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HOLOCAUST IN ROVNO

The Massacre at Sosenki
Forest, November 1941

Jeffrey Burds





Holocaust in Rovno

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Holocaust in Rovno: The Massacre at Sosenki Forest, November 1941



Jeffrey Burds
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*This Book is Dedicated to the
Memory of Three Rovno Friends:*

*For Rovno survivor Chaya Musman who escaped,
For her Polish friend Jurek Nowakowski who stayed behind,
and for the woman he saved*

Krystyna Nowakowska (née Leah Bodkier)

“May You who are the source of mercy
shelter them beneath Your wings eternally,
and bind their souls among the living,
that they may rest in peace.”

—*From the Kaddish, the Jewish Prayer for the Dead*

*“Those who survived that day on November 7th [1941]
will never be able to erase it from their memories and hearts.”*

*—Testimony of Rovno Holocaust
Survivor, Abraham Kirschner*

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MAP 1 *Western Volhynia*

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A note on transliteration and place names

Most Jewish survivors left their accounts in either German, Polish, Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew or English. Therefore the sources themselves present numerous spellings of place names. To avoid confusion, I have adopted the standard convention of converting all place names into their modern Ukrainian or Polish equivalents, depending on where they lie geographically today.

I have made two exceptions: Rovno is consistently used throughout this book instead of the Ukrainian version, Rivne, or the Polish Równe, or German Rowno; and L'vov should be L'viv in Ukrainian (and Lwów in Polish), and I have preserved the Ukrainian transliterated form for all uses except direct references in wartime documents, where the German "Lemberg" was more common.

Similarly, personal names have in most cases been restored to their original forms, so that Iurii Novakovksii in Soviet files is usually rendered in the proper Polish spelling of his name, Jurek or Jerzy Nowakowski.

And in German, I have retained the original German term *Aktion*, plural *Aktionen*, which refers to mass killing operations.

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Introduction: The Intimacy of Violence

Abstract: A short introduction sets up the main theoretical issues of the book. In Eastern Europe, Holocaust perpetrators were intimately connected with their victims. Therefore the history of the Holocaust in the East represents a fundamentally different pattern of violence than the history of the Holocaust in Western Europe.



Burds, Jeffrey. *Holocaust in Rovno: The Massacre at Sosenki Forest, November 1941*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. DOI: 10.1057/9781137388407.0006.

For those who do not specialize in the history of violence in Eastern Europe, it may be difficult to understand the degree to which genocide and ethnic or religious cleansing are hate crimes perpetrated not against random strangers, but more often than not targeting *personal contacts*. Jan Gross's poignant observations of multi-ethnic western Ukraine (or south-eastern Poland) just prior to World War II are especially relevant here:

In these easternmost hinterlands of interwar Europe each hamlet or village was to a large degree an isolated universe. As often happens in such an environment, intense personal hatreds were harbored, and an ethnic and religious component gave them the potential to engulf entire communities. Yet, much as the violence represented an explosion of combined ethnic, religious, and nationalist conflict, I am nevertheless struck by its intimacy. More often than not, victims and executioners knew each other personally. Even after several years, survivors could still name names. Definitely, people took this opportunity to get even for personal injuries in the past.¹

Jan Gross's profound insights on how large wars translate into small ones is a crucial backdrop to neighbor-against-neighbor violence in Ukraine before, during, and after World War II.

This monograph is a reconstruction of the events surrounding the German *Aktion* that led to the massacre of some 23,500 Jewish men, women, and children at three sites in Sosenki Forest, outside Rovno, in Volhynia, Ukraine, on November 7–9, 1941. Often remembered as the “second Babi Yar,” the massacre of Jews in Rovno was one of dozens of similar German-sponsored large-scale anti-Jewish killing operations perpetrated in Soviet zones that marked the first autumn and winter of World War II in the East. Preceding the adoption of the “Final Solution” of the “Jewish problem” at Wannsee in January, 1942, Rovno and other German mass killings of Jews in the East were a testing ground for genocide. In Ukraine alone, more than 441,414 Jews were killed in a four-month period, from September to December 1941—largely shot by special German units supported by far more numerous units of local collaborationist police. Throughout the Soviet East, adding the Baltics, Russia and Rumania, the number of murdered Jews in large *Aktionen* rises to over 650,000, nearly one in four of all Jews killed in the Holocaust in the East.

Despite the profound importance of the German decision in late summer to professionalize the procedures for the murder of Jewish men, women, and children at killing sites throughout the East, there has been

scant study of any of these *Aktionen* that typified German policy in autumn and winter 1941 other than a series of works on Babi Yar, the murder of some 33,000 Jews in a ravine northwest of Kiev on September 29–30, 1941.² I hope this microhistory of the massacre at Rovno in November 1941 will encourage historians to do research on other *Aktionen* of the era when German occupation authorities tested the limits and defined the procedures and processes of genocide in Soviet zones.

The professionalization of killing was matched by the establishment of efficient methods for the organized seizure and redistribution of the wealth that disenfranchised or murdered Jews left behind. This political economy of genocide is an integral part of the story of the German occupation in the East, and the German administration's crucial dependence on local collaborators.

In this study of the massacre at Rovno in November 1941, our aim is not just to summarize the moment of violence itself, but to follow its trajectory, to explore its legacy in the community where unspeakable acts of mass violence occurred. In his *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas identified the act of violence itself as an ontological event: not just the moment of violence, but the changing life trajectories of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders alike became the nexus for transforming individuals in communities of violence.

Every war employs arms that turn against those who wield them. It established an order from which no one can keep his distance... Violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance.³

* * *

Drawing from more than a decade of research in archives in Russia, Ukraine, Israel, Poland, Germany, and the United States, supplemented by interviews with survivors and their families, I here present a microhistory of the German *Aktion* in Rovno, Ukraine, from November 7–9, 1941. I have made every effort to weave together largely unpublished eyewitness accounts of perpetrators, bystanders, and Jewish survivors to reconstruct the horror of a single German *Aktion* typical in Ukraine in autumn and winter 1941.

By and large, these unpublished accounts come from four main sources. First, in Moscow at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), there is the collection of the Extraordinary State Commission (ChGK) which was assigned the task of preserving a Soviet institutional memory of the experience of the war in Soviet zones.⁴ These central archival collections are likewise preserved at the republic level in Kiev, Ukraine, at the Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine (TsDAHOU), and at the local or oblast level, at the State Archive of Rovno Oblast (DARO). In Kiev, there is also the State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (Arkhiv SBU), which includes the documentation of the efforts of the Soviet secret police to investigate war crimes and perpetrators, with eyewitness reports, analyses of physical evidence, etc. Supporting materials were drawn from other Ukrainian archives, especially the German “District Galicia” collections preserved in the State Archive of L’viv Oblast (DALO).

Also crucial are the eyewitness accounts preserved in the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH) in Warsaw, Poland. These have been supplemented with similar accounts preserved at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. Substantial materials were also collected at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York, and the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education.

Finally, in the early 1960s the West German government created the *Central Office of the State Justice Administration for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes* (*Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*) in Ludwigsburg. This unit became the Federal Republic of Germany’s primary investigative office for Nazi-era crimes. Among these investigations were interviews with several German soldiers and policemen who took part in the Rovno *Aktion*.

Notes

- 1 Jan Tomasz Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 43. For insights on neighbor-against-neighbor violence in Eastern Europe, see Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001);

- Shimon Redlich, *Together and Apart in Brzezany: Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians, 1919–1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).
- 2 Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004): 291–293.
 - 3 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969): 21. I am grateful to Mount Holyoke anthropologist Andrew Lass for drawing my attention to this work so many years ago in a talk he gave at Yale University.
 - 4 Most scholars agree that there are some concerns about the reliability of Soviet collections on many aspects of World War II. However, these objections seem to focus more on the typed and edited versions of original handwritten testimonies, than on the testimonies themselves. See the discussion in Marina Sorokina, “People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* Vol. 6, No. 4 (Fall 2005): 797–831.

1

Holocaust East versus West: The Political Economy of Genocide

Abstract: *Three main elements distinguished the Holocaust in the East from the Holocaust in Western and Central Europe. First, the Holocaust in the East was presented to the public as a war of liberation from Stalinism, from Soviet “Jewish-Bolshevism.” Second, the Holocaust in the East was by and large carried out openly, in the presence of non-Jewish locals. In the West, most Jewish victims of the Holocaust were rounded up and forcibly transported in sealed trains to concentration camps in Central and Eastern Europe. This distance generated considerable space for deniability: sustaining the myth that Jews had been the victims of deportation and forced labor, not of mass annihilation. In contrast, a much smaller proportion of Soviet and East European Jews were exterminated in camps. While most Western and Central European Jews perished in the “industrial efficiency” of the camps, most Jews in the Soviet and Eastern European zones were shot, and the overwhelming majority were massacred at designated killing sites in or near their own homes by predominantly local ethnic nationalist militias who played the central role in their executions. Third, the Holocaust in the East mobilized a considerable proportion of the local population as co-perpetrators.*

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In early 1945, U.S. Military Intelligence—the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—infiltrated several of its German-speaking secret agents into Prisoner of War (POW, or P.W.) camps of captured German soldiers. Although these agents did not unearth much valuable intelligence this way, the raw reports leave us with a fascinating snapshot of the popular culture of Wehrmacht soldiers near the brink of defeat, particularly

The influence of . . . Nazi propaganda which, apparently, has concentrated on the anti-Bolshevik line and, doubtless, has been very successful. If the P.W.s have grotesque ideas about the U.S.A., what they think about the U.S.S.R. is simply fantastic. A normal human brain ought to eliminate automatically this kind of fantasies, but Nazi propaganda has succeeded in transforming normal ways of thinking into morbid phantoms.¹

U.S. Intelligence officials noted with dismay that “the influence of anti-semitism [sic] is simply devastating.”² As one German POW remarked to a secret informant: “The Poles will thank us for having exterminated their Jews.”³

World War II left a powerful imprint everywhere there had been a German occupation. Sixty years after the war ended, we have not begun to comprehend the nature and contours of that imprint, the depth and repercussions of occupation. In essence, what I am describing is a popular hate culture of the *Żydokomuna*, the alleged “Jewish-Communist conspiracy” that was used to justify genocide against Jews as part of the German-Ukrainian war of resistance against Soviet power.

Nazi propaganda against the *Żydokomuna*

Three main elements distinguished the Holocaust in the East from the Holocaust in Western and Central Europe. First, the Holocaust in the East was presented to the public as a war of liberation from Stalinism, from Soviet “Jewish-Bolshevism,” from the *Żydokomuna*. From the very first days of the German occupation in the East, witnesses noted the sudden appearance of ubiquitous leaflets and posters calling for a people’s war of liberation from “Stalinist oppression” and “Jewish-Bolshevism.” To legitimize German authority and recruit local support for German occupation policies, the “Jewish-Communist” element was anathematized in posters, leaflets, and hundreds of occupation

newspapers that translated German messages of hate into the local vernaculars of the Soviet Union's multiethnic communities.⁴ Leonard Dubinskyi, in Rovno, noted that after the Germans came, "there were posters everywhere."⁵ A priest, Mikhail Nosal, recalled that throughout Volhynia "people read these posters, they whispered about them, and gazed at all this 'literary' rubbish with disbelief."⁶ In his memoir about wartime Brzezany, Shimon Redlich recalled that "both German and Ukrainian nationalist propaganda widely used the theme of Judeo-Bolshevism and alleged Jewish participation in the Soviet terror machine."⁷ German and local nationalist leaflets alike scapegoated "Jewish-communists" for Soviet atrocities, real or imagined: "People [of Ukraine]! Know that Moscow, Poland, Magyars, the Jews—they are your enemies! Annihilate them!" This was a typical OUN-Bandera Ukrainian nationalist leaflet distributed widely during 1941 that openly advocated violence against Jews, ethnic Poles, and other ethnic groups. Other OUN-B leaflets advocated the same extremist views: "Exterminate the Poles, Jews, communists without mercy! Do not pity the enemies of the Ukrainian National Revolution."⁸ Władislaw and Ewa Siemaszko found evidence that Ukrainian nationalists in Rovno (as elsewhere) had displayed their own posters calling for Ukrainian collaboration with the German liberators, and the liquidation of so-called foreign nationalities who had settled on Ukrainian soil as "pests" who ate Ukrainian bread. Twenty "foreign" nationalities were listed as enemies of Ukraine: Jews were first, Poles were second.⁹

Besides posters and public printed decrees, there were also occupation newspapers. In his own study of the Ukrainian occupation press, Mykhailo Koval found 190 German-sponsored Ukrainian language newspapers with a combined circulation of more than a million copies, plus 16 radio stations, local movie production facilities, and traveling exhibitions. The war against "Jewish-Bolshevism" was a central story in 576 of 700 issues of the occupation-era Ukrainian newspaper in Kiev, *New Ukrainian Word* (*Novoe Ukrainskoe Slovo*).¹⁰ Typical was this message from editor Ulas Samchuk in the newspaper *Volyn*, published in Rovno, on September 1, 1941: "The element that settled our cities, whether it is Jews or Poles who were brought here from outside Ukraine, must disappear completely from our cities. The Jewish problem is already in the process of being solved."¹¹ Occupation newspapers in the East regularly advocated the total annihilation of the alleged "Judeo-Communist" threat.

In his comprehensive survey of occupation-era newspapers, Sergei Kudryashov found nearly 200 Russian-language newspapers regularly published in German-occupied zones in Russia and eastern Ukraine. In his own study of the Ukrainian occupation press, John-Paul Himka found 160 German-sponsored Ukrainian-language newspapers and magazines. And hundreds of other Polish, Lithuanian, Estonian, Latvian, and Belorussian newspapers of the German occupation have likewise received attention from scholars. Circulation data from Poland show print runs of 10,000 to 200,000 copies of each newspaper, and millions of leaflets: the point is that a serious effort was made by the Germans to win the hearts and minds of civilians living in occupied zones of the Soviet Union.¹²

To take just one of hundreds of examples: in Latvia, attacks against local Jews were justified by media reports showcasing Soviet abuses. In the main Latvian-language newspaper of the German occupation, *Tevija*, throughout July 1941 there appeared numerous photographs of mutilated Latvian corpses from Riga's main Soviet People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) prison, ostensibly innocent victims of "Jewish-Bolshevik" torture. A September 6, 1941 article in *Tevija*, entitled "Horrible Evidence from Excavated Graves," presented forensic evidence to describe Soviet tortures in excruciating detail. In Rēzekne, according to the article, the Soviet NKVD tortured Latvian physician Dr. Paul Struve, removing the skin from his hands in boiling water, cutting out his tongue, and pounding nails into his heels. Hildegard Krikova had been beaten, tortured, and her breasts had been cut off. And the son of a local man, Yakov Terent'ev, had been found with the skin literally ripped from his back.¹³

Such detailed accounts were used to legitimize the German attack as a "liberation from Jewish-Bolshevism," and appealed to all Latvians to support the regime by scapegoating all "Jewish-Communists" for such horrors. By vividly recounting the sufferings of local martyrs—these "victims of Soviet repression"—the accounts transformed the larger German war into every Latvian's personal war against a monstrous enemy. Here and throughout the Soviet western borderlands, we find a curious ritualized vilification of Jews as communists, a vilification echoed in anti-"Jewish-Communist" posters and leaflets in shop windows and newspapers. The rituals themselves displayed the Jewish alliance with communism, and in this way justified and legitimized actions against Jews. In 1941 alone, approximately 72,000 of Latvia's 80,000 Jews were massacred.



FIGURE 1.1 *The Wehrmacht as an army of liberation from the Jewish-Communist threat. On the base of a destroyed Lenin statue in northwest Russia, the German occupying authority constructed a new monument with this plaque (in Russian and German): “In Commemoration of the Liberation of Pskov by the Germany Army, July 9, 1941”*



FIGURE 1.2 *On the base of a destroyed Stalin statue in eastern Ukraine, written in German and Russian, “The Bolshevik Terror Has Been Broken.”*

Source: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Nusya Roth Collection, RG1871.

In the first months of the war, Soviet Jews caught behind German lines were forced to take part in humiliating rites of iconoclastic violence—“Lenin funerals” and “Stalin parades”—where non-Jewish neighbors were encouraged to taunt Jewish men, women, and children as they dismantled symbols of communist authority, sang communist or Jewish songs, chanted communist or Jewish prayers. In dozens of documented cases, such rituals normally ended in violence—as the communist symbols, usually statues of Lenin or Stalin, were buried alongside local Jews who were massacred by their non-Jewish neighbors.¹⁴ After the end of such “self-cleansing” pogroms in summer 1941, German propagandists and their local collaborators continued to report on actions against Jews in local media outlets, and regularly informed the local public about the progress in the war against the “Jewish-Communist” element.



FIGURE 1.3 *Iconoclastic destruction of a Stalin statue in Białystok, Poland, July 1941*



FIGURE 1.4 *Local Poles throw stones at a Lenin statue in Bialystok, Poland, July 1941*
 Source: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Nusya Roth Collection, RG1871.

Second, the Holocaust in the East was by and large carried out openly, in the presence of non-Jewish locals. In the West, most Jewish victims of the Holocaust were rounded up and forcibly transported in sealed trains to concentration camps in Central and Eastern Europe. This distance generated considerable space for deniability: that Jews had been the victims of deportation and forced labor, not of mass annihilation. In contrast, a much smaller proportion of Soviet and East European Jews were exterminated in camps. While most Western and Central European Jews perished in the “industrial efficiency” of the camps, most Jews in the Soviet and Eastern European zones were shot, and the overwhelming majority were massacred at designated killing sites in or near their own homes by predominantly local ethnic nationalist militias who played the central roles in their executions.¹⁵

Third, the Holocaust in the East mobilized a considerable proportion of the local population as co-perpetrators. As numerous observers have noted, “The holocaust in eastern Poland could not have been accomplished without the active participation of hundreds of thousands of locals recruited by the Nazis to control and then slaughter Jews in the field.”¹⁶ Survivor and Jewish partisan Samoil Gril added: “For every one

German perpetrator there were more than seven Soviet civilian” recruits in the German occupation police.¹⁷

The primary pool of executioners in the Holocaust in the East came from Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Belorussian nationalists. Paradoxically, the “brutalization of warfare“ in the East was fueled as much by local antipathies as it was by German racial ideology.¹⁸ Russian historians Kirsanov and Drobiazko have found a direct correlation between the escalation of anti-civilian violence and the rapid expansion of local ethnic nationalists in German services: “The adoption by the German leadership of the policy of ‘total war’... had a telling effect on the expansion of the scale of the utilization in the military forces of the Reich of human resources from occupied Soviet territories.”¹⁹ Seeking support in Soviet zones, the German occupation authorities rallied nationalist fervor against “Jewish-Communism.” As Soviet partisan commander Panteleimon Ponomarenko reported in a Top Secret message to Stalin in 1942: “The Germans are utilizing every means in order to attract contingents from our own population in occupied oblasts into the struggle against partisans, the protection of the railways, and in the struggle against the Red Army, forming from them military units, punitive (*karatel’nye*) and police detachments.”²⁰ Alfred Reiber noted in his insightful article on World War II in the East as civil war: “The destruction of the Jewish population of Ukraine, reduced from 870,000 to 17,000, could not have been accomplished without the aid of the local population, because the Germans lacked the manpower to reach all of the communities that were annihilated, especially in the remote villages.”²¹

The German effort to recruit locals into service in the occupation authority was by all measures enormously successful. The ratio of Germans to local collaborators in many departments and police organizations ran from one to five in 1941, to 1 to 20 or more by 1943. Figures from the Reichskommissariat Ukraine show that the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, Protection Squad) employed some 15,000 Germans and 238,000 native police at the end of 1942, reflecting a ratio of nearly 1 to 16, a rate that rose to 1:25 or even 1:50 in some eastern regions by 1944.²² Romanichev found that the size of the *Schuma* (police auxiliary) units in German police forces throughout the occupied zones in the East grew more than ten times between late 1941 and early 1943.

According to V. Müller-Hillebrand, Slavic infantry units grew from 90 in 1943 to over 200 Russian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian battalions, including other nationalities, by the middle of 1944.²³ Kirsanov and

Drobiazko estimated that about 1.2 million Soviets served in German armed Wehrmacht and SS units throughout the war.²⁴ These recruits became the primary perpetrators in the German annihilation of Jews and other local enemies in the East, and the primary force in Germany's ruthless anti-partisan and reprisals campaigns against Soviet civilians in 1943 and 1944.

Notes

- 1 Three raw reports have been preserved at the U.S. National Archives: NARA, RG226 OSS Classified Sources & Methods Files, Entry 210, Box 175, Folder 6: "Report about a stay in a P.W. camp," Document #007902/002 (8 typed pages); "What German P.W.s think about the war," #007902/003 (10 typed pages) "Report about one week's life and experiences in a P.W. camp," #007902/004 (11 typed pages). All undated. The quotation comes from NARA, RG226, Entry 210, Box 175, Folder 5, "Report about one week's life and experiences in a [German] P.W. camp," Secret, declassified in 1994.
- 2 "Report about a stay in a P.W. camp," Secret, no date (January or February 1945). NARA, RG226, Entry 210, Box 175, Folder 6, Document Number 007902/002, p. 6.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 The best study of Ukrainian occupation newspapers is Kostiantyn Kurylyshyn and Iaroslav R. Dashekvich, *Ukrains'ke zhyttia v umovakh nimets'koi okupatsii (1939–1944 rr.): za materialamy ukrainomovnoi lehal'noi presy* (Lviv: Lviv's'ka natsional'na naukova biblioteka imeni V. Stefanyka, 2010). Cf., A. V. Okorokov, *Osobyi front: nemetskaia propaganda na Vostochnom fronte v gody Vtori mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: Russkii put', 2007); Robert Edwin Herzstein, "Anti-Jewish Propaganda in the Orel Region of Great Russia, 1942–1943: The German Army and Its Russian Collaborators," *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* Vol. 6 (1989): 33–55; Sergei Kudriashev and Liubov' Kudriavtseva, comp. "O vsekhn podozritel'nykh litsakh soobshchaite nemedlenno..." *Istochnik: Dokumenty russkoi istorii* (1993) No. 2: 89–93; Johannes Schlootz and Babette Quinkert, eds. *Deutsche Propaganda in Weissrussland: 1941–1944; eine Konfrontation von Propaganda und Wirklichkeit; Ausstellung in Berlin und Minsk* (Berlin: Free University, Fachbereich Politische Wiss., 1996); and Babette Quinkert, "'Hitler, der Befreier!' Zur psychologischen Kriegsführung gegen die Zivilbevölkerung der besetzten sowjetischen Gebiete 1941–1944," in *Bulletin für Faschismus- und Weltkriegsforschung* (Heft 14, 2000): 57–83. On German anti-Jewish propaganda and the incitement of anti-Jewish actions in the early days

- of the war, see Zhanna Kovba, *Liudianist' u bezodni pekla: povedinka mistsevoho naselennia skhidnoi Halychyny v roky "Ostatochnoho rozv'iazannia ievreis'koho pytannia,"* (Kiev: Sfera, 1998): 70–76, 100–101; Bogdan Musial, *"Kontrrevolutionäre Elemente sind zu ershiessen": die Brutalisierung des deutsch-sowjetischen Krieges in Sommer 1941* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2000): 200–210.
- 5 Affidavit of Dr. Leonard Dubinskyj (b. 1881), November 25, 1944, Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter, GARF), f. R-7021 Chrezvychnaia gosudarstvennaia kommissiia po ustanovleniiu i rassledovaniuu zlodeianii nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatnikov, op. 71, d. 40, l. 40.
 - 6 "O zverstvakh nemestkikh zapravit na Volyni," GARF, R-7021, op. 71, d. 1, l. 44. (November 29, 1944).
 - 7 Shimon Redlich, *Together and Apart in Brzezany: Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians, 1919–1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 102. On the Holocaust in Soviet zones, see Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).
 - 8 Tsentral'nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Vyshchikh Organiv Vlady Ta Upravlinnia Ukrainy (hereafter, TsDAVO), f. 3833, op. 63, d. 9. On Ukrainian nationalist leaflets targeting communists, Jews, and Poles, see Il'ia Al'tman, *Zhertyv nenavisti: Kholokhost v SSSR, 1941–1945* (Moscow: Fond "Kovcheg," 2002): 40–49.
 - 9 Władisław Siemaszko and Ewa Siemaszko. *Ludobójstwo dokonane przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na ludności polskiej Wołynia* (Warsaw: Borowiecky, 2008), I: 723.
 - 10 M. I. Koval, "The Nazi Genocide of the Jews and the Ukrainian Population, 1941–1944," in Zvi Gitelman, ed. *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997): 51–53; Mikhail I. Tyaglyy, "The Role of Anti-semitic Doctrine in German Propaganda in the Crimea, 1941–1944," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 2004): 421–459; and John-Paul Himka, "Krakivski visti and the Jews, 1943: A Contribution to the History of Ukrainian-Jewish Relations," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* Vol. 21, No. 1–2 (Summer-Winter, 1996): 81–96; Kostiantyn Kurylyshyn and Iaroslav R. Dashekvich, *Ukrains'ke zhyttia v umovakh nimets'koi okupatsii (1939–1944 rr.): za materialamy ukrainomovnoi lehal'noi presy* (Lviv: Lviv's'ka natsional'na naukova biblioteka imeni V. Stefanyka, 2010).
 - 11 Quoted in Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe during the Second World War* (New York: Macmillan, 1985): 195.
 - 12 Sergei Kudryashov, "Russian Collaboration with the Nazis and the Holocaust," Paper presented at the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem [<http://www.yad-vashem.org.il/research&publications/research/kudryashov.pdf>]; and Himka, "Krakivski visti and the Jews, 1943." Circulation data from Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Reptile Journalism: The Official*

Polish-Language Press under the Nazis, 1939–1945 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994): 75; Sergei Kudryashov, “The Hidden Dimension: Wartime Collaboration in the Soviet Union,” in John Erickson and David Dilks, eds. *Barbarossa: The Axis and the Allies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994): 238–254.

On newspapers published in local vernaculars in German-occupied zones, see: Henry Abramson, “Nachrichten aus Lemberg; lokale Elemente in der anti-semitischen Ikonographie der NS-Propaganda in ukrainischer Sprache,” in *Grenzenlose Vorurteile* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002): 249–268; Henry Abramson, “‘This is the Way it Was!’ Textual and Iconographic Images of Jews in the Nazi-sponsored Ukrainian Press of Distrikt Galizien,” *Why Didn’t the Press Shout? Journalism and the Holocaust*, edited by Robert Moses Shapiro (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2003): 537–556; Grzegorz Hryciuk, “*Gazeta Lwowska*: 1941–1944 (Wrocław: Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1992); and Piotr Kołtunowski, *Strategia propagandy hitlerowskiej w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie na podstawie “Krakauer Zeitung” (1939–1945)* (Lublin: Studium historyczno-filologiczne, 1990). On the enormous German investment in propaganda in occupied zones in the East, see the classic study by Hasso von Wedel, *Die Propagandatruppen der Deutschen Wehrmacht* (Neckargemünd: Kurt Vowinkel Verlag, 1962).

