Jews did try the evasion strategy. The first attempts to escape were immediately after the German invasion of the USSR, even before the city was captured by the German troops. In Białystok, notes the historian Ben-Cion Pinchuk, the Soviet authorities made

“a feeble and largely unsuccessful attempt to rescue their own personnel and party members. An effort was also made to organize a special convoy for some of the writers and artists who had found

refuge in the city ... But even for those fortunate enough to find motor vehicles moving east, chances of reaching the safe rear were meager; most of them were caught between the pincers of the German army several hundred miles to the east or strafed by airplanes.” (Pinchuk 1980)

Irene S. was one of those who tried to escape. “Masses of humanity were on the road trying to reach the Soviet Union” (HVT-98). Unfortunately, she was overrun by the advancing German troops and was forced to come back. “Some people tried to escape, but most failed,” is how Leon F. summarized the situation (HVT-2903).

Lucyna Bilotinsky was one of the lucky few. Her parents were prominent communist activists and were imprisoned in Poland for their political activities. When the war started, her father was “running from one Soviet office to another” to get instructions, but the offices were already vacated. His communist friends, mostly Jews, decided to stay in the city “to defend the homeland.” Bilotinsky-senior wanted to stay with them, but his wife convinced him to escape because after the Germans captured the city, she argued, he would be hanged on the nearest lamppost. The family caught the last train leaving Białystok. On the train, their main desire was to reach Minsk—it was widely believed that the German troops would not be allowed to capture the city (Bilotinsky 2011). Among those communist activists who tried to reach the Soviet hinterland from Białystok was also Bilotinsky-senior’s friend from a Polish prison, Hersh Smolar, who ended up leading the Minsk ghetto underground.

Some, though probably very few, tried to escape the ghetto shortly after it was established. Dr. Karshman, a Judenrat member, left Białystok and escaped to Warsaw, where he was killed in August 1942 (Blumental 1962). A handful of others could have escaped, but chose not to. Shortly after the ghetto was established, Moshe Goldschmidt was assigned to work for a German army rear unit. When the frontline moved further to the East, the unit also had to leave

the city. Several German officers offered to change Goldschmidt's name to Max, register him as *Volksdeutsche* (a person of German background) and take him with them. Goldschmidt did not want to leave his family and refused the offer (Goldshmidt 1991). After being deported to Prużany Michel Mielnicki and his brother were offered a chance to join a group of Jewish partisans in the forest. They refused because they did not want to leave their parents (Mielnicki and Munro 2000). Leon F. received a similar offer, and also refused (HVT-2903). Yehiel Sedler worked outside the ghetto, and met a Polish girl, with whom he had a love affair. The girl wanted to marry Yehiel and hide him, but he refused (OHD-110(15)).

The number of people trying to escape increased towards the end of the ghetto's existence. Yet, most were caught and killed—some by Germans, some by the local Poles. Chasia Bornstein-Bielicka, who was the underground courier and lived outside the ghetto, rented a room in the apartment of a Polish family that thought she was a Polish peasant girl. Oftentimes she heard the landlord telling his son how he and his friends in the Polish nationalist underground caught hiding Jews and either killed them or brought them back to the ghetto by force (Bornstein-Bielicka 2003). Fanya, Shmuel Iwry's sister tried to hide their parents, but they were betrayed and shot. When the final liquidation came she realized that escape was impossible and took poison (Iwry 2004). Many made desperate attempts to escape when it was perceived as the last chance to survive and jumped off the trains carrying them to death camps. The vast majority perished being hit by the train, shot by the German guards, or betrayed or killed by the local Poles. Only very few, such as the underground activists Kawe and Lebedz (Berkner 2001; Shalev 2005), or the girl Luba Olenski (Olenski 2006) managed to escape from the train. Chana Birk jumped off the train to Treblinka, and hid in the forest from August until December with two other women from the ghetto. Eventually they were betrayed by local Poles, arrested by the

Germans and sent to a concentration camp (OHD-110(8)). In March 1943 George Turlo took a train from Białystok to Warsaw. “On the train,” he recalled, “during the first portion [of the journey], the train was stopping very often on the rail tracks, and a putrefied smell, stench, was coming from the outside. And I saw the German soldiers pouring the gasoline on some bodies along the track. And somebody told me this was the latest convoy from Białystok ghetto to the way to Treblinka.” (USF-F60-00045)

From the Small Ghetto, testifies Izrael Bramson, thirty people tasked with transporting valuables from the emptied ghetto managed to escape. They hid in the forest with a peasant, and then in a church in the cemetery, where they were caught. Some were shot on the spot, some were put in prison, and only a handful managed to survive (ŻIH-301/7). Sheima L. was selected to be in the Sondercommando 1005. One day, when the Red Army was closing in, a member of the group shouted in Yiddish: “Guys, run!” Sheima L. escaped to the forest and hid until the liberation. In the forest, he was assisted by a Polish peasant who had happened to serve with Sheima L. in the same Polish army regiment (HVT-3616).

Even after the ghetto was liquidated there were people who refused to risk moving to the Aryan side. There were people hiding in bunkers and cellars for months, with almost no food and water because going to the Aryan side was perceived as suicidal. Ewa Kracowska and Jay M. hid together from August 16 until November 1943. “We waited until the very last,” recalled Jay M., and then decided to escape to the forest. Interviewed separately, in Israel and in the US, neither of them discussed the possibility of trying to move to the Aryan side even though Polish was Kracowska’s mother tongue (HVT-430; OHD-110(5)).

The number of people who successfully hid with non-Jews or managed to survive with faked documents on the Aryan side is extremely small, probably no more than three dozen.

While these people differ in terms of age, political affiliation, wealth and background, they do have several things in common. First, they spoke good Polish, were mainly females and hence uncircumcised, and most were not Białystok natives.

Celina H. and her twin sister were born in Warsaw after their mother moved there from Białystok. In 1939 the family escaped to Celina's grandparents and found itself in the Białystok ghetto after the German invasion of the USSR. Theirs was a wealthy family; in Warsaw they had a Polish nanny and spoke impeccable Polish. In addition, the twins had blond hair and didn't look Jewish. When it became increasingly dangerous to stay in the ghetto, Celina H.'s mother bought her and her sister Polish documents and hid them, in exchange for payment, with a Polish peasant. Their aunt hid with the mother's Polish friend. Before moving to the village, Celina H. and her sister were forced to learn Catholic prayers because even though they spoke impeccable Polish, they knew next to nothing about Catholicism. In the countryside, the main danger was not the Germans (there were none in the village) but other Poles. "We always had to be on our toes," Celina H. recalled (HVT-2521). Felicja N. was also born in Warsaw to parents who moved there from Białystok. In 1939 she escaped to her grandparents and lived with them until the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Like Celina H., Felicja N. spoke Polish at home. In 1941 the Germans entered Białystok and "it was the beginning of our hell (*gehenna*)," she remembered. Felicja N. was lucky—her great-grandfather owned a sawmill in a village nearby Białystok and befriended one of the local Polish families. The families knew each other "for ages." Eventually, Felicja N. managed to escape the ghetto and reach the friends' village. The family hid Felicja N. without ever asking to be paid for their help. Interviewed in 1991, she refused to reveal the

names of her saviors—first, they were humble people, and second, they feared the reaction of other people in the village (HVT-1874).⁶³

Jack R., originally from Brańsk, hid with a Polish farmer, with whom his father did business before the Holocaust. After hiding with this farmer during the first stages of the German occupation, Jack R. managed to smuggle himself to the Białystok ghetto where he had relatives. Urged by his cousin, Jack R. went back to his farmer friend and hid with him until the liberation (HVT-1516). Anszel Sznajder, originally from Choroszcz, a small community ten miles away from Białystok hid for some time with Polish farmers who were friends of his family. Even though these Poles belonged to a right-wing, virulently anti-Semitic underground organization, they were willing to take the risk of hiding a Jew they personally knew (OHD-110(9)).

In Białystok proper, Zachary A. hid during the last days of the occupation with the brother of his Polish friend. It should be noted here that Zachary A. was not originally from Białystok, and arrived there only after the Germans occupied Eastern Poland (HVT-2575). Mina Kizelstein was hidden by an anti-Fascist German, who ran a factory in which Kizelstein's father was a foreman. Miriam Grosman, the sister of Chajka Grosman, one of the underground leaders, was helped by the family of her non-Jewish friend Olla, with whom Miriam Grosman worked during Soviet rule (Shalev 2005).

Finally, in Białystok there was also a group of young Jewish female members of the underground, who lived on the Aryan side, working for the underground in the ghetto and for the partisans in the forest as couriers and smugglers of weapons and provisions. They did not engage in evasion—living on the Aryan side was the assignment they were given by the underground.

⁶³ Eventually she revealed the names of her saviors in the 1996 English translation of her Polish language memoir.

Yet, this group gives us a very good indication of who were the people perceived as capable of surviving on the Aryan side. Furthermore, their memoirs and testimonies are important for understanding of what it meant to be a hiding Jew on the Aryan side of Białystok. The most striking feature of this group of about a dozen young female Zionists and Communists is that, besides Chajka Grossman, none of them were originally from Białystok. The majority came from Grodno, which was only fifty miles away, but there the levels of Jewish integration were substantially higher (Bornstein-Bielicka 2003). All spoke good Polish, but discovered that speaking the language was not enough to successfully pass as a Pole. Chasia Bornstein-Bielicka, a left-wing Zionist, was pretty much integrated into Polish society in Grodno. She went to a Polish school, had Polish friends and spoke an impeccable local dialect of the Polish language. But she had no knowledge of Christian prayers and traditions. “Only after some time I discovered that my Polish name [in false documents] ‘Halinka’ was based on St. Halina. But which St. Halina—there were two of them” (Bornstein-Bielicka 2003). Lisa Ch., a Communist, was Bornstein-Bielicka’s schoolmate. When she attempted to move her niece out of the ghetto to join her on the Aryan side, the first thing she taught her was Christian prayers because as a Jew, the girl knew none. This didn’t help—the girl was denounced and taken to the Gestapo. Even though Lisa Ch. managed to obtain her release, the niece had to return to the ghetto, where she perished (HVT-3560).

