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Publication Date

2013

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

**BLOOD AND INK:
RUSSIAN AND SOVIET JEWISH CHRONICLERS OF CATASTROPHE
FROM WORLD WAR I TO WORLD WAR II**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY

by

Polly M. Zavadvker

June 2013

The Dissertation of Polly M. Zavadvker
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Abstract

Polly M. Zavadvker

Blood and Ink: Russian and Soviet Jewish Chroniclers of Catastrophe from World War I to World War II

This study is about three wars that took place in Eastern Europe between 1914 and 1945 and how Russian and Soviet Jews wrote about them. It focuses on the figures S. An-sky (1863-1920), Simon Dubnov (1860-1941), Isaac Babel (1894-1940), and Vasily Grossman (1905-1964). During the First World War, An-sky provided humanitarian relief to Jewish civilians along the Eastern Front, and Dubnov was a historian and Jewish national rights activist. In 1920 Babel was a propagandist with the Red Army during the Polish-Bolshevik War. Throughout World War II Grossman served as a frontline reporter with the Red Army. Each figure witnessed and wrote about Jewish populations that suffered from military violence in the multi-ethnic frontier between historic Poland and Russia that became sites of fighting in each war.

This is the first study to compare Russian and Soviet Jewish war writing from 1914 to 1945 from a historical perspective. It explores: 1) How the experience of war in the twentieth century has correlated with the expression of Jewish identity; 2) The multiple influences and constraints, including Russian and Jewish cultural values, political goals, and wartime censorship, that have shaped the representation of Jewish war history; 3) How different generations of Jewish intellectuals depicted Jews as a people, or nation, in a time of crisis; and 4) The ways that each of the writers'

individual efforts to make sense of war related to their contemporaries' representations of Jewish civilians.

The sources for this study are non-fictional texts written in Russian and Yiddish during wartime or immediately after, including diaries, memoirs, letters, documentary anthologies and journalism. Russian and Soviet Jewish war chroniclers are viewed as active participants in the histories that they sought to describe. Their writings are interpreted as chronicles, or first drafts about the catastrophic events that they witnessed.

This study's main finding is that these chroniclers helped to forge a distinctly Russian Jewish historiography of war that preceded and encompassed the period of the Holocaust. This finding contributes to the study of historiography, modern Jewish history, and national groups in Imperial Russia and the USSR.

For my father, Phil Zavadivker,
and in memory of my mother, Maryana Zavadivker (1949-2007)

Acknowledgements

It is an honor to thank everyone who has supported me in graduate school:

I am most grateful to my advisor, Nathaniel Deutsch, for his encouragement over the years. He has provided a model of intellectual innovation that I hope to carry forward. I profoundly appreciate Murray Baumgarten for all of the wisdom and incisive scholarly advice he has shared with me. I also wish to thank Peter Kenez for imparting his broad knowledge of European and Jewish History, and for his legendary dark humor. It has been my good fortune that Harriet Murav agreed to serve on my committee after we met while studying Yiddish at Tel Aviv University. She continually inspires me with her groundbreaking work.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Bruce Thompson and Jonathan Beecher of UC Santa Cruz for encouraging this study in its early stages. For the illuminating conversations I had at Stanford, I thank Gabriella Safran, Gregory Freidin, Steven Zipperstein and Amir Weiner. I wrote the majority of this dissertation in Philadelphia, and would like to thank Benjamin Nathans for welcoming me to the vibrant Russian History scene at the University of Pennsylvania. It is also a pleasure to thank Robert Weinberg for inviting me to give a paper at the Delaware Valley Seminar in Russian History, where I received valuable feedback on Chapter 3.

I am deeply grateful to Carol Avins for sharing sources related to Babel's war diary and for commenting on my translation of An-sky's war diary. I thank Robert Chandler, Pietro Tosca, and John and Carol Garrard for sharing Grossman-related documents and creating finding aids that allowed archival work to go more quickly. I

thank Grossman's son Fyodor Guber for discussing memories of his father with me. For generously opening her home to me in Kiev during a research trip in 2011, I am grateful to Lilia Kisilevskaja. And I am profoundly indebted to Irina Paperno for teaching a captivating (and what turned out to be) haunting course on "the Soviet experience" that I took as a student at UC Berkeley.

For invariably interesting conversations and e-mail exchanges, I wish to thank Kiril Feferman, Karel Berkhoff, Patrick Finney, Gennady Estrakh, Adam Teller, Arkadii Zel'ster, Wendy Lower, Yuri Slezkine, Olga Litvak, Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, James Clifford, Omer Bartov, Nancy Sinkoff, Paul Glasser, Eric Lohr, Benjamin Nathans, Simon Rabinovitch, Peter Holquist, and David Engel.

I offer thanks to the knowledgeable librarians and archivists at the Vernadsky Library in Kiev, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive in Washington, the Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem, the Slavic Reference Services at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the Center for Jewish History in New York, and University of Pennsylvania's Center for Advanced Judaic Studies. A special word of thanks goes to Vadim Altskan of the USHMM, and Bella Noham of Yad Vashem.

At UC Santa Cruz I received greatly appreciated financial support from the Program in Jewish Studies, the Lisa and Ernst Auerbach Family Fellowship in Jewish Studies, the Institute for Humanities Research, the Graduate Division, and the Department of History. I am also grateful to the following private foundations and organizations for these awards: the Targum Shlishi Foundation Dissertation Writing Fellowship, the Claims Conference Saul Kagan Fellowship in Advanced Holocaust

Studies, the Professor Bernard Choseed Memorial Fellowship at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and the Dr. Sophie Bookhalter Fellowship in Jewish Culture from the Center for Jewish History.

I could not have finished graduate school without my family's help. The tremendous amount of support they have given me exceeds the credit I can possibly give them here. It is with great affection that I thank my sister Allison Gervis, my brother-in-law Jason Berman, and my parents-in-law Barbara and Phil Berman.

Finally, I am above all grateful to my husband Jeffrey Berman for his love and inspiration. He has also rescued my own documents from the electronic dust bin of history more times than he probably cares to remember. Our daughter Miriam doesn't yet know what the piles of books in our house are all about, but completing this dissertation would have been far more difficult without the joy she brought me.

I began graduate school one year after the untimely death of my mother, Maryana Zavadvker. I felt compelled to write about Vasily Grossman in part because he attempted through writing to come to terms with his mother's death. In very different circumstances from Grossman's, writing this dissertation became a way for me to honor my mother's memory, and move beyond the pain of her death. My father, Phil (Yefim) Zavadvker, has unconditionally supported my goal to become a historian. He and my mother, who in 1979 emigrated from Kiev to the United States, shared memories with me that sparked a fascination with Soviet and Jewish history. This fascination evolved into the intellectual journey that led to graduate school. I dedicate this work to them, with love and gratitude.

Introduction

Witnesses to War: Russian and Soviet Jews as Chroniclers of Catastrophe, 1914-1945

"The time for writing "War and Peace" will come in the future. Now is a time of War without quotation marks—not a novel, but life."

-Il'ia Erenburg, 1941¹

This study is about three wars that took place in Eastern Europe from 1914 to 1945 and how Russian and Soviet Jews wrote about them.² These writers witnessed and survived World War I, the Polish-Bolshevik War, and World War II, respectively. These wars, like all wars, were contests that caused extraordinary amounts of damage to people and places. Yet in war, the meaning of the pain that human beings endure and the blood that is taken from bodies is never self-evident.³ The meaning of that pain and the blood that is spilled must be created, and the effort to do so almost always begins with people putting words to paper. The writers we will encounter in this study began to make sense of these wars before they had even come to an end—at the moments when they turned aside from the human disasters in their midst, and paused to write in ink and pencil in the small pads of paper and notebooks

¹ Originally published in a 1941 article in *Literatura i isskustvo*, (Literature and Art), and cited by the author in his memoir. Il'ia Erenburg, *Liudi, gody, zhizn'*, 3 vol., ed. B. Ia. Frezinskii (Moscow: Tekst, 2005), 2: 294.

² In this study I use the descriptors "Russian Jewish," "Soviet Jewish" and the subjects of "Russian Jewry" and "Soviet Jewry" to mean both the Jewish population of the former Russian Empire (including the territory of what is now Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, and so forth), as well as the Jews in what became the USSR who continued to identify primarily with Russian culture and language.

³ My approach to the subject of how people generate meaning about war in language draws from Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), esp. 1-23, 60-157. The view that language about war is inherently moral and that it correlates with the construction of national identity follows another work (also influenced by Scarry's approach): Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage, 1998).

that they carried on themselves. They wrote sitting in military trucks, trains, and horse drawn carts, and in hotels, military headquarters, and civilians' homes. From the notes they hastily scribbled at the time of war, they created stories about what they had seen and remembered. Their stories represent history, and part of what they represent is the history of Jews in Eastern Europe during wartime.

Writing down the history of war is a highly charged moral and political act. For Russian and Soviet Jews, their choice to put pen to paper was directly influenced by the Jewish identities of the war victims, as well as their relationships, as fellow Jews, to those victims. Because they had witnessed and survived war, they were able to put many war victims' stories into words. They felt powerfully compelled to write about Jewish suffering because that act expressed in a very deep sense who they were and how they saw themselves; and because they had seen that suffering with their own eyes, whether as reporters traveling with armies, relief workers among civilian populations, or in other capacities.

Russian and Soviet Jewish war chroniclers also described watershed events of the twentieth century. World War I and World War II became the sites of titanic struggles to injure and kill. The damage wrought by these wars generated a global effort not only to rebuild countries, lives and relationships between individuals and nations, but to also redefine the very meaning of humanity and civilization itself.⁴

⁴ Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide, and Modern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). My approach to the study of war and identity is influenced by Bartov's contention (6) that "we cannot understand the manner in which individuals; ethnic, religious, and ideological groups; and nations perceive themselves or interact with others, without considering the impact of our century's preoccupation with violence." Bartov further argues that the project to redefine

Russian Jews were of course not alone in their effort to understand how and why such vast quantities of human blood had been shed; this took place throughout Europe, and indeed, among people on every continent where these global wars had an impact.

What made the attempt to represent war so fraught with significance for our writers, however, is that these wars impacted the Jewish civilization that had existed in Eastern Europe for nearly a millennium. The writers witnessed war take place in the very heartland of devastation, along the frontier that lies between historic Poland and Russia. These borderlands were home to the largest segments of Europe's Jewish populations until 1945, and consequently, they became the places where the largest segments of Europe's Jewish population fell victim to violence in each war. Russian and Soviet Jewish war chroniclers knew this firsthand because many of them had traversed hundreds of miles of war zones. They also knew this because all of them were born and raised in the territories that became war zones between 1914 and 1945.