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- 14 Gross, *Neighbors, passim*; Dieter Pohl, “Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Western Ukraine—A Research Agenda,” in *Shared History-Divided Memory: Jews and Others in Soviet-Occupied Poland, 1939–1941*, edited by Eleazar Barkan, Elizabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007), 305–313; and Kai Struve, “Rites of Violence? The Pogroms of Summer 1941,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* Vol. 24 (2012): 257–274.
- 15 Patrick Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest’s Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- 16 Hubert P. van Tuyll. Review of Martin Dean’s *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44*, *The Russian Review* Vol. 60, No. 3 (July 2001): 448–449.
- 17 Samuil Gil’ [Samoil Gil], *Krov’ ikh i segodnia govorit’. O Katastrofe i geroizme evreev v gorodakh i mestechakh Ukrainy* (Moscow: “Fond Zhabotinskii,” 2005), 302. Taking just the German Order Police in Soviet zones, there were 14,622 *Volksdeutsche*, and 126,321 local volunteers, a ratio of 8.6 to 1.
- 18 Hans-Jürgen Müller, “The Brutalization of Warfare, Nazi Crimes, and the Wehrmacht,” in John Erickson and David Dilks, eds. *Barbarossa: The Axis and the Allies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994): 229–237. On the escalation of German violence in the East versus the West, see Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–1945: German Troops and the Barbarisation of*

- Warfare* (London: Macmillan, 1985); Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 68–70; Truman Anderson, “The Conduct of Reprisals by the German Army of Occupation in the Southern USSR, 1941–1943,” Ph.D. Dissertation, (University of Chicago, 1994); Ben Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).
- 19 N. A. Kirsanov and S. I. Drobiazko, “Velikaia otechestvennaia voina 1941–1945 gg.: natsional’nye i dobrovol’cheskie formirovaniia po raznye storony fronta,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia* No. 6 (November 1, 2001): 70.
 - 20 P. Ponomarenko to I. Stalin, August 18, 1942, *Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (APRF), f. 3, op. 50, d. 471, ll. 107–110, published in “Karateli: ‘Idet beshenaia natsionalisticheskaia propaganda,’” *Vestnik APRF [Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii]* 1995, No. 2: 120–122.
 - 21 Alfred J. Reiber, “Civil Wars in the Soviet Union,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Winter 2003): 147–148.
 - 22 Raul Hilberg, *Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1960), 243–244. Cf., Oleh Klymenko and Serhii Tkachov, *Ukrainci v politsii v reikhskomisariati “Ukraina” (Pivdenna Volyn’): Nimets’kyi okupatsiinyi rezhym na Kremenechchyni u 1941–1944 rr.* (Kharkiv: Ranok-NT, 2012); Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999); Richard Breitman, “Himmler’s Police Auxiliaries in the Occupied Soviet Territories,” *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* Vol. 7 (1990): 23–39; and Erich Haberer, “The German Police and Genocide in Belorussia, 1941–1944,” *Journal of Genocide Research* Vol. 3 (2001), No. 1: 13–29; No. 2: 207–218; No. 3: 391–403.
 - 23 V. Müller-Hillebrand, *Das Heer. 1933–1945* (Frankfurt a/M, 1966) Vol. 3: 70, 114, 141; N. M. Romanichev, “Sotrudnichestvo s vragom,” in *Narod i voina. Book 4 in Velikaia otechestvennaia voina, 1941–1945. Voенno-istoricheskie ocherki v chetyrekh knigakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1999): 153–167.
 - 24 N. A. Kirsanov and S. I. Drobiazko, “Velikaia otechestvennaia voina 1941–1945 gg.: natsional’nye i dobrovol’cheskie formirovaniia po raznye storony fronta,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia* No. 6 (November 1, 2001): 68.

2

Aktion: The Holocaust in Rovno

Abstract: This chapter is a reconstruction of the details of the massacre at Rovno in November 1941. I have presented the overlapping eyewitness accounts of perpetrators, bystanders, and victims in what is a stunning and deeply painful chapter in human history.



Burds, Jeffrey. *Holocaust in Rovno: The Massacre at Sosenki Forest, November 1941*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. DOI: 10.1057/9781137388407.0008.

In the post-Soviet era, scores of historians have worked to correct local estimates of the Soviet dead during World War II. The revised figures for Jewish dead were published in 2002 by Russian historian Il'ia Al'tman in his authoritative study, *Victims of Hate: The Holocaust in the USSR*.

TABLE 2.1 *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union, 1941–1945*

Republic	1941–January 1942	February 1942– October 1943	November 1943–1945	Total
Ukraine	540,000	860,000	30,000	1,430,000
Belarus	250,000	550,000	10,000	810,000
Moldavia	130,000	–	–	130,000
Lithuania	180,000–185,000	25,000	10,000	215,000–220,000
RSFSR	69,000–90,000	75,000–80,000	–	144,000–170,000
Latvia	72,000–74,000	2,000	1,000	75,000–77,000
Estonia	1,000	–	–	1,000
Total	1,242,000–1,270,000	1,512,000–1,517,000	51,000	2,805,000–2,838,000

Source: Il'ia Al'tman, *Zhertvy nenavisti: Kholokhost v SSSR, 1941–1945* (Moscow: Fond “Kovcheg,” 2002), p. 303, Table 8.

More than 2.8 million Soviet Jews were killed in World War II. In contrast to their Central and West European counterparts, Soviet Jews were not as a rule killed in camps, but rather they were shot execution-style, usually in mass police actions normally perpetrated by local recruits.¹

The Holocaust in the East followed a distinct chronology. The summer months of 1941 were marked by what the Germans euphemistically dubbed the era of “self-cleansing efforts” (*Selbstreinigungsbemühungen*), characterized by the appearance of “spontaneous” mass acts of neighbor-against-neighbor reprisals against Jews for communist atrocities.²

By late summer 1941, the German leadership began to impose a rule of law in order to discourage random and spontaneous vigilante-style civilian acts of violence against Jews. Jewish ghettos were organized, Jews were required to wear yellow patches, special restrictions applied, special work certificates were issued for some Jews with special skills, while the majority of others were forced to assemble for deportation or annihilation.

About one-quarter of all Soviet Jews were shot in mass actions in autumn and winter 1941. To date, just one of these actions—the massacre at Babi Yar, near Kiev, on 28–30 September—has received close historical

study.³ Sixty-three similar massacres in Ukraine between September and December 1941, accounting for 441,414 confirmed murdered Jewish men, women, and children, have been identified in Table 2.2.

TABLE 2.2 *Aktionen: mass killing operations of Jews in Ukraine, September 1–December 31, 1941. In 64 confirmed shooting operations of Jews, 441,414 Jewish men, women and children were massacred in Ukraine in the last four months of 1941. This represents nearly a third of all Ukrainian Jews killed in World War II*

Place	Date	Estimated Number Jews Killed	Units
Korosten	IX/1941	770	
Novograd Volynskiy- Chizhovka (Zhytomyr District)	IX/1941	3,200	
Ananiev	IX/1/1941	300	
Dubossary	IX/3–28/1941	6,000	
Khazhin	IX/4/1941	4,144	PB303?
Berdichev	IX/4/1941	1,303	
Vinnysia	IX/5/1941	2,200	PB304
Radomyshl (Zhytomyr District)	IX/6/1941	1,667	Sonderkommando 4a, Ukrainian police killed 1,107 adults and 561 children PB303?
Chudnov (Zhytomyr District)	IX/9/1941	900	PB303 Ukrainian police
Ruzhin (Zhytomyr District)	IX/10/1941	750	Germans Ukrainian police: Skaradumov, Goncharov, Yosef Rodenko (former Chief of Police) and Krochmal
Ladzhyn	IX/13/1941	486	PB304
Gaisin	IX/16/1941	4,000	PB304
Melitpol	IX/15?	2,000	EG D
Mariupol	IX/15?	8,500	EG D
Berdichev	IX/15–16/1941	12,000–16,000	Police Regiment South Reserve Police Battalion 45 Jeckel's Stabskompanie
Vinnysia Einsatzkommando 6	IX/16 and IX/22/1941	28,000	PB 45, 69(?) and 314
Uman	IX/16–23/1941	1,421	PB304, EK5
Zhytomyr	IX/19/1941	3,145	EK 4a, PB303
Chudnov (Zhytomyr District)	IX/20/1941	800	
Nikolaev Sonderkommando 11a	IX/21–23/1941	7,000	Ohlendorf's EG D, 11th Army.
Skvira	IX/20/1941	850	Einsatzkommando 5 Police Regiment South

Continued

TABLE 2.2 *Continued*

Place	Date	Estimated Number Jews Killed	Units
Stryi	IX/22–23/1941	830	Yom Kippur Security Police Ukrainain Auxilliary Police
Skvira	IX/23 [?] /1941	140	
Kherson	IX/24–25/1941	8,000	Einsatzkommando 11a
Kremenchug	IX/27 to XI/7 1941	8,000	
Kamenets-Podolsk	IX/27–28/1941	23,600	PB 320
Kiev -Babi Yar EK (sonderkommando) 4a,	IX/29–30/1941	33,771	
	(IX/29 Yom Kippur)		Einsatzgruppe C 2 Ukrainian commandos PB 45, 303 PB 45, 303
Kirovograd	VII/23, IX/30	4,200	SK4b, PB304
Toporov	IX/X	120	
Buczacz	IX/X	400	
Ostrog	X/1/1941	2,500	Confirm—IX/1 or X/1?
Kakhovka	X/1941	500–740	PB9, 4th Company
Kostopol	X/1/1941	1,400	
Nadworna	X/6/1941	1,200–2,000	PB133
Stanislawów	X/12/1941	10,000–12,000	“Bloody Sunday” PB 133
Sheparovtse	X/12/1941	3,000	
Dnepropetrovsk	X/13–14/1941	13,000–15,000	
Kolomiya	X/15 [?] /1941	1,200	PB133
Kosow	X/16/1941	2,088–2,700	Some shot at pits a kilometer outside city; others burned inside synagogue
Delatyn and Jaremzcze	X/16/1941	1,950	3rd company of PB 133
Odessa	X/22–24/1941	25,000–34,000	“Odessa Massacre”
Chernigov	X/23/1941	116	Sonderkommando 4a
Chernigov	X/24/1941	144	Sonderkommando 4a
Komarno	X/25/1941	> 200	
Tatars	X/25/1941	???	
Bolechov	X/28–29/1941	750	
Chernigov	X/29/1941	49	Sonderkommando 4a
Taganrog	X/29/1941	2,500	
Miropol-Zolotonosha	X/XI	1,000	PB303
Chernigov	XI/early/1941	3,000	
Konotop	XI/1/1941	153	
Przemyslany	XI/5/1941	400	Detachment of Security Police from Ternopyl
Rovno-Sosenki	XI/7–9/1941	23,500	Police Battalion 33 (Ostland) PB 315, PB 320, Ukrainian Police
Nezhin	XI/1941	300	
Berdichev	XI/1941	2,000	
Kamionka-Strumilowa	XI/10/1941	500	SP-Sokal Aktion at Obydów
L'vov	XI/8/1941	3,000–5,000	During formation of ghetto
Czernowitz	XI/1941	30,000	
Drohobycz	XI/22/1941	250	PB133(?)

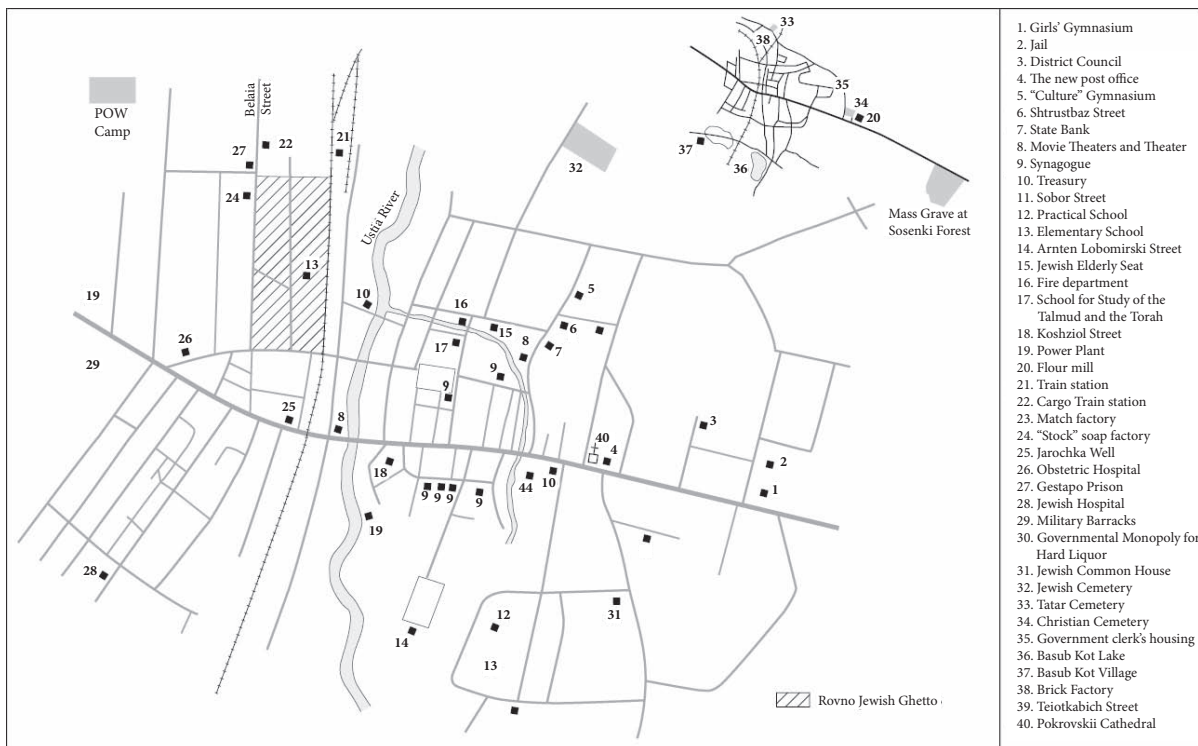
Continued

TABLE 2.2 *Continued*

Place	Date	Estimated Number Jews Killed	Units
Odessa	XI/23/1941	30,000	
Boryslav	XI/27–28/1941 Auxiliary Police	700–800	Schupos, Ukrainian
Delatyn	XI and XII, 1941	544	Killing site: Vikhovets forest
Gorodenka	XII/5/1941	2,500	Detachment of Security Police from Kolomiya
Kharkov	XII/6/1941	10,271	EG C
Brzezany	XII/12/1941	1,000	Stanislawov security police
Zablotov	XII/12/1941	1,000–1,350	
Simferopol	XII/13–15/1941	14,300	Police Battalion 3, 3rd Company
Litin	XII/19/1941	2,000	German Security Police from Vinnytsia, Ukrainian Police, Gebietskommissar Volkhammer supervised
Yalta	XII/25–31/1941	300	Police Battalion 3, 3rd Company
Simferopol	XII/30/1941	10,000	

¹ These numbers are substantially higher than those confirmed in German *Einsatzgruppen* reports. *Einsatzgruppe A* reported that as of October 15, 1941 it had shot 125,000 Jews; *Einsatzgruppe B* gave an incomplete total of 45,000 shot as of November 14, 1941; *Einsatzgruppe C* had two reports: *Einsatzkommando 4a* on November 30, 1941 reported 59,000 shot; and *Einsatzkommando 5* reported on December 2, 1941 a total of 36,000 shot. Finally, *Einsatzgruppe D* reported on January 2, 1942 a total of 76,000 shot over the preceding months of activity. This is a total of 341,000 victims. The discrepancy lies in the initiatives of local police and the German Wehrmacht. On mobile killing operations, see Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 300–301. We know that there were also additional mobile and local killing units that followed up on *Einsatzgruppen* activities following initial *Aktionen*.

Source: Yad Vashem's Online Guide of Murder Sites of Jews in the Former USSR, http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/about/institute/killing_sites_catalog.asp; Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009); The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945, Volume II: Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe (Indiana University Press and USHMM, 2012); Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy*; Massimo Arico, *Polizia d'ordine e genocidio ebraico. I crimini del battaglioni tedeschi do polizia giugno 1941/settembre 1942* (2010); Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003); S. G. Chuev, *Spetszluzhby tret'ego reikha* (St. Petersburg: Izd. Dom "Neva," 2003); Wolfgang Curilla, *Die deutsche Ordnungspolizei und der Holocaust im Baltikum und in Weißrußland 1941–1944* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2006); and Alexander Kruglov, "Jewish Losses in Ukraine," in Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower, eds. *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008): 272–290.



MAP 2.1 *The town of Rovno in 1941*

Source: Adapted from *Rowne; sefer zikaro* [Rowno; a memorial to the Jewish community of Rowno, Wolyn], edited by A. Avitah (Tel Aviv: 1956). I am grateful to Amit B. E. Gitterman for his translations of the map's legend from Hebrew to English.

The Holocaust in Rovno

Rovno (Ukrainian: *Rivne*; Polish: *Równe*; German: *Rowno*) is a town in northwestern Ukraine that became the seat of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine during the German occupation, from June 28, 1941 to February 2, 1944. Emphasizing that Rovno was substantially smaller than the ancient Ukrainian capital city of Kiev, Reichskommissar Erich Koch readily admitted that he had chosen Rovno as the seat of his administration “to underline the nullity of Ukrainian statehood.”⁴ In the 1930s, Rovno had a population of about 60,000: some 24,000 Jews, and equal numbers of Poles and Ukrainians.⁵

The war came to Rovno in mid-September 1939 in the form of a massive influx of refugees as Jews fled the German invasion of Poland. Eyewitness Yeshaayahu Shindelkroit recalled: “All of a sudden Rovno was filled with refugees from Lodz, Warsaw, Lublin, and elsewhere. The city grew more crowded each day, and not everybody was able to find a roof over his head. There was a shortage of food, since the stores were emptied of groceries and there had been no re-supply. The major radio stations were destroyed already, or had been taken over by the Germans. Nothing was left but a few small radio stations that broadcasted little news, and it was hard to tell what was the real situation. Fear was widespread, and Rovno began to resemble a city under siege. Nobody knew what the next hours would bring.”⁶

Soon after, following directly from secret prior agreements regarding Soviet and German spheres of influence, the German Wehrmacht left the city, and the Red Army became the masters of Rovno. Initially, Soviet soldiers—eager for consumers’ goods from the “decadent” West—drained Rovno stores of supplies, and hardship was widespread. But by late autumn 1939, when Soviet policing focused mainly on ethnic Poles as former exploiters in this “revolution from abroad,” a partial normalization returned, but deficits continued because of the massive influx of Jewish refugees.⁷

With the commencement of World War II in 1939, Rovno was under Soviet control for some 21 months. The ethnic mix in Rovno shifted dramatically after Soviet “liberation” in September 1939, when Soviet class war in occupied zones along the Curzon line became an ethnic war targeting Poles. During this period, the Polish population was largely deported, while the Jewish population swelled to over half the city numbers, enlarged by Jews fleeing eastward away from the German occupation of Poland.⁸

The brief period of Soviet occupation brought substantial changes in the lives of the Jews of what had been southeastern Poland. In Soviet L'viv, Marek Herman noted with wonder the new opportunities he enjoyed: "Now, suddenly, it was as though I could stand tall and I was filled with a sense of freedom. I began to absorb new values; I acquired a working class consciousness. For the first time I understood, and also believed, that there was no difference between Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, or Russians, that we were all human beings."⁹ In Rovno, just over 200 kilometers northeast of L'viv, Chaya Musman was 17 and in the tenth class at the Rovno gymnasium when Soviet forces "liberated" eastern and southeastern Poland in autumn 1939. Her published memoirs remain the most detailed and comprehensive summary of life in Rovno immediately before the war.¹⁰

In Musman's recollections, the most notable feature of Soviet occupation was the breakdown of traditional dividing lines that separated ethnic and religious groups. She fondly recalled the social changes and cultural upheavals that Sovietization brought:

In the beginning of the 1940s, we...considered ourselves equals among equals... The time from 17 September 1939 to 22 June 1941 I remember as the brightest, happiest in my life...

I was young [just 17], and found myself in my first friendship ever with a Pole—with Jurka Nowakowski. Washing our hands of all conventions, artificial barriers that divided the nationalities, we walked together about the town. I could feel the offhand stares cast by disapproving elders, but the times had so abruptly changed that even our Rabbi from Kamenka, in whose home we lived, did not dare to make comments about my dates with a Polish boy—either to me or to my parents.

Even things inside the Rabbi's own home had changed. His son cut off his [Hasidic] curls and exchanged his [black, Hasidic] greatcoat for a suit, and even joined some sort of labor union (*artel*). Both of [the Rabbi's] daughters likewise found jobs. The synagogue was deserted, and my own mama openly cooked food on our primus stove on Saturdays, while the Rabbi's wife permitted me to pump water in her kitchen.

It was a happy time, or perhaps, it was not so much the time but our age, our youth, that painted everything around us with radiant, joyous colors."¹¹

Jurek Nowakowski was born in Kiev in 1918, the son of Alexander Nowakowski, a judge from a well-to-do family. Born in Grojec, near Warsaw, in 1879, the young Alexander, a Polish Catholic, studied Law at the University of Kiev, where as a student he met and married Zinaida

Andrusenko, a very well-to-do Russian Orthodox woman. In 1918, when it became unsafe for ethnic Poles in post-World War I Ukraine, Nowakowski's family fled from Kiev to Koziencie, where Nowakowski was appointed a judge by the newly established independent Polish government in Warsaw. When he died suddenly in 1924 due to complications associated with pneumonia, his wife, three daughters, and six-year-old son Jurek fell into deep hardship. To ease their situation, and to get support from the local Catholic church as well as from Polish relatives, Jurek's wily Russian mother Zinaida had herself baptized as a Polish Catholic (the children were already Catholic). Although one of his sisters, because of her "Russian" looks, was often insulted with slurs of "*kacapka*" (a derogatory Polish slang term for a Russian woman), the family managed to make do, moving often between Luboml, Luck, and Rovno, all towns of southeastern Poland and Volhynia.

From age 14, Jurek Nowakowski's best friend was Kostek Romski, of Russian and Jewish heritage. But back then, "we didn't care about our different nationalities. In Rovno," besides Poles, Ukrainians and Jews, "there also lived Czechs, Germans, and Tatars."

Jurek Nowakowski passed his high school examinations in May 1938, and as a young educated Pole he was found fit for duty by the Polish Military Commission and drafted into the Divisional Cadet Reserve Infantry Regiment No. 44 as a rifleman posted on the Polish frontier in Rovno. He had planned to get a law degree at the University of Lublin after his military service, but the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 changed everything.

Defeated by the Germans, his unit had retreated to Luck when the Soviet Red Army entered the city on September 17, 1939. Then a cadet corporal, Nowakowski ignored the Soviet order to appear, and instead he and other members of his unit traded their military uniforms for civilian clothes, threw their rifles and ammunition into the Styr River, and followed the railway lines back home toward Rovno.

By that time, Kostek Romski had joined the Soviet militia. Despite Jurek's own radical sympathies, his background as a son of a Polish judge and service as a non-commissioned officer in the Polish army barred his own participation in Soviet administrative work. His mother once again used her perfect Kievan Russian and advanced skills of persuasion to convince Soviet officials to allow the family to register as ethnic Russians, which protected them from the worst aspects of Soviet police abuse over the coming months. This no doubt saved their family. According to a 1944 Top Secret report from NKVD Chief



FIGURE 2.1 *Jurek Nowakowski as a Polish military cadet, 1938*

Source: Nowakowski family archives



FIGURE 2.2 *Nowakowski (right) just prior to the Soviet occupation of Rovno, 1939*

Source: Nowakowski family archives.

Lavrentii Beria to Stalin, 389,382 ethnic Poles were deported to the Soviet interior from West Ukraine and Western Belorussia during the Soviet occupation of the region from September 1939 to August 1941.¹²

It was at this time in 1940 that Jurek Nowakowski met Mina Bodkier, and through her, Mina's cousin Leah Bodkier. By that time, Jurek was 22, and Leah and her friend Chaya were both just 17.¹³

If Chaya Musman's memories of youth were light, so too did the Soviet occupation bring forebodings, dark shadows of Soviet police abuse that affected everyone. She continued in her memoirs:

Evenings we usually became a foursome: my closest girlfriend Leah [Bodkier], the most beautiful girl in our school, with her friend Kostia Romski, and I with Jurka. Kostia was older than us. He lived separately from his father and stepmother, with whom he had quarreled. His father—a well-known doctor in the town—was a baptized Jew, but I don't think this was the cause of their conflict.

Once [during one of our walks] we met a funeral procession: the funeral of a Roman Catholic priest. Jurek suggested that we visit his grave. According to superstition, if you burn a candle on the fresh grave of a Roman Catholic priest at midnight, you can find out how long you will live.

At first Leah and I refused; it would be terrifying to walk among the graves at night. The boys laughed at us and made such a fuss that we all eventually agreed to go, electing to meet at the entrance to the main path of the Catholic cemetery at fifteen minutes before twelve at night.

It was a warm moonlit night in May 1940. The cemetery lay quiet, bathed in green, flooded with moonlight, but it seemed to us that spirits hid in the shadows of the gravestones. It's hard to say why Leah and I put up with this adventure. Jurek and Kostik waited for us on the main path; upon seeing them we breathed more easily. Of course, we chose not to tell them about the frights we had endured, and the lads heartily congratulated us for our courage.

Flowers lay on the fresh grave of the Roman Catholic priest. Kostia gave each of us a candle. We set them on the grave and lit them. Three times Kostia lit his candle, and each time the flame went out. Our candles each burned differently, for some reason mine began to melt. When we left the cemetery, we left behind three burning candles.

Kostia laughed nervously, but none of us saw much meaning in the extinguished candle. Who believes in death at seventeen?

Two weeks later Kostia was arrested. We never saw him again, either before or after the war. [Soviet] justice was at that time quite swift, and oh so rarely just.