Bornstein-Bielicka also describes how exactly Lisa Ch. was able to move to the Aryan side. Bornstein-Bielicka worked as a maid for a German official, a devoted Nazi, and an SS member. Once a female neighbor of her employer, also a German, told Bornstein-Bielicka that she was looking for a maid and asked if she knew someone. Bornstein-Bielicka considered this a perfect job—“working for the Germans, *as far as possible from the Poles*” (Emphasis added).

The person chosen by the underground for the job was Lisa Ch. (Bornstein-Bielicka 2003). Ania Rud came from Grodno to Białystok with her husband. She was on the Aryan side even though she did not look typically Polish. To “improve” her external appearance, she had her hair dyed. While she was on the Aryan side, her husband who also did not look Polish, had to remain in the ghetto because it was considered safer for the women to be outside the ghetto than for the men (OHD-110(10)).

Finally, a story told by Bornstein-Bielicka demonstrates that the overarching Polish antipathy towards the Jews in Białystok was also well known among the Germans. After working as a maid for the Nazi official, Bornstein-Bielicka tried to get a job with Otto Busse, a German painter who was known in the ghetto for his friendly attitude towards his Jewish employees. As it happened, Busse needed a secretary and interviewed Bornstein-Bielicka, who presented herself as Polish for the job. During the interview, Busse praised his previous Jewish secretary, who was deported, and Bornstein-Bielicka told him that she knew this person from elementary school, and spoke highly of her. Later, after Bornstein-Bielicka eventually revealed Busse her true identity, Busse told her that she was hired because of this one phrase during the interview—never before had he heard Poles saying good things about the Jews (Bornstein-Bielicka 2003). It is possible that because he was German, Poles were simply afraid to say positive things about Jews around him, but nonetheless this story might indicate something about the nature of Polish-Jewish relations in the city.

Living on the Aryan side required nerves made of steel, recalled Bornstein-Bielicka. Her sister, who did not look Jewish and did not speak good Polish, tried to live on the Aryan side, but gave up on the idea, admitting that she could not bear the pressure. Unfortunately, there was no

other way Bornstein-Bielicka could have saved her family in the wartime Białystok (Bornstein-Bielicka 2003).

Coping

In this section, I discuss the coping strategies adopted by the Jews of Białystok and demonstrate how these were jointly shaped by the Holocaust-era reality (such as the Judenrat policies and the nature of the Nazi persecution) and pre-Holocaust factors, networks, and relations.

In many respects, coping was virtually the only strategy available to the vast majority of Białystok Jews. While the Judenrat and its leaders engaged in public collaboration and preached compliance, it became increasingly harder to survive by faithfully following the Nazi orders and living off the food rations provided by the authorities. The evasion option, as shown in the previous section was also largely unavailable due to the nature of ethnic relations in the city and the very low levels of Jews' integration into Polish society. Resistance was small, secretive, confined to a small circle of trusted members and was not perceived as a viable survival strategy by most ghetto inhabitants. Thus, coping and trying to outlive the Nazis inside the ghetto was probably the only strategy open to the majority of Białystok Jews.

Throughout the ghetto's existence, Barasz's cooperation with the Germans made coping more viable and attractive a strategy. In Białystok, most people were constantly hungry, but no one died of starvation. Judenrat public notices instructing the public to burn potato peels (which were devoured by the starving Jews of Warsaw and Minsk (Blumental 1962)) is the best evidence that the food situation in the ghetto was harsh, but not desperate. Judenrat meeting protocols indicate that until their confiscation by the German authorities in February 1942, there

were fifty-five privately owned cows in the ghetto (Blumental 1962). Charles Zabuski recalls witnessing how a cow was smuggled into the ghetto. “It was a risky operation, but then, every day in the ghetto was a life or death risk” (Zabuski and Brott 1996). Finally, the ghetto also had vegetable plots, the so-called Barasz Gardens. Cultivated by members of the Zionist youth movements who underwent agricultural training as part of their immigration preparation program, the plots provided the Judenrat institutions, such as the hospital, orphanages, and public kitchens with vegetables which were largely unavailable to inhabitants of other large ghettos (Bender 2008).

The health situation in the ghetto was also tolerable. In Białystok there were no epidemics of typhus that decimated the Jewish population of Warsaw and Łódź. One of the reasons for this generally good public health situation was the two years of the Soviet rule. According to one of the ghetto physicians, Dr. Tuvia Cytron, the ghetto had universal health care services, organized following the Soviet model of hospitals, outpatient clinics, and separate sanitary services that were tasked with prevention of diseases (OHD-110(6)).

Given the combination of a hostile outside world and a tolerable existence inside the ghetto, initially the ghetto was seen as a source of optimism and security. When the ghetto was closed, the Jews were happy because they felt protected, recalled Hadassa Levkowicz (OHD-110(22)). Chaim Mielnicki who was targeted by the Polish nationalists for his collaboration with the Soviets felt safe behind the ghetto walls. “On the positive side, the ghetto was self-contained, in the sense that it was exclusively Jewish, and that inside its walls, at least we didn’t come in contact with any Polish or Nazi fanatics” (Mielnicki and Munro 2000). According to Yehiel Sedler, people simply got used the new situation and “thought this is how the life is going to look in the future” (OHD-110(15)). “In the ghetto life was almost normal. The whole problem was

food and that [they] let us live, that there will be no persecutions and we won't be sent away," summarized Rachel Lachower the ghetto experience (OHD-110(23)).

As the Jews' food stocks and savings dwindled, the problem of supplementing the meager rations provided by the Judenrat became increasingly acute. The only solution to the problem was to find independent sources of supply. For some people their workplace became such a source. The mother of Celina H. worked as a housekeeper for a German officer. "It was the best possible job" because she was able to bring food to her family in the ghetto (HVT-2521). Sometimes people who worked outside the ghetto were able to trade valuables for food.

The majority employed in factories did not enjoy such opportunities. For these families the black market became the solution. "Jews needed food, which the Poles had; Poles needed goods, which Jews had" (Zabuski and Brott 1996). The ghetto cemetery, located by the ghetto fence, became the main spot for these Polish-Jewish transactions. The increasing demand for food was answered by the emergence of groups of smugglers, who made the black market activities their main source of income. Some of these smugglers were professional criminals who knew the trade. For others, any previous contacts with the Polish population came in handy. Henry Bass knew many Poles in the city and this, he testified, helped him a lot when he snuck out of the ghetto to exchange things for food (Bass 1983). Yekutiel S. was one of the very few Białystok Jews who attended a Polish school and therefore spoke good Polish. He made a living sneaking out of the ghetto. Disguised as a Pole, he bought potatoes and firewood at the city market, where they were rather cheap, and smuggled the products he bought back to the ghetto (HVT-3823). Shamai Kizelstein, the son of a city council member under the Poles, exchanged his bicycle for a sack of potatoes and at times was able to sneak hats, which were highly sought after by the peasants, out of the ghetto and exchange them for potatoes and dairy products

(Kizelsztejn 1985). Zvi Yovin bought potatoes at the city market and smuggled them back to the ghetto. “Sometime twenty kilograms, sometimes thirteen kilograms. If there were good Germans [guarding the ghetto gate]—they let you in, if there were bad Germans—they took everything.” Once Yovin was caught and imprisoned, but because he was from a respected family, he was released from jail (OHD-110(11)).

Not surprisingly, many smugglers were Jewish refugees from outside the city. Some engaged in black market activities because they spoke better Polish than most Białystok natives; for others, who were unregistered and therefore “illegal” in the ghetto, this was the only source of income. Jack R., who came to Białystok from Brańsk and had Polish friends outside the city, used to smuggle food into the ghetto. Charles Zabuski’s brother-in-law, a refugee from Warsaw, did not look Jewish and spoke good Polish. Pretending to be a Pole, he snuck out of the ghetto and went to a place where many Polish-Jewish transactions took place. When Poles from the countryside came to the city to trade with Jews, he scolded and shamed them for trading with Jews while Poles are starving. The peasants, feeling ashamed, sold him their produce at a low price (Zabuski and Brott 1996). Avrahan K. smuggled himself to the Białystok ghetto from neighboring town of Tykocin and was therefore “illegal.” He was appalled by how bad the refugees were received in the ghetto. “If I only knew how they would receive us there, I might have tried to hide among the non-Jews,” he admitted. For him becoming a smuggler and trading on the black market was the only available way to make a living. “I took risks but I didn’t have choice. It was not hard to get stuff out of the ghetto, it was much harder to smuggle things into the ghetto,” he remembered (HVT-3639).

Obviously, not every ghetto inhabitant could afford buying things on the black market and therefore those who were wealthy before the war had substantially better chances of not

being constantly hungry. The father of Michel Mielnicki owned two buses in interwar Poland and the family had savings, including US dollars. “Amazing stuff, Yankee currency—for one US dollar we could buy seven kilos of black market bread, or several kilos of potatoes” (Mielnicki and Munro 2000). These savings also helped the family after it was sent to Prużany. “When suitable work was not available we had our cache of American dollars to fall back on” (Mielnicki and Munro 2000).