In their private and published writings, these intellectuals wrote extensively and articulately in often stark and realistic language about the suffering of Jewish civilians. They wrote about populations of people who did not go to war with weapons in their hands; people who were often violated and killed because enemy combatants denied them their humanity, and regarded them as inferior classes of beings. While there were times that enemy combatants treated Jews no differently than they did other civilians in the war zone, the writers were acutely aware of

humanity and identities lies "at the core of this century," and that this project has been "characterized by a tremendous destructive urge followed by a long and as yet uncompleted process of coming to terms with the disasters it has produced."

instances when Jewish civilians were subjected to unparalleled forms of victimization. Furthermore, the act of describing Jewish civilians' lives and deaths, and of pointing out the differences that distinguished them from other civilians, had political consequences, primarily because the different governments whose war efforts they served utilized information about atrocities against civilians for propaganda purposes. The Tsarist and later Soviet governments exercised authority over the content and amount of information that the public could know at any given time.⁵ For that reason, the Jewish writers who chose to write about Jewish civilians performed a moral and political act as much as they did a literary and historical one. They created records of Jewish history that might have otherwise have been silenced, lost, or falsified by the countries that fought these wars.

This study, then, is not only about how Jewish writers in Russia and the Soviet Union attempted to assign meaning to wars that catastrophically impacted Jewish civilian populations in Eastern Europe. It is also about how in the process of doing so, they left behind critically valuable and revealing documents—records about themselves, about how they viewed the Jews in their midst, and about the destruction of human civilization that took place before their own eyes. These documents mirror the writers' own experiences at war as much as they do the civilians whose lives and deaths they described.

⁵ I follow the argument of Mark Grimsley and Clifford Rogers, who write that that atrocities against civilians have "always been instrumental rather than absolute;" they constitute "a tool in diplomacy" that instill fear and terror in bystanders, and aim to convince the targets of violence that their regimes cannot protect them (in Mark Grimsley and Clifford J. Rogers, eds., *Civilians in the Path of War* [Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002], xii).

Yet as Joan Scott reminds us, a person who conveys their experience of history always brings to bear their *own* history on whatever it is that they witness and describe.⁶ One's descriptions of reality are generally shaped by pre-existing identities, influences and ways of seeing. From this perspective, these war writings also provide us with rich sources for understanding the cultural and political influences that have shaped Russian and Soviet Jews' representations of Jewish history. They reveal the distinct kinds of Jewish identities that the writers brought to the war zone, and how the catastrophic wars they witnessed impacted those identities. Their war writings are also records of how those influences and identities changed across thirty years in which a revolution, war, and genocide took place. They allow us to reconstruct the historical processes that influenced these writers' attempts to forge new identities for themselves as they witnessed and chronicled Jewish civilian experience.

Our protagonists' stories are riddled with tension in part because they faced formidable challenges in their attempts to represent Jewish suffering. When they sought to publish writings about Jewish suffering for audiences of readers of Russian and Yiddish, they often confronted and had to respond to multiple contingencies. Among the most important of these contingencies were military censors who controlled the circulation of information, and consequently, determined what could be discussed in public about Jewish war victims. As we will see, Tsarist and later Soviet

⁶ Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17:4 (1991): 773–797. My study pursues Scott's exhortation (777) to engage "questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured." Throughout this study I attempt to follow Scott's call to "attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences" (779).

authorities were inconsistent in how they formulated and enforced wartime censorship policies regarding Jews. Censorship policies were often dictated by the shifting aims of wartime propaganda and military strategy. As a result, there were times during the First and Second World Wars when Jewish wartime suffering could be discussed in the media, and times when it could not—when the writers' attempts to show that Jews' war experiences made them inherently *different* from other subjects or citizens became taboo.

I explore the dynamics of censorship during each war not only because they impacted how Jewish war victims could be represented in the media, but also because censorship had moral, personal and social consequences for the Jewish war chroniclers themselves. In some cases it was because the state censored this information that they felt compelled, both as individuals and in collectives, to publicize Jewish civilian experiences. Censorship has therefore had a critically important role in shaping the writing of Jewish war history. As I will argue, Russian and Soviet Jewish war chroniclers from the First to Second World Wars developed uniquely Jewish approaches to representing modern war in part as reactions to conditions of censorship in Imperial Russia and the USSR. Their distinct approaches manifested, among other ways, in their attempts to name and identify victims as Jews, and to assign meaning to the lives and deaths of the war victims, both as individual human beings and as members of an imagined Jewish nation.

This is also the first study to show that Russian and Soviet Jewish writers responded to catastrophes during wars that preceded *and* encompassed the period of

the Holocaust. These writers' stories are windows for exploring questions that address the place of the Holocaust in modern Jewish history: How did Russian and Soviet Jews contribute to the creation of modern Jewish historiography—how do their accounts about Jewish civilian wartime experience contribute to our knowledge of Jewish history? How did they compile history both before and during the Holocaust? How did the experience of witnessing war impact the transformation of their identities as Russian and Soviet Jews from 1914 to 1945? How can we trace the expression of that transformation through the records that each of them created during and after wartime? How did Jewish thinkers of different generations (Imperial, Revolutionary, and Soviet) depict Jews as a people or nation during the three wars that respectively rocked, unsettled and finally decimated Jewish civilization in Eastern Europe?

The final question is addressed to earlier scholars who have claimed that the efforts of Soviet Jews to document the Holocaust were as unprecedented as the events that they sought to describe.⁷ While I agree that *certain* aspects of the Holocaust, as well as the means of representing it were exceptional in history, the findings of this study—which include discussion of a first "Black Book" in the First World War and a second (and far better-known) "Black Book" during the Second World War—demonstrate that the efforts of Soviet Jewish chroniclers to document catastrophic

⁷ Joshua Rubenstein (*Tangled Loyalties: The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg* [New York: Basic Books, 1996], 212), writes of *The Black Book* that "such a collaborative effort was unprecedented in the Soviet Union." Rubenstein may be technically correct, though as this study argues, *The Black Book* was not without precedent in the history of pre-Soviet Russian Jewry.

history were not entirely without precedent in Russian-Jewish culture. Soviet Jews during World War II did have predecessors from earlier generations who had faced remarkably similar challenges. These findings suggest that the Holocaust can and should be studied as part of a longer trajectory of Jewish history.

Our lens for exploring the questions above are four figures who witnessed and wrote about three different wars: S. An-sky (1863-1920), Simon Dubnov (1860-1941), Isaac Babel (1894-1940), and Vasily Grossman (1905-1964). During World War I, An-sky provided humanitarian relief to Jewish civilians on the Eastern Front. In the same war, Dubnov was a national rights activist and historian who documented Jewish wartime experience from the "home front" in Petrograd (as St. Petersburg was called from 1914 to 1924). In 1920 during the Polish-Bolshevik War (which was part of a larger series of conflicts that comprised the Russian Civil War of 1918 to 1921), the twenty-six year old writer Isaac Babel served as a political educator, or propagandist in the ranks of the Red Army's First Cavalry. During his war travels Babel encountered many of the same Jewish communities An-sky had seen in the Ukrainian-Polish borderlands just a few years prior. During World War II, Vasily Grossman became a well-known Soviet war correspondent for the paper *Krasnaia zvezda* (Red Star). From 1943 to 1945 Grossman traveled the front lines with the Red Army from Stalingrad to Berlin, and en route, he crossed Ukraine, Belarus and Poland. In that capacity he became one of the first journalists in world to write about the killing fields, mass graves, ghettos and death camps that the Red Army liberated from Nazi occupation.

Although An-sky, Dubnov, Babel and Grossman occupy center stage of this story, their contemporaries will also make frequent appearances throughout the chapters to come. Some of these figures were well-known to their peers, others were not. They include, for example, the influential ethnographer Lev Shternberg (1861-1927), as well as the folklorist and soldier Aba Lev (1882-1959), both of whom wrote about Jewish civilians on the Eastern Front during World War I. In relation (or lack thereof) to Isaac Babel, we will discuss Elias Tcherikower (1881-1943), who observed Dubnov in action during World War I, and in 1919 began to compile what became an extraordinary archive of materials about anti-Jewish violence during the Russian Civil War. Likewise, a history about Grossman cannot neglect to mention his important colleague Il'ia Erenburg (1891-1967) who during World War II became one of the USSR's most famous war correspondents, and who together with Grossman earnestly dedicated himself to documenting Nazi anti-Jewish atrocities. We will also meet Efim Gekhman (1914-1977), a friend of Grossman's, fellow colleague at *Krasnaia zvezda*, and fellow Jew from Ukraine, who also chronicled the Holocaust during the liberation period. In fact, when Gekhman entered the city of Riga on the heels of the Red Army, he collected material for an essay about the city in which he described the final days and moments of Simon Dubnov, who was killed there in December 1941.⁸ Gekhman's work reveals one way that Soviet Jewish chroniclers of the Holocaust carried on in the footsteps of earlier generations of Russian Jews.

⁸ Efim Gekhman, "Riga," in *Chernaia kniga. O zlodeiskom povsemestnom ubiistve evreev nemetsko-fashistskimi zakhvatchikami vo vremenno-okkupirovannykh raionakh Sovetskogo Soiuzi i v lageriakh*

An-sky, Dubnov, Babel and Grossman can be distinguished by their different political and artistic temperaments, wartime duties, ages, and nature of the wars that they witnessed. As we get to know them, we will account for those differences. But one of our primary goals is to reveal what they had in common as witnesses to war. One crucial factor that united Russian and Soviet Jewish chroniclers is how they witnessed war. Whether as relief workers or correspondents, nearly all of them became travelers of war zones, like disaster tourists at a time of almost global disaster. Part of what makes it intriguing and historically worthwhile to study them together is that their individual journeys overlapped in one area in particular—what is now part of western Ukraine and Belarus, and eastern Poland.

For centuries prior to World War II, this East European frontier was home to communities of Jews, Germans, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Roma and other peoples. Submerged in war for seven years during World War I and the Russian Civil War, the region did not recover economically until well into the 1930s. Between 1939 and 1945, the Soviet and then German Army occupied the region. By the end of World War II, Stalin and Hitler's regimes, along with some of the Polish and Ukrainian natives who lived there, had all played a part in ethnically cleansing the once diverse borderlands. State-sponsored policies of deportation, population exchange, and genocide, including the Nazi Holocaust of the Jewish and Roma

unichtozheniia Pol'shi vo vremia voyny 1941-1945 gg., eds. I. G. Erenburg and V. S. Grossman (Vilnius: Yad, 1993), 329-343.

populations transformed this multi-ethnic frontier into what are today's largely ethnically homogenous nation-states of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine.