Even now I do not know what offense Kostia committed, or whether he even committed an offense against Soviet power. They did not repress his father. Kostia had never been a Zionist. Under the Poles he had never collaborated with the "Deuce" [the Polish secret police]. He had never been a member of either the underground Communist or Trotskyite parties. In 1940 he had

worked as the director of a Pioneers' House [—the local communist scouting club—], and as far as we knew he had a good opinion of Soviet authorities. But this was how Soviet power was—they constantly needed victims in order to maintain fear in the rest [of us]. We did not even grow frightened at the time—[mainly] because we knew too little about Soviet power, we believed in her too much, and nurtured the hope that someday they would realize their mistake and let Kostia go. But his candle had already gone out.¹⁴

In his unpublished memoirs, Jurek Nowakowski described the fate of his best friend, Kostia Romski: “One morning at the beginning of 1941 I saw my friend Kostek Romski on a truck of armed Chekists [the Soviet secret police]. He had a serious face and had a bandaged hand. . . . He nodded to



FIGURE 2.3 *Leah Bodkier, 1940*



FIGURE 2.4 *Leah Bodkier, 1938*

Source: Nowakowski family archives.

me, and the Chekists looked at me with suspicion. After a few days I learned that he was arrested by the NKVD. He was accused of working with White Army sympathizers (his father was a Jew, his mother was Russian). Kostek died in a Moscow prison in Butyrki later that year, in 1941.”¹⁵

That fateful summer of 1941

By prior arrangement with the Germans according to the terms of the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact signed on August 23, 1939, the Soviets “liberated” areas east of the Curzon line from German attack, and in 1939–1940 annexed these regions into the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the German invasion of Poland and the commencement of World War II created a flow of refugees, mainly Jews, who fled eastward away from the German attack. Relying on the kindness of fellow Jews who were concentrated in urban areas, Jewish refugees swelled the populations of towns east and southeast of Poland. As a result, most estimates place the population of Jews in Rovno by June 1941 at somewhere over 30,000.¹⁶

With the German attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the flight of Jewish and non-Jewish refugees toward the east began again. About 3,000 Rovno Jews—10 percent or so of all Jews in the region—fled successfully before the Germans arrived. Among these was Chaya Musman, who retreated with her cousin deep into the Soviet rear.¹⁷ Her best friend, Leah Bodkier, tried to escape with her cousin Mina; while Mina managed to get away, Leah was cut off by a German advance, and she had to return to Rovno.

Sissel Green was 11 years old at the time of the Barbarossa attack. Her family had fled Warsaw to Rovno in autumn 1939 to escape the German invasion. Once the bombs started falling in June 1941, their family immediately set out again to walk towards the east. “Instinctively, we joined the masses leaving the city and the devastation behind. In droves, the people headed east towards the city of Kiev in the Ukraine. As we marched, the multitude intensified and we found ourselves walking amidst a company of thousands, along with a massive column of trucks and other transport. One day drifted into the next.” Strafed by German attack planes, the human columns of refugees would hide during momentary attacks, then set back on the road again, as thousands lay dead along the main highway from L’viv to Kiev. It took Sissel’s family months to reach Kiev on foot, arriving in a deep frost and rumors of the massacres at Babi Yar.

So they set out on foot again, this time toward Khar'kiv, nearly 400 kilometers north. The entire ordeal was marked by mind-numbing fatigue, illness and injury due to exposure and malnutrition.¹⁸

Shalom Yoran's family had fled Raciaz, Poland, southeast towards Rovno in autumn 1939. On the outskirts of Rovno, they heard rumors about Soviet deportations, so they chose to avoid the larger cities and instead settled nearby, in a hamlet named Smorgon. In June 1941, Yoran turned 16—and like the Green family, fled to escape the German invasion. “As soon as it grew dark, Soviet civilians and their supporters, and the Jews, began to flee the town, heading east. Any available means of transportation was used, mostly horses and carts, and several cars for the Soviet dignitaries.” Yoran's goal was to reach a town with a railhead, and find space on a Soviet train heading east from there. But there was no space, and Soviet police guarded the train cars, reserving places for their own families and friends, driving most everyone else away. As they continued on the road, Yoran witnessed as Ukrainian peasants attacked the retreating Jewish columns, beating Jews on the road, looting Jewish families. Reaching the town of Ilya on June 29, 1941, Yoran met the Germans for the first time: “When the shooting stopped and more Germans arrived, we saw a shocking spectacle—local Polish and Belorussian citizens running toward the Germans, welcoming them with flowers. Girls blew kisses at them, and everybody behaved as though their saviors had arrived.”¹⁹

As difficult and perilous as flight was for many Jews, only a few of those who remained in Rovno after June 1941 would survive the war. The Germans reached Rovno on June 28, 1941.²⁰ A Wehrmacht soldier, Private Werner Bergholz, wrote in his diary under the date June 31 (sic) [July 1] 1941: “When . . . we passed through Rovno all the shops were raided and everybody took whatever he could lay his hands on.”²¹

On the outskirts of Rovno

Abraham Kirschner was a metal smith from Klevan, outside Rovno. In June 1941, as the German invasion began, Kirschner initially fled 12 kilometers from Bronniki to Klevan, some 20 kilometers northwest of Rovno. The first German soldiers to arrive were a unit of 180 Wehrmacht soldiers, who immediately inquired about any Red Army units in the area. Learning from locals that none remained, the soldiers relaxed from the first days of the fighting at a nearby creek. In fact, six Red Army soldiers with heavy machine guns had dug into the hills

near the creek. So that as the German soldiers were bathing, they were mowed down—and all 180 of the German soldiers were slaughtered.

This was a tragedy for the Jews, because the SS men who also arrived that same day in Klevan were informed of the incident and blamed the Jews for it. Immediately they entered the town like hyenas and any Jew they came across they killed on the spot. The rest they dragged from houses and hiding spots, helped by local Ukrainian nationalists who led them to Jewish households. Especially vicious was a butcher named Sertsov, who led the Germans to the Soviet vodka warehouse. He told the SS men that all Jews in the town were communists, and then he rode with them and pointed out Jewish homes. After the Germans got drunk they began the killings. 150 people—men, women and children, the elderly—were assembled at the bazaar market and killed. The Germans threw grenades into Jewish houses, where people lay dying among the rubble, and the rest they killed in their houses and on the streets. This is how some 700 people were killed from a total population of 2,500 people in Klevan.

For three days the corpses of those murdered lay unburied on the streets, where dogs and pigs ripped them apart. When the corpses began to rot, the Germans ordered the remaining Jews to bring the corpses to the Synagogue, where they closed the gates, poured gasoline over it all, and ignited it.

The remaining Jews ran away. The Germans would not allow Jews to live in Klevan, so they had to move to the surrounding towns and cities. Jewish property, Jewish houses, were then robbed by the local townspeople, to such a degree that all the Jews were completely robbed of everything.

During the shootings of the Jews in Klevan we hid in a town three kilometers away in Bielov, at the home of the local Orthodox priest, who took in our whole family for three days. When the other townspeople learned of this we were forced by the crowd to leave the honorable priest, who was unable to pacify the crowd. We learned later that that priest along with his wife and daughter died a horrible death in 1943 when the town was burned by the Germans. This *Aktion* was helped out by the dark navy blue [Ukrainian] police.²²

Afraid for their lives, Kirschner and his family fled southeast to Rovno, where they just managed to avoid being detained at a check point at the edge of the city. Some 250 other Jews—mostly adult men—were arrested there and never heard from again. “We learned later from people who lived outside the town that they heard shots ring out all night from the area by Belaia Street which later became the site of a massive Jewish grave.”²³ This was the site of the notorious Gestapo prison in Rovno, located in the northwestern section of the city, just east of the POW camp, and just north of the future Jewish ghetto.

Succeeding eventually in getting to his shop in Rovno, Kirschner and his family managed to stay off the grid of German and Ukrainian violence during these early days of the war.

The Holocaust in Rovno

The annihilation of the remaining Jews of Rovno occurred in three stages. Some 3,000–4,000 Jews were murdered during July and August, 1941, the period of “self-cleansing” vigilante-style pogroms. A mass action in November 1941 killed more than 17,500 adult Jews, while more than 6,000 Jewish children were murdered at a nearby killing site at the same time. A follow-up mass action in July–August 1942 annihilated the remaining Jews in Rovno—so that Reichskommissar Erich Koch declared the city *Judenrein* or “cleansed of Jews” by the end of July 1942.²⁴

Immediately upon arrival, the German occupation authority made every effort to drive a wedge between local civilians and Jews. The standard orders posted in newly conquered zones read: “Should anyone give asylum to a Jew or let him stay overnight he, as well as the members of his household, will be shot by a firing squad immediately.”²⁵ Besides these notices, anti-Jewish placards were posted everywhere: “We will give nothing to yids!” “There is no place for yids among you! Out with the yids!” “The yid is your eternal enemy!”



FIGURE 2.5 German Ukrainian-language anti-Jewish poster: “We will give nothing to yids!”

Source: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Nusya Roth Collection, RG1871



FIGURE 2.6 “There is no place for yids among you! Out with the yids!”
Source: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Nusya Roth Collection, RG1871, [Ukraine, no date].



FIGURE 2.7 “The yid is your eternal enemy!... • Who brought you famine, tears and mass murder? THE YID! / • Who devised the worst NKVD torture methods and sadistically tortured your brothers? THE YID! / • Who worked least and ate best? THE YID! / • Who abducts your wives and daughters and then defiles them? THE YID! / • Who has exterminated millions of people in the cellars of the NKVD? THE YID! / • Who has the nicest apartments? THE YID! / • Who denounced capitalists the most but had an insatiable lust for money himself? THE YID! / STALIN AND THE YIDS - ONE VILLAINOUS GANG!”
Source: Museum of World War II, Natick, [Ukraine, no date].



FIGURE 2.8 *Ubiquitous culture of hate in German-occupied Ukraine. Ukrainian women view anti-Jewish hate posters, no date. In Ukrainian, the poster reads in part: “STALIN AND THE YIDS -ONE VILLAINOUS GANG!”*

Source: Bundesarchiv-Bildarchiv (Koblenz) BA-Bild, 116/131, Seite 62, No. 180.

Even as stiff penalties were imposed against Jewish fraternization or support, occupation authorities likewise offered substantial rewards to non-Jews for assisting the police in tracking down concealed Jews: “A death penalty will be executed upon anyone who directly or indirectly supports members of bands, saboteurs, dangerous criminals, or escaped prisoners of war; to anyone who supplies them with food stuffs, conceals, or by any other means helps them. All of their property will be confiscated.” Meanwhile, substantial rewards were offered for anyone who would report the whereabouts of hidden Jews.²⁶

Jewish survivor Barbara Barac recalled that after an assault on Jewish men in Rovno on July 8, 1941, remaining Jews in the city had to stand on line to turn over their remaining gold and silverware. This public spectacle was witnessed by non-Jews, mainly Ukrainians, who wore “sinister smiles, as if it were a funny show.” She found Rovno’s Ukrainians to be “mostly very dangerous enemies of the Jews.” Why? “Although the Germans would not have recognized us as Jews, the Ukrainians could tell the difference very well and would have handed us over to the Germans immediately.”²⁷

Fifteen-year-old Adela Liberman and her sister 13-year-old Inda Liberman resided before the war in homes in Rovno and Zdolbuniv,

12 kilometers directly south of Rovno.²⁸ That first summer of the German occupation, they worked 12-hour shifts from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. in labor brigades supervised by the Ukrainian police. “During work they abused us in an inhuman manner. They beat and abused us.” Police raids and roundups were common: “The Ukrainian police and German army began capturing Jewish men from the streets, houses, dragging them from attics, basements and other hiding spots. All were taken and placed into cars and trucks and driven off in an unknown direction. It was believed that they were taken for labor, but they never returned.”

Anti-Jewish laws were introduced almost immediately. Eight days after the Germans arrived, all Jews aged 11 or older were required to wear on their left arms a white armband with a yellow Jewish Star of David. A month later, the bands were changed to round yellow patches roughly eight centimeters round, required to be worn on the left arm for all Jews aged 14 or older. “At the end of August 1941 the *Judenrat* announced the



FIGURE 2.9 “Lenin Funeral,” Summer 1941: in the first days of the war in the East, a Jew from a village near Rovno, Ukraine, carries a broken statue of Lenin’s head as he passes through a gauntlet of German beating and abuse. The Wehrmacht soldiers are using hardwood cudgels. From the photo album of Karl Wilhelm, of d. 8./ Artillerie regiment 25 d. 25. Inf. Div.

Source: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Nusya Roth Collection, RG1871.

order, that Jews were no longer allowed to walk on sidewalks, but only in the middle of the road.”²⁹

Abraham Kirschner was 21-years-old when the Germans entered Rovno on June 28, 1941. Kirschner left an affidavit in November 1945, preserved in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, where he described how periods between explosions of open anti-Jewish terror were marked by random acts of ubiquitous violence:

The German treatment of the Jews began to get worse and worse by the day. One day after working in the army barracks “Reichskommissar” Koch came upon an idea, that all men and women should undress completely and have each group pour water over the other group from large buckets, with water that was left over from washing the toilets, hallways and steps. Under the order of this armed maniac we were forced to perform this hellish act if we wanted to escape death. When an army unit was walking down the street and they came across a Jew on the road, they shot him on the spot because they believed Jews were bad omens. On another occasion, upon seeing a group of Jews standing in line, a motorcycle driver drove onto the side walk with his motorcycle, critically injuring one Jew, who eventually died.³⁰



FIGURE 2.10 July 1941 celebration of German “liberation” in Rovno. Printed on the blue and yellow Ukrainian flag are the words: “Volia Ukraini abo smert’”—“Freedom for Ukraine, or death.” On the banner is the symbol of the Ukrainian liberation movement, the trident (tryzub), and the nationalist oath: “Slava Ukraine,” “God Bless Ukraine!”

Source: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Nusya Roth Collection, RG1871.



FIGURE 2.11 (Left) “Long Live Adolph Hitler!” (Right) “Long Live Stepan Bandera!”

Autumn 1941

As we have seen, the massacre at Rovno on November 7–9, 1941 was one of at least 64 similar massacres that marked the second phase of German anti-Jewish policies in the East from September to December 1941. These mass killings were a testing ground, a prelude to the formal adoption of the “Final Solution” in January 1942.

The death tolls are staggering. There were nearly 200,000 Jews shot in *Aktionen* in Ukraine in September 1941; more than 90,000 Ukrainian Jews shot in October 1941; more than a 110,000 Ukrainian Jews shot in November; and more than 50,000 more Jews shot in December 1941. Altogether, 86 percent of all Ukrainian Jews killed during the first six months of the German–Soviet war, and one-third of all Ukrainian Jews lost in World War II, were massacred in killing operations following the Babi Yar model in the last four months of 1941.³¹

This sudden escalation of anti-Jewish violence was articulated in clear signals from the German military. As Alexander Kruglov has observed, “the bulk of mass murders...took place as a rule before oblasts were transferred from military to civil administration, i.e., under the cover of military necessity.”³² In other words, Jews and other “communist elements” were killed as a means for “securing the occupied territories.”³³ Less than two weeks after the massacre at Babi Yar, for instance, General

Walter von Reichenau—commander of the Sixth Army—issued the following order on October 10, 1941:

The most important goal of the campaign against the Jewish-Bolshevik system is the complete crushing of the instruments of power and the eradication of the Asiatic influence in the European cultural sphere.

In this connection there also exist *tasks* for the troops that extend beyond the traditional one-dimensional soldierly identity. In the east the soldier is not only a fighter according to the rules of warfare, but also the carrier of an inexorable racial idea and the avenger of all the bestialities that were inflicted upon the German and related races.

Therefore the [German] soldier must have *full* understanding for the necessity of harsh but just punishment of the Jewish sub-humans. It has the broader objectives of nipping in the bud any uprisings in the Wehrmacht's rear, which experience shows to have always been instigated by Jews.³⁴

The Rovno civilian leadership were sending the same signals regarding the “Jewish problem.” On October 9, 1941, Hans Frank informed the ministers of the General Government in Kraków: “As far as Jews are concerned . . . I want to tell you quite frankly that they must be done away with one way or another.”³⁵ German-occupation newspapers in Volhynia likewise communicated the anti-Jewish message to the Ukrainian public. *Ukrainskyi golos*, *Nashi visti*, *Kovel'ski visti*, *Gorokhiv'ski visti* all ran headlines that spoke with one voice: “Jews are the bacilli of decay!” “Jews are the greatest enemy of mankind!”³⁶ Ulas Samchuk, the editor of the main newspaper of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, *Volyn'*, published in Rovno, openly called for the annihilation of Ukrainian Jews. In September 1941, Samchuk wrote: “All [foreign] elements that reside in our land, whether they are Jews or Poles, must be eradicated. We are at this very moment resolving the Jewish question, and this resolution is part of the plan for the [Reich's] total reorganization of Europe.”³⁷

The move to annihilate all Jews in Rovno and the surrounding vicinity—the fateful transition from *Massenmord* (mass murder) to *Endlösung* (the Final Solution)—came sooner in central Volhynia than in most areas of the German-occupied East. Largely, the move to annihilate all local Jews was driven by Reichskommissar Erich Koch's decision to establish his base of operations for the Reichskommissariat Ukraine in Rovno by September 1, 1941. Automatically, it became an imperative to “cleanse” as much of the new capital as possible of Jews—both to set an example for other areas, but also practically speaking: removing Jews was a means

by which to open up apartments and offices for the new German staff. The result? Over 80 percent of Rovno's remaining Jews—17,500 adults, plus more than 6,000 children—would be executed in just three days, November 7–9, 1941. Two sites were prepared in advance at Sosenki forest, four kilometers east of the city: 17,500 Jews killed in one series of pits; and more than 6,000 Jewish children killed in another site nearby.

A memorandum from November 1941 from the commanders of *Einsatzgruppe C* entitled “The Situation and Mood in Volhynia,” provided an epitaph on why it had been necessary to annihilate 80 percent of Rovno's Jews in a single operation:

Paragraph 4: *Jews*. It need not be particularly stressed that Communist agitators received very warm support from the Jews. Under the prevailing conditions, it was important to stop the activity of the Jews in Volhynia and to remove thereby the most fertile soil from Bolshevism. The extermination of the Jews, who are, without any doubt useless as workers and more harmful as the carriers of the bacillae of Communism, was necessary.³⁸

Normally, the planning for such an action would have been in the hands of Higher SS and Police Leader South Friedrich Jeckeln, a Himmler appointee who had shown great zeal in the ruthless annihilation of Soviet Jews. But Jeckeln left for Latvia in early November 1941, soon to be replaced by Hans-Adolf Prützmann. The Rovno massacre was therefore organized by the Commander of the Order Police in Reichskommissariat Ukraine, Otto von Oelhafen.³⁹ Its implementation was entrusted to a partial unit of Einsatzkommando 5 (under the command of SS-Sturmbannführer Hermann Ling (1899–1945)), the German SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*, Security Service) forces in Rovno, as well as to Ukrainian auxiliary police and the local military administration. The entire operation was coordinated with Rovno Area Commissioner (*Gebietskommissar*) Dr. Werner Beer.⁴⁰ According to historian Shmuel Spector, the ditches at Sosenki Forest had been dug in advance of the killing operation by Russian prisoners of war at the execution site located in a pine forest some four kilometers east from Grabnik Square, adjacent to Pokrovskii Cathedral in central Rovno.

Preparations for the mass killing operation inevitably leaked. A Soviet prisoner of war inside the POW camp at Rovno smuggled out a crumpled communication to the Soviet partisan underground: “Yesterday they drove us beyond the edge of the town. In a field near Sosenki [Forest] they forced us to dig enormous ditches. We suspect that they

are preparing a mass shooting. Try to find out what's going on, and communicate [back]. It is possible that we dug our own graves. Inside the camp there is therefore some basis for considerable agitation.”⁴¹

In the early 1960s the West German prosecutor's office at Dortmund undertook an investigation of all police units that took part in the massacres in and around Rovno during the war. In his massive study of the Order Police units and their wartime activities, Wolfgang Curilla identified five main units that were responsible for the Rovno massacre: *Einsatzkommando* 5, Police Battalion 320, the 1st Company of Reserve Police Battalion 33, Police Battalion 315, and the Ukrainian militia.⁴² Police Battalion 315 was one of the units primarily responsible for encircling the shooting site to prevent Jewish escape. The main force responsible for the shootings was Police Battalion 320, although most prominent among the shooters were former Soviet citizens, members of the local Ukrainian auxiliary police.

Sergeant of the 7th Company of 11th Police Battalion Hermann Bolcz insisted to Soviet interrogators in 1944 that the main force responsible for the shootings was Police Battalion 320.⁴³ The 1st Company of Reserve Police Battalion 33 was also known as *Ostlandkompanie*, and it was composed largely of Estonian *Volksdeutsche*, ethnic Germans in Estonia who had fled the Soviet occupation to Germany in 1940–1941.⁴⁴

Einsatzkommando 5 was part of *Einsatzgruppe* C, some 80–100 SD commandos who had formed a detachment of *Einsatzkommando* 5C (which had been disbanded a few days before the massacre).⁴⁵

Prelude

Soviet partisan leader in the Rovno area, Terentii Novak, has written that his secret agent Ivan Luts' entered the Rovno Jewish quarter just before the November 1941 *Aktion*, where he informed two students whom they knew, Liberman and Malva Gol'dberg, about the planned liquidation of Rovno Jews. Novak was hoping to provoke an uprising within the Jewish neighborhoods, but (according to Novak) Jewish elders refused to stir the captives to rebel: “Why are you striking such fear in the hearts of us unfortunates? Our people have angered the Lord our God and He has sent Hitler as retribution for our sins. It is wrong to struggle against the will of the Highest One. We must endure, silently bearing all torments, no matter how grave.” A young Jewish woman, Mal'va Gol'dberg, who

had heard Luts's somber warning promised to spread the news of the impending massacre. The following night, Novak went himself to the Jewish quarter and met with Gol'dberg, who sobbed uncontrollably in his arms, complaining that no one would agree to resist the summons—because they had faith in God, because they were too afraid, or simply because they did not believe the young woman's story of their impending doom.

Undeterred, Novak sought Liberman's help to persuade the intimidated mass to resist. Liberman refused to accept the warning, insisting that such a mass murder of innocent civilians was without precedent, and spreading the rumor would only unnecessarily upset the Rovno Jews. "Even the Nazis with all their cruelty would never stoop to such barbarism." Novak met with an attorney who knew Gol'dberg well. He likewise greeted the news with denial: "Who are you people, and where did you get such... sinister news?!... Why should we believe you? On what basis? Your communication is [nothing more than] a provocation." The attorney was convinced that such an uprising would provoke the very liquidation action Novak and his men were trying to prevent. When Novak still persisted angrily, the Jews threatened to report him to the police, and he was forced to leave. All the same, it is likely that many Jews who went to Grabnik Square on the morning of November 7 were keenly aware that they faced imminent death.⁴⁶ Rumors of the impending *Aktion* abounded, and there was considerable apprehension as the hour for departure approached.

This theory is confirmed by Barbara Barac, who was convinced that the true purpose of the assembly of Jews on November 7 was well-known by leaders in the Rovno Jewish community. The key to surviving the *Aktion* was to remain behind, which depended on a valid work certificate. In the days following the *Aktion*, Barac recalled, there was a lot of conflict within the Rovno Jewish community: "Obviously, the rich people were the first to get those papers and some of the genuine craftsmen and specialists were not always so successful. . . . It became clear that the majority of the people holding the craftsmen's certificates got them by bribery. The real craftsmen had perished. So it was a stormy meeting with everybody shouting, fighting and cursing."⁴⁷ Barac did not have a valid work certificate, but she chose to stay behind with her daughter. They survived only because some quick-witted neighbors placed icons in the windows of the first-floor apartments, sending the message to the Germans that theirs was a Christian home.⁴⁸



FIGURE 2.12 *Pokrovskii Cathedral in Rovno: the Orthodox cathedral at Grabnik Square where the Jews were assembled on November 7, 1941. 17,500 Rovno Jewish adults and more than 6,000 of their children were forced to leave their bags in large piles on the square, then to walk to the killing site at Sosenki Forest, some four kilometers east of the city center.*

Source: German soldier's scrapbook photo from Summer 1941, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Nusya Roth Collection, RG1871.

The massacre at Sosenki forest⁴⁹

Early on Friday morning, November 7, 1941, Soviet partisan Terentii Novak and his unit made one last effort to open the eyes of Rovno Jews. But they were too late. Watching from the edge of the Jewish section, Novak observed how the Germans lit the area with floodlights. And then a ring of soldiers and police surrounded the entire Jewish section. "At sunrise shooting could be heard from the direction of the railroad tracks. Dogs howled, there was the sound of broken glass, the yells of Germans mixed with the cries of women and children. Then gradually everything grew quiet. And an hour later the town square [at Grabnik] began to fill with people. Gendarmes and police drove all the inhabitants of the ghetto [toward the square]. It was obvious that many had been taken from their beds, frightened and half-dressed. Mothers unsuccessfully tried to warm their young ones with their breath. The young carried the old in their arms. Silence reigned, in the slumped shoulders and heads, and in the crowd of many thousands, bitterly frightened on the square. From the sidewalks and nearby buildings several thick

echelons of soldiers surrounded the square, police and gendarmes in black greatcoats.⁵⁰

On the afternoon of Thursday, November 6, 1941, the German Reichskommissariat in Rovno had posted a printed decree demanding that all Jews without a work certificate—regardless of gender, age, occupation, or place of employment—appear at Grabnik Square the next morning, Friday November 7, the 24th anniversary of the Great October Revolution of the communist enemy. The Jews were encouraged to bring all necessities including foodstuffs, not to exceed 10 kilograms per person.

Eduard Rozenberg, born in 1893 in Latvia, was a Jewish resident of Rovno at the time of the massacre. He gave the following testimony in a handwritten affidavit dated November 21, 1944, and provides us with the standard version of the events that transpired at Rovno in November 1941:

On the evening of 6 November [1941], notices were distributed that all persons without certifications from their place of work were required on the next day, 7 November at six o'clock in the morning, to appear at the square on Grabnik [Street] with a three-day supply of food.

Believing the Germans planned to deport them, people took with them all of their best, most valuable possessions. Early the next morning, it was still dark, thousands of people filled the streets on their way to the square on Grabnik. Walking were women with children, old folks, young men carrying babies in their arms.

When seventeen thousand people had assembled at the square, suddenly out of nowhere there appeared German and Ukrainian police, armed with tommy guns, who surrounded the entire square in a double row. They ordered the people on the square to leave all of their things. Next [the police] began to drive them like cattle through a field to a place called Sosenki Forest, located four kilometers from Rovno. A large pit had already been prepared at Sosenki Forest. The doomed people were ordered to undress and to stand at the edge of the pit. The naked people were shot with tommy guns.