This widespread smuggling outraged Barasz for it harmed the impression of an obedient, productive, and hard-working ghetto that he so desperately wanted to create. More than once the Judenrat appealed to the ghetto population to refrain from widespread smuggling, or at least not to provoke the Germans by smuggling what were considered luxury items; the Jewish Police also at times went after the smugglers. During an open meeting with the ghetto public on November 9, 1941, Judenrat member Limon tried to shame other Jews by saying that instead of going to work they went out to do business and didn’t realize that by doing that they could endanger the ghetto as a whole (Blumental 1962). To increase the ghetto’s productivity, Barasz urged Jews to understand that they were living in extraordinary times. He berated the doctors who were willing to grant sick leave: “They claim that anyone who is infected with tuberculosis cannot work. Certainly! But there is a danger here that the man will die not from tuberculosis, but from not working!” (Blumental 1962) None of these efforts helped, because while Barasz and the Judenrat were preoccupied with the long-term survival of the community, the ghetto inhabitants focused mainly on personal survival and meeting their most basic needs.

In addition to the immediate physical risk of being identified on the streets and arrested or being beaten by German sentries, the smugglers (especially those with legal status in the ghetto) also faced an uneasy tradeoff between immediate gain and long-term security. Smuggling

brought food and money, while working in a factory was perceived as the best insurance policy against deportation. “It was clear to all that having a worker ID was like having permission to live,” recalled Ewa Kracowska (OHD-110(5)). Thus, many people exerted great effort toward finding employment. Once a group of Jews was recruited to fix a roof, remembered Charles Zabuski. “Never in my life had I held a hammer in my hand and I didn’t know anything about roof repair, but the desire to live and sustain my family gave me a burst of courage; I declared myself a roof expert and I forgot to be afraid. I didn’t know then that in the years ahead I would preserve my life again and again by claiming to be expert at several other ‘careers’” (Zabuski and Brott 1996). Shama Kizelstein registered in the labor exchange as builder apprentice because at that time this profession was in high demand. He knew nothing about the construction work (Kizelsztejn 1985).

Not all jobs were created equal, however, and only employment in factories that were considered essential for the German war effort was seen as the key to safety. The February Aktion, during which factory employees were spared only reinforced this impression. Joe D. worked as a plumber in the SS building, but was not issued an “essential worker” permit and was deported. Yet, precisely because he worked for the SS, he was given the “protected prisoner” status, and was not gassed upon his arrival to Auschwitz (HVT-1678). Irene S. opened a school in the ghetto and taught kids “everything from Latin to physics.” Because this job could not protect her from deportation, she was forced to find employment in a factory (HVT-98).

Both in the ghetto and later in the camps, the employment choices and opportunities often depended on pre-war factors and ties that often determined who lived and who perished. Shama Kizelstein looked for a job inside the ghetto. A person who knew his parents was a factory clerk, and this is how he found employment. Bernice S. knew German from home, “and it came in

quite handy when the Germans came. My knowledge of the Gothic script gave [me] a job as a secretary. It was an unusual thing for a Jewish girl to be working as a secretary outside the ghetto, and I was able to help my family” (HVT-1336). Yekutiel S. pretended to be a carpenter because his father had a carpentry shop (HVT-3823). Zachary A. studied mechanical engineering in a technical university in Danzig and therefore registered as mechanic. His German boss realized that he was not really a mechanic, but kept him anyway—Zachary A. was his only employee who spoke German (HVT-2575).

Previous ties and connections were also important beyond finding employment. Chaim Mielnicki worked for the NKVD during the time of Soviet rule over the region. He did not register in the ghetto because he feared that his presence would become known to the Germans or Poles. What saved the Mielnicki family was that Chaim’s cousin, Pejsach Mielnicki, was a Judenrat member and took care of them even though he disdained his relative’s collaboration with the Soviet security services (Mielnicki and Munro 2000). The sister of Lipa A. was among the young women sent from Białystok to Wołkowysk. The father of Lipa A.’s friend was a Judenrat member there, and the sister was able to return to Białystok (HVT-1842).

One of the doctors in the ghetto hospital studied in Freiburg University in Germany. The doctor spoke German in a Freiburg dialect and one of the SS officers who came with Globochnik from Lublin to liquidate the ghetto noticed the way he talked. As it happened the Jewish doctor and the SS official were alumni of the same university, and the officer spared the doctor’s life, sending him to the work camp instead of Treblinka (OHD-110(6)).

Often previous connections were not enough to ensure survival and private initiative was needed. After being deported to a camp, Yehiel S. pretended to be a locksmith. The other

locksmiths in this group were also “locksmiths just as I am a ballet dancer.” Later, when tailors were needed, he registered as tailor (HVT-3823). Shamaï Kizelstein registered as apprentice taxidermist without knowing anything about the trade (Kizelszteïn 1985). During a selection in Auschwitz, Celine B. noticed where the young people were being sent. Then, she found some red paint to put on her mother’s cheeks to make her look younger, and pushed her in the “right” direction (HVT-403).

The discussion of coping strategies would not be complete without mentioning the “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1987) employed by the Białystok Jews. Contrary to Barasz’s strategy of creating as productive a ghetto as possible, the Jews, who were not compensated for any additional effort they put into their work had every incentive to work as little as possible. In addition, they also understood perfectly well that appearance was more important than the actual output. When the German supervisors visited the factory floor, Ewa Kracowska and her co-workers would turn on all the machines, those that were needed and those that were not. “It was a real festival in order just to make an impression” (OHD-110(5)). Zachary A. also recalls turning on all the machines in the shop work during the inspections.

The actual quality of the Jews’ forced labor was rather low. While some scholars would view these shirking efforts as resistance, I contend that they were an integral part of coping strategies, and simply helped the Jews to spend as little energy as possible, rather than consciously harming the German production effort (although such sabotage efforts certainly existed as well).

Finally, an important component of the coping strategy was the hideouts, built all over the ghetto. Because escape to the Aryan side was not a viable option, eventually the choice the

ghetto Jews had to make was either to hide or to comply with the deportation order, which in the vast majority of cases meant the gas chamber. “The most important issue each family faced was to obtain enough food, and the next was to have a place to hide in the event of an Aktion,” recalled Luba Olenski (2006). “[T]wenty thousand people in the hideouts—impossible to find them,” is how Mordechai Tenenbaum described the February 1943 Aktion. The bunker, built by Tenenbaum’s Dror movement was among the largest in the ghetto. Thirty five meters long and 1.5 meters wide, located four meters below the ground, it was equipped with a ventilation system, water, and electricity. “A real catacomb” noted Tenenbaum proudly (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). Many other hideouts were no less sophisticated. “Inventions upon inventions” wrote Tenenbaum (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). For some, building hideouts became a source of income. Thus, Hashomer Hatsair members built hideouts for rich people in the ghetto and with the money they gained, they bought food from Poles (OHD-110(4)).

For Abraham O. taking the family to the forest was not an option, so he decided to build a bunker in which he would be able to survive for at least six months. He hid in the bunker during the ghetto liquidation and was determined not to go outside, no matter what. “We lived like rats in a hole,” is how Abraham O. described the life in the bunker (HVT-189). Ewa Kracowska and Jay M. hid in a cellar from August until November 1943. “We waited until the very last,” Jay M. testified, but eventually there was no chance of staying any longer in the ghetto and nothing good awaited them on the Aryan side of the city. They escaped to the partisans. Jay M.’s sister, Celine B., refused to go to the forest and kept hiding with her mother until they were found by the Germans (HVT-403). Lisa Shtrauch spent twelve weeks in a hideout, but then was arrested and sent to the Stutthof concentration camp (OHD-110(12)). When hiding was impossible, people preferred giving themselves up rather than going to the Polish side. “One day I got up in the

morning and the house was empty,” remembered Esther G. For some time she hid in the attic, but eventually decided to give herself up, and was deported to Auschwitz (HVT-186).

Resistance

Shortly after the German invasion, a joint Polish-Jewish communist underground was established with the goal of helping the Soviet Union in its struggle against Nazi Germany. The initiative came from Tadeusz Jakubowski, a Polish communist who hid in the ghetto before moving to Warsaw. Yet, besides Jakubowski and a handful of Polish communists, virtually all the underground members were Jewish. In December 1941 the “Organization of Workers and Peasants for War against the Invaders,” which later became known as the Anti-Fascist Committee, was established (Bender 2008). It is hardly surprising, notes Sara Bender, that the Communists were the first movers in the resistance—all the other movements and organizations had been disbanded by the Soviets. Quite a few communist underground members were young Jews with a Zionist past who joined the Komsomol during the Soviet rule. Even those Jewish organizations which retained the core of their most devoted activists in the underground were leaderless. Shortly after the Red Army occupied Białystok in 1939 many local Zionist youth movements’ leaders escaped the city and moved to Wilno, which until 1940 belonged to the independent Lithuanian state. Furthermore, because the Communist party was outlawed and persecuted in Poland, the Białystok communists (some of whom escaped to the city in 1939 from the German-occupied Poland) had much better underground experience than the Zionists.

As in Minsk, the initial impetus for the establishment of the underground was the desire to help the Red Army soldiers, taken prisoner by the German troops, recalled the prominent underground member Elias Baumac (OHD-110(24)). According to another communist

underground member, the historian Szymon Datner, many young Jews willingly joined the resistance—they were people of both sexes who belonged to every political stream. The older members, however, were the communist activists (Datner 1946), many of whom already had substantial underground experience.