Because of its history between 1914 and 1945, this region has been known by several different names. Prior to the end of World War I, Imperial Russia's side of the border was part of the so-called "Pale of Jewish Settlement," the region of officially sanctioned residence for the empire's population of five million Jews.⁹ The Austro-Hungarian Empire's side of the border was called Galicia, where one million Jews lived among nearly ten million Poles, Ukrainians and other minorities. Because of its landscape—swamps, marshes and rivers—in Polish the land was known as the *kresy* (marches). During the interwar period, the region became divided between independent Poland, and the Ukrainian and Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republics. These three countries, now independent nation-states, continue to claim parts of the region, albeit with altered borders and a near complete erasure of its former diversity.

Recent scholars have also bestowed various names upon this borderland: Timothy Snyder has called it the "bloodlands"; Kate Brown has described it as the "epicenter" of the twentieth-century's many cataclysms, a geographic mosaic of ethnicities and cultures that became "No Place."¹⁰ These evocative terms convey the

⁹ The Russian Empire annexed these territories from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. For religious, economic and social reasons, the Tsarist authorities decided that the Jewish population of one million people then living there should reside within delineated borders and be limited to certain occupations. For the origins of the Pale, see John Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the 'Jewish Question' in Russia, 1772-1825* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986).

¹⁰ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1. Another recent study that focuses on this region is Alexander V.

unrelenting nationally and ideologically-motivated violence carried out by states and individuals there from 1914 to 1945. But if our goal is to know more about the history of these regions, it is important to remember that the different populations who lived in this place of many names did not call their home a "bloodlands," and neither did the Russian and Soviet Jewish writers who traveled there during wartime. Rather, they wrote about the experiences of Jews in places that had very particular significance, places that these Jews had called home for centuries. And indeed, all of them described war as a Jewish national tragedy.

It is critically important to point out that Russian and Soviet Jewish chroniclers of catastrophe wrote about war as a Jewish national tragedy not only because Jews were killed in large numbers, but also because they viewed war as a form of violence that had unhinged, or unmade the cultural world that defined and bound together Jews as a people. When they witnessed or attempted to reconstruct military violence against civilians, they described those individual civilians as members of a people—the Jewish people. In their efforts to describe war as a Jewish national tragedy, writers like An-sky, Dubnov, Babel and Grossman each expressed in distinct ways what contemporary scholar Elaine Scarry has observed about war—that in addition to being a contest to injure bodies, war is also an event that represents the "unmaking of civilization as it resides in each of those bodies."¹¹

Prusin, *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870-1992* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹¹ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 122. Scarry's observations are important to my interpretation of how Russian and Soviet Jewish war chroniclers approached the work of representing Jewish catastrophe. She writes (113-114) that there are "three arenas of damage in war, three arenas of alteration: first,

These writers asked: What does war mean, then, for the Jewish people? If war does more than kill people—if it also destroys culture and civilization—then what will become of Jewish culture in the future? How will the Jewish people's experiences of war be remembered if military censors prohibit their stories from reaching the public? If we do manage to publicize it, will readers believe us? And will they have the capacity to comprehend what has taken place? The writers pursued these questions with a sense of urgency during and after the different wars.

Furthermore, it is not obvious that men like An-sky, Babel and Grossman would have felt compelled to describe these wars as Jewish national tragedies. To appreciate the significance of the weighty questions that preoccupied them, we must first take a step back and ask who they were. First of all, each of them identified with Russian culture to different degrees. They looked to Tolstoy for their values, not the Talmud. At least as adults, they all spoke primarily in Russian, not Yiddish. Prior to serving in the different wars, they began their literary careers in St. Petersburg and Moscow, far from where the vast majority of the country's Jewish population lived. They also identified in various ways with socialist ideas, and subscribed to the basic principle that history was moving progressively forward toward a time of social equality. As secular thinkers, they believed and hoped that in the future, the barriers and disabilities that then separated people by religion, ethnicity and class would be overcome. In addition, during each war An-sky, Babel and Grossman entered the war

embodied persons; second, the material culture or self-extension of persons; third, immaterial culture, aspects of national consciousness, political belief, and self-definition."

zone wearing military uniforms that clearly identified them as outsiders. While Jewish civilians could usually spot them as fellow Jews, they also recognized that the writers were not "one of us."

Yet while many of these war writers embraced Russian or Soviet values at various points in their lives, they did not necessarily negate or wholly abandon their identities as Jews. Indeed, one of the main findings of this study is that for intellectuals ranging from An-sky to Grossman, the extraordinary circumstances of war generated a heightened (if also complicated and sometimes ambivalent) self-consciousness and identification as Jews. This was due to the simple reason that the war zones were located in parts of what was (or had formerly been) the Pale of Jewish Settlement—the region that literally and symbolically represented their origins as Jews. For many of them, the wars of the twentieth century collapsed the space between city and province, between traditional and secular or assimilated Jews. They understood that Jews in the country's westernmost provinces, among them friends and (in Grossman's case) close family whom they had moved away from years, even decades earlier, would likely become war victims.

Yet on the other hand, the writers themselves did not wholly identify with the Jews they encountered in the war zone. Their war chronicles are like maps of a rocky psychological and cultural terrain that they negotiated as they attempted to make sense of their fellow Jews' suffering. Sometimes they wrote with sympathy for Jewish civilians, at other times they expressed a sense of distance and ambivalence toward them. The geography of wartime conflict brought them into contact with people who

lived different lives than they did themselves. Many lived in shtetls (Yiddish: Jewish market towns), as well as in Jewish neighborhoods of larger cities in Galicia and the Russian Empire, such as Lvov and Minsk. In fact these places were not unlike those where the writers themselves were born and had left years earlier—places whose demographics and public spaces facilitated a modicum of communal insularity. Most of the Jews living in small towns or cities of the region distinguished their culture from those of their neighbors because they spoke Yiddish, followed the Jewish calendar, and observed ritual laws regarding food, prayer and marriage that generally reduced chances for extensive social interaction with gentiles.¹²

The history of how secular Russian and Soviet Jews encountered the Jewish civilians of Russia's western borderlands therefore reveals a great deal about the identities of Russian and Soviet Jews, as well as how their identities changed over a period of thirty years. The stories of these war chroniclers provide us with a lens for examining the complex process through which the Russian Jews who took part in World War I became the Soviet Jews who witnessed and wrote about the Second World War and the Holocaust.

An-sky, as we will see, expressed solidarity with the plight of poor, Yiddish-speaking folk. He spoke and wrote in their language, and knew the intricacies of their

¹² To be sure, a significant number of Jews in imperial times spoke the same languages that their Christian neighbors did, read the same newspapers, and interacted everyday with them in places like markets, factories and courtrooms. On these themes, see for example Gershon David Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town : The Case of Opatów in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); David Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov* (New York: New York University Press, 1995); Ben-Cion Pinchuk: "The Shtetl: An Ethnic Town in the Russian Empire," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 41: 4 (2000): 495-504.

folk beliefs, even though he did not share their belief in God or their practice of Jewish ritual. There were even times, as he wrote, that "to tell the truth, I didn't entirely believe the story" that his interlocutors were telling him.¹³ Yet An-sky, much like Dubnov, understood World War I as a crucible in which (they believed) the future of the Jewish nation in Russia would be forged. They believed that their wartime relief work and documentation efforts would help provide a basis for Jewish national life in post-war Russia.

Babel, as we will see in Chapter 4, differed from An-sky and Dubnov in his views of the Jews as a people and a nation. He viewed the Polish-Bolshevik War and the Civil War as events that would define the new *Soviet* order, not as an opportunity to further the Jews' national struggle in Russia. Babel portrayed his journey through the former Pale and Galicia as a kind of time travel into the past. He often described the Jews he saw there as if they were figures in a historical reenactment show. He wrote elegiacally about a living people because as he watched the Bolsheviks establish their authority with acts of violence that aimed to symbolically and literally erase the past, and to sever people from their religious roots and heritage, he thought it inevitable that things like synagogues and Hasidic people would become obsolete and eventually extinct.

¹³ S. Ansky [An-sky], "In Khorostkov During the First World War," in *From A Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry*, ed. and trans. Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, 2nd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1998 [1993]), 181.

Grossman's views of the Jewish people are perhaps the most nuanced of all the figures described in this study. On the one hand, in his Holocaust writings he described the Jewish people in a manner somewhat akin to Dubnov and An-sky—that is, as a people defined by their possession of distinct traditions, culture and history. Grossman also wrote about Jewish victims of war with a sense of sympathy, and genuine admiration that sometimes bordered on idealization. Yet on the other hand, his private writings expressed ambivalence and prejudice toward traditional Jews that reflected the discourse of his times, and some of the biases that Jews like Babel had expressed twenty years prior. His war writings link him to previous generations of Russian Jewish thinkers, but they also reveal evidence of changes that transformed Russian Jewish culture in the years between the revolution and World War II.

In this sense, a comparative study of how figures like An-sky, Dubnov, Babel and Grossman described the Jewish people during times of war reveals an arc of Jewish identity that connects the Jews of late Imperial Russia to those of Soviet times. The contours of this arc might emerge more clearly if we pause to survey their remarkable lives, which began with Dubnov's birth in 1860 and ended with Grossman's death in 1964.

A Century of Russian and Soviet Jews

Semyon Dubnov (1860-1941)

The man who would become a preeminent historian and theorist of Jewish national identity was born in Mstislavl, in the eastern Belorussian region of the Pale

of Settlement.¹⁴ Dubnov grew up in a religiously observant family, but studied the Russian language from his early teens and read works by a wide range of European thinkers, as well as the emerging literature of the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment). His first essays of the early 1880s preached the importance of reforming traditional Jewish ways of life. Although he believed that religion played a positive role in maintaining Jewish identity over time, he ultimately adopted a secular outlook.

By the close of the 1880s, however, Dubnov had come to regard the Western model of reform and emancipation adopted by German Jews during the previous century—whom he emulated, but also sought to rival—as neither feasible, nor desirable for the Jews of Poland and Russia. In response, he began to develop a groundbreaking theory of Jewish national identity. His biographer Robert Seltzer has described Dubnov's view as a "completely secular conception of a historic Jewish will to survive" and to "adapt creatively to changing environments." Throughout his life, writes Seltzer, Dubnov also maintained a "positive appreciation of the psychological strengths of the still largely traditionalist and ethnically distinct Jewish masses," meaning, of course, the masses of Eastern Europe.¹⁵

¹⁴ This summary of Simon Dubnov's life draws from Robert M. Seltzer, "Simon Dubnov," in *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Dubnow_Simon> (accessed May 10, 2013); V. E. Kel'ner, *Missioner istorii: Zhizn' i trudy Semena Markovicha Dubnova* (St. Petersburg: "Mir," 2008); S. M. Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni: Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia: Materialy dlia istorii moego vremeni*, ed. Viktor Kel'ner [Saint Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie, 1998]); Sophie Dubnov-Ehrlich, *The Life and Work of S. M. Dubnov: Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish History*, trans. Judith Vowles, ed. Jeffrey Shandler (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, in association with the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1991).