Some tried to run away, but they were shot, and others were forced to carry their bodies to the pit. The slaughter continued day and night for three days.⁵¹

“Near the pits, functionaries of the Rovno *Gebietskommissariat*, or local administrative commission, busily registered the names of victims and

collected and inventoried their documents and valuables.”⁵² In addition to more than 17,000 adults in one mass burial site, Soviet forensic investigations after the war uncovered another site nearby with some 6,000 Jewish children. While most of the adults had been shot, usually in the back of their heads, most of the children were murdered by having their necks broken, or they were literally buried alive under the weight of other bodies.⁵³

As horrible as this summary is, this account cannot begin to convey the real horror of what happened in Rovno for three days and nights in November 1941. The scene of mass murder is by no means a controlled situation. “On that day there was very bad weather. A mix of snow and rain was falling. The roads were very dirty.”⁵⁴ Assembled at Cathedral Square on Grabnik Street on a cold, wet, wintry day of November 7, 1941, more than 20,000 Rovno Jews—men, women, children, the elderly, the sick, the infirm—were ordered to dump their bundles in piles at the front of the square. A 43-year-old Polish woman, Emilia Rablinska, lived at Number 4 Grabnik Street, just across from the square. She watched in horror from her apartment window: “Already before sunrise on November 7—when it was still dark, and a bitter wind drove a blinding snow and rain, crowds of thousands of people converged along all the surrounding streets toward Cathedral Square. There were whole families—carrying bundles, suitcases, food. Women carried children in their arms. The elderly and sick were led by the hand.”⁵⁵ “Everywhere could be heard: ‘*Schnell! Schnell! Juden!*’ [Quickly! Quickly! Jews!] For amusement, officers beat with sticks or kicked anyone standing near.”⁵⁶

By design, the Rovno massacre was a macabre parody of a Soviet parade—November 7 was after all the 24th anniversary of the “Great October Revolution,” the most sacred “holiday” of the “Jewish-Bolsheviks.” The mass *Aktion* therefore by design took on carnivalesque overtones.

For victims as well as bystanders, the events of the next three days and nights were an Armageddon. Eyewitnesses recalled the incessant wail of the crowd, the screaming of prayers, the loud howling and crying, the taunts of the guards. Dead bodies littered the entire route between Cathedral Square and the killing site at Sosenki Forest. Forty-year-old Mariia Demchishina, an ethnic Ukrainian, recalled that “any [Jews] remaining who did not leave their apartments were driven with clubs to the square by the German SS.” Her husband and his friend went out to Sosenki Forest to see “what the Germans would do with the Jews.”

“On that day there was very bad weather. A mix of snow and rain was falling. The roads were very dirty. . . . The Jews walked quietly to Sosenki [Forest], and those who could not walk—especially young children—the Germans would shoot along the road. [As a result] at that time along the road to Sosenki there were very many corpses—of women, men, and especially many dead bodies of children. The Germans shot the Jews without interruption for three days and nights.”⁵⁷

“It was a bitter cold morning, very windy, heavy snow was falling. I saw from afar the gathered Jews standing and freezing. Many Germans guards and Ukrainian policemen surrounded the place.”⁵⁸ While the assembly began with a wet snow, the marchers had transformed the ground beneath them into a muddy mess. Along the route, the stench of human fear lingered in the air: of vomit, urine, defecation, sweat. The last 1–2 kilometers, the victims could actually hear the sounds at the killing site: the mad screams of victims, the volley of gunfire, which ended any illusion that those in line would survive that day. “Horrible screams and moans could be heard.”⁵⁹ “There were such loud screams that they could be heard back in the town.”⁶⁰

In their joint affidavit from January 1946 in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, Rovno Jews Adela and Inda Liberman (daughters of Maks and Fajgi Liberman) left their own eyewitness account of the violence in Rovno.⁶¹ Just 15 and 13 years old in 1941, the two sisters recounted how the Rovno Jews

were driven towards Sosenki [Forest], but they were not allowed to walk on the road. Instead, they were forced to walk through the swamps, with the result that many people got stuck there. Most made it to Sosenki. There waiting for them were graves ten meters long and one meter wide. Germans and Ukrainians threw twenty Jews at a time into the graves, then shot only some of them, so that many were not even wounded. Then they poured acid over the Jews, covered them with dirt, and threw on a new layer [of Jews]. In this way there were many layers in a single grave. Those who had been stuck in the swamps were pulled free, tied to a wagon either by an arm or a leg, and in this way they were dragged to the graves and buried there. Small children were stabbed with bayonets and then thrown into the graves. The operation took a whole day to complete.⁶²

Non-Jewish eyewitnesses recalled with horror that the scene was so incredible, so far beyond any hell one might conjure in one’s own imagination, that some of the Jews literally went mad—arms flailing, mouths frothing, screaming—and they had to be subdued: by loved ones, or

strangers, or by the butt of a rifle, or a bullet from a gun. Semën Sholopa, an ethnic Ukrainian from Drohobych oblast, recalled: “When the Jews saw that they would be shot, they began to cry, particularly young children began to cry, and they began to plead with the *Gestapovtsy* to have mercy and not shoot them.”⁶³ Inevitably, some Jews tried to run away. Individuals were run down, shot, beaten, and then dragged back to the pit as an example for the others. Groups of runaways were usually cut down with hand grenades, or with a volley from a tommy gun.⁶⁴

Just as there were some who tried to break out of the chain of guards who surrounded the square, or along the 4 kilometer route the victims were forced to walk towards the killing site at Sosenki Forest, there were among the guards those who transgressed more easily, more readily, with more sadistic delight than the others. Emilia Rablinska recounted the story of a Jewish woman—last name Frishberg—who had managed to escape from Sosenki Forest, only to be captured and killed six months later: “She told me the following: They forced people to walk up to the pits in lines, and then shot them with tommy guns. Some were only wounded, but these were pushed live into the pits. Later the pits literally seemed to move. At night they broke the people down into small groups, shot them, and pushed them into the pits. This nightmare continued for two more days and nights.”⁶⁵

Abraham Kirschner was another eyewitness of the *Aktion* of November 7–9, 1941:

On the fifth of November 1941 there appeared an order on the building of the *Judenrat* that those who did not possess work cards had to assemble the following day on Lisa Kuli Street, taking with them everything they wanted for their evacuation outside the Rovno city limits. It was promised that special automobiles would be provided for pregnant women, children and the sick and the elderly. We were warned that if we did not show up at 6 a.m. [on the morning of November 7, then] we would be killed.

The people were completely unprepared for what was to come. No one knew of any kind of *Aktion*, and everyone reported to the meeting place. 17,500 people were prepared for relocation. On that day anyone who possessed work cards was released from work, and under penalty of death they were not allowed to go out on the streets. If the head of the family possessed a work card, then he had the right to keep with him his wife and two children, but the third child would be required to report to the meeting place.

Some walked along with their children, even though they possessed a work card. Others hid their children. And a few others passed their children off to be cared for by others. Once everyone reported to the meeting spot, SS

patrols walked from house to house like bandits wielding axes, revolvers and flame throwers. They ransacked the houses, plundered what they could, and where they found someone hiding without a work card they dragged them out of the house, and killed them. If there was a third child hidden, without thinking they shot him. I was a witness to what happened in a house across the road belonging to the Tsytryna family where they found a third child of eight months, the sister of Tsytryna, who had gone to the meeting place by herself and did not want to take her child with her because it was already cold and snow was already accumulating in some spots. At that moment the Germans as a punishment took Tsytryna's own son, and with no regard for the father's pleas, they threw him face down onto the ground and shot him.

When this order [to assemble at Grabnik Square on November 7] appeared on the walls, people lost their heads. They began to feel a premonition that something bad was going to happen. Even so no one could have imagined the total tragedy that was awaiting them. People ran to the *Judenrat*, but it was closed. Panic spread among the Jews, along with crying and fear. Some tried to escape from the city, but all the roads were blocked off by the army. ...

People walked with their bags, blankets and bedding, [they carried extra] clothing for children, and anything else that they felt was essential. Some tried to conceal themselves in hiding spots, while others asked friends what they should do. The people were completely disoriented.

In our house there was a dilemma: my family did not want to stay with me because there were rumors that all craftsmen would be sent off to the heart of Germany. Thus they preferred to go because they thought that they would be sent off to a camp in Szapkowa, which was about 10 kilometers away from Rovno. Even though my mother was sick at that time, she was running a fever of 38° Centigrade [or, 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit], she composed herself and left along with my father and sister and 14-year-old younger brother. My younger brother was so beautiful and mature that he looked like he was 16 years old, and he begged me to allow him to stay with me. But because he was too young to get a work card of his own, I was afraid that if they came and found him without a card that they would shoot him.

The parting was awful because our family was very close to each other and we did not want to separate. Even though my mother did not foresee the horrific events to come it was difficult for her to leave me alone. She advised me to stay, because she believed that maybe I would then have a better chance of surviving because I was young and strong.

And that is how they all went. Everyone prepared himself for the journey, taking with them what they could. The weather was horrible, far worse than

normal at that time of year. In the early morning it was windy, snowing with rain and cold. The people walked down the streets in long lines from every street, carrying all of their belongings and their children. An elderly man wearing his *tallit* [(Jewish prayer shawl)] walked with his wife, a cane in his hand. The older Jews took their bags with them down the street, carrying them like packages. In the houses the people bid their farewells with those who stayed behind. From every corner came the sound of crying and moaning.

Those who survived that day on November 7th will never be able to erase it from their memories and hearts.⁶⁶

Forced to remain at home in his family's apartment, Kirschner had to piece together what happened next from some 30 survivors of the massacre that followed in the hours and days ahead.

At Grabnik Square, on the commons by Lisa Kuli Street, there gathered some 17,500 people. Some 30 [of these] people were [eventually] able to escape, and tell what happened there. People stood or sat in the rain and snow, or in the mud until 11 o'clock a.m., at which time arrived [*Reichskommissar*] Erich Koch with a group of his SS men and Dr. Besrem [Dr. Beer] from the Governor's office. [Koch approached] a lectern that had been placed on the square to give a speech.

The lying bastard told the people that the relocation could be averted if the Jews gave up all of their valuables and money. A gate was set up in front of which [the Germans] placed a box. Everything was done with a German touch for perfection. The people had to walk past the gate and give up all of their valuables under penalty of death. So they gave up everything so as to not get shot. When everyone had walked by, they announced a second time: that the Jews must give up everything that they brought with them, even packages and suitcases, after which they will be allowed to return home.

Numerous things were added, the mound with these things grew by the minute. When [the Jews] had been robbed of everything, a battalion of armed "hero" SS men arrived. They began to separate out the children, the young and the old, saying that the children and the elderly would be transported in trucks. Not everyone gave up their children. After the separation, the SS men began to push the older people forcefully.

Not too far from this gathering place was a forest. In these woods there had been dug trenches a few meters apart. Machine guns had been hidden near these trenches. The children were forcibly pushed alone in a different direction, thrown into the trenches along with grenades, and then covered

with dirt. From the recollections of the local Ukrainians—[ethnic] Poles and some [Jews] who by some miracle were able to escape this massacre—the ground was still moving under the dirt: many of the children had been buried alive. The elders were then forcibly pushed along by soldiers wielding tommy guns, “*Jude lauf!*”—“Run, Jew!” Those who did not run fast were shot. Some ran a kilometer or two, while others who heard the shots, stopped and said that they did not care either way, and these too were shot.

By the evening the German heroes began the shootings. They lit up the entire area with floodlights and shot into the defenseless crowd. The shooting lasted all night and into the next day, until noon. A few dozen [Jews] managed to escape the massacre. I know five people who escaped.

One of them told me he escaped with his wife and child, that at a certain point he told them to lie down on the ground and to play dead. A moment later they felt bodies fall on top of them. On top of him fell a bloodied woman who had been shot. They lay there under the dead for the whole night. Then the SS men began to stomp with their boots on the lying dead and began to beat the bodies with sticks to make sure that no one would scream out. When someone did scream out he was finished off. My friend was hit with a stick but he did not make a sound. But when the SS men beat his wife, she brought her child closer to her without thinking, which made the child cry. The SS man fired off a round of shots and killed [my friend’s] wife and child.

He lay under the bodies for two days. On the third day he crawled out and ran back home. Another friend lay in a ditch for two days. He was also able to escape. One survived, but the SS men saw him running down the hill and began to shoot at him. He dove into a deep outhouse, but he drowned.⁶⁷

Then just 14 years old, Lybel’ Halperin was among those Jews who crawled from the pits at Sosenki:

Surrounded by armed guards we stood for a long time shaking in the cold and wind, till they began leading groups of people into the ditches under a shower of shootings. And then our turn arrived. I was trembling, I knew this was the end and I said to my father: “Maybe I should escape, father, try my luck.” Father said: “The bullets would reach you, Lybele, there is no escape.” I said: “And if I stay here, Father, the bullets would not reach me?” I was still talking [to my father] when we were pushed into the ditch with bullets flying around and above us. I fell into the ditch on top of quivering bodies, and others fell on top of me. I did not see my father; I was shocked and did not know if the bullets [had] hurt me. I moved to the side of the ditch and pressed myself to the earth. This is all I remember. The ditch was

getting fuller and fuller and the shots subsided, the crying stopped as well, I felt earth being spilled on top of us.

With a few other wounded I began inching to get out of the earth layer that covered us, but not all had the strength to ascend. After inhuman efforts we came out—only a few of us—from the death ditch. We did not know what to do and where to go. A dead silence prevailed around us; there was no living soul in sight. We lay on the ground afraid to raise our heads. The shootings and screaming of the day were still ringing in my ears.⁶⁸

Halperin crawled for hours through the forest, desperately hoping not to be discovered and shot. He then ran in the direction of Aleksandriia, a village where he had Jewish friends who might hide him. Eventually, he joined a group of Jewish partisans, and survived the war in the forests.

Krystyna Nowakowska was the wartime and post-war alias of the Jewish woman, Leah Bodkier (born in 1923 in Rovno), who had been the best friend of Chaya Musman from the 10th class in the Jewish women's gymnasium at Rovno in 1939–1940. Nowakowska lost 18 family members at Sosenki Forest, and barely escaped with her own life. Her eyewitness testimony of the events at Sosenki Forest in a handwritten affidavit dated November 30, 1944 is perhaps the most complete account we have of the tragic events:

On [6] November [1941] notices were distributed that persons of Jewish nationality without certifications from [their] place of work (so-called *Arbeitsschainov*) were required to appear the next day—that is on [7] November '41—at six o'clock in the morning on Cathedral Square on Grabnik [Street], for evacuation from the town. Before November 6 rumors had circulated around the town that we were all to be deported somewhere. No one even had the thought that they were assembling us to be shot.

On [7] November our entire family—father, mother, sister, cousin, uncle and aunt—walked to Cathedral Square on Grabnik [Street]. A wet snow was falling, a piercing wind was blowing. It was still dark, but thousands of people walked toward the square from all directions through the storm and bad weather.

No one but Jews was on the streets, since the order of the town chief (*Gebeitskommissar*) had created an unusual situation. Moreover, there was still a curfew on the streets for persons not of Jewish nationality.

Men walked with bundles on their shoulders—the Germans had permitted us to take with us our valuables and a supply of food. Women walked

carrying children in their arms. Old folks came too, the healthy carried the sick in their arms.

Towards ten o'clock in the morning, we finally reached the square. Even before arriving at the square people began to sense something bad—all adjacent streets had been sealed off by the SS and the [local Ukrainian] police.

It was impossible to turn around and go back—the police would not have permitted it, and people were [locked] into such a dense mass that there was no room even to move, let alone [try] to walk against the flow. Pushed from behind and not seeing the police pressed us into some sort of madness.

Some time between noon and one o'clock the square was so packed with people that there was room for no more. A German climbed a hillock and told the assembled crowd through a megaphone that they must leave here in a heap on the square everything they had brought with them: bundles, packages, suitcases, parcels, etc.

A half hour later there had grown several mounds of such bundles. Next they led us along two routes to village Sosenki, located some 2–3 kilometers' [walk] from the town. Now three chains of [local] police and SS escorted us. There was no possibility of escape.

As we approached Sosenki, we understood that we were walking to our deaths. Before my eyes there appeared a nightmarish scene, one from which my blood freezes even now [more than three years later], though the threat of death has long passed.

There was a ditch perhaps 100 meters long. Logs had been thrown across the pit. On the logs stood 10–20 people, arranged with the backs of their heads facing us. There was a long volley from tommy guns—and the people fell into the pit, like mowed ears [of corn].

Not far from the ditch were several more pits. Everyone was forced to undress stark naked and to walk up to the edge of the pit—men and women separately. Every [executioner] practiced his own special type of murder: some lined their victims up along the edge of the pit facing forward, and the Germans by turns shot each one in the back of the head. Others stood their victims on their knees in front of the pit, while others forced their victims to run towards the pit and shot them as they approached the edge, and so on.

Some threw young children alive into the pits, while others hurled them into the air and shot them in flight. All of this was accompanied by deathly groans and screams of the dying, and by the laughter of the executioners. If one of the doomed tried to run off to the side, they shot him. Working

this way for about two hours, the German would walk up to a table, drink a glass of vodka, snack on a sandwich with sausage, and then continue his vile work anew.

As night fell, naked and at the limits of exhaustion from what I had seen, I lost consciousness. I was saved that night by some sort of miracle: I crawled between the lines of police and reached my friends who lived at the edge of the town. My entire family and all of my relatives had been shot together with eighteen thousand Jews of Rovno.

I do not know the names of the executioners—there were SS men, Gestapo, Ukrainian police. The shooting went on for almost three days.⁶⁹

Jurek Nowakowski had tried to save Leah and her little sister Mina by concealing them in the attic of his mother's home. "On the eve of the 'Action,' I managed to persuade my mother to keep two Jewish girls in our house. . . . Unfortunately, by the time my mother agreed it was already late afternoon and halfway to Leah's home I ran into a police patrol. When I came the next morning [7 November] to the Bodkiers' apartment it was already sealed. I was desperate, and [my sister] Dzikka said I was even 'green.'"⁷⁰ A few hours later, watching from his mother's apartment across from the cathedral at 3 Zamknutaia Street, Jurek Nowakowski later recalled that the entire event at Grabnik Square had been observed by the townspeople of Rovno: a massive crowd of non-Jewish civilians had assembled outside the police cordon. After the Jews had departed, these townspeople descended upon the piles of suitcases and other Jewish valuables in a melee that lasted for quite some time, dragging away all that they could carry. Eventually, the police fired shots into the air to disband the crowd.⁷¹

Ordinary men? The perpetrators at Sosenki forest

Estonian *Volksdeutsche* Edmund Gustav Aunapu was a 31-year-old policeman in Ostland Company, the 4th Company of the 320 Police Battalion, and later the Reserve Police Battalion 33, who was a guard during the mass action in Rovno in November 1941.⁷² Aunapu was sent to Rovno with his unit in September, 1941. Interrogated by Soviet military authorities after his capture on November 20, 1946, Aunapu's recollection of the Sosenki Forest massacre closely mirrors the memories of local eyewitnesses: "At 8 p.m. on the evening [of November 6, 1941] they took us

away in cars out of the city and ordered us to organize a guard around the city, so that no one could enter or leave the town. We stood guard until five o'clock in the morning of the next day. At five o'clock several cars approached, picked us up and took us to our battalion barracks, which was located on the western edge of the city of Rovno." The very next morning, immediately after breakfast, Police Battalion 320 was trucked first to Cathedral Square, where they guarded the perimeter as some 23,500 Jews of Rovno were assembled. Later, Police Battalion 320 was driven out to Sosenki Forest, where they took turns in shifts either guarding the perimeter around the killing site, or taking part in the shooting.⁷³ "The shooting took place over the course of two days. Other units of our battalion relieved us once the ditches had been filled with corpses. The 320 Police Battalion did the shooting. When I stood guard on the last night I walked past the place they had done the shooting and saw many graves with unburied corpses. Before the shooting all of the victims had undressed." On the third day, Aunapu's unit stood guard as Soviet POWs spread dirt in an effort to conceal the mass graves.⁷⁴

One of 15 defendants charged in the Kiev War Crimes Trial in 1946, Sergeant Boris von Drachenfels, has also left his own eyewitness account of the Rovno massacre.⁷⁵ An Estonian *Volksdeutsche* in *Ostlandkompanie*, Drachenfels was *Wachtmeister* or Sergeant of the company of the 320 Police Battalion that played a primary role in the shooting at Sosenki.⁷⁶ Of the 15 defendants tried in Kiev in 1946—Drachenfels was just one of three to be sentenced to hard labor instead of execution.⁷⁷

In his interrogation transcripts, Drachenfels described the massacre this way:

Screams of thousands of people were heard from far away... They stood surrounded by many policemen and awaited their fate... The policemen drove groups of people to the ditches, where they undressed. Special SD details and the policemen of our battalion shot them at the nape of the neck. Adults were forced to lie down in the ditches and were shot, while children were torn away from their mothers and shot. Most of the shooters were drunk... People begged for mercy, mothers begged us to spare their children.⁷⁸

Drachenfels was sentenced in Kiev to 15 years hard labor at a Soviet labor camp in Vorkuta for his role in the massacre at Rovno.⁷⁹

After several layers of bodies had filled the ditches, the last few thousand victims were killed above ground in an open field adjacent to the

main killing site. Soviet partisan leader Terentii Novak watched from the nearby forest: “Soldiers and officers of the SD searched through the bodies of the dead on the damp soil, shooting with pistols or killing the injured with bayonets. The horrific field of death ran with blood as a wet snow fell. Pink streams of water mixed with human blood ran all the way down to the road.”⁸⁰

Another German soldier who witnessed the events was Max Weichert. In November 1941, Weichert had been stationed in Rovno. Weichert was able to watch the assembly of more than 20,000 Jews at Grabnik Square through his office window. Pressed by his peers to visit the killing site at Sosenki Forest, Weichert saw the massacre of Jewish men, women, and children with his own eyes, and even photographed the scene. He was particularly haunted by the memory of “one young mother [who] held her baby in her arms. They shot her, and simply buried the baby alive.” Weichert suffered a nervous breakdown after witnessing the events of the Rovno massacre firsthand, and soon after he was found unfit for duty.⁸¹

In an affidavit before a German war crimes investigator in the 1960s, teleprinter engineer Kieback in *Einsatzgruppe C* confirmed the details of these horrific accounts provided by victims and bystanders:

In Rovno I had to participate in the first shooting... Each member of the firing-squad had to shoot one person. We were instructed to aim at the head from a distance of about ten meters. I can no longer say today who gave the order to fire. At any rate it was a staff officer. There were a number of staff officers present at the shooting. The order to fire was ‘ready to shoot, aim, fire!’ The people who had been shot then fell into the grave. I myself was detailed to the firing-squad; however, I only managed to shoot about five times. I began to feel unwell, I felt as though I was in a dream. Afterwards I was laughed at because I couldn’t shoot any more. A private or lance-corporal from the Wehrmacht, I don’t know which unit, took my carbine from me and went and took my place in the firing-squad.

I went and stood about 50 meters away from the firing-squad. It was obvious that I was in no state to go on shooting. The nervous strain was too great for me. When I am asked whether I was reprimanded for my refusal, I have to say that this was not the case.⁸²

Friedrich Bergeman was one of three or four members of his unit who volunteered to kill Jews at Rovno. He took part in shooting three columns of Jews—men, women, children, including infants—approximately one

hundred Jews per column. Then, according to his testimony, Bergeman was overcome with nausea and “unable to bear the smell of blood” any longer, so he returned to his barracks.⁸³

Born in 1908 in Helsinki, Finland, Kurt Kadick was the son of a German engineer, an expert on telegraph technology. Kadick studied in a Russian gymnasium from 1916–1918. After the Russian revolution, his family moved to Riga, Latvia, in 1918. From 1931 to 1941, Kadick worked in the Riga Postal Savings Bank. In 1941, with the Soviet annexation of Latvia, Kadick was one of several thousand Baltic *Volksdeutsche* men who under the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact were allowed to relocate to Germany. Then 31 years old, Kadick, like so many others of his generation, was enrolled in a special German police school for reservists. In 1941, he was mobilized into a special Latvian police unit, Police Battalion 33.

Shortly after their arrival in Rovno, the Latvian Police Battalion (PB33) was deployed in the *Aktion* against Rovno Jews. On November 6, the day before the *Aktion*, his unit was informed by their commanding officer First Lieutenant Linke that Rovno Jews were to be “resettled” the next day. There was no mention that the Jews would be shot.

Initially, Police Battalion 33 was responsible for securing the main roads into and out of Rovno. Their specific instruction task was “to capture any fleeing Jews.” They were specifically warned against the use of excessive force against the Jews, probably to avoid a riot which would have undermined the orderly execution. Each member of the unit was issued a Karbiner 98 and 35 rounds of ammunition.

Kadick recalled that there were no incidents on that first night of the *Aktion*, and his unit was relieved early on the morning of November 8. At around noon on November 8, Kadick and ten of his fellow soldiers travelled northeast to see the killing operation at Sosenki forest first hand. Interviewed in September 1960 by investigators in the *Central Office of the Judicial Authorities for the Investigation of National Socialist War Crimes*, Kadick recalled very vividly what he had witnessed:

We went to one of the roads leading out of the town, which led to the place of execution. The road led out of Rovno towards the northeast. When we arrived at this road we saw a long procession of Jews who were moving slowly and dragging their feet. Most of the Jews had one piece of hand baggage with them. Sick and frail Jews were transported by horse and cart. I saw men, women, children and old people. Our job now was to cordon

off both sides of the road to thwart any attempted escapes. There were no attempted escapes at my position.

As the long line of Jews moved forwards, so did the roadblocks. After about three or four kilometers, the line turned right into a climbing, hilly and wooded landscape. I was at the front of the line. Very close to the road I saw about six or seven prepared trenches. We had to form a double cordon around these trenches and a section of land further away. I was part of the inner cordon.

The Jews were then conducted, or rather driven, into a large clearing. At this point, I should mention that as soon as I saw the trenches I knew that the Jews were going to be shot. The Jews were also aware of this. At this point no one would have believed in resettlement any longer. Before the Jews were driven into the clearing cordoned off by us, I remember that they had to surrender their valuables. There were several tables for this purpose, with men in brown uniforms sitting at them. Even as the first Jews arrived in the clearing, they were forced towards the trenches by a guard. Prior to this, the Jews had to undress until they were naked.

The shootings started straight away. I was standing about 70 meters away from the trench. Before this, I had looked at one of the trenches at close quarters. The trench was approximately four to five meters deep, around ten meters long and eight meters wide. From my cordon position, I could see how the Jews were being driven out of the clearing in rows of four. They had to climb a slope and get into the trenches from there. The trenches were flatter on one side so that the Jews could slide down. The shootings started at around lunchtime (about 1 to 2 p.m.). From my cordon position, I could only see how the Jews disappeared into the trenches and shortly afterwards I heard the pistol shots.

After some time the trench filled and, from where I was, I could see how the Jews had to lie on top of the other corpses and were then killed by the marksmen by a shot in the back of the head. They carried on shooting until it was dark and by this time 4 or 5 of the trenches were full to the top with corpses. As far as I could estimate, there were still approximately 6,000 Jews in the clearing. These Jews were left. I was now relieved of my cordon duties with my group and we went back to our barracks in Rovno. Other members of the police battalion as well as Police Battalion 320 stayed at the execution site during the night. Ukrainian militias had also been deployed to the execution site for cordoning purposes. I got the impression that the members of the Ukrainian militia were particularly brutal in driving the Jews forwards.