Around the same time, in the German-occupied Wilno, where numerous Zionist youth movements' members gathered during the Soviet occupation period, these movements renewed their activities openly. Prior to the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, the Zionist youth movements established in Wilno what later became known as the *Koordinatsiia*—a joint body that coordinated the youth movements' activities—mainly in an attempt to organize the immigration to Palestine of as many activists as possible. Under Soviet rule, the *Koordinatsiia* ceased to exist because the Zionist youth movements went underground and operated independently of one another (*kol ehad iashav bepinato vepaal besheket*) (Reznik n.d.). Following the German occupation of Wilno, it was decided to resume the *Koordinatsiia* activities. One of the first things the Zionist youth had to do was to determine their response to the mass killings of the city's Jews that started immediately after the German troops took over Wilno. According to Nisan Reznik, a *Koordinatsiia* member from the Hanoar Hatsioni, the opinions among the members were divided. Hashomer Hatsair, led by the poet Aba Kovner, a Wilno resident before the WWII, argued that the shootings in Wilno are part of the larger plan to kill all the Jews under German rule and therefore it was necessary to immediately organize resistance to this extermination plan. Dror, led by Mordechai Tenenbaum, a refugee from Warsaw, argued that the conditions in Wilno were unique, and therefore the solution was to try to relocate as many young Zionists as possible to safer havens. At that time, notes Reznik, Tenenbaum most likely did not favor armed resistance inside the ghetto (Reznik n.d.).

To achieve his goal of saving the Dror members, Tenenbaum established contacts with the anti-Nazi German sergeant Anton Schmidt and devised a daring plan of smuggling, with Schmidt's assistance, the Dror members from the Latvian port city of Liepaya (Libau) to Sweden on ice that covered the Baltic Sea. When it became clear that the plan could not be carried out, Tenenbaum chose what he considered to be the second best option—the Białystok ghetto. Białystok was chosen for two main reasons—first, it was considered a relatively safe ghetto at that time, and second, the Dror movement had a substantial support base in the city. Some Dror members decided to stay in Wilno, and some Hashomer people eventually also left to go to Białystok. Having transferred about a dozen Dror activists from Wilno to Białystok, Tenenbaum left the city and moved back to Warsaw. Even though he looked Jewish, Tenenbaum managed to arrange false documents for himself. His new identity was that Josef Tamaroff, a Muslim Tatar. Because Tatars usually had black hair, dark eyes, and were circumcised, for Tenenbaum this was a perfect arrangement that allowed him to move rather freely around occupied Poland. The only danger with having Tatar documents was the need to be familiar with Islamic religion and traditions. Unlike the vast majority of Polish Jews who knew nothing about Islam, Tenenbaum, who studied in the Warsaw University Institute of Oriental Studies, knew a substantial amount.

Meanwhile, in Wilno the Jewish underground resistance movement, the FPO, was organized. The FPO encompassed the whole political spectrum from the communists on the left to the Revisionist Zionists on the far right, and started preparing an uprising (which never actually materialized). One of the FPO members was Chajka Grosman, who prior to the war was the leader of the Hashomer Hatsair in Białystok and in 1939 escaped to Wilno where she took part in the activities of the Koordynatsiia and the subsequent Zionist underground. It was decided

that Grosman should return to her hometown to organize resistance among the Zionist youths in the ghetto.

Upon returning to Białystok, Grosman discovered that there was a communist underground already operating in Białystok. Yet, the communists were not interested in fighting inside the ghetto and saw their main goal as smuggling as many young fighters as possible to the forests, where they could better help the Soviet Union win the war. Hashomer Hatsair, on the contrary, saw its main mission as fighting for Jewish honor and was determined to resist the Nazis inside the ghetto. Furthermore, while the Białystok communists were willing to consider cooperation with the Marxist Hashomer Hatsair, they steadfastly refused to have anything in common with the less radical Dror, let alone the right-wing Revisionists. In short, as notes Arens in discussing a very similar situation in the Warsaw ghetto, the pre-war political and ideological cleavages, which had nothing to do with the objective reality in the ghetto, prevented the emergence of a unified underground (Arens 2009).

Trying to influence the communists, Grosman had to travel to Warsaw, where she approached Józef Lewartowski, a leading Polish communist of Jewish origin, and urged him to support the creation of a joint underground of all political forces. While sympathetic to Grosman's goal, Lewartowski declined to help. Białystok, he argued, was a part of the Soviet Union, and therefore he had no authority over the comrades there (Bender 2008; Shalev 2005). In addition to attempts to influence the communists, Grosman also invested considerable efforts in bringing to Białystok her partner Edek Boraks, an experienced underground activist under the Soviets, to organize the military aspects of the Hashomer Hatsair resistance activities. After Grosman returned to her hometown, the previously leaderless Hashomer Hatsair members in

Białystok began organizing into an underground resistance force which in some aspects (the internal organization and the membership) built upon the activities of the local Hashomer Hatsair underground during the Soviet rule.

Initially, the Białystok ghetto underground groups focused mainly on obtaining and distributing information. According to Datner, virtually every political movement inside the ghetto had its own radio and the news was transcribed and distributed (Datner 1946). “A good radio link was set up in the ghetto; almost every day we listened to English news bulletins and broadcasts from the Soviet Information Bureau,” testified Riva Voiskovskaya, one of the key members of the ghetto communist underground. “We published Comrade Stalin’s speeches and distributed materials on Treblinka and Auschwitz,” she added (Ehrenburg and Grossman 2002).

Later on, the communists and the Hashomer Hatsair were able to reach a compromise according to which both fighting inside the ghetto *and* the partisan activities in the forest would be the underground goals. In August 1942 what would later become known as the Anti-Fascist Front A was established. Its members were the communists, the Hashomer Hatsair and a faction of the socialist anti-Zionist Bund (Bender 2008). Not everyone was happy with this cooperation, however. A communist faction led by Judyta Nowogródzka opposed any idea of fighting inside the ghetto, split from the communist underground and created their own organization which saw its goal as sending people to fight in the forests.

Even though a unified organization of the communists and the Hashomer Hatsair was established, in practice each organization operated alone, often without even knowing what their counterparts did. Some rank and file underground members did not even know that other political movements also had an underground in the ghetto. When the first groups of Jewish

partisans went out to the forests, very few Hashomer Hatsair members joined them. First, note the Hashomer Hatsair members Makowsky and Lach, there was an acute shortage of weapons, and second, the idea of an uprising in the ghetto was still prevalent among the Hashomer Hatsair people (Bender 2008).

In November 1942 Mordechai Tenenbaum returned to Bezirk Bialystok because the Warsaw ghetto Jewish Fighting Organization, the ŻOB, decided to appoint him the commandant of the ghetto underground. This, however, did not mean that in the Białystok ghetto Tenenbaum could automatically rely on obedience and support of any group besides his own Dror movement. As I showed in the previous chapter, similar ŻOB attempts to gain control over the Kraków ghetto Jewish underground failed miserably. At the same time, Tenenbaum was a respected Zionist youth leader, one of the key activists of the Koordinatssia where he worked closely with the Hashomer Hatsair activists, including Boraks and, to a lesser extent, Grosman. Furthermore, since the time of the Koordinatssia, cooperation among Zionist left-wing youth movements was perceived as natural, while before the war relations between the movements were quite strained (Kless 1999). After lengthy negotiations on often hair-splitting ideological questions, in January 1943 the Anti-Fascist Front B, which included the Dror, Hashomer Hatsair, Hanoar Hatzioni, the Revisionists, and a faction of the Bund, was established. Hashomer Hatsair, which was a member of both Fronts, served as a link between the organizations (Bender 2008). Around that time Tenenbaum also started keeping a diary, which survived the war. Written in beautiful Hebrew with occasional words and phrases in Yiddish, Polish, Russian, German, and English languages, it provides a unique though inherently biased source of data on the Białystok ghetto underground.

Also in January 1943, Tenenbaum composed an appeal to the ghetto Jews, which was scheduled to be published at the time of the uprising. This appeal is a good source to evaluate Tenenbaum and his comrades' motivations and goals.

“Five million Jews have already been murdered; of Polish Jewry only ten percent has been left ... *We shall not go like lamb to the slaughter!* If we are too weak to defend our lives—we are strong enough to defend our Jewish honor and our human dignity. We shall fall like heroes, and in our death—we will not die! Don't escape from the ghetto—without weapons you will be killed. After you fulfill your national duty [of fighting in the ghetto]—go armed to the partisans. The arms you can get from every German in the ghetto” (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984).

For Tenenbaum, as it can be clearly seen from the phrase “and in our death—we will not die,” fighting and defending the national honor was a way of survival. Not physical survival of individuals, but more symbolic, historical survival of the nation. In this sense, Barasz who collaborated with the Germans, and Tenenbaum who resisted them, were not dissimilar. Both thought in terms of the group and collective survival (as each of them understood it), and were willing to sacrifice their lives to achieve this goal. For the communists, on the contrary, Jewish national honor meant little; much more important was the Soviet victory over Germany.

When the news about the February 1943 Aktion reached the underground (via Barasz), Tenenbaum and his comrades had to make a decision whether to “fight after the first Jew is taken out of the ghetto” (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984) or to wait until the final liquidation. Even though the weaponry possessed by the underground was completely inadequate, the general mood of the underground activists was to rebel. Hashomer Hatsair led the militant line; the Dror members were more hesitant (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). Yet, in the last moment, after a consultation with Barasz, Tenenbaum backed down and ruled against rebellion. All Dror members survived

the Aktion; the Hashomer Hatsair was not that lucky. A bunker in which Boraks and several other movement members hid was discovered by the Germans. They were deported to Treblinka and killed there.

After the Aktion, Tenenbaum sped up the preparations for an uprising. The main foci of his activities during these days was obtaining weapons, the unification of the two Fronts, and the protection of his organization from the German security services. “Have to be careful (*tsarikh lehizaer*),” Tenenbaum wrote in his diary. “And again, conspiracy rules—as in Soviet times,” he added describing his attempts to minimize unnecessary contacts between the movement members (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984).