¹⁵ Seltzer, "Simon Dubnov."

Dubnov's distinct approach to Jewish history-writing developed in the image of his nationalist beliefs. In a seminal essay of 1891, he defined historical consciousness to be one—possibly *the* most important—component of modern national Jewish identity.¹⁶ Yet the Jewish masses in Russia and Poland had yet to discover their own history and culture, argued Dubnov, and he urged them to cultivate a sense of national consciousness by studying, and just as importantly, writing their own history.

A prolific writer himself, Dubnov issued a steady stream of landmark publications about Jewish history in Russian. The first, entitled *Vseobshchaia istoriia evreev* (General History of the Jews) appeared in 1896. From 1897 to 1907 he published essays in *Voskhod* (known as *Pis'ma o starom i novom evreistve*, or Letters on Old and New Judaism), now regarded to be his most formative statements on Jewish national identity. In his "letters," he argued in reaction to the platforms of the Zionist and Jewish Labor Bund movements. He claimed that it was not in the interest of Jews to pursue a territorial homeland, nor to liberate the working class by fomenting revolution. Rather, Dubnov maintained that Jews should modernize their communal institutions so as to gain constitutional recognition as a national minority in a multinational empire. In 1907, Dubnov founded a political party, the *Folkspartey*, to promote his goals of cultural autonomy and national rights for Jews in Russia.

¹⁶ S. M. Dubnov, *Ob izuchenii istorii ruskikh evreev i ob uchrezhdenii istoricheskogo obshchestva* (St. Petersburg, 1891).

Dubnov's three decades of experience as a publicist and scholar propelled his mission to document Jewish experience during the First World War. As a result of that mission, he produced what became the first ever "Black Book" of Russian Jewry (which will be the topic of Chapter 3). Dubnov's ideas about national rights continued to echo in postwar Jewish political discourse, including the minority-rights provisions that formed part of the Versailles Treaty in 1919, as well as the Bund's struggles to secure national rights in interwar Poland. Dubnov emigrated from Russia in 1922 and settled in Berlin, where he continued publishing important studies of Hasidism and Jewish world history. After Hitler's rise to power in 1933, he moved to Riga, where he published his autobiography in Russian. He was murdered in December 1941 in the Nazi-established ghetto in Riga.

S. An-sky (1863-1920)

The man better known to the world as "An-sky" was born Shloyme Zaynvl Rapoport in Chashniki and grew up nearby in Vitebsk, in the northern Belorussian sector of the Pale of Settlement.¹⁷ Like Dubnov and many other intellectuals of his time, both Russian and Jewish, he was drawn from a young age to study European thought and the Russian language. Unlike Dubnov, however, Rapoport was raised by a destitute and single mother. From his teenage years he felt drawn to populist (*narodnik*) revolutionary principles developed by Russian thinkers, which radically championed the cause of the poor masses, and specifically, the Russian peasantry, or

¹⁷ See Gabriella Safran, *Wandering Soul: S. An-sky, Creator of the Dybbuk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1-15.

narod (people). Rapoport left his native shtetl during his late teens and undertook a populist pilgrimage "to the people," opting to live among miners in the Ukrainian Donbass region. He became fascinated with populist-inspired ethnography, and began his literary career writing primarily in Russian on behalf of radical political and cultural causes. He developed the view that a people's knowledge of their own traditions and history could serve as a source of empowerment, and even a wellspring for revolutionary change.¹⁸

Rapoport acquired the pseudonym "An-sky" (roughly equivalent, in Russian, to "Anonymous-sky") after moving to St. Petersburg in 1892. He left soon thereafter for Western Europe, where he lived from 1892 to 1905, and worked closely with leaders of the Socialist Revolutionary (SR) Party. After 1901, An-sky began composing poetry and prose on Jewish themes in both Russian and Yiddish, edited an SR journal in Yiddish, and wrote what became the Bund's anthem in Yiddish ("Di shvue," or The Oath).

In December 1905 An-sky returned to St. Petersburg in the wake of the post-revolutionary amnesties that the Tsarist government granted to radicals. It was then that he began seriously theorizing about how populist revolutionary ideals and the ethnographic study of folk culture might improve the lives of the Jewish masses, with whom he began to express an increasing sense of identification. He had become convinced of the idea which had emerged among East European Jews in the preceding decades, that Jews constituted a distinct *narod*, or people among European

¹⁸ See Safran, *Wandering Soul*, 88-91.

peoples. Such an idea seemed more feasible to An-sky in 1905 than it might have in the 1880s because in the intervening years, Jewish national activists had generated a thriving civic society—a Yiddish, Russian and Hebrew-language press; Zionist, Bundist and liberal political movements; scholarly disciplines forged by figures like Dubnov that encouraged the study of East European Jewry; and a range of philanthropic initiatives intended to reform and also sustain traditional Jewish life.

An-sky's ambitious effort to study Jewish folklore remains among his most distinct and influential achievements. Inspired partly by Dubnov, in 1911 An-sky organized a team of explorers to collect artifacts of Jewish culture from throughout the Pale of Settlement. During the summers from 1912 to 1914 his expedition visited the Kiev, Volhynia and Podolia provinces of the southwestern Pale of Settlement (now in central Ukraine), a region known for culturally significant shtetls and populations of Hasidic Jews.¹⁹ An-sky incorporated the material he gathered and learned about on the expedition, such as folk songs, folktales, and mystical customs in his literary masterpiece, the play *The Dybbuk*. He initially composed the play in Russian in 1913 and soon thereafter it was translated into Yiddish and Hebrew versions.

The outbreak of war cut An-sky's ethnographic expedition short, but the fifty-one year old veteran activist forged ahead in his mission to defend and promote Jewish national causes. He was hired in November 1914 as a civilian aid worker for the emergency relief organization established in Petrograd, the Jewish Committee for

¹⁹ On the expedition see Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent*, 1-92; Safran, *Wandering Soul*, 195-205.

the Relief of War Victims (*Evreiskii komitet pomoshchi zhertvam voyny*, or EKOPO). As we will explore in greater detail in Chapter 2, he recorded his experiences assisting Jewish civilians in Poland, Ukraine, Galicia and Bukovina in a Russian-language diary that he later translated into Yiddish and revised as a lengthy memoir known as *Khurbn Galitsye* (The Destruction of Galicia).

An-sky's project to revise and translate his war writings at the end of his life embodied what had been a lifelong dual affiliation with Jewish and Russian causes. Unlike most of the Yiddish writers of his generation, he wrote a great deal in Russian, remained devoted to Russian populism, and possessed an inimitable temperament that compelled his multiple and sometimes conflicting loyalties. His biographer Gabriella Safran has remarked on his "strong emotions, sensitivity to the problems of others, and powers of observation," noting that An-sky "impressed his contemporaries with his passion, his idealism, and his ability to give himself completely to constituencies and causes that others saw as mutually exclusive."²⁰

Following the Bolshevik coup and the targeting of SRs for persecution, An-sky fled Moscow for Vilna in September 1918. He spent his last months in Warsaw, where he completed *Khurbn Galitsye*, and worked to establish institutions that would further the study of Jewish folk culture. He died on November 8, 1920.

²⁰ Gabriella Safran, "Rapoport, Shloyme Zaynvl," in *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (accessed May 14, 2013) <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Rapoport_Shloyme_Zaynvl>.

Isaac Babel (1894-1940)

Isaac Emmanuelovich Babel was born in Odessa in the southern Russian Empire, a port town whose Jewish community was known for its cosmopolitan ethos.²¹ His family placed heavy emphasis on upward mobility and acculturation, but did not abandon Judaism altogether, and he studied Hebrew and Talmud with private tutors until the age of sixteen. At the age of seventeen, he enrolled in the Institute of Finance and Business Studies in Kiev.

In 1913 Babel published his first short story in Russian on the theme of assimilation and generational differences among Jews (*Staryi shloime*, or "Old Shloyme"). After earning his business degree, he opted to pursue his literary goals, and in 1916 he headed for Petrograd to make a name for himself in Russian letters, much as An-sky had done a quarter-century earlier. After the October Revolution, Babel worked as a translator and reporter for various, sometimes conflicting causes.

Babel returned to Odessa in May 1919, and during the summer of 1920 he served as a journalist and ideological propagandist while traveling with the Red Army's First Cavalry, then fighting to rout Polish national forces from Ukrainian territory. He encountered many of the same communities of Jews whom An-sky had studied during his ethnographic expedition and later assisted during World War I. Like An-sky, Babel recorded his wartime experiences in a diary. In 1923 he began to

²¹ Biographical data on Isaac Babel comes from Gregory Freidin, "Isaac Emmanuelovich Babel: A Chronology," in *The Complete Works of Isaac Babel*, ed. Nathalie Babel, trans. Peter Constantine (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 1052-1058; Gregory Freidin, "Two Babels—Two Aphrodites: Autobiography in *Maria* and Babel's Petersburg Myth," in *The Enigma of Isaac Babel: Biography, History, Context*, ed. Gregory Freidin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 16-62; Ephraim Sicher, new book on Babel.

publish short stories based on that diary which were issued as a collection in 1926 entitled *Konarmia* (meaning Horse Cavalry in Russian, but translated in English as *Red Cavalry*). Written in minimalistic prose that was shot through with themes of disguise, ambivalence, brutality, and narrated by a Jew in disguise, the stories were immediately recognized as a groundbreaking masterpiece of Russian realism. The work defined Babel as an artist and brought him fame and fortune. Despite his primary identity as a writer of Russian prose, his interest in Jewish themes and Yiddish literature continued to surface throughout the 1920s, particularly in his translations from Yiddish to Russian of Sholem Aleichem's works.

As a writer, Babel remained tied to the Soviet cultural establishment until the end of his life—a dependency, as his biographer Gregory Freidin has argued, that was bound by his personal obligations to his family, which included his mother and sister, as well as three women, each of whom bore him a child between 1926 and 1937.²² Babel remained a high-profile cultural figure in the USSR until his arrest in May 1939. The explicit rationale for his arrest remains unclear, but authorities accused him of what during the Purges amounted to standard and were baseless charges from which he was posthumously exonerated (spying for France and Austria, and

²² Freidin, "Two Babels—Two Aphrodites," esp. 25-27. Freidin argues against the commonly held view that the last seven to eight years of Babel's life were years of "silence"—that unable to reconcile himself to the demands of Soviet political ideology and censorship, Babel altogether withdrew from public life and print culture. Freidin reads Babel's play *Maria* as "autobiographical fiction" that reveals "two Babels" in a juggling act during the mid- to late-1930s: the committed family man and Soviet writer; spontaneous artist and "literary moneymaking machine;" "proper bourgeois Jew" and "bohemian author of genius." Freidin (30) reads some of Babel's other stories from the late 1920s and early 30s ("The Road" in particular), as attempts to at once revise, or "cover up" the anti-Bolshevik views he had expressed in his 1918 pieces in *Novaia zhizn'*, and to "stress his loyalty to the new regime, even as he conveyed, through ingenious circumlocution and allegory, the sense of danger he now associated with his career as a Soviet writer."

conspiring to assassinate Soviet political authorities). Stalin signed the order for Babel's execution and he was shot at Lubianka Prison in Moscow on January 27, 1940, and buried in a mass grave.