The next day, I went back to the execution site with my group, in accordance with orders. I arrived there at about 4 p.m. I could see that all of the trenches were already full to the top with corpses. There were around 1,000 Jews still in the clearing. My unit leader then gave me the special order to guard the money taken from the Jews. The money was in two very large suitcases that had been left open. The money was only paper money in various currencies. Ukrainian militias had to search the clothes the Jews had removed for valuables and money. They placed the paper money in the cases that I was guarding and they handed the gold and valuables over at the tables at which Germans in brown uniforms were sitting. As far as I remember, there were three to four tables, occupied by three to four men in brown uniforms. I could clearly see how the “brown party people” were extremely interested in the jewellery and valuables. Since all of the trenches were full to the top with corpses, as I already said, the remaining 1,000 Jews were shot in the clearing. On this day, the weather was cool and wintry. It was raining and snowing. The ground was very soft. I saw how the Jews had to lie face down in the mud and were then shot. There were approximately 20 Jews in each row. The marksmen walked past at the foot end and fired on the victims. In the clearing the Jews also had to lie naked on top of the Jews who had already been shot. They were killed in the same way.

Just before dark, all of the Jews had been killed. In my opinion, around 18,000 Jews were killed in this *Aktion*. Two days after the *Aktion*, members of my police battalion were deployed to night guarding duties at the mass graves. I, too, stood there for one night. Our duties included keeping grave robbers away from the graves. From the graves you could still hear the groans of several victims. I also saw a hand stretching out of the grave and moving. Some of the victims were obviously still alive. It was a gruesome sight.⁸⁴

As challenging as it must have been to carry out the intimate and messy murders of countless strangers, the psychological strains would have been far greater for perpetrators who knew their victims. Ukrainian police seem to have borne the main burden of execution squads in the large *Aktionen* of autumn 1941. At Babi Yar, for instance, there were 1,500 shooters: 300 were ethnic Germans (from Germany and the Baltics), and 1,200 were ethnic Ukrainians.⁸⁵

While German shooters may have had a choice on whether or not to take part in the massacre, such latitude was evidently not available to the far more numerous members of the Ukrainian militia.⁸⁶ A Jewish survivor from Rovno, Batia Zaluska, testified that “several of the Ukrainian executioners dropped their weapons and started running toward the

pits. Their commander shouted after them: ‘What’s the matter with you, Jew-lovers, an order is an order?’ He thereupon gave the order to shoot them, and they were mowed down into the pit,’ side by side with their Jewish victims.⁸⁷

Ukrainian police auxiliaries, part of the *Schutzmannschaft* formed on Himmler’s order of July 26, 1941, played a major role in the Sosenki Forest massacre.⁸⁸ Why would local Ukrainians collaborate to murder local Jews? In a debriefing by U.S. Intelligence officers, a former agent in the Ukrainian Section of the German Abwehr (Military Intelligence), Kraków, Poland, noted the considerable benefits of service:

Each man working for the Ukrainian Section [of Abwehr III, or German Military Intelligence] in Kraków received a beautiful, two-room, fully furnished apartment, including a telephone and radio. Men, who were stationed outside the city, in the provinces, also were furnished with apartments or little houses, including telephones and radios.

Men operating in Kraków, in addition to German food ration coupons, also received special consignments of whiskey, cigarettes, clothes, food, etc. In the provinces each “*Meldekopf*” [German agent] was regarded as an official translator for the *Zollkommissariat* [German Customs] and received the same [as a German] officer’s rations, which were given to all civil service workers.

In addition each worker received a steady pay ranging from 300 to 500 *złoty*ch, an operating expense account, and extra compensations for reports, which varied, depending on the degree of their importance. Some valuable reports would bring in up to 2,000 *złoty*ch. Ukrainian Sections in Kraków as well as in the provinces were furnished with safe houses, where suspicious individuals were interrogated.⁸⁹

Work brought contacts, and contacts brought opportunities. A Lemberg woman, an ethnic Ukrainian, was interviewed by a representative of the Extraordinary State Commission in 1944. Asked about her apartment, that had belonged to Jews before the war, she first expressed ignorance. Eventually, she admitted: she had been a cleaning lady in the Gestapo headquarters.⁹⁰

Besides material advantages and remuneration, there were other benefits to collaboration: “In addition to the official identification cards (*legitimacia*) each worker was furnished with documents permitting him to walk around the city or county at night (at the time ordinary citizens were not permitted to walk around at night after certain hours), to ride

I myself cannot tell you in detail about what happened at Sosenki since I did not see it. But people who took part in the shootings told me about it. Seva Maevskyi, born 1921, by occupation a radio technician, worked with the Gestapo, and later in German counter-intelligence, attached to the Communications Department (*Verbindungsstab*); and Georg Datsiuk, an ethnic Ukrainian,⁹⁶ who worked as a translator in the *Schutzpolizei*, and later in the Ukrainian-German SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*), the German security service.

Datsiuk told me that at first it was “uncomfortable” for him to shoot defenseless people, moreover ones that were naked and lying on the ground face down. Among those whom he, Datsiuk, shot were several of his acquaintances, Jewish girls with whom he had met earlier on social occasions (*vecherinki*), some with whom he had even studied at school. But, Datsiuk said, he had to shoot even them. It was the norm, Datsiuk continued, to develop a taste for blood, for murder. An older policeman—I do not now recall his name—showed him by example how to do it, and then Datsiuk began to fire next: to shoot into the backs of their heads, and then to throw the bodies into the pit. They did not shoot the children—they didn’t want to waste the bullets—and instead just hurled them live directly into the pit. I have survived [horrors], said Datsiuk, even Neron never faced.⁹⁷

Maevskyi bragged that following the mass shootings at Sosenki he collected so many gold watches, coins, bracelets and other items that he had enough for the rest of his life.⁹⁸

Sergei Leshchuk, about 35 years old, residing in Rovno, also took part in the shooting of the Jews.⁹⁹

Chaya Musman was shocked to tears when she first read this affidavit from her beloved Jurek Nowakowski. Why? Because Georg Datsiuk had been their friend—and the young women Datsiuk murdered had been close friends in their shared circle, members of her 10th grade class at the Jewish girls gymnasium.¹⁰⁰ Chaya had heard rumors that someone from their group had been one of the shooters, but she did not know it was Datsiuk until she first read this document in 2004. She remembered him as such a decent, sensitive soul. And the thought that Datsiuk had been transformed into a monstrous perpetrator who murdered their friends with such impunity clearly hurt her very deeply.

It is the sad truth that former friends sometimes became monstrous perpetrators. Another survivor left this story. Due to their wealth, Lidia Eichenholz’s family was forced by the Soviets to move from Rovno to Dubno (over a hundred kilometers away) in autumn 1939. Then 16, Eichenholz

remembered with sadness the son of a Ukrainian Catholic priest named Nestor, who had become quite friendly during the Soviet occupation era: “I saw Nestor every day until June of ‘41. After the German invasion of eastern Poland, I heard that Nestor had joined the Petliura Brigade. . . . Nestor had betrayed all of his Jewish friends. He disappeared in 1945, never to be seen again.”¹⁰¹ Her father, grandfather, and all of the men of her family were taken away by the Ukrainian militia in July 1941 and shot into a nearby pit. Among the shooters was her pre-war friend Nestor.

In the files of the Ukrainian auxiliary police (*Hilfspolizei*) in Lemberg, there are 54 applications to join the Ukrainian police, all dated August 1941, and each consisting of a petition requesting permission to join the police force, where most promised “to carry out all orders honorably and conscientiously.” Each applicant also provided a short autobiography indicating place and date of birth, profession, military service, and other relevant data which often included reasons for wanting to join the German occupation police force. Of 53 applications, all were ethnic Ukrainian; and 45 (85 percent) indicated that they had joined the Ukrainian People’s Militia as soon as the Germans had invaded the Soviet Union. Almost all had served in the Polish army in the 1930s, and none was from Lviv city. Most were aged 30–35, and none was older than 40. Several indicated membership in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), some even served prison sentences under the Poles for Ukrainian nationalist activity, and all showed clear traces of Ukrainian nationalist sympathies, signing their names, for instance, as “Topopko Mykhailo Ukrainian,” or indicating that they had joined “to get revenge against Jews and the Poles.”¹⁰² Clearly, the German authorities were screening their collaborationist police for genocidal tendencies, and the most ready pool for such men was from within the ranks of the Ukrainian nationalists.

Besides nationalist sentiments, opportunism was also a clear factor affecting decisions to join the collaborationist police. The political economy of the genocide certainly seems to have helped motivate the perpetrators. Yitzhak Arad has described the general outlines of the Holocaust as an economic crime. “First, all the dwellings and their contents left behind by hundreds of thousands of Jews who had fled or who had been evacuated eastward, inside the Soviet Union, on their escape from the approaching German forces. Second, the hundreds of thousands of apartments (and their contents) formerly occupied by Jews who had been evicted and removed to the killing sites or to ghettos as interim stage on their way to extermination. Third, all personal belongings,

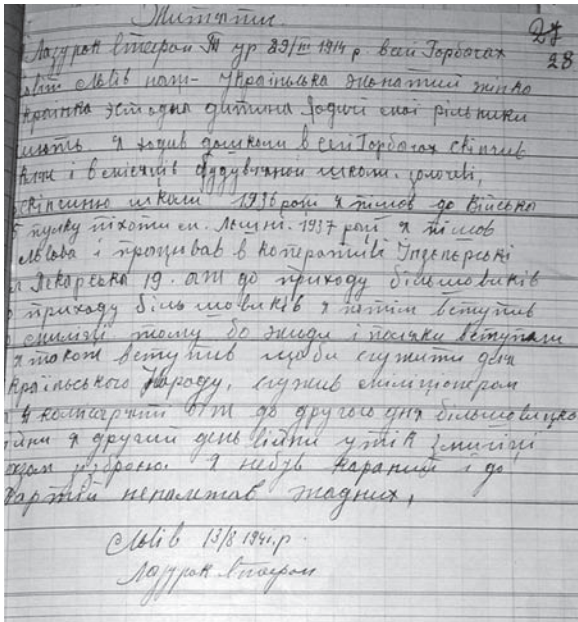


FIGURE 2.13 Typical Ukrainian nationalist autobiographical essay (dated August 13, 1941) in an application to become a policeman during the German occupation. The Germans were clearly screening for special attributes, selecting applicants who were Ukrainian nationalists, young, fit, military veterans, and who had displayed genocidal tendencies by indicating in their essays that they had joined “to get revenge against Jews and the Poles.”

Source: State Archive of L’viv Oblast, f. R-12, op. 1, d. 4, l. 28.

currency and valuables stolen from the victims at the sites where they were murdered.”¹⁰³ An ethnic Polish woman in Rovno, 43-year old Emilia Rablinska, recalled: “The clothes of the people who were shot were transported in wagons to the attics of the town’s administrative buildings, to barns, etc. They were washed, sorted, and then divided among the Germans, who sent these things back home to Germany.”¹⁰⁴ All this was an intrinsic part of the economic exploitation of Ukraine, with spoils of genocide divided among locals as well as German soldiers and the Reich administration. By design, everyone else could benefit economically from the demise of the Jews.

Besides gold watches, numerous other incentives were offered to police and collaborators with the German occupation regime. By 1944, German occupation authorities were offering as much as 20 liters of vodka and 5,000 zloty for every Jew apprehended by locals. Enlisting

the support of local Ukrainians entailed explicit costs. In Trokhybrid, a predominantly Jewish village northeast of Lutsk, “half the houses had already been dismantled by scavenging Ukrainians, who had carted off everything, even the walls and floors.”¹⁰⁵ “Salt was almost unobtainable then, so the Germans rewarded every Christian who killed a Jew or brought him in alive with half a kilogram of salt.”¹⁰⁶ As a result, the costs for Jews seeking to evade capture likewise rose dramatically during the war.¹⁰⁷ By winter 1943, false papers cost as much 25,000 zloty in Lemberg.¹⁰⁸ A suicide capsule in Kraków by 1943 cost 10,000 zloty.¹⁰⁹

Besides economic opportunity and anti-Semitic ideology, alcohol was also a primary ingredient in the massacres. As Raoul Hilberg observed about the *Einsatzgruppen* generally, “every once in a while a man did have a nervous breakdown,” and “in several units the use of alcohol became routine.”¹¹⁰ Psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton found that members of the *Einsatzgruppen* suffered from very high rates of “severe anxiety, nightmares, tremors, and numerous bodily complaints,” all symptoms of post-traumatic stress.¹¹¹ Rudolf Hoess recalled: “Many members of the *Einsatzkommandos*, unable to endure wading through blood any longer, had committed suicide. Some had even gone mad. Most of the members of these *Kommandos* had to rely on alcohol when carrying out their horrible work.”¹¹² Soldiers who stayed with Kazimir Brysh, from the village Kravchytsa near Lemberg, were responsible for atrocities around Lemberg. Brysh later recalled: “They got drunk every day, and when I asked where they got the vodka, they answered: ‘They give us the vodka, and that suits us just fine. We’ve got to drink.’”¹¹³ Leonid Rein confirmed that “many [shooters] . . . were intoxicated during the executions.”¹¹⁴

Mass executions were always followed by grand celebrations for the police who took part in the shootings. As historian Jürgen Matthäus noted, “Himmler’s frequent calls for post-execution festivities would allow his men to bond, unwind, and uphold a semblance of normalcy.”¹¹⁵ All of this fell under the rubric of managing the “spiritual hygiene” of soldiers: “Battalion commanders and company chiefs have to make special accommodations for the spiritual care of the men participating in such actions. The impressions of the day have to be blurred by social gatherings. In addition, the men have to be continuously lectured about the necessity of measures caused by the political situation.”¹¹⁶



FIGURE 2.14 *Black Propaganda: The False 'Jewish-Bolshevik Confession'.* To minimize local sympathies for Jews killed in mass *Aktionen*, the Germans often posted notices like this one “WE, ACTIVE Bolshevik Cadres, during the yid-bolshevik era seized the people’s homes, drove parents and children from their homes into the snow. We deported parents and children to Siberia. We seized so much of the people’s bread [that] we created an artificial famine, and people [starved] to death. We destroyed grain crops, drove livestock away so that the German Army would not get them. We continue to agitate against the German armed forces even now. AND THEREFORE WE, WITHOUT QUESTION, DESERVE SUCH PUNISHMENT.”

Source: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Nusya Roth Collection, RG1871.

Rovno survivor stories

On the day following the massacres at Sosenki Forest, Novak’s Soviet partisan unit posted typed accounts of the carnage over the tops of the original German decrees ordering the Jews to assemble at Grabnik Square. Novak strolled through the streets observing how shocked

locals—mostly Ukrainians and ethnic Poles—read the accounts aloud to one another, tears streaming down their faces.¹¹⁷

Over the days and weeks to follow, a few handfuls of Jewish survivors reappeared in Rovno, desperately seeking information about loved ones, appealing to non-Jewish neighbors and friends for support. And they brought with them horrific accounts of the massacre which gradually filtered throughout the rest of the community.

In her published memoirs, Chaya Musman left this loving account of her Polish friend Jurek Nowakowski's courageous efforts to rescue her best friend, Leah Bodkier (aka Krystyna Nowakowska), from certain death:

Telling the story about the Jews of my massacred town, I also want to talk about my friend, the Polish boy Jurek Nowakowski. He turned out to be a genuine person, a Person with a capital "P." My girlfriend Leah did not succeed in evacuating [in Summer 1941] and remained in Rovno. Like all the other Jews of the town, in November 1941 Leah, her parents, and her younger sister Mina went to [the square on] Grabnik. From there the Germans drove them [on foot] in small groups to the woods, to a forest named Sosenki, where they shot them. When the group containing Leah and her parents came near to Sosenki, they could hear shots being fired, and [Leah's] father commanded his wife and daughters to run. Leah rushed into a [nearby] field, as guards fired after her, but fortunately no one chased after her. Leah ran to a haystack, climbed inside, and hid there until dark.

That night she went to a cottage of Ukrainian peasants, who took her in, fed her, and gave her a change of clothes. She was wearing a fine cloak and dress; Leah gave these to her hosts, and took peasant clothing from them in exchange, in which she returned to the town, to her empty house.

At home she found no one—her parents, sister, all her neighbors had been killed. She was alone on a dead street.¹¹⁸

Several days later Jurek Nowakowski found her and took [Leah] home with him, hiding her in his attic [at Number 3 Zamknutaia Street].¹¹⁹

Krystyna Nowakowska later recalled that the Ukrainian police who watched over the Jews along the route to Sosenki Forest appeared every 100 meters or so, so that escape from the line was actually quite easy. The Ukrainian policeman could fire a few rounds as you ran, but he could not leave his post.¹²⁰



FIGURE 2.15 *Newlyweds Krystyna and Jurek Nowakowski, 1942*



FIGURE 2.16 *Krystyna Nowakowski with her son, Jerzyk, June 1945*

Source: Nowakowski Family Archives

Notes

- 1 The Al'tman data substantially modify previous estimates. Cf., Wolfgang Benz, ed. *Dimension des Völkermords: Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (Munich, 1991). On patterns of violence in the East versus the West, see Timothy Snyder, "Holocaust: The Ignored Reality," *New York Review of Books* (July 16, 2009); and Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
- 2 See Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, and the Polish Institute of National Memory's subsequent investigation in two volumes: Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persaka, eds. *Wokół Jedwabnego* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2002).
- 3 Aleksandr Kruglov, *Tragediia Bab'ego Iara v nemetskikh dokumentakh* (Dnepropretrovsk: Tkuma, 2011); David Budnik, et. al., *Nichto ne zabyto: evreiskie sud'by v Kieve, 1941–1943* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 1993); Erhard R. Wiehn, *Die Schoah von Babij Jar* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 1991); Patrick Dempsey, *Babi-Yar: A Catastrophe* (Measham: P. A. Draigh, 2005); Il'ia Levitas, ed. *Pamiat' Bab'ego Iara: Vospominaniia, Dokumenty* (Kiev: Evreiskii soviet Ukrainy, 2001). Karel Berkhoff is currently preparing a definitive study of the massacre at Babi Yar.
- 4 Michael Burleigh, *Ethics and Extermination: Reflections on Nazi Genocide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 81.
- 5 Shmuel Spector, *The Holocaust of the Volhynian Jews, 1941–1944* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990); and Tikva Fatal-Kna'ani, *Yehudeh Rovne, 1919–1945 [Jews of Rovno, 1919–1945: the Life and Death of a Community]* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2012). For a summary of the Holocaust in Volhynia, see Timothy Snyder, "The Life and Death of Western Volhynian Jewry, 1921–1945," in Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower, eds. *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008): 77–113. Also see the informative essay by Alexander Kruglov, "Równe," Martin Dean et al., eds. *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945, Volume II: Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe* (Indiana University Press and USHMM, 2012): 1458–1461. The best study of the Holocaust in Volhynia is Gerlach, Christian. *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschaft- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburger Edition; Auflage: Studienausgabe, 2007).
- 6 *Rowne; sefer zikaro* [Rowno; a memorial to the Jewish community of Rowno, Wolyn], edited by A. Avitachi (Tel Aviv: 1956): 514–517. translated from the Yiddish by Amit B. E. Gitterman.
- 7 Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*.

- 8 Terry Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing," *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 70, No. 4 (December 1998): 813–861; Keith Sword, ed. *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939–1941* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).
- 9 Marek Herman, *From the Alps to the Red Sea* (M.P. Western Galilee, Israel: Ghetto Fighters' Museum, 1985): 26.
- 10 Khaya (Chaya) Musman, *Gorod moi rasstrel'ianniyi* (New York: 1994). Musman's parents were both among the 17,500 adult Rovno Jews shot at Sosenki on November 7–9, 1941. Chaya Musman was born in Rovno on November 11, 1922. She died at the age of 87 in Brooklyn, New York, on June 7, 2010.
- 11 These extended passages have been reproduced by permission from Chaya Musman, *Gorod moi rasstrel'ianniyi*, 74–77. Note that Chaya Musman wrote "Botker," while Jurek Nowakowski always wrote "Bodkier." I have therefore used "Bodkier" throughout this book to refer to the Botker/Bodker/Bodkier family of Rovno.
- 12 GARF, f. R-9401, op. 2, d. 64, l. 380. A. F. Noskova, ed. *NKVD i pol'skoe podpol'e, 1944–1945 (Po osobym papkam' I. V. Stalina)* (Moscow, 1994): 5.
- 13 This pre-war biography was reconstructed from Jerzy Joseph Nowakowski, "Family Memoirs," Original unpublished Polish manuscript prepared in New York, March 5–28, 1985. Translation into English by Tamara Nowakowski, his granddaughter. 16 typed pages.
- 14 These extended passages have been reproduced by permission from Chaya Musman, *Gorod moi rasstrel'ianniyi*, 74–77. Cf., Christine Worobec, "Death Ritual among Russian and Ukrainian Peasants: Linkages between the Living and the Dead," in *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine*, edited by John-Paul Himka and Andriy Zayarnyuk (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2006): 13–45.
- 15 Nowakowski, "Family Memoirs," 8. Note that Kostek's father had been a Menshevik member of the Russian Duma in the prerevolutionary era, a factor that may have led to his arrest and execution by the Soviets.
- 16 Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews*. In his essay on Równe, Alexander Kruglov put the Jewish population of Rovno in June 1941 at 28,000. By his estimate, 5,000 Rovno Jews managed to escape eastward in the days following June 22, 1941, leaving some 23,000 Jews in Rovno at the start of the German occupation. Those numbers are low, and do not correspond with subsequent counts of Jewish victims verified by forensic investigators. See *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945, Volume II: Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe*, 1459. At the same time, it is clear from numerous contemporary accounts that Jewish refugees moved freely from one place to another, and it is likely

- that the numbers of Rovno Jews continued to rise even after the massacre in November 1941.
- 17 Roughly 13 percent of the Jews of the western Soviet Union survived the war—10 percent because they fled eastward with the Soviet retreat in 1941, and only 3 percent from among those who remained behind in hiding.
 - 18 Place names have been edited for clarity. Sissel Green, *Sissel's Story: A True Story of a Jewish Family's Survival from 1880 to 1958* (Bloomington, Indiana: Trafford Publishing, 2001): 188–190.
 - 19 Shalom Yoran, *The Defiant: A True Story of Escape, Survival, & Resistance* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996): 49–53. Yoran joined the partisan resistance, and wrote these memoirs in the late 1940s in an Israeli hospital while recovering from his wounds.
 - 20 Maksim Gon, “Golokost u zakhidniy Volyni,” *Biulleten' Golokost i suchasnist'* Vol. 5 (September–October 2002); Vol. 6 (November–December 2002). On the Holocaust in Volhynia, see Maksim Gon, ed., *Golokost na Rivnenshchyni (dokumenty ta materialy)* (Dnipropetrovs'k: Tsentral'nyi Ukrain's'kyi fond istorii golokostu, 2004); and Spector, *Holocaust of the Volhynian Jews, 1941–1944*.
 - 21 As quoted in Hannes Heer, “How Amoralty Became Normality: Reflections on the Mentality of German Soldiers on the Eastern Front,” in Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, eds. *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II, 1941–1944* (New York: Bergahn Books, 2000): 330.
 - 22 Testimony of Abraham Kirschner, (b. 1920 in Klevan, near Rovno), October 11, 1945, Kraków. Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (hereafter, ŻIH), 301/1190, p. 1.
 - 23 Testimony of Abraham Kirschner, ŻIH 301/1190, p. 3.
 - 24 Reichskommissar Erich Koch died in a Polish prison in 1986. Michael Parrish, *The Lesser Terror: Soviet State Security, 1939–1953* (Westport: Praeger, 1996): 128.
The number 17,500 Jewish adults is based on subsequent Soviet forensic examination of the mass graves at Sosenki forest. On the discrepancy between *Einsatzgruppen* reports (citing 15,000 killed) and subsequent findings, see Ronald Headland, *Messages of Murder: A Study of the Reports of the Einsatzgruppen of the Security Police and the Security Service, 1941–1943* (Teaneck, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992): 53.
 - 25 Cited in Koval, “The Nazi Genocide of the Jews and the Ukrainian Population, 1941–1944,” 52.
 - 26 Poster from the Reichskommissar Ukraine, Rovno, in German and Russian, dated June 1942. GARF, f. R-7021, op. 71, d. 40, l. 16.
 - 27 B. Baratz, *Flucht vor dem Schicksal*, 84. As cited in Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine Under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004): 81. In English, see Barbara Barac, *Escape from*

Destiny: Holocaust Memoirs from Ukraine (Melbourne, Australia: Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre, 1990).

- 28 Testimony of Adela and Inda Liberman, 1946, Łódź. ŻIH 301/872.
- 29 Testimony of Adela and Inda Liberman, ŻIH 301/872.
- 30 Testimony of Abraham Kirschner (from Rovno), dated 10 November 1945. ŻIH 301/1190, p. 3.
- 31 These numbers are based on the data in Table 2. In contrast, Alexander Kruglov offered these numbers: September: 136,220; October: 118,510; November: 65,370; December: 87,130. The discrepancy lies in part in methodology: Kruglov worked with aggregate numbers, whereas the author of this study worked with confirmed *Aktionen*. And Kruglov distinguished between German versus Romanian or Magyar administrations inside modern Ukrainian borders. The data in Table 2 drew no such distinctions. Kruglov, "Jewish Losses in Ukraine," *The Shoah in Ukraine*, 278–279.
- There are other problems in the Kruglov data. For instance, while Al'tman estimated the number of Ukrainian Jews killed in the Holocaust to be 1,430,000, Kruglov argued that there were 2,720,538 Jews in Ukraine before the war, of whom 2,100,836 or 77.2 percent were killed in the Holocaust. Al'tman, *Zhertyv nenavisti: Kholokhost v SSSR*, 303; Kruglov, "Jewish Losses in Ukraine," *The Shoah in Ukraine*, 272–290.
- 32 Kruglov, "Jewish Losses in Ukraine," 280.
- 33 Dieter Pohl, "The Murder of Ukraine's Jews under German Military Administration and in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine," *The Shoah in Ukraine*, 27. Whereas Kruglov and most other historians have emphasized the preeminent role of ideology in the killing operations, Pohl has underlined the importance of "the connection between the Wehrmacht's seizure of food stores, its ideological perception of the food situation, and the decision to murder the . . . Jews." (37) Applying the same logic to local militias, Leonid Rein agreed: Occupation "policemen saw participation in the murder of unarmed people as a means to improve their families' material situation. This was of no small significance in the difficult economic circumstances resulting from Nazi occupation policies." Leonid Rein, "Local Collaboration in the Execution of the 'Final Solution' in Nazi-Occupied Belorussia," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* Vol. 20, No. 3 (Winter 2006): 394; Peter Klein et al., eds. *Die Einsatzgruppen in der besetzten Sowjetunion 1941/42. Die Tätigkeits- und Lageberichte des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD* Publikationen der Gedenk- und Bildungsstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, Band 6. (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1997): 116.
- 34 Quoted in Geoffrey P. Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007): 124–125.
- 35 Megargee, *War of Annihilation*, 124.