In his effort to obtain weapons for the underground, Tenenbaum also made an attempt to contact the main Polish nationalist underground, the Home Army (AK). Invoking the example of Warsaw, where the AK helped the Jewish underground to get weapons, he wondered why the same cannot be also done in Białystok. “We have reached full understanding in Warsaw, why shouldn’t it be the same in Białystok?” The causes of the AK hostility are well known and rooted in the city’s history—the Poles blamed the Jews for their alleged widespread collaboration under Soviet rule and resented them for that. Tenenbaum tried to convince the AK that Jewish organizations also suffered under the Soviets, but failed. No help was extended to the Jewish underground even though Tenenbaum described the members of his organization as citizens of the Polish state, fighting against their country’s enemy and therefore deserving support (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). While the Polish nationalist AK was unwilling to help, the Polish communist People’s Guard (GL) was unable to help. Because the city was considered part of the Soviet Union, the GL was simply not allowed to operate in this territory, and the first Russian

partisans reached the area only after the ghetto was liquidated. Thus, unlike in Kraków or Minsk, because of the two years of Soviet rule, the Białystok ghetto underground had no external allies or helpers whatsoever.

The situation was not different in the Białystok countryside. Pawel K. was sent by the underground out of the ghetto to join the partisans. Because he did not look Jewish, he became the partisans' liaison with the local peasant population. In his dealings with the peasants, Pawel K. never presented himself as Jewish, and if asked whether he came from a Jewish unit, he always said that his wife was from the Jewish detachment, but he is not. Even people who were friendly and who helped the anti-German guerillas still preferred not to compromise themselves by collaborating with the Jews, he recalled (HVT-3218).

The negotiations with the communists consumed a considerable amount of Tenenbaum's energies. Besides the split over where to fight, the communists, true to their revolutionary tradition, sought to create "a Jewish mass movement to get out to the forest" (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). Tenenbaum viewed this approach as completely unrealistic and preferred a tightly knit underground organization to which, only after the rebellion broke out, the masses would join. Finally, to promote the uprising option Tenenbaum had to win over not only the communists, but also the members of his own movement. The underground archive contains the notes from the Dror movement meeting in which the two options of resistance—in the forest vs. the ghetto—were discussed. The discussion was heated. Some people argued for resistance inside the ghetto only, realizing quite well that fighting in the ghetto meant certain death. "We should view the ghetto as our Musa Dagh," one member claimed (Tenenbaum-Tamaroff 1984). Others preferred the forest option. The majority demanded to combine the two—namely to send

people to the forests, but under no circumstances to abandon the ghetto, and to fight there when the liquidation order comes.

The people who favored this option, as well as the Hashomer Hatsair, probably did not realize that by splitting up their forces (and weapons caches) they would limit the potential of both options. Hashomer Hatsair sent only several people to the forests, but these were the most well trained and militarily capable organization members, such as Eli Vered, a Polish Army NCO who was one of the handful Hashomer Hatsair members with prior military experience. In the Hashomer Hatsair underground, Vered was in charge of members' military training (OHD-110(3); OHD-110(19)), so sending him to the forest probably harmed the prospect for military action within the ghetto quite substantially. When the time of the uprising came, Irene S., a member of the Hashomer Hatsair, was given a grenade and sent to blow up a German tank. She had no idea how to use the weapon she was given. "I didn't know which end to open it and how to open it," she admitted (HVT-98). "I am standing there with a grenade in my hand, trembling ... And I hear a German voice behind me ... an old German soldier, saying 'what are you doing, *mein kind* ... Give it [the grenade] to me. Where are you parents?' He thought I was a lost child who just picked up a grenade." The German soldier led Irene S. to her parents who were at the deportation point. "And this was my contribution to the underground" (HVT-98). It is possible that had Eli Vered remained in the ghetto, Irene S. would have been better prepared.

Eventually, on the eve of the ghetto destruction, Tenenbaum was able to secure the unification of both Fronts into one fighting organization. He was elected the commander and Daniel Moszkowicz, a communist, became his deputy. On the evening of August 15, 1943, Chasia Bornstein-Bielicka, a member of the Hashomer Hatsair who lived on the Aryan side,

snuck into the ghetto and notified her comrades that the city was swarming with German troops and their Slavic and Baltic collaborators, and that the Germans were encircling the ghetto (Bornstein-Bielicka 2003). Her information was dismissed and no one bothered to notify Tenenbaum. Barasz, who previously promised to let the underground know when the liquidation order comes, also reneged on his promise. Thus, the underground lost several crucial hours that could have been spent on preparing the rebellion. By the time of the uprising the underground had in the ghetto about two hundred fighters, 130 firearms and a large cache of grenades, most of which were homemade (Bender 2008). Yet, despite this meager amount of ammunition available to Tenenbaum and his fighters, the Germans were forced to use tanks and airplanes to put down the uprising. Contrary to Tenenbaum's expectations, the ghetto population did not join the fighting.

The fate of Tenenbaum is somewhat unclear. During and immediately after the war there were rumors that following the uprising Tenenbaum escaped to the forests and commanded a large partisan unit (Anonymous n.d.), but these proved to be wrong. The most likely version is that when Tenenbaum and Moszkowicz realized that the battle was lost and almost all the underground members were dead, they committed suicide. A German report on the liquidation of the Biaylstonk ghetto listed the casualties of the German side as nine wounded servicemen, including two officers (Bender 2008). As with the Cyganeria bombing, these figures are certainly unrealistic. Given the nature and the intensity of the fighting it is hard to believe that only nine Germans were wounded in an uprising that required aviation and tanks to be put down.

Who were the underground members? The vast majority were politically active young people, either Communists or Zionists. People who did not belong to political organizations or

did not have proper connections had difficulty joining even if they wanted to. Thus, Sergei Berkner, even though not a member of any political organization was allowed to join only because his father was connected to the communist underground. He was sent to the forest and survived the war (Berkner 2001). Ewa Kracowska, who came from a wealthy and assimilated family (by Białystok standards) very much wanted to join the underground but could not. For the communists, she came from too wealthy a background; for the Zionists she was too assimilated. Eventually she was admitted to the Judyta Nowogródzka splinter organization only because the underground wanted to use her room as a meeting place. Besides her, none of her friends with a similar background were in the underground (OHD-110(5)). Fina Cukiert was a Komsomol member, but became an underground member only after a person she knew from school offered her a chance to join the underground. Like in the case of Kracowska, the underground needed her apartment (OHD-110(21)). On the other hand, Lisa Shtrauch was involved with Zionist organizations in her hometown (not far away from Białystok), but did not know anyone in the ghetto and did not take part in the underground, likely because she did not have proper connections to find them and was not offered to join because the underground members did not know her (OHD-110(12)).

The small number of people with military experience in the underground also indicates that training, capability, and physical strength had almost no impact on recruitment patterns. Shlomo Tanchelewicz was young and physically fit. When the Germans invaded the USSR he was at home on short leave from the Soviet navy, where he served. He did not seek the underground and was not offered a chance to join. He also does not mention being involved with any political youth movements before 1939 (OHD-110(14)).

The Białystok ghetto underground also provides a chance to examine the reasons for joining the resistance by looking at two pairs of same-sex siblings in which one sibling was active in the resistance while the other was not. Eli Vered was a devoted Hashomer Hatsair member. He was sent by the movement to the forest and survived the war fighting with the partisans. His brother, Abraham Vered, was less politically active. For some time, like his brother, he was in the Hashomer Hatsair, but then he moved to a non-affiliated left-wing youth club. Under the Soviets he joined the Komsomol. Abraham Vered's memoir does mention having contacts with the underground and even undergoing some sort of training, but during the ghetto liquidation he did not fight and went to the deportation point. In the case of the Vered brothers the difference also certainly cannot be explained by varying levels of physical strength or courage—later in their lives both brothers became officers in the Israeli army combat units. The more obvious difference between them is the extent of their pre-resistance political involvement.

A similar story can be told about Miriam and Chajka Grosman. Chajka Grosman was active in the Hashomer Hatsair and became one of the underground leaders. Miriam Grosman was also involved with the movement for some period of her life but the extent of her involvement did not match that of her sister. Chajka Grosman did not look Jewish and could have chosen evasion, but she opted for resistance, eventually using her non-Jewish looks to work for the underground on the Aryan side. Miriam Grosman looked Jewish, but also had non-Jewish friends and opted for evasion. Clearly, such comparisons are not perfect as the siblings differed in terms of age—and, in the case of the Vered brothers, military training—but they are illuminating nonetheless.

Finally, there are two questions which are crucial for the analysis of the Białystok ghetto uprising. First, was the uprising local in its origins or was it imported from Warsaw by Tenenbaum? And second, why did the communists in Białystok agree to take part in the rebellion even though it did not promote their main goal of contributing to the Soviet victory and it diverted people and resources from partisan warfare?

It is impossible to know for sure whether the Białystok ghetto would have rebelled without Tenenbaum. Yet, the available evidence suggests a very high likelihood of uprising even without him. “The idea of the uprising was of the Hashomer,” recalled Shmuel Goldberg, a member of the communist underground (OHD-110(13)), and the movement had never abandoned the will to rebel. Even when the Front A started sending people to the forests, very few Hashomer Hatsair members went there precisely because the organization strongly supported the ghetto rebellion strategy. Tanenbaum himself wrote that the Hashomer support for an uprising was unequivocal while the Dror members were still undecided. It was Tenenbaum who called off the uprising during the February Aktion after being convinced by Barasz—but Hashomer Hatsair had the will to fight then. Finally, most Hashomer Hatsair members in the Białystok ghetto were city natives, as was their leader, Chajka Grosman.