Vasily Grossman (1905-1964)

The man born Iosif Solomonovich Grossman acquired the nickname Vasily as a child growing up in Berdichev, a town in the Russian Pale of Settlement roughly 100 miles south-southwest of Kiev. At the time of Grossman's birth, Jews made up close to three-quarters of Berdichev's total population, and the city possessed an illustrious history as a center of both Hasidic life and Haskalah. Grossman's parents had met as activists for the Bund, and they raised their son to appreciate socialist values, as well as Western European thought and literature. His parents separated during his youth, and he remained with his mother in Berdichev.

Grossman studied Chemical Engineering at Moscow State University from 1923 to 1929. After graduating he worked as a chemical analyst in the Donbass, and briefly became the director of pencil factory. In 1934, he formally abandoned his scientific training to pursue literature, and that same year he published the short story *V gorode Berdichev* (In the Town of Berdichev). Babel hailed the story as the work of a fresh talent who had innovatively portrayed Jewish themes in socialist realism form.

In 1937 Grossman became a member of the Soviet Writer's Union, a sign of having been accepted by the official Soviet literary establishment. After war broke out with Germany in June 1941, Grossman volunteered and was posted to *Krasnaia zvezda*, where as a frontline correspondent he tracked the Red Army's catastrophic

retreat to Stalingrad, and then long victorious trek back to Berlin. When the war began, Grossman's mother was still living in Berdichev. He did not manage to evacuate her prior to the German Army's arrival there on July 7, 1941. She was killed in a Nazi-led massacre of the city's Jews on September 14 and 15, 1941.

Grossman began publishing about Nazi anti-Jewish atrocities starting in 1943, as the Red Army uncovered traces of them during the first year of the liberation of occupied territory. He became increasingly involved in the collective effort among Soviet Jewish intellectuals to document the annihilation of Jewish populations, and from 1944 to 1946 he and Il'ia Erenburg served as the main editors of a *Chernaia kniga* (Black Book), an encyclopedic compilation of literary essays, testimonies and documents about the mass killings of Jews in dozens of cities, shtetls and small towns under German occupation in the occupied USSR and Poland.

After the war Grossman wrote two major novels about the war, *Za pravoe delo* (For a Just Cause, published in Russia in 1952) and *Zhizn' i sud'ba* (Life and Fate). *Life and Fate* included lengthy meditations on the nature of totalitarian society. Despite his obvious pride in having served the Soviet war effort, Grossman implicitly compared Stalin to Hitler, and the Soviet gulag to the Nazi concentration camp. Not surprisingly, authorities confiscated the manuscript in 1961. It was first published posthumously in the West in 1980. The subject of the war and the mass murder of Jewish civilians during the war preoccupied Grossman until the end of life. He died from stomach cancer on September 14, 1964, on the anniversary of his mother's death outside of Berdichev thirteen years earlier.

Grossman's trajectory as a first-generation Soviet Jew, much like that of Babel before him, exemplified social transformations of his generation. His and Babel's pursuit of upward mobility, acculturation and integration into the middle and upper echelons of society—a pursuit that their own parents' generation had instilled by example—paralleled that of nearly one million Jews who emigrated from the Pale of Settlement to the Russian interior in the decade after 1917. Babel and Grossman were among a youthful mass of people who left behind a population of Jews in the country's western provinces that was relatively older, more likely to have spoken Yiddish, and less educated than their younger counterparts would be within the following decade.²³ Like many of their contemporaries, Babel and Grossman became fully integrated into Soviet society. They joined the Writer's Union; they fell in love and had children with non-Jews. It is significant, however, that in the midst of events that came to define Soviet history and collective memory—the Civil War and Second World War—they encountered Jews whose experiences haunted them, and made them aware of their own identities in sometimes troubling ways. How they responded in writing to that fraught encounter is one of the questions that drives this study.

Bearing Witness, Writing History: Russian and Soviet Jewish Historiographies of War and Catastrophe

This study seeks to trace the process through which Russian and Soviet Jews constructed narratives about Jewish civilian experience during three different wars. These figures left records of their writing process in their wartime journalism, private

²³ Mordechai Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust: A Social and Demographic Profile* (Jerusalem: The Centre for Research of Central and East European Jewry, 1998), 190.

letters, essays, and diaries. They wrote in Russian, and in rare cases they later translated their war writings into Yiddish. Because my goal is explain how they chronicled events that they lived through, I focus on the texts they wrote during or immediately following the period of the war. Thus, I do discuss the "Black Book" that Dubnov edited and published in 1918, as well as An-sky's World War I memoir *Khurbn Galitsye* (The Destruction of Galicia), which he began writing in 1916 or 1917 and completed in 1920. However, I do not examine the well-known fictional works that Babel and Grossman created on the basis of their war writings (Babel's *Konarmiia*, and Grossman's novels *Za pravoe delo* and *Zhizn' i sud'ba*).

The choice to link these figures on the basis of their writings from three different wars allows me to speak about the subject of Russian Jewish war writing in the twentieth century. However, in speaking of these writers as part of a phenomenon called "Russian Jewish war writing," I do not make the claim that An-sky and Dubnov exerted a formal influence over later generations, or that they determined the content of Babel or Grossman's works. There is no evidence that the latter figures ever read Dubnov or An-sky, nor did they cite their writing or describe them as prior authorities or models for their own war chronicles. There *is* evidence that Babel and Grossman knew of each others' *fictional* works (Grossman, we know, admired *Red Cavalry*, and Babel admired "In the Town of Berdichev"). But Grossman could not have possibly influenced Babel's war writings in 1920, and Grossman never referred to Babel in his own writings during World War II.

In other words, I do not make the claim that An-sky, Dubnov, Babel and Grossman's works constitute a "tradition" or "legacy" of Russian-Jewish war writing. Rather, I approach these three figures' lives and works with the intent to show what is shared *and* what is distinct among them as individual examples of Russian-Jewish war writing. Each chapter examines the writers on their own terms. My goal is to recreate each figure's response to war in the context of a distinct time and place. However, I do explicitly compare them at times, both to illuminate important features of the individual writers as well as to suggest certain family resemblances among them. A comparison of An-sky and Babel's respective descriptions of the towns Brody and Sokal in Chapter 4, for example, is very revealing of the writers' divergent concepts of Jewish history and national identity.

As a historian, I begin from the premise that figures like An-sky, Babel and Grossman witnessed and wrote about events that actually took place. Therefore, any additional evidence that we now possess about these events can and should be compared against their eyewitness accounts. To that end, I have tried to reconstruct their experiences on the ground by turning to other eyewitness accounts, archival sources, and current scholarship. In addition, their accounts of history, like all histories, can be read as narratives and stories about the past. Thus, I employ tools of literary analysis throughout this study in order to explain how the writers constructed

narratives of historical reality, often by looking at their use of language and discourse, as well as a number of categories in Russian and Jewish culture.²⁴

The term that best applies to the eyewitness accounts written by Russian and Soviet Jewish war writers is that of chronicles. My use of the concept of "chronicles" is indebted to Hayden White's influential work *Metahistory*. White's central idea, briefly summarized here, is that all histories are written down in the form of narrative. White defines the first stage in the process of writing historical narrative as the creation of chronicles, or what he calls an "unprocessed historical record."²⁵ Russian and Soviet Jews became wartime chroniclers insofar as what they wrote during and immediately after war—diaries, private letters, essays, memoirs and journalism—represented the first stage, or unprocessed record, as it were, of real events that they experienced in real time.

These war chronicles were not composed in a vacuum, however. As noted earlier, they reflected influences and ideas that each figure brought to the war, drawn from their different backgrounds in ethnography, journalism, political activism, and literature. For that reason, these texts can also be read as forms of discourse, or different modes in which the writers chronicled the history of Jewish wartime suffering. The exploration of this war writing discourse speaks to broader questions of historical import, including the formation of Jewish identity over time, how writers

²⁴ My approach to war writing is influenced by Olga Litvak, *Conscription and the Search for Modern Russian Jewry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), esp. 4-6. Litvak's book is a historical analysis of how "the literary construction of Eastern European Jewry has displaced the history of actual Jews who lived in a real place called. Russia" (4).

²⁵ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 5.

construct national narratives, and the impact that war has had on both of these phenomena.²⁶

As first drafts, written from within the whirlwind of wartime experience, these chronicles do contain factual errors and mistakes. Thus, in 1922, when the historian Yankev Shatzky reviewed An-sky's First World War memoir, he pointed out that An-sky, the Russian intellectual and outsider to Galicia, had gotten some of his facts wrong about the Jewish communities there. Shatzky claimed that An-sky's ethnographic approach meant that his memoir would be of potential interest to "folklorists and psychologists," but of little use to future historians.²⁷

Similarly, on August 29 of 1920, Babel wrote about the victims of a pogrom in the Galician town of Komarów, but incorrectly wrote down the names of two victims.²⁸ He also confused the dates of his diary entries on multiple occasions. And when Grossman first saw the ruins of Treblinka death camp with the Red Army in the late summer of 1944, he estimated a death toll of three million victims, and wrote that the figures surpassed those of people killed at Sobibor, Majdanek, Belzec and

²⁶ Olga Litvak (*Conscription*, 9) provides a model here for my reading of war writing as a form of discourse. She reads conscription literature as a "Jewish discourse, polemically charged by the post-emancipation commitments on the part of Russian maskilim to the collective future of Russian Jewry."

²⁷ Yankev Shatzky, *Bikher velt* no. 2 (January-February 1922), 171.

²⁸ Isaak Babel, *Dnevnik 1920 goda*, in *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), vol. 1: 424. Babel's account can be compared to a list of pogrom victims in Komarów in a Polish-language documentary source of the Polish-Bolshevik War, *Inwazja Bolszewicka a Żydzi: Zbior Dokumentow*, 2 vols. (Warsaw, 1921), vol. 2: 20-21, 104-106, as found in Isaac Babel, *1920 Diary*, ed. Carol J. Avins, trans. H. T. Willetts (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 123.