- 36 Vladyslav Nakonechnyi, “Kholokost na Volyni: Zhertvy i pamiat,” *Korni* No. 36 (October–December 2007).
- 37 Quoted in Nakonechnyi, “Kholokost na Volyni.”
- 38 *Einsatzgruppe* report, dated November 14, 1941. Yitzhak Arad, ed. *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads’ Campaign Against the Jews, July 1941–January 1943* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Holocaust Museum, 1990): 236. Compare the version in Spector, *The Holocaust of the Volhynian Jews*, 107.
- 39 On Befehlshaber der Ordnungspolizei Otto von Oelhafen, cf. IfZ, MA 1569/15, Vernehmung Otto Oelhafen, 7./28.5.1947. Thanks to Dieter Pohl for sharing these details, along with the text of a decrypted German radio telegram dated 9 November 1941, discovered by Stephen Tyas at the British National Archives (NA/PRO): HW 16/32.
- 40 Klein, *Die Einsatzgruppen*, 76–77. Captured by the Soviets in 1945, Jeckeln was subsequently interrogated. He was hanged in Riga in February 1946 for atrocities committed in the Baltic region. See Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe der Weltanschauungskrieg: Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und SD, 1938–1942* (Stuttgart, 1982): 566–569.
- 41 Signed “V.P.” Quoted in T. F. Novak, *Parol’ znaiut nemnogie* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1966): 111. Novak was one of the key figures in the creation of the anti-German Rovno underground resistance. His account of the massacre appears on pages 110–120. As we shall see later, Novak has an obvious resentment against Jewish leaders during the war, and this seems to have shaped his recollections. Some or all of his account may be apocryphal. Historian Jared McBride has followed Novak’s wartime activities in post-Soviet archives, and he is convinced that most of Novak’s memoir has been falsified. See Jared McBride, “‘A Sea of Blood and Tears’: Ethnicity, Identity and Survival in Nazi Occupied Volhynia, Ukraine 1941–1944,” Ph.D. Dissertation, UCLA, forthcoming in 2014.
- 42 Wolfgang Curilla, *Die deutsche Ordnungspolizei und der Holocaust im Baltikum und in Weißrußland 1941–1944* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2006): 619.
- 43 Memorandum No. 221 from the 1st Ukrainian Front, dated 11–13 April 1944, GARE, f. R-7021, op. 148, d. 28, l. 62, partially reproduced in A. I. Kruglov, ed. *Sbornik dokumentov i materialov ob unichtozhenii natsistami evreev ukrainy v 1941–1944 godakh* (Kiev: Institut Iudaiki, 2002): 387–388.
- 44 On *Ostlandkompanie*, see the “Ordnungspolizei Handbuch” by Stefan Klemp, “Nicht ermittelt” *Polizeibataillone und die Nachkriegsjustiz - Ein Handbuch (Gebundene Ausgabe)* (Essen: Klartext-Verlagsges, 2005). On PB 320 and 33, see pp. 618–622.
- 45 For a summary of the unit’s activities, see Dieter Pohl, “Die Einsatzgruppe C,” in Klein, ed., *Die Einsatzgruppen in der besetzten Sowjetunion, 1941/42*. For an excellent summary of recent work on the Holocaust in Ukraine,

see Dieter Pohl, "Schauplatz Ukraine: Der Massenmord an den Juden im Militärverwaltungsgebiet und im Reichskommissariat 1941–1943." *Ausbeutung, Vernichtung, Öffentlichkeit. Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Verfolgungspolitik*, Norbert Frei, Sybille Steinbacher, and Bernd C. Wagner, eds. (Munich: Saur, 2000): 135–173.

- 46 Novak, *Parol' znaiut nemnogie*, 113–115. Note that Novak's account seems to converge the original Sosenki massacre in November 1941 with the liquidation of the Rovno ghetto in July–August 1942. His main point is to attack the Jewish elders for their refusal to heed his warnings and organize a Jewish uprising against the Germans.
- 47 Barac, *Escape from Destiny*, 11, 21.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 49 Most of the details about the massacre at Sosenki forest in November 1941 have been gleaned from some 52 handwritten affidavits prepared by eyewitnesses for the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission (ChGK) in 1944. These are preserved in GARF, R-7021, op. 71, d. 40, ll. 1-64. To my knowledge, none of these original records has been previously used by researchers. Typewritten copies of a small selection of these affidavits are preserved in Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Rivenskoi Oblasti (hereafter, DARO), f. R-30, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 1-124, with copies available in Yad Vashem, Israel. Besides the eyewitness affidavits from the Extraordinary State Commission files in Moscow, there are also several testimonies preserved in the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH) in Warsaw, Poland.

Note that there is some discrepancy in the dates. Several sources have identified the *Aktion* at Rovno as having taken place from November 6–8, 1941, and a very well-respected historian Aleksandr Kruglov in Kiev has likewise presented this as the date of the shootings. I have retained the popularly defined date of November 7–9, 1941 because most eyewitnesses offered these dates. I believe the discrepancy is rooted in the differences between the operation and the actual shootings: German police units were mobilized to close the city on the eve of the shootings to protect against mass Jewish flight. Likewise, they were mobilized after the shootings to protect the killing zone at Sosenki forest from grave robbers. Therefore, three days of shooting became a week or more of specialized police operations. While there is some disagreement about the dates, there is no disagreement about what took place: the events themselves have been confirmed by all witnesses to these tragic events, regardless of whether they were German, Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, or Jewish, and regardless of their role in the *Aktion*, as perpetrators, bystanders, or victims.

- 50 Novak, *Parol' znaiut nemnogie*, 116. Novak mistakenly referred to the Jewish neighborhoods in Rovno as the "Jewish ghetto." The Jewish ghetto

- was not formally established until December 1941, after the November *Aktion*.
- 51 GARE, f. R-7021, op. 71, d. 40, ll. 11–12 ob. Cf., a similar testimony that confirms these details by Khaim Izrailevich Lerner, dated 21 November 1944. GARE, f. R-7021, op. 71, d. 40, ll. 13–14.
- 52 Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews, 1941–1944*, 114, based on Yad Vashem materials.
- 53 “Akt” dated . GARE, f. R-7021, op. 71, d. 40, l. 34.
- 54 DARO, f. R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 90.
- 55 DARO, f. R-30, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 94–95.
- 56 Novak, *Parol’ znaiut nemnogie*, 117.
- 57 DARO, f. R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 90.
- 58 Z. Ledichover, “Rovno’s End,” translated from Yiddish by Naomi Gal, in *Rowne; sefer zikaron*, 526. Ledichover was hiding from arrest in the apartment of a Polish cleaning lady who had worked for his family before the war, Vasniek, who had an apartment opposite Grabnik Square.
- 59 DARO, f. R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 90.
- 60 Testimony of Polish woman Emilia Rablinska (b. 1898). DARO, f. R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 96.
- 61 Testimony of Adela and Inda Liberman (from Rovno), dated January 1946, ŽIH 301/872, pp. 1–8.
- 62 Testimony of Adela and Inda Liberman, ŽIH 301/872, pp. 7–8.
- 63 Testimony of Semën Sholopa (b. 1900), dated 11 September 1944. GARE, f. R-7021, op. 67, d. 82, ll. 26 ob.-27. This witness report refers to a mass action at Drohobych in 1943.
- 64 Khaim Izrailevich Lerner, dated 21 November 1944. GARE, f. R-7021, op. 71, d. 40, ll. 13–14.
- 65 Testimony of Polish woman Emilia Rablinska (b. 1898). DARO, f. R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 96.
- 66 Testimony of Abraham Kirschner. ŽIH 301/1190, pp. 4–5. Kirschner mistakenly identified the date as November 6.
- 67 Testimony of Abraham Kirschner. ŽIH 301/1190, p. 6.
- 68 Meir Auksmen [Meir Oxsmán], “The Survivor from a Mass Grave,” translated from Yiddish by Naomi Gal, in *Rowne; sefer zikaron*, 544–545.
- 69 GARE, f. R-7021, op. 71, d. 40, ll. 28–30. An edited (Sovietized) typed copy of the original affidavit also appears at DARO, f. R-30, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 87–89. The above text reflects the original handwritten version prepared by an NKVD clerk in Russian, with Nowakowska’s signature on the bottom of each page. Note that Nowakowska got the dates wrong in her original affidavit: the date of posting was 6 November; the date of Jewish assembly at Grabnik Square was November 7. Nowakowska’s account of the Rovno action became the standard for the Soviet police investigations

that followed. It appears, for instance, as a typed witness report in the Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (hereafter, Arkhiv SBU), f. 13 FP, Case 74725 (5398) Aunapu, Edmund Gustav, ll. 69–70. A Russian version of Nowakowska's testimony was published in Itskakh (Yitzhak) Arad, *Unichtozhenie evreev SSSR v gody nemetskoj okkupatsii (1941–1944)* (Jerusalem and Moscow: Yad Vashem, 1991): 151–152. That version cites a collection at Yad Vashem Archive, o-53/32.

- 70 Nowakowski, "Family Memoirs," 9.
- 71 Interview with Dr. Jerzy Nowakowski, Port Washington, New York, March 28, 2013.
- 72 Arkhiv SBU, f. 13 FP, Case 74725 (5398) Aunapu, Edmund Gustav. Aunapu's main handwritten interrogation transcript appears on ll. 35–40, dated November 20, 1946. Aunapu was captured by the Red Army near Dubno on February 3, 1944. Many thanks to Jared McBride for sharing this material.
- 73 Testimony of Edmund Aunapu, Arkhiv SBU, f. 13 FP, Case 74725 (5398), l. 36.
- 74 *Ibid.*, ll. 36–37.
- 75 Wachtmeister Boris von Drachenfels was sentenced in Kiev in 1946 to fifteen years hard labor at Vorkuta, a Soviet prison camp in the Far East. Kruglov, "Unichtozhenie evreev v g. Rovno," 113. Drachenfels survived the camps, and returned to Germany after the war. His last published interview was in 2002.
- 76 Drachenfels did not actually belong to Police Battalion 320, but to the so-called *Ostlandkompanie*, which is the 1st company of Police Battalion 33.
- 77 While the West German prosecutor at Dortmund (Z) 45 Js 7/61 was able to confirm the names of 529 participants in various German atrocities, they ruled that there was insufficient evidence (though high probability) that Drachenfels had taken part. AR-, Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, = ZStL II 204 AR-Z 48/58. I am grateful to Dieter Pohl for this information.
- 78 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter, USHMM), RG-06.025, Central Archives of the Federal Security Services (former KGB) of the Russian Federation records relating to war crime trials in the Soviet Union, 1939–1992, Section *02 Kiev, 1945–1946 (N-18762, tom 11), document 234, Interrogation of Drachenfels-Kalyuvera, V.B. B-E-O. of December 10, 1945. This passage was quoted in Alexander Victor Prusin, "'Fascist Prisoners to the Gallows!': The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials, December 1945–February 1946," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 2003): 1–30.
- 79 After his return to Germany, Drachenfels became a celebrity in West Germany, where he was often interviewed about the hardships of prison camp life for German soldiers in the Soviet Union. See *Ihr verreckt hier bei ehrlicher Arbeit! Deutsche im Gulag 1936–1956* (Graz: Anthologie des Erinnerns, 2000); and a film, *Verurteilt im Kiewer Kriegsverbrecherprozess 1946*

(Dokumentation von: Christine Blum - Minkel und Bengt von zur Mühlen). I am grateful to Dieter Pohl for this information.

80 Novak, *Parol' znaiut nemnogie*, 119.

81 Testimony of Weichart's friend, Robert Tomartskievich (Tomarczkiewicz), supply unit, German 100 infantry division. GARE, f. R-7021, op. 148, d. 43. The location of the photographs of the Rovno massacre is unknown. Tomartskievich saw his friend Weichart in Rovno at Christmas time in late 1941. I am grateful to Jared McBride for sharing this document.

On the culture of violence and the German preoccupation with collecting grisly photographs on the Eastern Front, see Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944. Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (München, 1996); and Daniel Uziel, “Wehrmacht Propaganda Troops and the Jews,” *Yad Vashem Studies* Vol. 29 (2001): 28–63.

82 As cited in Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen and Volker Riess, eds. “*The Good Old Days*” *The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders* (New York: Konecky and Konecky, 1991), 62. [Statement of Kiebach 1.11.63; 204 AR-Z 269/60, p. 1431 f.]; and Kruglov, ed. *Sbornik dokumentov i materialov ob unichtozhenii natsistami evreev ukrainy*; Spector, *Holocaust of the Volhynian Jews*, 114, adds: “The ditches had been dug by Russian POWs in advance at the execution site located in a pine forest. Near the pits, functionaries of the Rovno *Gebietskommissariat* busily registered the names of victims and collected and inventoried their documents and valuables. Men of the SD Kommando unit from Rovno who until a few days before had formed a detachment of *Einsatzkommando 5C* were the main perpetrators. Their unit numbered between 80 and 100 men.” Cf., Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993): 64–67; and Pohl, “Die Einsatzgruppe C,” 76–77.

Oswald Rufeisen noted that many German policemen perceived the killing of Jews as a “dirty business” from which it was permissible to abstain where possible. See Rein, “Local Collaboration,” 393.

83 As cited in Aleksandr Kruglov, “Unichtozhenie evreev v g. Rovno v nachale 1941 goda v svete nemetskikh dokumentov,” *Golokost i suchasnist’: Studii v Ukraini i Sviti* Vol. 11, No. 1 (2012): 164–165. Also a guard at the POW camp in Rovno, Bergeman was executed in East Germjany for war crimes in in 1959. Kruglov, “Unichtozhenie evreev v g. Rovno,” 113.

84 Testimony of Kurt Kadick, a member of Reserve Police Battalion 33. Bundesarchiv B 162/2896, Bl. 3414–3419. Thanks to Martin Böckler for sharing these materials, and to Jared McBride for assistance in collecting the entire archive of Rovno materials from the *Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen* (ZStL) in Ludwigsburg, Germany.

- 85 As cited in A. Ia. Naiman, “Iudofobiia sovremennykh antiukrainskikh sil v Ukraine,” *Obshchestvo “Evreiskoe Nasledie”* (Moscow) No. 13 (1995). This predominance of Ukrainian perpetrators at Babi Yar was a source of pride for Rovno political leader, Deputy of the Rovno City Soviet, V. Shkuratiuk. In contrast, historian Dieter Pohl insists there were perhaps dozens of Ukrainian shooters at Babi Yar, and that the main contingent of perpetrators came from Sonderkommando 4a, a German unit.
- 86 On following orders, see Browning. *Ordinary Men*.
- 87 Spector, *Holocaust of the Volhynian Jews*, 114. Testimony of Batia Zaluska, NCD IP File 0162.] [NCD IP is Nazi Crimes Department, Israeli Police.]
- 88 Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 1992): 52–53.
- 89 Anonymous report from a former agent in the Ukrainian Section, Kraków, Poland, no date. “The Organization and Working System of the Abwehr III in G[eneral]G[overnment],” NARA, RG263 [NND36821], CIA Subject Files, Box 3, German Intelligence Service (Abwehr), Vol. 4: 1–10. The quote appeared on page 3 of the report.
- 90 GARF, R-7021, op. 67, d. 75.
- 91 NARA, RG263 [NND36821], CIA Subject Files, Box 3, German Intelligence Service (Abwehr), Vol. 4: 3.
- 92 Rein, “Local Collaboration,” 395.
- 93 Quoted in Rein, “Local Collaboration,” 396. On the seizure of Jewish property, see Martin Dean, “Jewish Property Seized in the Occupied Soviet Union in 1941 and 1942: The Records of the *Reichshauptkasse Beutestelle*,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* Vol. 14, No. 1 (2000); Martin Dean, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Dieter Pohl, “The Robbery of Jewish Property in Eastern Europe under German Occupation, 1939–1942,” in Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler and Philipp Ther, eds. *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe* (New York: Bergahn Books, 2007): 68–80; and Gerard Aalders, *Nazi Looting: The Plunder of Dutch Jewry during the Second World War* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2004).
- 94 Nahum Kohn and Howard Roiter, *A Voice from the Forest: Memoirs of a Jewish Partisan* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1980): 147.
- 95 Kohn and Roiter, *A Voice from the Forest*, 147–148. Kohn served as a communications liaison between Soviet spy Nikolai Kuznetsov—aka Abwehr Lieutenant Paul Siebert—and Moscow. On the culture of violence and pride in Jewish abuse among members of the Reich administration in District Galicia, see the horrific descriptions in Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944*.
- 96 Crossed out in the original: “an ethnic Ukrainian ‘who later became a Volksdeutsche.’”

- 97 The reference is apt. According to Greek mythology, Neron was a demon from hell, a collector of souls who could not resist a good deal. The modern equivalent would be Mephistopheles: a demon that corrupts goodness with bargains in exchange for the soul. The name “Neron” has the mathematical equivalent of “666.”
- 98 Local collaborationist police collected gold watches as a sign of their wealth and status. See the account from Rovno of Soviet partisan fighter Nahum Kohn: Kohn and Roiter, *A Voice from the Forest*, 147–149.
- 99 From the handwritten affidavit of Jurek Nowakowski, dated 6 December 1944, preserved in GARE, f. R-7021, op. 71, d. 40, ll. 52–53. Datsiuk and Maevskyi were also identified in Samoil Gil’s book, along with others: Gebietskommissar Weir [Beer?], Gestapo investigator Holts Mainz, Ukrainian police Nesterchuk, Zubkov, Kravchuk, Maevskyi, Datsiuk, and prison guards Kushneruk, Nikitiuk, Fedotov, Kovalenko, and Krivoi Kondrat. Samuil Gil, *Krov’ ikh i segodnia govorit*, 163–165.
- 100 Datsiuk’s biographical details were confirmed in a master list of violent perpetrators during the German occupation of Rovno oblast, preserved in GARE, R-7021, op. 127, d. 168, ll. 1–56. The file lists 282 names, with short biographies, cross-referenced with witness affidavits. The inventory contains comparable perpetrator lists for every oblast occupied by the Germans. I am grateful to Jared McBride for sharing this document.
- 101 Lidia Eichenholz, *Survivor’s Tale* (New York: iUniverse, 2004), 18. The “Petliura Brigade” was named after Symon Petliura, a notorious Ukrainian nationalist officer whose troops perpetrated pogroms against Ukrainian Jews during and after World War I. Petliura was assassinated in Paris in 1926 by Sholom Schwartzbard, the husband and father of one of Petliura’s many Jewish victims.
- 102 Derzhavnyi Arkhiv L’vivskoi Oblasti (hereafter, DALO), f. R-12 Komanda ukrainskoi polytsi u L’vovi, op. 1, d. 4 “Avtobyografii ta zaiavy osib pro zarakhuvanye ix u polytsiiu,” 1941, ll. 1-111. [Quotations from l. 28.]
- 103 Yitzhak Arad, “Plunder of Jewish Property in Nazi-Occupied Areas of the Soviet Union,” *Yad Vashem Studies* Vol. 29 (2001).
- 104 Testimony of Polish woman Emilia Rablinska (b. 1898). DARO, f. R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 96.
- 105 Kohn and Roiter, *A Voice from the Forest*, 57.
- 106 Kohn and Roiter, *A Voice from the Forest*, 57.
- 107 YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (hereafter, YIVO), RG1258 The Papers of Philip Friedman, Box 49, File 869, Klara Z. Szwarcow Kramer, *W Ukryciu: Dziennik z okresu okupacji hitlerowskiej w Zolkwi*, typescript in Polish, 142 pages, entries date from summer 1942 to July 26, 1944. The data on rewards for Jews appears on p. 43. Klara Szwarcow was one of just 50 Jewish survivors from the 8,000 Jews in Zolochiv at the start of the war. She survived by

hidin in an underground bunker of a *Volksdeutsche* family, the Becks, who protected eighteen Jews until liberation by the Red Army. See Clara Kramer and Stephen Glantz, *Clara's War: One Girl's Story of Survival* (New York: ECCO, 2010).

- 108 Landau Ozjasz "Ghetto we Lwowie - Papiery aryjskie," YIVO, RG1258, RG215 Berlin collection, File 853.
- 109 Landau Ozjasz "Ghetto we Lwowie." YIVO, RG 1258, RG 215 Berlin collection, File 853.
- 110 Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews*, 218. Cf., Rachel MacNair, "Psychological Reverberations for the Killers: Preliminary Historical Evidence of Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress," *Journal of Genocide Research* Vol. 3, No. 2 (2001): 275.
- 111 MacNair, "Psychological Reverberations for the Killers," 276.
- 112 R. Hoess, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Autobiography of Rudolf Hoess* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1959), 163. MacNair, "Psychological Reverberations for the Killers," 275.
- 113 GARF, f. R-7021, op. 67, d. 77, l. 43.
- 114 Rein, "Local Collaboration," 393.
- 115 Jürgen Matthäus, "Controlled Escalation: Himmler's Men in the Summer of 1941 and the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Territories," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* Vol. 21, No. 2 (Fall 2007): 229.
- 116 Quoted in Matthäus, "Controlled Escalation," 229.
- 117 Novak, *Parol' znaiut nemnogie*, 119.
- 118 Dr. Jerzy Nowakowski adds here that Krystyna eventually made her way to her uncle's apartment, where she stayed initially. Krystyna's uncle had a valid work certificate, and therefore he had been allowed to remain in Rovno.
- 119 Musman, *Gorod moi rasstrel'iannyi*, 74-77.
- 120 Interview with Dr. Jerzy Nowakowski, Port Washington, New York, March 28, 2013.

3

Aftermath: The Legacies of the Rovno Massacre

Abstract: *This chapter is a summary of the aftermath of the massacre of Rovno Jews in November 1941, tracking the lives of some of the 30 known survivors.*



In the last section of the book, I take a thread from a story by Isaac Bashevis Singer and explore the legacy of “hauntings” surrounding the Rovno massacre. As one of the survivors of the massacre recalled: “Those who survived that day on November 7th [1941] will never be able to erase it from their memories and hearts.” The event haunted perpetrators, victims, and bystanders alike, and it continues to haunt the descendants of survivors and victims and their descendants today.

Burds, Jeffrey. *Holocaust in Rovno: The Massacre at Sosenki Forest, November 1941*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. DOI: 10.1057/9781137388407.0009.

The destruction of the Jews of Rovno profoundly transformed the once thriving Jewish cultural center. Abraham Lydovski, a Jewish partisan, returned to Rovno in February 1944, where he found a hauntingly familiar but virtually unrecognizable city: “Ukrainians and Poles dressed elegantly with Jewish clothes are walking joyfully in the streets, from the Jewish houses that are now resettled one can hear cheerful laughter. We pass the city streets like mute shadows, looking for a Jew, and there are none.”¹

Rovno Jewish survivor Abraham Kirschner recalled how the Rovno Jews left behind in the Jewish section after the massacre learned of the tragic fate of loved ones massacred at Sosenki Forest:

Those of us who had stayed behind kept meeting people who told us of that horrible night, and that in the forest lay thousands of murdered bodies. There were still some among the dead in the trenches who were still alive but who were slowly choking to death from lack of air.

On the third day [after the massacre] thirteen of us drove out to the forest without our arm bands, using a borrowed automobile. Our eyes were welcomed with a hellish sight. Thousands of bodies were already beginning to turn black in the mud. In one area there were hundreds of Soviet passports, in another an abandoned boot, pieces of human bodies. I did not find my own family, but only my beautiful 17-year-old female friend, who was lying next to her parents with a bullet hole in her cheek.

Later we were witnesses to the burying of the bodies. They brought a group of Soviet POWs, tied up a few bodies to a horse, and this is how the horses dragged the bodies to the graves. There were twelve graves in all, each with lengths of 12–20 meters, and around 10 meters deep. The POWs who buried the bodies were also killed, to eliminate witnesses of the atrocities. The ground was furrowed with plows to remove any and all signs, so that afterwards it was not possible to tell what kind of atrocity occurred here.²

A German officer took a photograph of the Jewish corpses from the overflow pit in the clearing. This photograph was confiscated from him in 1944 by a Rovno Jew, Hippolite Sitovskii. Until now, this photograph has remained hidden in a Moscow archive. It is the only known photograph of the killing site at Sosenki Forest.

Besides his visit to Sosenki Forest soon after the massacre, Abraham Kirschner also observed the handling of the property seized from the Rovno Jews.



FIGURE 3.1 *A previously unpublished photograph of the massacre at Sosenki Forest, November 1941. Confiscated in 1944 from a German officer by Rovno local, Hippolite Sitovskii.*

Source: GARF, R-7021, op. 71, d. 40, l. 39.

The day after the execution 600 horse-drawn carriages arrived at the [Reichs] governor's office with all of the things left behind at the meeting place by those who had been murdered. I saw as all of these things rode by, as they were unloaded. [Jewish women]—wives and daughters—were ordered to sort all of these things. They later said that there were many things covered in blood among the clothing, which the Germans ordered either to be thrown out, or to be taken away by the Jews. The remainder of the things was placed in the Synagogue, which had been transformed into a warehouse for the stolen items.