Why did the communists agree to the idea of armed uprising inside the ghetto? In my view, here the city’s unique local history plays a key role. According to Dror member Bronia Kliebanska, the communists in Białystok found themselves in limbo. The communists were used to rigid party discipline and felt lost when they found themselves without instructions and guidance. The Polish Communist Party was geographically close, but refrained from interfering because the city was perceived to be part of the USSR; yet the local communists had no contacts

with Moscow (OHD-110(17)). According to the communist Elias Baumac, there were instructions from the Aryan side, but they were inconsistent (OHD-110(24)). The Zionists, on the other hand, enjoyed the financial assistance and backing of Barasz and were probably stronger than their communist counterparts. This peculiar situation faced by the Białystok communists probably made them more open to local pressures and initiatives, and was in my view the reason for why they agreed to cooperate with the Zionist movements. Of course, we will never know for sure whether this was indeed the case.

Concluding Remarks

Like Kraków, Białystok was part of the Polish state until 1939 and like Minsk, was part of the USSR in 1939-41. While the behavior, the choices, and the experiences of the Białystok Jews were shaped by the same logic that guided the behavior of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust in other ghettos, the fate of the Białystok ghetto inhabitants was to a large extent shaped by local histories and relations. The low level of integration into the Polish society turned out to be detrimental to the city's Jews. More specifically, it prevented the Jews from seeking the evasion strategy because they did not know Polish and therefore could not pass as Poles even if they had blond hair and blue eyes. It also affected the underground resistance because the main Polish underground organization was more anti-Semitic in Białystok than in most other places and refused to extend to the Jewish resistance even symbolic support.

The attitude of the Polish underground was also strongly affected by the second factor that shaped Jewish behavior—the experience of the Soviet rule. The two years of the Soviet occupation affected the Jews in several ways. First, the Soviets destroyed all the Jewish political and social institutions, making the elderly Rabbi Rosenmann the only available option for the

position of the Judenrat chair. The Soviet experience also affected the nature of resistance. First, because no other political organizations existed in the city, the communists (with quite a few former Zionists among their ranks) were the first movers in the underground. Second, when the Zionist underground was eventually organized, it built on the experience acquired during the period of the Soviet rule. Third, the Soviet annexation of the city made it off limits to the Polish communist People's Guard, which was the natural ally of the Jewish resisters in other ghettos, such as Kraków. Finally, the Soviet policies exacerbated the already existing ethnic animosities in the city and made the Poles even less likely to help the Jews. In Minsk and Kraków the Jews had many enemies and few friends, while in Białystok that they had virtually no friends at all. This is one of the reasons why the number of Jewish survivors in Białystok is lower than in the other two cities. But, unlike the ghettos of Minsk and Kraków, those of Białystok will be remembered as the one that rebelled.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

“Can there be a Political Science of the Holocaust?” asks Charles King (2012). One of the main goals of this study was to move forward the efforts to answer this question in the affirmative. In this work I use the theoretical and the methodological tools of social science to analyze one of the most overlooked aspects of the Holocaust—the variation in the Jewish victims’ individual and collective behavior.

At the individual-level, I suggested a new typology of victims’ behavioral strategies: collaboration, compliance, evasion, coping, and resistance. ***Collaboration*** was defined as cooperation with the enemy by either participating in the process of killing or facilitating its execution. Collaboration is of two basic types—public and open, as in the case of Jewish Councils’ leaders; or private and secret, as in the case of paid informants. ***Compliance*** means obeying the rules that the authorities prescribed and taking no active steps to change one’s situation. ***Coping*** means confronting the danger and trying to survive without leaving one’s community or country, engaging in collaboration, or participating in organized armed resistance to the perpetrators. ***Evasion*** is an attempt to escape persecution by hiding, immigrating, or assuming a false identity. ***Resistance*** is defined as involvement in organized activity aimed at harming the perpetrators. I applied this typology in an analysis of three large ghettos: Minsk, Kraków, and Białystok, and I have developed two primary arguments to explain victims’ strategies:

1. Victims’ choices of particular strategies depended on their pre-Holocaust political and social experiences, as well as available credible (or perceived as credible) information on the likelihood of survival;
2. Local-level politics, experiences, and relations affected choices of survival strategies.

More specifically, my hypotheses were the following:

H1: The choice of behavioral strategy is affected by available credible (or perceived as such) information on the likelihood of survival.

H2: The vast majority of Jews adopted coping as their behavioral strategy and did not change this strategy until the very end.

H3: The choice of resistance and collaboration strategies was strongly affected by one's pre-war activism in political parties and organizations.

H4: The choice of evasion as survival strategy is strongly affected by one's pre-WWII level of integration into the larger non-Jewish society.

H5. The choice of a particular survival strategy was affected by distinctly local factors and histories, namely the history of interethnic relations in the locality and the locality's socio-economic profile.

Empirical evidence from my case studies largely supported H1. People chose their survival strategy based on the information they had; when new credible information was received, prior beliefs were often updated and the behavior was changed. However, given the extreme conditions under which people were forced to make their choices, some individuals chose to reject credible information about their odds of survival. Discarding discomforting or troubling information is a well-studied psychological phenomenon. With regard to these people my hypothesis fails.

H2 was also supported by empirical evidence. Coping was indeed the most common strategy, adopted by the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and people kept clinging to this

strategy until the bitter end. The empirical evidence also partially supported H3 in the cases of both collaborators and resisters. One observable implication of this hypothesis is that the majority of members of Jewish Councils and the top echelons of the Jewish Police would be people with previous political experience. This observable implication turned out to be partly correct for the Jewish Councils analyzed here, and not correct for the Jewish police. The Jewish Council of the Białystok ghetto consisted almost exclusively of people with previous political and public experience; in Kraków the Jewish Councils included both political activists and people without past experience in politics, while in Minsk politically active people were actually prevented by the Germans from joining the Judenrat due to the prevalence of communist experience. In all three ghettos I found no discernible relationship between political activism and membership in the top echelons of the Jewish Police.

The second observable implication—that the members of the resistance organizations would be largely individuals with political experience—proved to be correct across all three cases: it was previously politically active people who resisted the Nazis in the ghettos of Minsk, Kraków, and Białystok. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that the type and the content of political activism did not affect the likelihood of joining the resistance—Communists and Zionists resisted with equal zeal and determination. The content of pre-war political activism did, however, affect the form of resistance—Communists preferred fighting outside the ghetto, while the Zionists opted for uprisings inside the ghetto walls. In addition, prior experience affected the prospects for coordination among resisters; communists and Zionists did not always want to cooperate even in the face of the Nazi threat. The data also supported a third observable implication of H3, that resisters and public collaborators would emphasize the well-being of a community or the needs of Communist or Zionist movements as the key motivation behind their

actions. This can be seen most clearly in the discussion of Ephraim Barasz, the leader of the Białystok ghetto Judenrat, who pursued the strategy of saving the ghetto by making it indispensable for the Germans, even though he believed that after the war he would be executed for collaboration with the enemy.

H4 was supported by the empirical evidence. People who were well integrated into local societies—e.g. those who had Polish, Russian, and Belorussian friends, who knew the local language and traditions—were much more likely to choose evasion than people who were less integrated. Thus, in Minsk and Kraków, where many Jews were well-integrated into the local non-Jewish society, evasion was widespread and even people who looked stereotypically Jewish had a chance to survive if they had non-Jewish friends. In Białystok, where the level of Jews' integration was extremely low, even Jews who had blonde hair and blue eyes stood almost no chance of escaping persecution by the Nazis.

The evidence also supports H5. The overall menu of possible strategies was the same in each ghetto, yet there was a variation in the distribution of strategies between community members and this distribution was affected by local factors and histories—Kraków's Austro-Hungarian legacy of relative tolerance and moderation and the toxic interethnic environment of Białystok had a tangible effect on Jewish behavior in each place—not only when it came to evasion, but also with regard to resistance, collaboration, and coping. Thus, “salvation through labor” had much more appeal and a greater chance of success in an industrial city like Białystok than in unindustrialized Kraków. And indeed, the strategy almost worked in Białystok, where the

local German authorities did their best to shield the ghetto from destruction. No such attempts were made in Kraków.⁶⁴

Regarding the meso-level patterns of Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis, I predicted that there should be a positive relationship between the level of community's pre-Holocaust political activism and resistance—the higher the level of political activism, the higher is the likelihood of resistance. More specifically, my hypotheses were:

H6. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was affected by the demographic characteristics of the ghetto and the resources available to the Jewish community.

H7. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was affected by the level of German repression.

H8. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was more likely in places with higher level of support for Jewish parties before the WWII.

H9. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was affected by the type of the regime, under which the Jews lived.

H10. Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis was more likely in localities with higher number of politically active Jews before the WWII.

I evaluated these hypotheses based on the three datasets I constructed for this project: 1) The Jewish Ghettos Dataset; 2) the 1928 Polish National Elections Dataset; and 3) the 1937 and 1939 Zionist Organization (ZO) Elections Dataset.

The findings of my statistical analysis not support hypotheses H6 and H7. Neither demographic factors, ghetto characteristics, nor the levels of the German oppression had a

⁶⁴ Schindler did try to save his Jewish employees, but it was a private attempt of an individual entrepreneur.

statistically significant estimated effect on the likelihood of ghetto uprisings. On the other hand, two variables associated with H9 and H10 had the largest and statistically significant estimated effect on the likelihood of uprising in the hypothesized directions: the number of politically active socialist-Zionists in the community (H10) and the experience of being under the Soviet occupation in 1939-41 (H9). The mechanism that explains this finding is the Soviet repression of non-communist political organizations, which forced several Zionist left-wing youth movements to initiate underground activities in the USSR. When Eastern Poland—the territory that was occupied by the USSR in 1939-41—came under the control of the Nazis in the summer of 1941, the determination to resist and the basic knowledge of how to organize underground work was already there.