Auschwitz. Later historians would place the number of victims of Treblinka somewhere between 700,000 and 800,000.²⁹

Therefore while I begin from the premise that these writings represented events that did actually take place, I also read them critically, following many other scholars who engage with eyewitness and testimonial accounts as sources of evidence about the past. Many scholars have acknowledged that they scrutinize the information conveyed by eyewitness accounts, and use the vantage point of hindsight to reconstruct a fuller, more accurate picture than what may have been available to eyewitnesses. At the same time, they do not reject the idea that eyewitness accounts can provide different kinds of historically valuable information.³⁰

These accounts also can tell us something about the cultures and societies in which they were produced. Recent studies by Alexandra Garbarini, Annette Wiewiorka and Jacek Leociak have interpreted testimonial texts like diaries and letters as sources for reconstructing the history of daily experience during World War

²⁹ Vasily Grossman, "Treblinskii ad," *Znamia* no. 11 (November 1944), 121-144, here 121. Robert Chandler has pointed out the error in his translation of this essay (Grossman, "The Hell of Treblinka," in *The Road: Stories, Journalism, and Essays*, ed. Robert Chandler, trans. Robert Chandler and Elizabeth Chandler, with Olga Mukovkina [New York: New York Review Books, 2010], 117, 335). A recent study estimates that 713,555 Jews were murdered at Treblinka (Peter Witte and Stephen Tyas, "A New Document on the Deportation and Murder of Jews during 'Einsatz Reinhard' 1942," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15:3 [2001]: 468-486, here 472).

³⁰ There is a large amount of scholarship on the use of testimony, or eyewitness accounts more generally, as a source for studying the past, and in particular, in studies of the Holocaust. Some of the recent works that influence my theoretical approach include Annette Wiewiorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Christopher Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

II.³¹ As Wiewiorka reminds us, witness testimonies are created "as part of a larger cultural movement" and "express the discourse or discourses valued by society at the moment the witnesses tell their stories as much as they render an individual experience." Witness accounts demonstrate the *uniqueness* of individual experience "using the language of the time in which they are delivered and in response to questions and expectations motivated by political and ideological concerns."³² In this study I apply Wiewiorka's approach in the attempt to identify the cultural influences, and political concerns that influenced each writer. In addition, I recount the material history of their attempts to chronicle Jewish experience. I compare different versions of their writings, explain how and whether they reached reading publics, and map out these texts' peregrinations during and after each war.

Given their strong attachment to Russian intellectual tradition, it is also necessary to ask how Russian culture influenced these chroniclers' representation of Jewish civilian experience. As I will argue, some aspects of Russian and Soviet Jewish war writing—for example, the intense preoccupation with the human element of war, and its impact of war on folk culture—can be traced to humanistic currents within Russian literary tradition. The origins of Russian literary responses to war

³¹ Annette Wiewiorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Alexandra Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006); Jacek Leociak, *Text In the Face of Destruction: Accounts from the Warsaw Ghetto Reconsidered*, trans. Emma Harris (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 2004). A study that follows a similar contextualizing approach but is limited to texts written or translated into English is Zoë Vania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also Alexandra Zapruder, Introduction to *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 1-12.

³² Wiewiorka, *The Era of the Witness*, xii.

deserves a more extensive analysis, which we will revisit further on in this introduction. At the outset, however, it is crucial to state that these chroniclers of Jewish catastrophic history were strongly influenced by Russian culture. It is in this sense, therefore, that I speak of them as creators of a distinct—and hybrid—Russian Jewish historiography of modern war and catastrophe.

Each chapter also examines the relationship between the individual writers and parallel efforts among Jewish intellectuals to document war experience. This is an attempt to illuminate the cultural and social discourse and practical concerns to which they responded. For example, we know that An-sky was integrally involved in Jewish civic initiatives both prior to and during the war. His efforts as a relief worker and chronicler of Jewish experience contributed to and can be compared against other projects of his time, notably Dubnov's project to create a comprehensive archive of Jewish war history in a so-called "Black Book." An-sky and Dubnov's efforts to document Jewish suffering embodied their belief that the creation of a documentary record of the people's wartime suffering would help ensure the acquisition of national minority rights and the continuity of Jewish culture in the postwar period.

In striking contrast with the other figures examined in this study, Babel did not associate with or contribute to the Jewish civil society efforts of his time. I interpret his war chronicles as the expression of his own singular, and above all aesthetic, ambitions. Grossman's war writings must be understood in the context of the Soviet state's approach to the representation of Nazi atrocities against Soviet citizens, a complex issue that, as we will see, was fraught with political and moral

significance for Soviet Jewish writers. It is also critically important to note that Soviet Jewish activists undertook projects to rescue, aid and document the experiences of fellow Jewish war victims during World War II in ways that resembled their counterparts' actions during World War I.

Recovering Russian-Jewish Chroniclers of Catastrophe in Historical Perspective

While the individual figures in this study have been subjects of several excellent biographical studies and literary works, Russian and Soviet Jewish war writing has not previously been studied as a historical phenomenon.³³ Similarly, the responses of Soviet Jewish writers to the Russian Civil War and World War II have been discussed in a number of works on Jewish literature in post-revolutionary Russia.³⁴ Previous scholars have explored the literary themes of the writers' important fictional works, but they have not always contextualized Russian-Jewish war chronicles within the broader historically relevant themes that are examined here, such as the changes and continuities with respect to national identity, and the impact of censorship on the writers' respective representations of Jewish civilians.

³³ For biographies of these figures, see Gabriella Safran, *Wandering Soul: S. An-sky, Creator of the Dybbuk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); on Babel, a comprehensive biography is forthcoming by Gregory Freidin; see also Efraim Sicher, *Babel' in Context: A Study in Cultural Identity* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012); *The Enigma of Isaac Babel: Biography, History, Context*, ed. Gregory Freidin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); on Grossman, see John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

³⁴ Alice Stone Nakhimovsky, *Russian-Jewish Literature and Identity: Jabotinsky, Babel, Grossman, Galich, Roziner, Markish* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Sicher, *Babel' in Context*; idem., *Jews in Russian Literature After the October Revolution: Writers and Artists Between Hope and Apostasy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature: Two Centuries of Dual Identity in Prose*, ed. Maxim D. Shrayer, 2 vol. (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2007); Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolution Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

Our knowledge about Russian and Soviet Jewish writers' personal encounters with war remained neglected subjects in scholarly literature in part because they were lost from public view. Several of the writers' private diaries—sources that best illustrate their wartime experiences—were not known about until recently. An-sky's Russian-language war diary has not been published, while Babel and Grossman's war diaries were first published in Russian in 1989 and 1990, respectively.³⁵

Another reason why these war writings have not been recognized as chronicles of Jewish history has to do with scholars' definition of what counts as a "Jewish" chronicle of catastrophe. These definitions are often based on language. David Roskies is one influential scholar who has studied An-sky's war writings in a literary context; he has interpreted them as a paradigmatic example of a modern Jewish literary response to a catastrophic event.³⁶ Roskies' landmark work primarily addressed Yiddish and Hebrew writing, however; texts that he regarded as part of what he called the "Jewish literature of destruction." Consequently, all Russian-language responses to catastrophe, including, for example, Dubnov's works during World War I and the Civil War, as well as Grossman's Holocaust writings, remained unexamined as examples of Jewish cultural responses to catastrophe.

Yet as this study argues, the dynamics that informed Russian and Soviet Jewish war chronicles did not uniformly follow the patterns that Roskies identified in

³⁵ An-sky's war diary is located at RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, 6. Babel's diary first appeared in print in *Sochineniia*, vol. 1: 362-435 (op. cit.); Grossman's war diary was first published in V.S. Grossman, *Gody Voyny* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), 244-457.

³⁶ David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

Yiddish and Hebrew-language responses to catastrophe. For example, Roskies argued that Yiddish and Hebrew writers employed a covenantal metaphor in their literary responses to catastrophe—that they often invoked, or parodied the Biblical concept of a divine covenant between God and the Jewish people as a means to symbolically enact the survival and continuity of the Jewish people in the face of apocalyptic disaster. While it is true that An-sky's Yiddish memoir did appropriate the metaphor of divine covenant (though, as I will argue in Chapter 2, he did not parody that metaphor, as Roskies suggests, but rather radically redefined it to suit a secular vision of Jewish history), covenantal symbols are conspicuously absent from the Russian-language writings that comprise the majority of the accounts we will examine here. Nonetheless, these Russian-language chronicles *did* constitute distinctly Jewish responses to catastrophic events. To understand why, they must be situated in the context of the political and cultural conditions in which they were composed. Knowing what made Grossman a "Jewish" war chronicler requires knowing something about Soviet censorship and wartime propaganda. It also requires a nuanced understanding of this secular and Russified writer's concept of Jewish identity and history.

My study of Soviet Jewish responses to war and catastrophe also contributes to recent innovations in scholarship about Soviet Jewish identity and culture. Several works, some of them framed as reactions to a provocative challenge posed by Yuri Slezkine's 2004 book *The Jewish Century*, have prepared the ground for a study about

Soviet Jewish war chroniclers like this one.³⁷ Whereas Slezkine emphasized what Jews like Babel and Grossman left behind as they became acculturated or assimilated to Soviet society and culture, works by scholars Arkadii Zel'tser, Anna Shternshis, Jeffrey Veidlinger, Elissa Bemporad, Harriet Murav and others cited cases that demonstrated the persistence of Judaic heritage in a Soviet context. These studies argued that Soviet Jews managed to create a distinct Jewish culture and identity while also adhering (or providing an alternative) to socialist norms and values.³⁸ The present work builds upon and deepens that scholarship by showing that Soviet Jews like Babel, Grossman and others brought a distinctly Russian (or Soviet) *and* Jewish perspective to the chronicling of catastrophe, including, in Grossman's case, the documentation of Jewish mass murder during World War II.

The subject of how Soviet Jews documented the Holocaust has been described in its main outlines in a number of important and archive-based works. Studies by Russian-born scholars Shimon Redlich, Il'ia Al'tman, and Gennady Kostyrchenko focused on the Jewish Anti-fascist Committee and *The Black Book*.³⁹ However,

³⁷ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

³⁸ Jeffrey Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theatre: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and idem., *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: War, Photography, and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011); Gennady Estrakh, *In Harness: Yiddish Writers' Romance with Communism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005); Arkadii Zel'tser, *Evreii sovetskoi provintsii: Vitebsk i mestechki, 1917-1941* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006); Elissa Bemporad, "Behavior Unbecoming a Communist: Jewish Religious Practice in Soviet Minsk," *Jewish Social Studies* 14:2 (Winter 2008): 1-31, and idem., *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming); Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2009); Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train*.