Next, the Germans and the Ukrainians took to robbing and plundering the houses of those murdered, and the rest was given for the Germans to use, for those who came to take over the administrative buildings. A multitude of things was then sent back to Germany. Of course, just like in other cities they had to give up furs of all kinds and sizes. Cars and motorcycles drove by covered with stolen bedding.³

Engineer Moshe Gildenman added: “The Ukrainians spread like locusts onto Jewish dwellings, where they robbed and pillaged all the

valuables. Some did not settle for what they could carry in their arms, brought wagons drawn by horses, and loaded furniture, appliances and household utensils—everything they could take. The whole Ukrainian population, poor and rich, educated and simple folks, participated in this misappropriation. There were quite a few cases when Jews were able to hide in basements, attics, in nooks and crannies, but the Ukrainians divulged to the Germans their whereabouts, so that they could destroy and annihilate them. Especially since they got paid for the service.”⁴

Then just 18 years old, Bluma Doitch managed to escape the *Aktion* at Sosenki by hiding in a Czech village nearby. She and her father returned to Rovno a few days later:

We felt like strangers in the city. There are no words to describe the Rovno I saw. We found her empty of Jews and in mourning. The houses were all broken open or sealed by the Germans. Here and there you could see Ukrainians towing objects or furniture—Jewish property, and big German trucks taking out the goods still left in Jewish houses. It was heartbreaking to see this depressing sight, our knees felt weak. It turned out that our house was in the ghetto area. The area spread from Ponietovska [Poniatowska] Street from the railroad to the end of Wolja. To this zone were confined the 4,000–5,000 Jews who survived the slaughter. Thus we found ourselves in the ghetto, our lives jeopardized. People were broken and depressed, were mourning their loved ones and some regretted not having gone with the others to their death. What was the point of this life? They all looked like walking-dead, hopeless, desperate and awaiting their death.⁵

The Sosenki massacre was followed by expanded efforts to liquidate all Rovno Jews who remained outside of the Jewish ghetto. Forty-year-old Mariia Demchishina, an ethnic Ukrainian, recalled that “After the mass shooting, the Germans escalated security on the streets of the city and any Jews still alive were captured on the streets and transported in special vehicles to [the Gestapo prison] at Belaia Street.” Curious, Demchishina visited a friend who lived opposite the prison on Belaia Street—and she watched with horror from the window of her friend’s apartment everything that went on. “There appeared before my eyes a most terrible scene. Two trucks specially loaded with people approached on the street. The Germans began to drive people off the trucks, five at a time. Once they were off the trucks, they were ordered to undress until naked and then climb down into a pit that had been prepared ahead of time. The people did not want to go, several cried and begged for mercy, but the Germans showed no mercy. Anyone who resisted or did not want to go [into the

pit] the Germans beat with rifle butts and shot them there [where they stood]. Those who climbed down into the pit were ordered to lie face down, and then the Germans shot them. The Germans shots some 60 people who had been brought in on those two trucks. After the shooting the Germans covered the pit with a bit of dirt and then they left.”⁶

The Liberman sisters likewise confirmed that “The following day [after the massacre] if they caught a Jew on the streets they shot him on the spot.”⁷

In the first days after her escape from the massacre at Sosenki, the dazed and terrified 18-year-old Leah Bodkier managed to make her way back to her family home in Rovno. There was an official Reich seal on the door, and her neighbors watched her suspiciously as she stood on her porch for some time wondering what to do. A passing German officer was eager to please the beautiful woman, and simply removed the seal for her so she could go inside. For the next several weeks, Leah traded most of the family furniture and other belongings for food. Eventually, she found safety in the home of a very religious Polish Catholic woman, Pani Ostapowiczowa, a wealthy widow who owned her own house. Leah also found support from a neighbor from before the war, Lidka Wysocka, a handsome ethnic Russian woman just a few years older than she was.

Soon after, Jurek Nowakowski began to visit Leah regularly, and they devised a plan to hide her “on the Aryan side” by getting her a false identity, and then marrying. Two friends, Lidka Wysocka and Kolka Trysiczow, a young radical whose sister Lena had grown quite wealthy as a wartime black marketeer, agreed to sign a false declaration together with Jurek: “We the undersigned declare that this person arrived as a refugee from Kutno, that her name is Krystyna Broniewska, daughter of Jozef, née Janicka, born July 3, 1922 in Kutno. All her documents were lost in a house fire.” This document was witnessed and sealed by a legal notary, and Leah had become a Polish girl. Next, Jurek Nowakowski persuaded a Polish Catholic priest to baptize her as Krystyna Broniewska. That priest referred them to a different Polish Catholic priest based in nearby Zytyn, where the couple was married on December 30, 1941.

Initially, Jurek’s mother was so upset by her son’s marriage to a Jew that she absolutely refused to allow the couple to live with her in central Rovno. That proved to be a fortuitous choice because it is doubtful the couple could have sustained the ruse in a town where Leah Bodkier had been so widely known. So the couple moved 12 kilometers south, to a room in an apartment in Zdolbuniv, and Jurek found work at the

Zentralhandelsgesellschaft Ost GmbH., which shipped food to and from the front. Jurek Nowakowski recalled: “My work in these institutions that dealt in the food trade was beneficial, since I could use my connections to get some extra staples for home. . . . Flour was an exchangeable commodity, and I would trade it. Thanks to my dealings we could get other products necessary to survival. . . . In this respect we survived quite nicely in this first period of the occupation, and we were able to help family and friends. It was worse with clothes and shoes, which we could not afford.”⁸ Krystyna gave birth to a son, Jerzy Nowakowski, on October 10, 1942.

Jurek Nowakowski left this description of their life living as fugitives in Zdolbuniv and Rovno:

Krystyna and I tried to live as normally as possible, and we did not abstain from having a social life, since doing so would arouse suspicion. So Krystyna would go to the seamstress who sewed a dress or tailored a coat. We went with little Jerzyk for walks to a nearby park or go to a friend’s place. From time to time I went drinking with friends. You could then find out a lot of news about the occupation. Daily work and chores meant it was possible to forget about the threatening dangers of everyday life. And a lot of it still existed. German police units, together with the Ukrainian police and Hungarian army patrols, did house inspections, audits, stopped people on the street, and rounded up young people for forced labor in Germany. The Ukrainian nationalists were dangerous too; they would cruelly kill the Polish population in the surrounding villages. The rumors and denunciations of our Polish neighbors were also dangerous, and we heard of other people being reported for hiding Jews.⁹

In short, they lived in constant fear of being discovered and denounced. “There were rumors that Jews in hiding were reported to the Germans, even on our own street.”¹⁰ The young family moved four times in the first year, each time avoiding the prying eyes of suspicious neighbors. Jurek added in his memoir: “In this writing I deliberately did not describe the street killings, executions, and gallows, which I would encounter regularly during the occupation. I didn’t tell Krystyna about many of these gruesome things during the occupation.”¹¹ “Krystyna had an Aryan look, especially when she wore a headscarf. She also had excellent [Polish] pronunciation, [with no detectable Jewish accent]. She maintained an air of self-confidence and assertiveness, arguing with the neighbors, which of course dispelled any suspicions. Many Polish anti-Semites trusted her enough to express their obsession about Jews. Nevertheless daily life was full of tension. There were frequent police checks in homes, and around the city Ukrainian nationalists killed Polish families.”¹²

Another problem was that by 1943 in Volhynia, it was not enough not to be Jewish, it had also become quite dangerous to be an ethnic Pole, as fanatical Ukrainian nationalism had led to growing attacks on ethnic Poles. Jurek's eldest sister Marysia was murdered in 1944 by Ukrainian nationalists—"Banderowcy"—when she went out to buy food for her co-workers.¹³ Zdolbuniv was liberated by the Soviet Red Army on February 3, 1944, and the family moved back to Rovno. The city was bombed regularly throughout the next few months, where 80 percent of Rovno was leveled by German bombs.

If anything, the hardship of this period was even harder than any they had experienced during the war. In June 1944, Jurek Nowakowski was called up for service in a guerrilla unit affiliated with Sydir Kovpak, a prominent Soviet partisan leader. He was released from military service in December 1944 after a serious injury to his right eye. In late June 1945, the entire Nowakowski family resettled to Poland in Bytom, Silesia.¹⁴

The formation & destruction of the Rovno ghetto

After November 9, 1941, about a quarter of Rovno's prewar Jews—some 7,500–8,000 people—remained alive in the town. Immediately after the Sosenki massacre, the apartments and property of all Jews were confiscated, and remaining Rovno Jews with valid work permits and up to three members of their immediate families were relocated into a newly established Jewish ghetto specially created in the northwestern section of Rovno, not far from the Gestapo prison at Belaia Street. Abraham Kirschner recalled:

The following day when I returned to work I found that I had lost my will either to work or to live after the loss of those closest to me. When the *Arbeitsleiter* [work leader] came and saw how we were all just standing around deep in thought, he said that a similar fate that befell our parents was awaiting us.

A few days later in Rovno they began to form a Jewish section. They crammed all the remaining (8,000) Jews into a few of the worst streets, and we then realized that even for us death was unavoidable. Since there was no place to escape, thoughts of suicide began to circulate among us. Some began to arm themselves with guns and grenades which had been left behind by the Soviets, and other began to build underground shelters.¹⁵



FIGURE 3.2 *Reichsminister Alfred Rosenberg enters Rovno on June 22, 1942 to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the war with the Soviets.*

Source: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Nusya Roth Collection, RG1871.

Convinced by then that it was just a matter of time before he too would be killed, soon after Kirschner escaped the Rovno ghetto and hid out for the rest of the war in Klevan.

In July 1942, most of the remaining population of Rovno Jews were sent some 70 kilometers north to Kostopil and Prokhurov, where they were killed in a series of smaller *Aktionen*.¹⁶ On July 13, 1942, Hermann Graebe, a German engineer of the firm Jung A.G based in nearby Zdolbuniv, witnessed the destruction of the Rovno ghetto firsthand:

On the evening of this day I drove to Rovno and posted myself with Fritz Einsporn in front of the house in the Bahnhofstrasse in which the Jewish workers of my firm slept. Shortly after 22.00 hours the Ghetto was encircled by a large S.S. detachment and about three times as many members of the Ukrainian Militia. Then the electric arclights which had been erected in and around the Ghetto were switched on. S.S. and Militia squads of 4–6 men entered or at least tried to enter the house. Where the doors and windows were closed and the inhabitants did not open at the knocking, the S.S. men and Militia broke the windows, forced the doors with beams and crowbars and entered the houses. The people living there were driven into the street just as they were, regardless of whether they were dressed or in bed. Since the Jews in most cases refused to leave their houses and resisted, the S.S. and Militia applied force. They finally succeeded, with strokes of the whip, kicks and blows with rifle butts in clearing the houses. The people

were driven out of their houses in such haste that in several instances, small children in bed had been left behind. In the streets women cried out for their children and children for their parents. That did not prevent the S.S. from driving the people along the road, at running pace, and hitting them, until they reached a waiting freight train. Car after car was filled, and the screaming of women and children, and the cracking of whips and rifle shots resounded unceasingly.

Since several families or groups had barricaded themselves in especially strong buildings and the doors could not be forced with crowbars or beams, these houses were now blown open with hand grenades. Since the Ghetto was near the railroad tracks in Rovno, the younger people tried to get across the tracks and over a small river, to get away from the Ghetto area. As this stretch of country was beyond the range of the electric lights, it was illuminated by signal rockets. All through the night these beaten, hounded and wounded people moved along the lighted streets. Women carried their dead children in their arms, children pulled and dragged their dead parents by their arms and legs down the road toward the train. Again and again the cries "Open the door!" "Open the door!" echoed through the Ghetto.

About 6 o'clock in the morning I went away for a moment, leaving behind Einsporn and several other German workers who had returned in the meantime. I thought the greatest danger was past and that I could risk it. Shortly after I left, Ukrainian Militia men forced their way into 5 Bahnhofstrasse and brought seven Jews out and took them to a collecting point inside the Ghetto. On my return I was able to prevent further Jews from being taken out. I went to the collecting point to save these seven men. I saw dozens of corpses of all ages and both sexes in the streets I had to walk along. The doors of the houses stood open, windows were smashed. Pieces of clothing, shoes, stockings, jackets, caps, hats, coats, etc., were lying in the street. At the corner of a house lay a baby, less than a year old, with his skull crushed. Blood and brains were spattered over the house wall and covered the area immediately around the child. The child was dressed only in a little shirt. The commander, S.S. Major Putz, was walking up and down a row of about 80–100 male Jews who were crouching on the ground. He had a heavy dog whip in his hand. I walked up to him, showed him the written permit of *Stabsleiter* [Chief of Staff] Beck, and demanded the seven men whom I recognized among those who were crouching on the ground. Dr. Putz was furious about Beck's concession and nothing could persuade him to release the seven men. He made a motion with his hand encircling the square and said that anyone who was once here would not get away. Although he was very angry with Beck, he ordered me to take the people from 5 Bahnhofstrasse out of Rovno by 8 o'clock at the latest. When I left

Dr. Putz, I noticed a Ukrainian farm cart with two horses. Dead people with stiff limbs were lying on the cart. Legs and arms projected over the side boards. The cart was making for the freight train. I took the remaining 74 Jews who had been locked in the house to Zdolbuniv.

Several days after 13th July, 1942, the Area Commissioner of Zdolbuniv, Georg Marschall, called a meeting of all firm managers, railroad superintendents, and leaders of the Organisation Todt and informed them that the firms etc. should prepare themselves for the “resettlement” of the Jews which was to take place almost immediately. He referred to the pogrom in Rovno where all the Jews had been liquidated, i.e., had been shot near Kostopil.¹⁷

During that first night that launched the final liquidation of the Rovno ghetto, Barbara Barac and her daughter had managed to escape to hide at the apartment of a family friend, Yakov Sukhenko. Barac recalled with particular disgust that even as they were lamenting the brutal annihilation of the remaining Jews, Sukhenko’s German neighbor was hosting a celebratory party: “At the same time [as we could hear the screams of Jews], in the apartment of the German woman, they were celebrating and I could hear the music and dancing.”¹⁸

The Rovno ghetto was liquidated in a final *Aktion* in August 1942. “At 11 at night the Ukrainian police and the German army personnel surrounded the ghetto and took all the Jews by foot and loaded them onto train wagons, leading them away in an unknown direction. A small group of Jews ran away to other towns on Aryan documents, some others to other ghettos.”¹⁹ The sealed train was headed to nearby killing sites, or to other ghettos that would be liquidated in subsequent operations.

Investigators for the Extraordinary State Commission followed the Rovno Jews to their final days, chronicling their subsequent liquidation in August and September 1942. On August 25, 1942, German units and Ukrainian militia annihilated nearly 3,000 Jews in Berezne.²⁰ After the massacre, a special unit of eight German policemen and several local members of the Ukrainian militia appealed to the local community to assist in rounding up the Jews that remained: “Whoever wants to receive a kilo of salt and a half kilo of sugar should betray Jews.”²¹

On September 25, 1942, in Aleksandriia village, near Rovno, several Ukrainian locals witnessed as two truckloads of Soviet POWs were brought in to dig a large pit roughly 500 meters past the railway bridge, at a place known locally as Priest’s field.²² That night, Ukrainian militia arrived from nearby towns and villages: from Tuchyn, Klevan, and

Kostopil.²³ The village was then surrounded with armed soldiers and militiamen. That night, fearing that they were about to be executed, numerous Jews tried to escape—but most were shot by the militia that had cordoned off the area. On the next day, 43-year-old Ukrainian carpenter Ivan Morozyk came out to watch the *Aktion* to murder the Jews.

On the next day, they assembled all the Jews on the square and began to seize valuable items: rings, watches, bracelets. At that moment I tried to leave to go dig potatoes, but I had no shovel, so they detained me and drove me out with everyone else. They drove everyone to Sviatskii Forest, at Priest's field. Everyone who had shovels, and I among them, was ordered into the bushes. When we moved into the bushes, they posted guards between us and the pit. And then the Germans seized all the women and forced them to undress completely. One Jewish woman, Chekhman, screamed wildly, begging them to allow her to bid farewell to her husband, so that a German hit her very hard.

When all the women had undressed, they were led into the pit, and we who were standing by could hear screams of women and children and shots from tommy guns. Then the men began to undress. Three young Jewish boys went around collecting everything they had in their pockets, and all the men were led into the same pit.

Then the German ordered us to bury [the dead], and we had just started to leave when twenty more Jews were led in, and we were ordered to leave. When [the last Jews] began to undress, I ran off though the woods into a ravine, which I followed to my nephew's, who lived near the site.²⁴

Fifty-three-year-old Ukrainian widow Agaf'ia Koval'chuk added that "After the mass shooting, [the Ukrainian militia] again began to conduct a search through the apartments [of the Jewish ghetto], followed by raids in the forest, looking for Jews. They succeeded in detaining nearly 100 people, who were led to the Goryn' River, and shot there."²⁵ Koval'chuk identified specific local Ukrainian militiamen who were involved in the massacre: police chief Pavel Gavryliuk, and his deputies Aleksandr Onyshchuk and Pavel Semeniuk, along with Aleksandr Ostapovych, Yuri Morkup, and many others.²⁶ Onyshchuk was identified as especially sadistic. Koval'chuk testified that she watched as he grabbed one old Jew, and demanded, "Give me your gold!" When the Jew had no gold to give, Onyshchuk grabbed the Jew by the beard and ripped it from his face along with the skin beneath it, after which he carved a cross into the Jew's forehead.²⁷ In October, in village Staromyl'sk, near Zdolbuniv, 1,700 Jews were shot in a nearby ravine.²⁸

From this date forward, Rovno and the surrounding vicinity were officially *Judenrein*, “cleansed of Jews.” The liquidation of other ghettos throughout Reichskommissariat Ukraine would continue for another seven months, so that by the end of April 1943, most of Ukraine was likewise officially “cleansed of Jews.”

Jewish ghosts “Hovering in the World of the Twilight”

In Isaac Bashevis Singer’s story, “A Wedding in Brownsville,” Dr. Solomon Margolin is visited by the ghost of his one great love, Raizel, who had been shot with the rest of her family by the Nazis back in Poland. Shocked, wrote Bashevis Singer, “Apparently Raizel didn’t realize her own condition. He had heard of such a state—what was it called? Hovering in the World of the Twilight. The Astral Body wandering in semi-consciousness, detached from the flesh, without being able to reach its destination, clinging to the illusions and vanities of the past.”²⁹ Margolin the survivor was plagued by guilt. “All of us are really dead, if you want to call it that. We were exterminated, wiped out. Even the survivors carry death in their hearts.” “He suffered from hypochondria and the fear of death haunted even his dreams.” And yet, somehow, he managed to find peace clinging to the ghost of his lost love.

The tragic fate of Rovno’s Jews haunted and still haunts the few survivors and their descendants. Like so many other Rovno Jews, Meir Auksmen was saved from the Rovno Holocaust only because he had been arrested in 1940, and therefore he spent the war in a Soviet prison camp in Siberia. Retreating with Soviet forces in June 1941, he was subsequently arrested and imprisoned for his Zionism. Auksmen had heard rumors throughout the war that all of Rovno’s Jews were gone. In rare prison camp meetings with people from Rovno, “We often cried about the fate of our brothers and poured out our hearts, wishing for revenge.” First and foremost, Meir Auksmen thirsted for retribution. He returned home soon after the war had ended. “All along the way were scattered about signs of destruction and desecration. I arrived at the Rovno railway station and before me I saw a city that looked as if it had been struck by an earthquake. Whole neighborhoods had been erased and only remnants of foundations of houses and islands of rubble bore witness to the destruction. Walking around on the streets and among passersby I did not see any Jews.”³⁰

Meir Rozenboym hid in Rovno during the German occupation with his family in the apartment of a friendly ethnic Czech. After he was

denounced to a Ukrainian policeman by an ethnic Ukrainian acquaintance, he escaped arrest and hid for more than one and a half years by living in a hidden dugout under a haystack in a nearby Czech village.³¹

Unlike most Jews, Krystyna Nowakowska never changed her name back to Leah Bodkier, her Jewish name before the war. Perhaps in her heart she died with her family on that cold November day in 1941, only to be reborn a Pole, Krystyna Nowakowska, in the days to follow. Perhaps it was because she and Jurek gave birth to their son, Jerzyk, on October 10, 1942, in Zdolbuniv, and fearing anti-Semitism in Poland after the war she preferred instead to conceal their Jewish heritage. Krystyna Nowakowska appears often in the Nowakowski family photo albums. There are several prewar photographs, but every portrait of Leah Bodkier has been relabeled “Krystyna Nowakowska,” written in her own hand.

In 1960, Krystyna Nowakowska returned for a visit to her Bodkier family home in Rovno. She managed to tour the house where they had lived. And she had conversations with many of their non-Jewish neighbors from before the war, as well as with the few remaining Jews who still lived there. As she walked through their apartments to capture old memories, Krystyna Nowakowska found Bodkier family furniture that had been plundered from her family’s home back in 1941.³² The unexpected discovery of artifacts of her buried past devastated her.

Jurek and Krystyna Nowakowska divorced in 1956. Krystyna eventually emigrated to Switzerland, where she worked as a librarian in Zurich. Her son Jerzy wrote: “She did use her wartime name Krystyna, I think in part to continue to protect me. I think some of her wartime fears never left her. Still, as she got older, she returned more often to her Jewish roots. She joined a congregation and chose the Jewish cemetery in Zurich where she is buried. Her tombstone carries her Jewish and Polish names, as well as the names of her parents and sister.”³³

Jewish ghosts & haunted spaces

“The day is for the living, the night is for the dead.”

—*Old Polish Saying*

All sites of violence resonate with special meaning to subsequent generations. In the case of Rovno, soon after the war concerted efforts were made to “forget” that some 23,500 victims of the massacre lay buried on

the outskirts of one of Ukraine's premiere cities, just a few hundred feet from the main highway to Kiev. Early post-war monuments fell victim to neglect, and most were broken in random acts of anti-Semitic iconoclasm. Through the next 46 years of Soviet power, the site was officially forgotten, as the woods and thickets grew wild over the graves. Projects were begun and then abandoned.

Astrophysicists dedicate their lives to the study of the unseen. No one has ever seen the edge of the universe, but astrophysicists can calculate its existence. No one has ever seen a black hole, but astrophysicists can infer its existence from its impact on surrounding stars.

In the same way, contemporary Ukraine is a land marked by its contested history, a place where many either deny the Holocaust or minimize its significance as a relevant part of Ukrainian history. "Holocaust," in Ukraine, is a word used to refer more often than not to the *Holodomor*—the famine of 1932–1933, which many Ukrainians believe to have been a direct result of Stalin's "genocidal" policies against Ukrainians. Memory of the fate of Ukraine's Jews during the war has largely been buried with the Jewish dead.

And yet, against the backdrop of Ukrainian myopias about the Ukrainian past there is the physical reality of artifacts that refuse to stay buried. R. Clifton Spargo has noted how "the natural world incorporates the violence it has beheld and quite literally upheld, as if the forest itself remembered the atrocities committed here."³⁴ During the first 20 years of post-Soviet Ukrainian history, the discovery of mass graves has become commonplace, and Ukrainian forensic science has been deeply divided between nationalist interpretations that generally attributed these newly discovered graves to Soviet atrocities rather than to Nazi brutality.

The cultural impact of all these dead buried so near to Ukrainian towns, cities and villages has not been subjected to close study. And yet despite the widespread presence of mass hidden graves in close proximity to nearby populations, the living go about their lives seemingly unaware of the presence of artifacts in their vicinity that profoundly challenge many of their own presumptions about the Ukrainian past. The Soviet leadership systematically destroyed or prevented the memorialization of Jewish dead, often making an active effort to pave over zones resonant of Jewish suffering, or a Ukrainian Jewish past.³⁵ Only in 2013, for instance, did the administration of the city of Lviv formally decide to stop using Jewish gravestones in public road paving projects.³⁶ So much destruction, but destruction with a purpose: to destroy artifacts and the memories they brought with them.

In Bibrka, 27 kilometers south of L'viv, the Soviet military bulldozed the desecrated local Jewish cemetery and built a barracks over it. In L'viv, a daycare center was built on the sands of what was the killing pit at *Janowska lager*, where there lie beneath the sand the bones of tens of thousands of Jewish victims. When the area was surveyed by the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission in 1945, Soviet engineers found a fetid pond of human fluids several meters deep that had percolated to the surface above the sands. "In the summer heat, corpses lying near the surface quickly decomposed, exuding a smell so oppressive that it was impossible to get near the graves."³⁷ The Great Synagogue of Rovno that had been transformed during the war into a sorting area for confiscated Jewish property is now the fashionable "Olympia" fitness and shopping center. The staging area at Grabnik Square near Pokrovskii Cathedral is now a blight of urban neglect. No stone or plaque marks the existence of the Jewish ghetto in Rovno's northwest Wola District. The one exception to forgotten memories of Rovno's Jewish past is Sosenki, where in 1991 international Jewish organizations built a memorial on the site. Now, however, the area is overgrown with weeds and marked by neglect, a frequent target of anti-Semitic arson and grave robbery. In contrast, there is a beautiful and well-maintained memorial at the site of the Gestapo Prison on Belaia Street, but it is dedicated to the "52,000 men and women who died here," with no mention of the fact that so many of these victims were Jews. Neglected heritage.

Forgotten history: Rovno's Jewish places today

There have been all these efforts to erase the past, and yet the bones of Jewish Rovno refuse to stay buried, the bodies refuse to stay hidden, as if the artifacts themselves have found ways to remind the living of the unpalatable and horrific truths about the inglorious Ukrainian past.

In a folklore rich with demons, golems and dybbuks, Jewish folklore has produced surprisingly little on the theme of Jewish ghosts of the Holocaust.³⁸ And yet in and around Rovno, one of the most persistent urban legends still widespread today is that of Jewish ghosts, of Holocaust victims who haunt the town to this day. Many believe that Soviet efforts to pave over the area in Sosenki Forest where 23,500 Jewish men, women and children lay buried were stymied directly by supernatural intervention: Jewish ghosts refused to allow the site to be forgotten. And there



FIGURE 3.3 *Rovno's Great Synagogue is now the site of a fashionable fitness and shopping center.*



FIGURE 3.4 *Grabnik Square, adjacent to Pokrovskii Cathedral, is now a decrepit and rundown urban blight.*



FIGURE 3.5 *The Jewish Memorial at Sosenki constructed by Israeli and international Jewish donations in 1991 has now fallen into neglect and disrepair, overgrown with weeds, and the frequent target of anti-Semitic arson and grave robberies.*



FIGURE 3.6 *In contrast, the Ukrainian monument at the site of the Gestapo Prison and mass grave on Belaia Street is well maintained. The granite cross that marks the site remembers the “52,000 men and women” who died there, failing to mention that many were Jews.*

Source: Photographs of Jared McBride, Rovno, August 2007.

are today numerous accounts of Jewish ghosts appearing along the 4 kilometer route from Pokrovskii Cathedral at Grabnik Square to the mass graves at Sosenki Forest.