Theoretical and Policy Implications

The findings of this study have several theoretical and policy-relevant implications. First, a major goal of this study was bringing agency back to the victims of even the most extreme political violence. In the social science literature, victims of mass violence are too often portrayed as and assumed to be powerless and passive subjects of violence, “to whom things happen and are done, rather than agents who make things happen through their doing” (Lubkemann 2008). During the Holocaust there certainly were limits to what the victims could achieve, but both the choices people made and the reasons for these choices impacted outcomes, and they should and can be studied and analyzed systematically.

Second, the study has several implications for Holocaust and the broader genocide studies scholarship. First, the Holocaust can and should be studied not only using the long established tools of qualitative research, but also by adopting quantitatively-oriented research

designs and statistical analysis of large-N datasets. Although nearly seventy years have passed since the Holocaust ended, this study was the first to simply count how many ghettos existed and collect data on each ghetto, yielding new findings; such an outcome is sufficient for demonstrating how a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methodologies can further the understanding of one of the key events of modern history. The findings also suggest that the Holocaust and genocide studies literatures should pay much closer attention to the meso-level—the level “where national-level policies and decisions translate into individual actions on the ground” (Finkel and Straus 2012). The analysis of the national level factors is important, but insufficient if we want to understand how mass killing unfolds on the ground: there is important variation at the sub-state level which is not captured by the macro factors, and this variation proved to be crucial for people’s survival. For example, national-level indicators of Jewish integration into Polish society tell us little about how meso-level factors were literally a matter of life and death, i.e. why a black-haired, dark-eyed circumcised Jewish male in Kraków who happened to have Polish friends stood a better chance of survival in comparison to a blond, blue-eyed Jewish female from Białystok who spoke only Yiddish. To understand violence and its outcomes one should also pay attention to where the violence takes place and account for local communities’ histories and traditions, which can greatly affect behavior. As Kalyvas (2003) has convincingly argued, violence is produced jointly by national and individual level factors and dynamics. In turn, I argue that these individual level factors and dynamics were shaped by the locality, meso-level.

An additional implication of this study is that the almost complete separation between the political violence and genocide studies literatures is somewhat artificial and a greater dialogue and convergence between the fields would greatly benefit both. Genocide and genocidal violence

can and should be studied and analyzed by applying the insights, theories, and methods of the political violence scholarship. The political violence literature, in turn, would benefit from paying closer attention to genocides and mass killings as these might provide new insights overlooked by scholars of civil wars.

There are several implications of this study for the broader discipline of political science. First, this study demonstrated that individual behavior is by and large driven by a rational (even if bounded) decision making process and strategic evaluation of survival chances and strategies, even under conditions of extreme violence. Second, the study argued that even the most common political activism, such as membership in political movements is not only a dependent variable that ought to be explained; it also is an independent variable can affects and explain behavior—again, even under conditions of extreme violence. Third, the study demonstrated the tangible and long lasting effects of political regimes and state policies on human behavior. The Austro-Hungarian Empire ceased to exist twenty years before the Holocaust, but its legacies still affected the worldview and the behavior of the Kraków Jews. The impact of the states and state legacies is not set in stone, however. In Kraków the impact of the Austro-Hungarian legacy was so strong mainly because the Polish state allowed the continuation of institutions and organizations created under the Habsburgs. As the experience of Minsk clearly demonstrates, state institutions and policies do shape identities and can have tremendous impact even after only a relatively short time of implementation. In 1921, Minsk and Białystok were quite similar in terms of interethnic relations and Jews' integration into non-Jewish society. Yet, by 1939, the dissimilarities between the cities were stark. Less than twenty years were required for a determined and proactive state to make a huge difference.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ On this point see also Dumitru and Johnson (2011).

My findings also have relevance for arguments regarding the importance of social integration on conflict outcomes (Varshney 2002) and the contribution of interethnic positive interactions (business or social). During the Holocaust, close interethnic relations between the Jews and their Slavic neighbors could not have prevented the violence, but they could (and often did) mitigate its effects by allowing some Jews to exercise the evasion option. It is quite certain that many more Jews would have survived in Białystok, had the interethnic relations in the city been more peaceful. In the context of the Holocaust, the “ethnic solidarity” explanation has been discussed by Helen Fein (Fein 1979), but what her national-level argument misses is the sub-national variation which, as the comparison of Białystok and Kraków demonstrates, was substantial.

The study also has an important practical and policy-relevant implication: we can analyze and even try to predict the behavior of people targeted by mass violence, and doing so might increase our ability to help these people when the violence unfolds. Even if the factors that I have identified as crucial in the Holocaust context turn out to be less important elsewhere, the greater and more important point remains—people and organizations tasked with humanitarian assistance and relief can potentially identify likely patterns of victims’ behavior based on pre-violence factors. Knowing that certain places have a greater likelihood to resist the perpetrators while in other places widespread evasion could be reasonably expected, more efficient assistance and relief strategies could be developed. Given the international community’s repeated failures in devising effective prevention strategies regarding mass killings, improving the quality of relief attempts is one of the things that can be done to improve the lot of people targeted by mass violence.

Future Research

A natural continuation of this research would be to analyze the behavior of victims of other cases of large-scale violence, such as in Bosnia, Rwanda, or the Ottoman Empire. I am confident that the classification of victims' behavior that I proposed in this work might be useful in analyzing victims' behavior in other settings. Specifically, it would be interesting to see how and whether political identities and experiences affected the behavior of Armenians, Bosnian Muslims, and Tutsis in these cases. For some cases, such as Bosnia, quantitative data on levels of inter-communal integration or patterns of voting can be collected with relative ease; in other cases the task would be more difficult to accomplish. However, my study has demonstrated that such efforts can yield results that are more than equal to the effort involved in the undertaking. The classification of victims' behavior and the findings of this dissertation can also be extended to other, non-genocidal cases of state-led violence and victimization. The behavior of Japanese Americans, interned by the US government during the WWII, or residents of Syrian towns, shielded by the government's forces would be good case studies, among numerous others.

Another potential avenue for further research would be to evaluate the impact of being subject to military occupation on political organizations and violence. The research on the impact of armed struggle on organizations and their post-violence development is plentiful; military occupation (which cannot be simply reduced to the fact of conquest) and its impact remain understudied. While there are scholars who study military occupation (Edelstein 2010) and some of its consequences, especially in the context of Iraq and Afghanistan (Berman et al. 2011; Herring and Rangwala 2005), much more can and should be done on this topic. Questions of how the experience of being under occupation affects political preferences, organizational structures and social networks might be crucial for understanding the social reality and future development of places such as Palestine, Iraq, and Kosovo.

The link between political identities and the likelihood of armed resistance to state-led violence can be also tested on other cases. For example, was the resistance to the Nazis in Western Europe more likely to crystallize in communities that exhibited specific patterns of voting behavior and political preferences? The scope of this line of inquiry can be also extended across time and space to other regions or periods—Latin America, Bosnia or Kosovo might be very good cases studies for this type of work.

My study also demonstrated the utility of the “historical turn” (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010) in political science research. “Historical cases” are important not only because of their antiquarian value. They also allow the research to produce new insights or to test the existing theories in different settings on “new” cases.⁶⁶ In other words, depending on the data availability there not only can, but also should be a political science of the Holocaust, the American Civil War (Costa and Kahn 2008), or the Crusades (Horowitz 2009).

This study has also demonstrated that political activism can have lasting effects. The political sociology literature did address the question of the effects of high-risk activism. Thus, Doug McAdam found that the experience of taking part in the Mississippi Freedom Summer campaign had a significant and long-lasting impact on the participants and their subsequent political activism and preferences. Numerous participants, he showed, later played important roles in free speech, anti-war, and women’s movements (McAdam 1986, 1988). The high-risk activism experience “solidified [the participants’] convictions and they maintained a high degree of involvement in progressive politics, even decades after Freedom Summer. In fact, he found a great deal of continuity between the volunteers’ activist beginnings in the 1960s and their political commitments in the 1980s” (Nepstad and Smith 1999). What is not examined in the

⁶⁶ In this regard it should be noted that in economics the “historical turn” is much more pronounced and developed than in political science.

literature is the impact of more mundane forms of political activism, such as taking parts in electoral campaigns or day-to-day activities of political parties. Hopefully, these questions will be addressed by future research.

Finally, while elsewhere I made an argument for focusing on meso-level factors that influence mass violence (Finkel and Straus 2012), in this dissertation I demonstrated how such factors can be incorporated into an analysis. Further research shall continue paying attention to this level, using different case studies, expanding the list of potential variables, or applying new methods and tools—for example GIS and spatial analysis.

All these potential future avenues are very promising in terms of potential theoretical and empirical contribution. As for the current study, it has achieved its goal if at this point the reader can answer King's question with unequivocal "yes."