³⁹ The pioneering study was Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Anti-fascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1982);

unlike the present study, these earlier works were limited to the wartime period, in part perhaps because they were the first studies of their kind. These scholars broke the proverbial and literal silence around the subject of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, which, as studies by Zvi Gitelman, Amir Weiner, and others have shown, became a taboo subject in Soviet historiography and public discourse after World War II.⁴⁰

Earlier scholars' choice to draw a boundary around the years of the Holocaust itself may also be a symptom of an assumption in the field of Holocaust studies—that the events of the Holocaust *and* efforts to describe it were unprecedented in history. My goal here, as mentioned above, is to challenge this claim by situating Holocaust representation within a broader cultural context and period of time. In this attempt I have been inspired by David Engel's pathbreaking 2010 study, *Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust*. Engel's thesis is that the study of the Holocaust has been artificially severed as a discipline from the field of Jewish History. In response, Engel encouraged studies that would explore "the question of whether earlier eras in the history of the Jews can be productively illuminated from the vantage point of the

archival sources are reproduced in *Evreiskii antifashistskii komitet v SSSR, 1941-1948: Dokumentirovannaia istoriia*, eds. Shimon Redlich and Gennadii Kostyrchenko (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1996). On the history of *The Black Book*, see Il'ia Al'tman, "Toward the History of the Black Book," *Yad Vashem Studies* vol. 21 (1991): 221-249; and idem., "The History and Fate of *The Black Book* and *The Unknown Black Book*," in *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-occupied Soviet Territories*, eds. Joshua Rubenstein and Ilya Altman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008), xix-xl.

⁴⁰ Zvi Gitelman, "Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust, 1945-1991," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941-1945*, eds. Jeffrey Gurock and Lucian Dobroszycki (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 3-27; Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Holocaust."⁴¹ This question is taken up here by examining Jews in Russia and the Soviet Union documented wartime experience prior to *and* during the Holocaust.

This study is not the first to examine the subject of Holocaust documentation in a broader chronological perspective. The very fine studies by Samuel Kassow (about Emmanuel Ringelblum's scholarship in the Warsaw Ghetto), and by Laura Jockusch (about Jewish historical commissions throughout early postwar Europe), do consider efforts to document the Holocaust in relation to earlier Jewish responses to catastrophe.⁴² However, both of these studies focus on documentation efforts among Jews in wartime and postwar Poland or western Europe, not the Soviet Union. It is also noteworthy that both Kassow and Jockusch identify Simon Dubnov to be the intellectual inspiration behind the historiographical projects they describe.

To be sure, Dubnov's influence on the development of East European Jewish historiography, and on An-sky's documentation efforts in the World War, cannot be overstated. However, it is critically important to qualify that Dubnov's ideas, however important they have been for the development of Jewish historiography, do not *entirely* explain the intellectual origins that influenced An-sky and later Soviet Jewish chroniclers of catastrophe. To better understand the origins of Russian Jewish war

⁴¹ David Engel, *Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 223.

⁴² Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?: Rediscovering a Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009 [2007]); Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). An essay that takes a similar approach is David Engel, in "Writing History as a National Mission: The Jews of Poland and their Historiographic Traditions," in *Emanuel Ringelblum: The Man and the Historian*, ed. Israel Gutman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2010), 117-140.

writing, we must look beyond Dubnov to other, more distant, but nonetheless exemplary figures in Jewish history. Similarly, we must draw attention to the role that Russian cultural influences played in the formation of a distinctly Russian-Jewish historiography of war and catastrophe.

Dual Origins: Jewish and Russian War Writing in Historical Perspective

The origin of Jewish war writing is inextricably entwined with the origin of Jewish history-writing. Both can be traced to an ancient event that also defines Jewish collective memory—the Roman suppression of the Jewish revolt in Judea from 66 to 70 CE and the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. One man who witnessed and chronicled that war, Flavius Josephus (born Yosef ben Matityahu), became not only the first Jewish war writer, but also the first Jewish historian. Josephus's well-known story bears retelling here because it provides a prototype in some respects for An-sky, Babel and Grossman's encounters with twentieth-century wars in Europe.

Josephus was born circa 37 CE into a priestly family in Jerusalem. He took up arms during the revolt against Rome, and led a sect of moderate Jews in the Galilee against both Rome, as well as more religiously zealous factions of Jews fighting for control of the region. The Roman Army captured Josephus in 67 CE, but spared his life. The army held him hostage for three years as an interpreter, and in that guise, Josephus visited Jerusalem, the city of his birth, accompanying Titus, the son of Emperor Vespasian. Josephus watched the imperial army that had spared his own life besiege his native city and demolish the Temple. He also saw the Romans take his

friends and family captive. After the war, he settled in Rome, where he was given Roman citizenship, a name that connected him to the ruling family (Flavius), and a pension for life. He began writing Jewish history, including a history of the 66-70 Roman-Jewish War.⁴³ Twenty years later, and still living comfortably in Rome, Josephus revisited his memories of the war while writing his autobiography in Greek.

When Josephus rethought his own role in the war in which the Romans had destroyed the Jews' spiritual and political capital, he sought to reconcile his identification with both imperial Rome *and* the Jewish victims, who had included his own family. In his autobiography Josephus tried to resolve these tensions by presenting himself as a man who had displayed Roman virtues of courage and physical strength, but had also acted out of devotion to Jews, namely by using his smarts—his *yidisher kop*—to subvert his enemies, rescue fellow Jews, and all the while faithfully serve the God of Israel. He did, however, neglect to mention, or else, as Michael Stanislawski has suggested, had decided to forget what had happened to the friends and family he saw being held captive in the doomed city.⁴⁴

Josephus's actions as a witness to and later chronicler of the Roman Army's destruction of his native city can be interpreted as a starting point, or template for understanding some of the contradictions that figures like An-sky, Babel and Grossman later faced as witnesses to catastrophic violence in their own "native"

⁴³ Translated from ancient Greek into English as Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Revised Edition, trans. G.A. Williamson (London: Penguin Classics, 1981).

⁴⁴ I am paraphrasing Michael Stanislawski's interpretation of Josephus's *Vita* in Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews: Essays in Jewish Self-Fashioning* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004), 18-31.

territory. Like Josephus, An-sky and Babel attempted in their writings to reconcile their identities as Jews with the violent acts that they witnessed their own armies commit. The example of Josephus applies to Grossman for a different reason: he too had to face that his family and friends had been among the victims killed by an occupying army (not, in Grossman's case, his own army). Like Josephus, all three writers deeply identified with the dominant culture of the place where they lived, yet when faced by the catastrophic destruction of Jewish populations during wartime, they expressed in different ways an identification with the people—their people—through their efforts to observe or support the victims, and to chronicle their experiences. It is in this sense, then, that wars provide a fascinating, if also tragic, case study for understanding the factors that have defined the fashioning of Jewish identity from ancient times to the present.

As men who, like Josephus, strongly associated with the hegemonic (in their case) Russian culture throughout their adult lives, An-sky, Babel and Grossman's war writings can be interpreted in another frame of reference as well—as examples of a distinctly Russian tradition of war correspondence. The influence of that tradition and its foundational figures can be explicitly identified within their works. It originated with the Russian journalists and litterateurs who took part in the Crimean War of 1854-1855 and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.

An-sky knew a great deal about these writers prior to the First World War. In a 1910 essay called "Narod i voyna" (The Folk and War) he wrote about folk

responses to war and what they revealed about a people's national character.⁴⁵ The references he cited in that essay—the works of Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1828-1910), and the lesser-known author Vasily Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko (1845-1936)—offer important clues about the moral values and literary methods that he and other future Russian-Jewish war writers appropriated from Russian literary tradition.

In his essay An-sky cited Tolstoy's best-known writings about war: *War and Peace*, and *Sebastopol Stories*, a series of sketches based on Tolstoy's experiences as a young officer during the siege of Sebastopol during the Crimean War.⁴⁶ In the latter work, Tolstoy had sought to reveal aspects of the human condition at war, and to mediate the experience of intense violence and suffering for readers in distant locations. Using realistic prose, his journalistic sketches described heroic deeds of courageous soldiers, but also a dysfunctional military machine staffed by corrupt officers, and soldiers, including many former serfs, who followed orders like automatons. Tolstoy wrote of hospitals where "you will see war not as a beautiful, orderly, and gleaming formation, with music and beaten drums, streaming banners and generals on prancing horses, but war in its authentic expression—as blood, suffering, and death."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ An-sky, "Narod i voina," *Vestnik Evropy* vol. 45, no. 3 (March 1910): 196-222; vol. 45, no. 4 (April 1910): 128-152.

⁴⁶ Ibid., no. 4: 137, 142, 146, 147, 148, 151. For the importance of the Crimean War in launching the figure of the war correspondent in western countries, see Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), xi.

⁴⁷ L. N. Tolstoy, *Sevastopol'skie rasskazy*, in *Sobranie Sochinenii v 22 tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1979), vol. 2: 87-207, here on 93; cited from idem., *The Sebastopol Sketches*, trans. David McDuff (New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), 48.

Tolstoy insisted in his descriptions of Sebastopol that the writer's job at the front was not only to interview officers for information or boost the morale of readers at home with tales of victory, but primarily, to be a witness to the suffering of ordinary soldiers. As he led his readers through the hospital, he urged them:

"Make your way forward and do not be ashamed to have come, as it were, to *observe* the sufferers (*smotret' na stradal'tsev*), do not be embarrassed to go up to them and talk to them: people in distress are glad to see a friendly human face, they are glad to talk about their sufferings and receive a few words of sympathy and affection."⁴⁸

For us, there are several crucial elements of this passage: first, Tolstoy's attention to human suffering; second, his compulsion to witness; and third, the exchange of compassionate dialogue between writer and "sufferer." Each of these elements are evident in An-sky's writings on Jewish civilian experience during the First World War. In different ways and in different contexts, Babel and Grossman also embodied Tolstoyan principles as they chronicled Jewish catastrophic history.

The second figure An-sky cited in "The Folk and War" essay was Nemirovich-Danchenko, who began his career as a journalist during the Russo-Turkish war in 1877-78, and reported again from Russia's war with Japan in 1904-05. He has been described as Russia's "first star reporter," and as an intellectual who pioneered a place in society for Russian war correspondents.⁴⁹ Like Tolstoy, Nemirovich-Danchenko's reports espoused not only patriotic or jingoistic adulation of

⁴⁸ Tolstoi, *Sobranie Sochinenii* 2: 90 / *The Sebastopol Sketches*, 44-45. Emphasis in McDuff's translation .

⁴⁹ Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 87. On the history of Russian war correspondence see 87-92, 186-187, 259-263. An-sky referred to Nemirovich-Danchenko's three-volume history of the Crimean War of 1877-1878, *God voiny v Maloi Asii* (St. Petersburg: P.P. Soikin, 1878).

heroic officers and generals, but also a populist-inspired attempt to represent civilians' and soldiers' experiences of war.

Nemirovich-Danchenko also innovated several technical aspects of war correspondence. His articles expanded the range of perspectives reporters usually took, for example, combining first-person narration with an ethnographic impulse to include space for his interlocutors, whose words and vernacular speech he cited verbatim.⁵⁰ The collection of folkloric material from the field of war also expressed a Tolstoyan attempt to understand the experience of war not only from the perspective of "great men," but ordinary people as well.