Throughout Germany, Poland and Ukraine, where millions of Jews died violently, there is a rich and vast culture of Jewish ghosts who continue to this day to haunt the lands of their murderers. As Polish folklorist Alina Cała has written, according to the Polish popular imagination, “Supernatural powers protected Jewish sacred places: synagogues, cemeteries, and even the sites where they had once been located.”³⁹ Beneath the surface of these urban legends grounded in supernatural agency lie profound insights into post-war popular culture. According to the sociologist, Avery F. Gordon:

The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. . . . Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.⁴⁰

Hauntings are by definition projections of an unsettled past. Among the most notorious sites of Jewish ghosts in modern Poland is Muranów, the district inside Warsaw which became the Jewish ghetto, and which was totally decimated after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of April 1943. This sacred site was eulogized by the immortal words of Jewish survivor Julian Tuwim, “We, Polish Jews,” in 1944:

We, Polish Jews. . . . [But] perhaps I should not say “We, Polish Jews,” but “We, ghosts, We, shadows of our slaughtered brethren, the Polish Jews.” . . . We, Polish Jews. . . . We, ever living, who have perished in the ghettos and camps, and we ghosts who, from across seas and oceans, will someday return to the homeland and haunt the ruins in our unscarred bodies and our wretched, presumably spared souls. . . . We, once more in the catacombs, in the manholes under Warsaw pavements, splashing in the stink of sewers to the surprise of our companions—the rats.⁴¹

Following the lead of Henri Lefebvre, historian Audrey Mallet has labeled the Warsaw ghetto region now known as the Muranów District of Warsaw an *espace vécu*—a space that is both imagined and alive.⁴² She has found numerous episodes of hauntings in Muranów: “According to local lore, Jewish ghosts have been haunting Muranów since the end of the war.”⁴³ Among these haunted places is the skyscraper located opposite

the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Built on the site of the former Great Synagogue, the new building's ghost is a rabbi who has allegedly haunted the site regularly since construction began in 1976. "It took the builders fifteen years to finish the tower, and local superstition holds that the delay was due to a curse put by the former rabbi of the Synagogue."⁴⁴ Mallet found that nearly everyone she met in the Muranów could offer a chilling ghost story about the district: nightmares of Jewish ghosts shaking or strangling them in their beds, blood-curdling screams, disembodied voices.⁴⁵ Alleged sightings of angry Jewish ghosts are common to this day throughout Poland on high holidays like, *Dzień Wszystkich Świętych*, November 1st, the Catholic Holy Day of Remembrance of Lost Souls (All Saints' Day).

Wrocław is generally considered to be Poland's spookiest city. As a British journalist recounted, "When the Red Army laid siege to Wrocław in 1945, the Nazi high command turned the city into a fortress, using the Gothic torture chambers under Partisan Hill as their headquarters. Screams are said to haunt the corridors."⁴⁶ In 2009, a popular night club had been opened at the site, now known ironically as *Prowokacja*, a place "where the living meet the dead." Ghosts of the dead victims of Soviet or German violence haunt the catacombs and streets of Odessa, a dormitory at Khar'kiv University, . . . nearly everywhere that Jews once lived, and died violently during and after World War II. In Łódź, locals have reported hearing the moans of Jewish slave workers killed by Nazis in the last house on Popioły Street.⁴⁷ In Goraj village in southeastern Poland, near Lublin, locals have repeatedly reported seeing a lion in the Jewish cemetery there, which they consider to be a Jewish ghost who protects the Jewish graves. At the site where Jews were rounded up and deported in autumn 1939, locals have regularly reported seeing Jewish ghosts smoking their long pipes as they walk on a small street adjacent to the place where now stands the Chapel of St. John of Nepomuk (near the Municipal Cultural Center).⁴⁸

Not far from Goraj, Izbica, Poland, located some 250 kilometers west of Rovno, became during the war a transit ghetto for Jews sent to extermination camps in Belżec and Sobibor. As a result, Jews represented 93 percent of the local population in 1942. A journalist, Małgorzata Maćkowiak, has described the town in vivid colors: "For decades Izbica has been a place where the echoes of wartime nightmares mingled with the supernatural presence of the past." The most haunted place in Izbica is a house, now abandoned, that was built on the site of a mass grave of Jewish

dead. “In the house you can hear the sounds of screaming children, and of running feet on the stairs.” Witnesses have confirmed seeing “the walls of the house flowing with blood, and at night we could hear the children crying. Sometimes you can hear the sound of a pounding fist on the glass.”⁴⁹

What is the meaning of all these legends of Jewish ghosts in southeastern Poland and western Ukraine? Avery Gordon put it best: “[E]ndings that are not over is what haunting is about.”⁵⁰ There has been no closure on Ukraine’s Jewish Holocaust past. In her insightful essay on “Poland’s Jewish Ghosts,” Ruth Wisse compared the loss of Jews to a lost limb in Polish culture and history: “Some Poles today acknowledge the Jews as their phantom limb, that amputated part of the body that leaves an irritating illusion of its presence. The Jews, however, are no longer there.”⁵¹ Jonathan Schorsch underlined the singular importance of this obsession with Jewish demons, with Holocaust victims who refuse to stay buried: “Around the black hole of collective trauma, whose power warps the very laws of nature, the line between illusion and reality, between presence and absence, blurs beyond recognition. Ghostly haunting, that is, involves precisely ‘that special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present.’”⁵²

The weight of history: “even the survivors carry death in their hearts”

“I don’t sleep at night, I cannot sleep at night. I am constantly being haunted.”

—*Shimon Srebnik, veteran of Łódź Ghetto*⁵³

Ghost stories have haunted generations of non-Jews in Ukraine, creating haunted places that remain sacred and even scary for most Ukrainians. But more real ghosts—the weight of the unredeemed and horrific past—have haunted Jews as well.

Hauntings have come in different forms. After the Soviet liberation of Rovno in 1944, survivor Eduard Rozenberg learned that a Ukrainian member of the German SD, Zubkov, had been responsible for submitting a denunciation against him, his wife, and his family—all arrested, then shot at Sosenki Forest. Rozenberg learned that Zubkov and his family had fled with the German SD to Lublin. “I was especially interested in this, to track him [Zubkov] down and avenge myself for the deaths of my

wife and family, all shot following his denunciation.”⁵⁴ A similar thirst for vengeance haunted other Jewish survivors for decades.⁵⁵ Libel’ Halperin, that boy who crawled from the dead in the pits at Sosenki, joined a partisan band in 1942, seeking to hurt those who had hurt him and his family: “I waged war and avenged [these sufferings], but my heart is still not calmed.”⁵⁶ When we read stories like these from Rovno, we find ourselves naturally crying out for justice. But where can we find justice after such unspeakable, such unimaginable suffering? Lawrence Langer raised this issue with particular poignance:

Let me begin with a concrete detail, because I am convinced that all efforts to enter the dismal universe of the Holocaust must start with an unbuffered collision with its starkest crimes. Recently I was watching the testimony of a survivor of the Kovno ghetto. He spoke of the so-called *Kinderaktion*, when the Germans rounded up all the children (and many elderly) and took them to the nearby Ninth Fort for execution. The witness was present in the room when an SS man entered and demanded from a mother the one-year-old infant she was holding in her arms. She refused to surrender it, so he seized the baby by its ankles and tore the body in two before the mother’s eyes.

Whenever I hear stories like these, which unfortunately are not exceptional but illustrative of hundreds of similar incidents, I react with the same frozen disbelief, partly because of the intrinsic horror of the episode but also because it violates my sense of how life should and might be lived. I try to imagine the response of those in attendance—the mother, the witness, and the killer—but even more, I ask myself what we can do with such information, how we can inscribe it in the historical or artistic narratives that later will try to reduce to some semblance of order or pattern the spontaneous defilement implicit in such deeds? Where shall we record it in the scroll of human discourse? How can we enroll such atrocities in the human community and identify them as universal tendencies toward evil inherent in all humankind?

Well, we can’t: we require a scroll of inhuman discourse to contain them; we need a definition of the inhuman community to coexist with its more sociable partner, and in their absence, we turn by default to more traditional forms of expression. The results may be comforting, but what price must we pay for such ease? The alternative is to begin by accepting a reality that escapes the bounds of any philosophy or system of belief that we have cherished since our beginnings, and to pursue the implications of this unhappy admission wherever they may lead.⁵⁷

All of us are haunted by the very irreconcilability of the horrors of the Holocaust with our own sense of the intrinsic value of life.

In this way, hauntings among Jews and non-Jews alike has not depended on direct experience of the Rovno Holocaust, but the Holocaust survivor experience has metamorphosed into a larger experience shared by non-survivors as well. Israeli writer Amos Oz dedicated his memoir, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, to his mother Fania Klausner, who committed suicide at age 38 in January 1952, when her son was just 12. Fania Klausner's father had owned a mill in Rovno before the war, but the whole family had managed to emigrate to Israel in 1934. Even though she and her family had escaped first-hand experience of the worst horrors of the war, Fania was forever after haunted by imagined memories of that awful slaughter of nearly 24,000 Jews in Sosenki Forest "among boughs, birds, mushrooms, currants, and berries." She could not escape the agonized cries of loved ones lost during the war. Amos Oz recalled:

Among the immediate reasons for my mother's decline was the weight of history, the personal insult, the traumas, and the fears for the future. My mother had premonitions all the time, probably because of the trauma of the Holocaust. She might have sensed that what happened to the Jews in her home town would sooner or later happen here [in Israel], that there would be a total massacre. This is not something she would share with a little boy, except perhaps obliquely, through some of the stories and fairy tales she told, the books she read, a hair-raising Schopenhauerian world view.

By the end of 1951, Fania's depression had grown quite serious. She died in despair, wandering the streets of Tel Aviv in a terrible rain storm, eventually taking her own life with an overdose of tranquilizers to permanently silence the screams of Rovno's ghosts.⁵⁸

Hauntings pass from the living and the dead to their descendants as well. Psychologists have observed the multigenerational contexts of hauntings and their impact on the offspring of Holocaust survivors. The burden of the past on the living was best described by Philadelphia journalist David Lee Preston, the son of Holocaust survivors on both sides. His mother was a teenage girl from Turka who survived the war in the sewers of Lemberg. A survivor of Auschwitz and Birkenau, his father was a Rovno Jew who had won a scholarship to study chemical engineering in France. Preston wrote lyrically of the tragic ways in which his parents' Holocaust experiences continued to haunt his own daily life:

I cannot divorce myself from the Holocaust. When I attend an orchestra concert, I see the semicircle of Jewish musicians forced to play at Belzec where my grandparents and 600,000 other Jews were slaughtered. On the train, I become my father with the other dead and living corpses on the boxcar to Auschwitz. In the shower at the gym, I am with my grandparents in the “shower” where they were gassed. When the mailman comes, he is the mailman who waited outside the house in Turka until they came for my mother’s family, then he went inside and helped himself to contents. Walking in the woods, I am with my father’s parents and the other Jews of Rovno, herded to the forest and told to dig ditches before being machine-gunned into them.⁵⁹

For some, the Holocaust imagination supersedes, frames, and defines the immediacy of real life. Menachem Z. Rosensaft put the burdens of remembering this way: “Many if not most children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors live with ghosts. We are haunted much in the same way a cemetery is haunted. We bear within us the shadows and the echoes of an anguished dying we never experienced or witnessed.” Rosensaft’s own personal ghost is that of a brother whom he never met, Benjamin, who was killed at Auschwitz on the night of August 3–4, 1943: “Since my mother’s death in 1997, he has existed inside of me. I see his face in my mind, try to imagine his voice, his fear as the gas chamber doors slammed shut, his final tears. If I were to forget him, he would disappear. . . . We who are haunted by the past must now pass on our legacy of ghosts.”⁶⁰

Perpetrators were also haunted by Jewish ghosts. For instance, in February 1942 SS General Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski returned to Berlin from the Eastern Front suffering from severe intestinal ailments. The chief of the SS medical staff reported to Himmler that von dem Bach-Zelewski was “suffering from hallucinations connected with the shootings of Jews which he himself carried out.”⁶¹ In another case, Waffen SS General Karl Wolff was the Supreme Commander of German military forces in Italy in 1945, and a former Chief of Staff of Heinrich Himmler. “In early 1946,” according to historian Richard Breitman, “Wolff was diagnosed as paranoid and was confined in a mental institution: he thought he was pursued by Jewish demons.”⁶² Wolff was so overcome by delusions of Jewish ghosts seeking revenge for his crimes that he was incarcerated in an asylum in February 1947.⁶³

And yet, while some are haunted by these tragedies of the past, others have found macabre opportunities buried with the bones of the Jewish dead.

Grave robbers and desecrations

Poet Andrei Voznesenskiĭ's haunting words in "The Ditch: A Spiritual Process" brought the first international attention to the macabre ritual of grave robbing from sites of mass killings of Jews from World War II:

Emaciated, like a poker,
Hamlet took skulls
And pulled out a row of crowns.
A person is different from a worm.
Worms do not eat gold.
Whither do you lead, ditch?
Not to flowers, nor to orphans.
This is a cemetery of souls—genocide.⁶⁴

The monument placed on the massacre site at Sosenki in 1945 was evidently removed or destroyed under the Soviets. Abraham Kirschner recalled:

Now after the end of the war we got a Jewish committee together of previous inhabitants of Rovno numbering twelve people. We found that spot, unburied each ditch, and then we poured dirt on top of each grave, and we fenced off the spot. We did this a few times, but every time our work was destroyed by *Banderowcy* [—Ukrainian nationalist partisans, followers of Stepan Bandera]. They ripped out the posts, tore down the barbed wire. They destroyed the hand-made signs that dedicated the place to the [Jewish] victims.

In the spring of 1944 a group of people gathered from all around Rovno, and Rabbi Steinberg said the *Kaddish* and spoke to the memory of the victims of Hitler's atrocities.⁶⁵

Władisław Siemaszko added that the Rovno survivors had to rebuild the monument "several times since each time they did it, the landmarks were destroyed and the commemorative plates were profaned with insulting inscriptions."⁶⁶ A new monument was placed at the site to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the German invasion in June 1991.⁶⁷ And since then, that site too has become a magnet for grave robbers and desecrators.

Rovno newspapers over the last 20 years of Ukrainian independence are filled with regular reports of "*chorni arkeology*"—of "black archaeologists," grave robbers who pick through the bones of Jewish dead at the mass graves at Sosenki searching for Jewish gold, diamonds and

other precious objects.⁶⁸ Popular belief throughout southeastern Poland and western Ukraine promises that great wealth can be found in Jewish graves. Polish folklorist Alina Cała has chronicled this “mad search for hidden treasure in the ruins of synagogues, houses, in abandoned cemeteries, and even in the extermination camps.”⁶⁹ “People from Belżec [extermination camp] grew rich because they dug up golden chains and teeth from corpses.”⁷⁰ And yet there is the tragic irony of all this search for Jewish gold in Ukraine today, where mainstream culture denies the very presence of those Jewish bodies even as wily opportunists regularly defile the sacred bones of the Jewish dead for their own profit.

Noted Polish literary scholar at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Kazimierz Wyka, put it best: “A golden tooth ripped from a corpse will always be bleeding, even if no one knew where it came from.”⁷¹

* * *

In 1946, a Holocaust survivor from Stryj, Ukraine, Moses Moskowitz, challenged the German people either to confront their crimes against the Jews, or forever to be haunted by Jewish ghosts who would refuse to be forgotten:

The Jews now in Germany, both native and foreign, are the *corpus delecti*, the accusers who haunt the Germans and will continue to haunt them until the thousands or millions of individual Germans who had a personal part in the extermination of the Jews are brought to justice. . . . As long as the Germans lack the moral courage to accept the consequences of the Nazi crimes against the Jews, they will seek to banish the accuser and they will denounce him as a disturber of their peace.⁷²

This statement can be adapted to our context: *As long as the Ukrainian people lack the moral courage to accept the consequences of Ukrainian nationalist crimes against the Jews, they will seek to banish the accuser and they will denounce him as a disturber of their peace.* Among European nations, Ukraine today stands alone as a country and culture that has more than any other failed to confront their own crimes against Jews. And therefore Ukrainians today remain haunted by the ghosts of the Jewish dead who refuse to stay buried.⁷³

Historian Omer Bartov recently explored the many ways Ukrainians have endeavored to erase Jewish culture from Ukrainian national memory:

The ghosts of the past still roam freely in the hills and valleys, clutter the unpaved streets, and congregate in synagogues transformed into garbage dumps and in cemeteries grazed by goats. And the inhabitants walk among the ruins and the ghosts, awakened to their presence only when asked by a stranger and forgetting them just as soon as he leaves. It is a region suspended in time...⁷⁴

It is time for Ukraine and the Ukrainians to confront their embattled past, and to let the bones of the Jewish dead rest in peace.

Notes

- 1 Abraham Lydovski, "Here Is Buried Jewish Rovno," translated from Yiddish by Naomi Gal, in *Rowne; sefer zikaron*, 560–563.
- 2 Testimony of Abraham Kirschner. ŽIH 301/1190, pp. 7–8.
- 3 Testimony of Abraham Kirschner. ŽIH 301/1190, pp. 8–9. Barbara Barac and her daughter likewise recalled the transport of clothing of the Jewish dead to the Great Synagogue. Barac, *Escape from Destiny*, 20.
- 4 Engineer Moshe Gildenman, "The Attitude of the Non-Jewish Population Toward the Jews," translated from Yiddish by Naomi Gal, in *Rowne; sefer zikaron*, 518. Gildenman added that ethnic Belorussians were just as bad as the Ukrainians, but that ethnic Poles—who had also been attacked by the Germans and Ukrainians—were "civil" towards Jews in Rovno in 1941. Ethnic Czechs, Gildenman recalled, were also very supportive of the Jews. On the political economy of genocide, see Ad van Liempt, *Hitler's Bounty Hunters: The Betrayal of the Jews* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005); Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006): 110–117, where the author has provided us with a complete translated copy of the original report: "Report A on the Conditions in Ukraine Based on an Examination by the 'German Service Post,' Ukraine, of the Private Correspondence between the Reich and Ukraine of German Companies Deployed to the Reich Commission and Their Employees," based on the German Postal Censor's analysis of thousands of letters from Germans assigned to serve or work in Ukraine.
- 5 Bluma Doitch (Guz), "Notes of the Bloody Affair," translated from Yiddish by Naomi Gal, in *Rowne; sefer zikaron*, 529–540.
- 6 DARO, f. R-30, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 90–91.

- 7 Testimony of Adela and Inda Liberman, *ŽIH* 301/872, pp. 7–8.
- 8 Nowakowski, “Family Memoirs,” 9, 12–15.
- 9 Nowakowski, “Family Memoirs,” 15.
- 10 Nowakowski, “Family Memoirs,” 9.
- 11 Nowakowski, “Family Memoirs,” 16.
- 12 Nowakowski, “Family Memoirs,” 9.
- 13 Nowakowski, “Family Memoirs,” 3, 15. On Ukrainian nationalist ethnic cleansing in Volhynia from 1943, see Timothy Snyder, “The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing 1943,” *Past & Present* No. 179 (May 2003): 197–234.
- 14 Nowakowski, “Family Memoirs,” 10–11. Under the terms of Stalin’s decree of November 9, 1944, all ethnic Poles were required to leave Ukraine, while ethnic Ukrainians were deported from Poland to Ukraine. According to their documents in the Extraordinary State Commission files in Rovno, Jurek and Krystyna Nowakowski left Ukraine on May, 5, 1945. DARO, f. R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 87.
- 15 Testimony of Abraham Kirschner. *ŽIH* 301/1190, pp. 9–10.
- 16 Browning, *Origins of the Final Solution*, 293.
- 17 Place names have been edited for clarity. Hermann Graebe, *The Trial of German Major War Criminals Sitting at Nuremberg, Germany, December 17, 1945 to January 4, 1946*. Twenty-Fifth Day: Wednesday, January 2, 1946, Part 1, 201–202. On Graebe’s courageous efforts to save Jews, see Douglas K. Huneke, *The Moses of Rovno: The Stirring Story of Fritz Graebe, a German Christian Who Risked His Life to Lead Hundreds to Safety During the Holocaust* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1985).
- 18 Barac, *Escape from Destiny*, 35.
- 19 Testimony of Adela and Inda Liberman, *ŽIH* 301/872, p. 3.
- 20 DARO, R-30, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 19–27.
- 21 Testimony of 46-year-old Jewess Briukha Sapozhnik, DARO, R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 22.
- 22 DARO, R-30, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 10–11, 13, 14–15.
- 23 DARO, R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 15.
- 24 DARO, R-30, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 10–11. 60-year-old Ukrainian peasant, Emel’ian Grytsiuk, was also in the group of locals who were required to bury the dead. Grytsiuk confirmed the details presented by Morozyk. ll. 12–13. Morozyk’s niece, Elena Morozyk, who lived some 200 meters from the killing site, likewise confirmed key details. l. 13.
- 25 DARO, R-30, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 14–15.
- 26 DARO, R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 14.
- 27 DARO, R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 15.
- 28 Testimony of local farm president, 51-year-old ethnic Ukrainian Kondrat Dmytruk, DARO, R-30, op. 2, d. 83, l. 42. This testimony is supported

- by numerous locals in Zdolbuniv and village Staromył'sk, where the ravine site for the mass killing operation was located. See especially the testimony of 30-year-old Broneslav Latyshkevich, DARO, R-30, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 44–45.
- 29 Isaac Bashevis Singer, "A Wedding in Brownsville," (1964) *Short Friday and Other Stories* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1961–1964): 238–245.
 - 30 Eventually, Auksmen found one Jew, Leibl' Halperin, whose story was recounted in Chapter Two above. Meir Auksmen [Meir Oxsmen], "The Survivor from a Mass Grave," *Rowne; sefer zikaron*, 544–545. Translated from the Hebrew by Sean Kiernan and Hannah Schwartz. On Soviet revenge on the Eastern front, see Jeffrey Burds, "Sexual Violence in Europe in World War II," published in a special issue on "Sexual Violence during War" in *Politics and Society* Vol. 37, No. 1 (March 2009): 47–55.
 - 31 Meir Rozenboym, "What I Saw with My Own Eyes," translated from Yiddish by Naomi Gal, in *Rowne; sefer zikaron*, 526–529.
 - 32 Interview with Dr. Jerzy Nowakowski, Port Washington, New York, March 28, 2013. Journalist and son of Holocaust survivors, David Lee Preston, had the same experience when he and his wife Rondee visited his mother's native town of Turka in 1992. David Lee Preston, "Speaking for the Ghosts," *The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine* (May 14, 1995).
 - 33 Personal correspondence from Dr. Jerzy Nowakowski to the author, dated April 17, 2013. Dr. Nowakowski identified the Jewish cemetery in Zurich as Schutzenrain.
 - 34 R. Clifton Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004): 227.
 - 35 This theme of a hidden past that lies just beneath the surface of modern Ukrainian life has been explored by Omer Bartov, *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
 - 36 On forensic science as politically contested territory in post-Soviet Ukraine and the Soviet Union, see Ivan Katchanovski, "The Politics of Soviet and Nazi Genocides in Orange Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 62, No. 6 (August 2010): 973–997; Nanci Adler, "The Future of the Soviet Past Remains Unpredictable: The Resurrection of Stalinist Symbols Amidst the Exhumation of Mass Graves," *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 57, No. 8 (December 2005): 1093–1119; and Irina Paperno, "Exhuming the Bodies of Soviet Terror," *Representations* Vol. 75 (Summer 2001): 89–118. Cf., James Mark, "What Remains? Anti-Communism, Forensic Archeology, and the Retelling of the National Past in Lithuania and Romania," *Past & Present* No. 206, Suppl. 5 (2010): 276–300; Zoe Crossland, "Of Clues and Signs: The Dead Body and Its Evidential Traces," *American Anthropologist* Vol. 111, No. 1: 69–80. On the deeper meanings of digging up bones in post-communist Eastern

- Europe, see Katharine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
- 37 Affidavit of ethnic Ukrainian Ekaterina Brodanova, born 1898 in Chernigov oblast, who worked during the war in Nivki settlement, near Kiev. GARF, R-7021, op. 65, d. 521, l. 39.
- 38 Jeremy Dauber, "Demons, Golems, and Dybbuks: Monsters of the Jewish Imagination," (Nextbook, 2004), at <http://www.programminglibrarian.org/assets/files/ltai/demons-golems.pdf>
- 39 Alina Cała, *The Image of the Jew in Polish Folk Culture* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1995): 133.
- 40 Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 8. As cited in Jonathan Schorsch, "Jewish Ghosts in Germany," *Jewish Social Studies* Vol. 9 (Spring–Summer 2003): 139–169.
- 41 Quoted by Audrey Mallet, "Negotiating, Contesting and Constructing Jewish Space in Postwar Muranów," M.A. Thesis: Concordia University, 2011, 84. The culture of hauntings in Warsaw's old Jewish quarter is the setting for Sylwia Chutnik's play, *Murano00*, allegedly based on real events, first performed in 2012 at the *Teatr Dramatyczny* in Warsaw. There are also works of fiction like Igor Ostachowiczu's *Noc żywych Żydów* [*Night of the Living Jews*], a *spinoff* from *Night of the Living Dead*, where the main character lives in an old block in Muranów district erected on the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto. In the basement there is a secret passage to the underworld populated by Jewish zombies, *all Holocaust victims*. One Polish reviewer called the book a "well-written, intelligent, and extremely perverse novel."
- 42 Mallet, "Negotiating, Contesting and Constructing Jewish Space in Postwar Muranów," 11–12.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 79–84.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 79.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 81.
- 46 Alex Webber, "Wrocław, Poland's Ghost Town," *The Guardian* October 30, 2009.
- 47 My thanks to Natalie Kononenko for descriptions of haunting in Odessa and Khar'kiv. And a very special thanks to Christine Worobec who kindly posted my request on the discussion board at SEEFA, the Slavic and East European Folklore Association. For Polish folklore on Jewish haunting, see Cała, *The Image of the Jew in Polish Folk Culture*, especially 132–135. My thanks to Larisa Fialkova at the University of Haifa, Israel.
- 48 Marta Miszczak, "Opowieści o dawnym Goraju: Goraj. Żydzi we wspomnieniach mieszkańców," *NOWa Gazeta Biłgorajska* No. 39 (2006).
- 49 Małgorzata Maćkowiak, "Opuszczony dom w Izbicy," *ONET: Strefa Tajemnic* April 16, 2012. Local views differ: while most believe that Jewish ghosts haunt

the abandoned house, others claim that a mother murdered her two children on the site.

- 50 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 139; Schorsch, “Jewish Ghosts,” 139–140.
- 51 Ruth R. Wisse, “Poland’s Jewish Ghosts,” *Commentary* Vol. 83, No. 1 (January 1987): 33; Schorsch, “Jewish Ghosts,” 139–140.
- 52 Schorsch, “Jewish Ghosts,” 140. He quoted Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 24.
- 53 Shimon Srebnik was a witness for the prosecution in *The Trial of Adolph Eichman*, Session 66, Part 3 (June 6, 1961).
- 54 GARE, f. R-7021, op. 71, d. 40, l. 12 ob.
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- (4) Kazimir Nowosadowski (b. 1922) (l. 42)
- (5) Protoirei Mikhailo Nosal' (ll. 44–45)
- (6) Vera Baidan (b. 1908) (ll. 49–50)
- (7) Valeriana Maevskii (b. 1901) (l. 52)
- (8) Yakov Ushakov (b. 1921) (l. 54)
- (9) Nina Krytovets (b. 1894) (ll. 58–59)
- (10) Anna Morozovskaia (b. 1893) (ll. 62–62 ob.)
- (11) M. Rybinskii (l. 65)
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- (7) Maria Demchishina (b. 1901) (ll. 19–20 ob.)
- (8) Nikolai Vorob'ev (b. 1914) (ll. 21–24)
- (9) Grigorii Kleshkan' (b. 1904) (ll. 25–27 ob.)
- (10) Krystyna Novakovskaia (Krystyna Nowakowksa, née Leah Bodkier)

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