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Appendix A: Additional Model Specifications

Logit Analysis of Uprisings in Polish Ghettos: Community Political Structure Explanations

Explanatory Variable	Model 3				Model 4			
	Coeff. (Logit)	Marg. Effect (x100)	Robust SE	Coeff. (Relogit)	Coeff. (Logit)	Marg. Effect (x100)	Robust SE	Coeff. (Relogit)
% Pro-Government Vote	0.036	0.001***	(.0003)	0.033	0.019	0.02	(0.0001)	0.015
% Comm. Vote	0.052	0.145***	(0.0004)	0.051	0.047	0.05***	(0.0002)	0.044
% Jewish Vote	0.053	0.15***	(0.0003)	0.047	0.032	0.03**	(0.0001)	0.023
% Jews in Community	-0.0003	-0.0001	(0.0001)	0.01	-0.0002	0.000	(0.000)	0.012
Ghetto Population (logged)					1.065	1.052**	(0.004)	1.016
Soviet 39-41					1.956	2.774*	(0.014)	1.791
Constant	-6.172			-6.298	-15.096			-14.612
Pseudo R2	0.117				0.294			
Log-Likelihood	-84.784				-67.584			
N		496				489		

Notes: * $p < 0.1$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported for estimated marginal effects. Standard errors are robust to clustering by German administrative regions

Logit Analysis of Uprisings in Polish Ghettos: Support for Jewish Parties

Explanatory Variable	Model 5				Model 6			
	Coeff. (Logit)	Marg. Effect (x100)	Robust SE	Coeff. (Relogit)	Coeff. (Logit)	Marg. Effect (x100)	Robust SE	Coeff. (Relogit)
% Bund Vote	0.06	0.2	(0.001)	0.064	-0.03	-0.035	(0.0007)	-0.022
% Minorities Bloc Vote	0.049	0.165***	(0.0004)	0.049	0.03	0.037**	(0.0001)	0.03
% Aguda Vote	-0.005	-0.016	(0.001)	0.0001	0.004	0.005	(0.0004)	0.011
% Poalei Zion Vote	-0.003	-0.011	(0.002)	0.026	-0.003	-0.004	(0.001)	0.03
% Galician Zionist Vote	0.024	0.081*	(0.0005)	0.026	-0.0006	0.000	(0.0002)	0.001
Ghetto Population (logged)					1.077	1.3***	(0.004)	1.008
Soviet 39-41					2.283	3.59***	(0.013)	2.119
Constant	-4.17			-4.14	-13.878			-13.096
Pseudo R2	0.077				0.283			
Log-Likelihood	-98.068				-75.715			
N		584				569		

Notes: * $p < 0.1$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported for estimated marginal effects. Standard errors are robust to clustering by German administrative regions

Logit Analysis of Ghetto Uprisings: Demography, Institutions, and Political Activism

Explanatory Variable	Model 7				Model 8			
	Coeff. (Logit)	Marg. Effect (x100)	Robust SE	Coeff. (Relogit)	Coeff. (Logit)	Marg. Effect (x100)	Robust SE	Coeff. (Relogit)
% Minorities Bloc Vote	0.047	0.102**	(0.0004)	0.046	0.496	0.065**	(0.0003)	0.04
ZO Voters (logged)	1.154	2.489***	(0.006)	1.116				
BWLI members (logged)					0.975	1.277**	(0.005)	0.933
% Comm. Vote					0.048	0.06***	(0.0002)	0.047
% Jews in Community					-0.0002	0.000	(0.000)	0.017
Ghetto Population (logged)					0.449	0.589	(0.005)	0.414
Soviet 39-41					1.571	2.204*	(0.013)	1.276
Constant	-9.669			-9.386	-14.133			-13.904
Pseudo R2	0.224				0.3152			
Log-Likelihood	-70.6				-56.218			
<i>N</i>		404				349		

Notes: * $p < 0.1$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported for estimated marginal effects. Standard errors are robust to clustering by German administrative regions.

Sample Averages: Uprising and Non-Uprising Ghettos

Explanatory Variable	Uprising	No Uprising
Ghetto Population (logged)	9	7.8
% Jews in Community	52.6	66.1
Duration (months)	13	13.3
% Jewish Vote	39	30.5
% Communist Vote	10.1	5.3
% Pro-Government Vote	29.5	25.6
% Minorities Vote	23.6	15.5
% Bund Vote	2.6	2.1
ZO Members (logged)	6.5	5.3
BWLI Members (logged)	5.9	4.5

Appendix B: Archives and Archival Collections

Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, Israel (CZA)

Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University, New Haven, CT (HVT)

Ghetto Fighters House Museum Archive, Kibbutz Lochamei Hagetaot, Israel (GFH)

Gratz College Holocaust Oral History Archive, Melrose Park, PA (GRA)

Jabotinsky Institute in Israel Archive, Tel Aviv, Israel (JIA)

Jewish Historical Institute Archive, Warsaw, Poland (ZIH)

Massuah Archive, Kibbutz Tel Yitzhak, Israel (MSH)

Moreshet Archive, Kibbutz Giv'at Chaviva, Israel (MRH)

Oral History Division, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel (OHD)

University of Michigan-Dearborn Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive
(UMD)

University of South Florida Holocaust Survivors Oral History Project, Tampa, Florida (USF)

US Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive, Washington, DC (USHMM)

Yad Vashem Archive, Jerusalem, Israel (YVA)

Appendix C: Excerpt from the 1928 Polish National Elections Book

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WYBORY DO SEJMU I SENATU W R. 1928

Tabl. 1.

WYBORY DO SEJMU WEDŁUG OKRĘGÓW WYBORCZYCH (c. d.).
 ÉLECTIONS À LA DIÈTE SUIVANT LES CIRCONSCRIPTIONS ÉLECTORALES (suite).
 OKRĄG WYBORCZY NR. 42 (dok.) — CIRCONSCRIPTION ÉLECTORALE N-o 42 (fin).
 POWIATY — ARRONDISSEMENTS: KRAKÓW, CHRZANÓW, OŚWIĘCIM, OLKUSZ, MIECHÓW.

POWIATY — ARRONDISSEMENTS: KRAKÓW, CZĘSTOCHOWA, OŚWIECIM, ZATOR																	
Powiaty Miasta Gminy wiejskie Arrondissements Villes Communes rurales	Liczba obwo- dów głosowa- nia Nombre des sections de vote	Liczba mieszkań- ców uprawn. do głoso- wania Nombre des habitants ayant le droit de vote	Złożono głosów Nombre des votes déposés	Unieważnio- no głosów w Komisjach Nombre des votes invalidés par les Commissions		Oddano głosów waż- nych ogółem Total des votes valables	Głosy ważne oddane na listy Nr. Nr. Nombre des votes valables obtenus par les listes N-o N-o										
				Obwo- dowej Locals	Okre- gowej Prin- cipale		1	2	3	4	7	10	14	17	24	25	37 ^a
Zagórze	1	634	554	2	343	211	150	36	—	—	6	—	11	—	7	1	—
Zalas	1	846	714	1	1	713	108	547	—	—	2	4	—	—	9	43	—
Zarki	1	867	789	1	26	763	235	85	16	—	374	—	10	4	1	—	40
a) Gminy pozostałe Autres communes rurales	40	12 147	10 156	628	1 115	9 041	2 667	3 441	392	—	613	14	758	44	107	975	30
Pow. — Arr. Oświęcim	44	25 593	20 935	128	133	20 802	8 706	8 357	3 476	3	152	2	1 034	1 545	132	2 360	35
a) Miasta — Villes	4	6 610	5 008	34	34	4 974	1 612	1 639	48	2	11	—	30	1 347	28	351	6
Oświęcim	3	5 592	4 151	26	26	4 125	1 054	1 419	3	2	6	—	5	1 329	28	278	1
Zator	1	1 018	857	8	8	849	458	220	45	—	5	—	25	18	—	73	5

Note: The page presents electoral returns from several cities in the Cracow region, including Auschwitz.

Appendix D: Zionist Organization Congress Elections Protocol

№ 154
ימלא ע"י הועדה הראשית

פרטיכל של הבחירות לקונגרס הציוני העשרים

א. העיר קזאן
ב. הבחירות התקיימו ביום הראשון, 11 יולי 1937 באולם בקהל הציוני

ג. מספר השוקלים שהיתה להם זכות הבחירה: 215
ד. מספר הדעות שנמצאו בקלפי 177
ה. מספר הדעות שאושרו 177
ו. מספר הדעות שנפסלו X
ז. הדעות שאושרו נמסרו בעד:

מספר הרשימה	ש מ ה ר ש י מ ה	מספר הדעות שקבלה כל רשימה
1	"רשימת ההסתדרות הציונית בפולניה - ההתאחדות העולמית של הציונים הכלליים"	37
2	"רשימת ברית הציונים הכלליים בפולניה"	2
3	"רשימת ה"מורח" ותנועת "חורה ועבודה" בפולניה"	37
4	"רשימת איגוד הציונים המדינתיים בפולניה" (מפלגת המדינה העברית)	1
5	"רשימת חבלוק של ארץ-ישראל העובדת בפולניה"	107

ח. הערות ועדת הבחירות:

החתומים מטה מאשרים בזה כי הבחירות נערכו בהתאם לתקנות הבחירות ולהוראות של הועדה הראשית לבחירות.

קזאן 11/7/37
דפוס והתאריך

א. ב. ג. ד. ה. ו. ז. ח.

חתימות חברי הועדה המקומית לבחירות וב"כ הרשימות

על הוצע המקומי להכין את פרטיכל הבחירות בשלש העתקות לפי הדוגמא דלעיל; אחת מהן נשארת אצל ועדת הבחירות המקומית והנשארות נשלחות תיכף ובאחריות (Polecony) לועדה הראשית לבחירות אל הקונגרס העשרים בורשה לפי הכתבת:

Główna Komisja Wyborcza do XX Kongresu Syjon. w Polsce
WARSZAWA, Nowolipie 3 m. 4

Note: Zionist Organization Congress Elections Protocol from Bereza-Kartuska, Wołyń region. There were 215 eligible voters in town, 177 voted in the 1937 ZO Congress elections. There were no invalidated ballots. General Zionists A received 31 votes, General Zionists B – 2, Mizrahi – 37, Jewish State Party – 0, and the Bloc for the Working Land of Israel – 107.