An-sky certainly noticed that Nemirovich-Danchenko's work blurred the lines between journalism and ethnography. Indeed, An-sky cited at length the latter's descriptions of stories, rumors, anecdotes and songs that he had collected among officers, soldiers and civilians. (Of course, An-sky was also then in the midst of planning his own ambitious project to collect folklore among Jews in the Pale of Settlement, which he launched in 1911, one year after he wrote "The Folk and War.")

It makes logical sense in light of the Russian Empire's geography that the methods of ethnography and war correspondence would influence one another. In Russia, wars took place in border regions. This meant that war correspondents' tours of front zones invariably brought them to the ethnic peripheries of the Empire,

⁵⁰ McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime*, 186, 120. McReynolds, 88, suggests that Nemirovich-Danchenko's stance towards war correspondence can be explained by the influence of his Armenian mother, who instilled in him an "abiding love for the ethnic peripheries of the Russian empire."

whether in Ukraine, the Crimea, the Caucasus, or eastern Siberia. It is telling that contemporaries referred to Nemirovich-Danchenko as a "tourist-writer" and "correspondent-ethnographer."⁵¹

Tolstoy and Nemirovich-Danchenko are emblematic of a humanistic approach that characterized Russian war correspondence. Both writers sought to show what a people's folklore and daily experiences could reveal about the nature of war and its impact on human beings. This is significant because it potentially set them at odds with the state and its armed forces, which invariably desired and pressured writers to boost morale and aid victory.⁵² Moreover, after the Crimean War it became widely expected that war correspondents not just in Russia, but around the world would portray enemy peoples and suspect groups in a negative light. As we will explore further in Chapter 1, the Russian military developed a view in the years prior to the First World War that became enshrined in military culture through the language of statistics and science. According to this view, the Russian military regarded ethnically diverse peoples in border regions, including Poles, Muslims, ethnic Germans, and Jews, as internal foes, precisely because they were seen and classified as unpatriotic and unreliable subject peoples.⁵³

⁵¹ The entry "Nemirovich-Danchenko Vasilii Ivanovich: Biobibliograficheskaya spravka," cites references of the terms from the populist papers *Otechestvennye zapiski* and *Budil'nik* in 1877 and 1881, respectively, in *Russkie pisateli. Biobibliograficheskii slovar'*, T. 2, ed. P.A. Nikolaeva (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1990).

⁵² The history of war correspondence (in the English language) is discussed in Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

⁵³ Peter Holquist, "To Count, to Extract, To Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia," in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of*

Tolstoy sought to reveal the human catastrophe of war in its "authentic expression" through the powers of observation; Nemirovich-Danchenko used his position as a war correspondent to publish articles about synagogues, mosques, and Buddhist and pagan temples. Their war writings reflected a principled form of resistance to the military's view of ethnic groups in border regions. The traveling war writers represented diverse groups of the ethnic and geographic peripheries as peoples with distinct folk culture and humanity. The Russian military, in contrast, classified these same peoples as suspect groups, and they codified this belief using the language of military science. In times of war, the military used this "scientific" proof of these groups' suspect characters as a pretext for removing them from the region by whatever means necessary, whether deportation or extermination. As a result, Russian war correspondents approached the war zone with a modicum of humanity that often brought them into conflict with the state's xenophobic military ethos.

In an encounter laced with irony and perhaps also the anxiety of influence, An-sky chanced to cross paths with the old war horse Nemirovich-Danchenko in Galicia during World War I. The latter was apparently still at large after forty years and three wars. By now, as An-sky put it with only thinly veiled envy, he was known as a "famous war correspondent," a writer whose articles could make or break an officer's career.⁵⁴

Lenin and Stalin, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 111-144.

⁵⁴ S. An-sky, *Der Yudisher Khurbn fun poylen galitsye un bukovina, fun tog-bukh 1914-1917*, in *Gezamelte shriftn in fuftsen bender* (Vilna, Warsaw, New York: Farlag "An-sky," 1928), vol. 4-6, here vol. 5:74-75. The translator of An-sky's memoir incorrectly identifies the "famous war correspondent"

Like these earlier figures, An-sky, Babel and Grossman traveled to the country's geographic peripheries during the three wars between 1914 and 1945. And indeed, each of the different powers who occupied the region at various times—including Tsarist, White, Bolshevik, Polish national, Ukrainian national, and German forces—invariably accused the Jewish population of suspect activities and treachery. Such accusations had lethal consequences when they were used as pretexts for classifying entire peoples of the region as supposedly inferior or otherwise dangerous, and hence allowing policies or practices of expulsion, rape and killing. This was indeed what happened during each of the wars that took place in the region between 1914 and 1945. Like the Russian war correspondents before them, An-sky, Babel and Grossman represented Jews in the war zone in a starkly opposed manner—not as "enemy aliens," but in humanistic fashion, and primarily as a people, or nation defined by a distinct and rich cultural tradition and collective history.

Tolstoy's *War and Peace* provided a model for several generations of intellectuals who wrote about war in Russia, including the protagonists of this study. An-sky, as we know, cited it in his 1910 essay. Likewise, Babel described Tolstoy as

that An-sky meets as Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko (S. Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I*, ed. and trans. Joachim Neugroschel [New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002], 147). Vladimir Ivanovich Danchenko (1858-1943) was the younger brother of war correspondent Vasilii Ivanovich, and became famous in his own right as a co-founder, with Konstantin Stanislavskii, of the Moscow Art Theater in 1898. Vladimir Ivanovich was also an important figure for An-sky when the latter attempted to stage *The Dybbuk* in Petrograd. See An-sky's diary for January 5 and 12, 1915, RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, ed. kh. 5, l. 3, 5.

"the most marvelous writer who ever lived," and the "man one should learn from."⁵⁵

We also know that Grossman read *War and Peace* twice during the Second World War, and modeled his post-war novels *For a Just Cause* and *Life and Fate* after it.⁵⁶

What is less known, however, and what the following chapters will illuminate in greater detail, is that these writers' wartime encounters with Jews were also shaped by a Tolstoyan model of humanistic war writing.

A Map of this Study

Chapters 1 through 3 focus on the First World War period. Chapter 1 gives the social, political and cultural context of An-sky's efforts as a relief worker on the Eastern Front. The chapter surveys the efforts of Russian Jewish intellectuals based mainly in Petrograd who responded to the urgent needs of Jewish civilians and soldiers in Russia and Galicia. Like his contemporaries, An-sky conceived of his task to aid, rescue and represent Jewish war victims as a national mission.

Chapter 2 looks closely at An-sky's encounter with Jews in Galicia and the Pale of Settlement as reflected in his Russian-language diary from 1915 and his post-war Yiddish memoir. I argue that An-sky employed his prior knowledge of concepts and categories in Jewish folklore as he attempted, through the process of translation and revision, to create a Jewish national narrative in the Yiddish language. An-sky

⁵⁵ For Babel's statements, see Isaac Babel, *You Must Know Everything: Stories, 1915-1937*, ed. Nathalie Babel, trans. Max Hayward (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1966), 213.

⁵⁶ On Grossman, see Jochen Hellbeck, "War and Peace for the Twentieth Century," *Raritan* 26:4 (Spring 2007): 24-48, here 26.

sought to create a secular Jewish national narrative of catastrophe, one that invested his role as a relief work with prophetic significance and authority.

Chapter 3 tells the little-known story of Simon Dubnov's effort to comprehensively document the Jewish experience of the First World War in an archive and a Russian-language text based on material from that archive, the first ever "black book" of Russian Jewry. Dubnov's project expressed his own political intentions, and also serves as a foil for understanding An-sky's parallel effort to construct a Jewish national wartime narrative. Dubnov's work is implicitly understood as a precedent for what became the second "black book" about the wartime suffering of Jews in German-occupied USSR and Poland during World War II.

Chapter 4 is about Isaac Babel during the ten weeks he spent fighting with the Bolsheviks in the Soviet-Polish War. Babel's path with the Red Army brought him to many of the same locations that An-sky had seen five years earlier in Volhynia and Galicia. I compare the two writers' accounts of the same towns, and explain why Babel, in stark contrast to An-sky, often concealed or appeared indifferent to the suffering of the Jewish civilians whom he encountered and described in his war diary.

Chapter 5 looks at Vasily Grossman's writings about Nazi-organized atrocities against Jews in Ukraine and Poland during the Second World War. It describes Grossman's journey across Ukraine and Poland as the Red Army liberated the region between 1943 and 1945. I argue that Grossman and his contemporaries developed a distinctly Jewish approach to witnessing and chronicling Jewish catastrophe in reaction to conventions of Soviet war propaganda and atrocity representation. The

chapter also closely examines Grossman's important 1943 essay "Ukraine Without Jews," with attention to the concept of Jewish peoplehood that he employed to depict the murdered victims. As I argue, Grossman's notion of Jewish peoplehood or national identity echoed (albeit with variations) the ideas of Jewish national identity articulated by Dubnov and An-sky more than thirty years earlier.

Note on Transliterations and Translations

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The transliteration of words from Russian and Hebrew follows the Library of Congress system, although I have removed diacritic marks, and made exceptions for words with commonly recognized English spellings (i.e., Tolstoy, Vasily, An-sky). The transliteration of words from Yiddish follows YIVO standards. Dates given prior to February 1918 follow the Julian ("Old Style") calendar, which was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar in the nineteenth century, and thirteen days behind in the twentieth century.

The spelling of place names in Poland and Ukraine is rendered with a mixed system. Names of places in present-day Ukraine are transliterated from the writers' own Russian spellings rather than current spellings in Ukrainian (hence, Zhitomir, rather than Zhytomyr; Berdichev, not Berdychiv). Places that are now in Poland, or on the Ukrainian side of the border but whose names are non-Russian in origin (such as Radziwiłłów and Toporów, for example), are given in Polish spellings.

Chapter 1

Fighting 'On Our Own Territory': The Relief, Rescue and Representation of Jews in Russia during World War I

"Times of colossal events are coming; they must be recorded."
-Lev Shternberg, quoted by Simon Dubnov (July 25, 1914)¹

In late July 1914, the Russian Empire mobilized its armed forces against the Central Powers. The vast territory between St. Petersburg and Berlin became a war zone and site of the Eastern Front. Over the next five years, the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and German armies engaged in battle along a thousand mile-long front, devastating the Polish, Ukrainian, Belorussian and Baltic lands where more than six million Jews lived.

An-sky left Petrograd in early August 1914 and traveled the war zone extensively. He set out to assist Jewish war victims in big cities like Minsk and Warsaw as well as smaller towns in the vicinity. He returned frequently to "the home front," in Petrograd, to report before Jewish activists there about the needs of the war victims he had seen. After Dubnov heard one of An-sky's reports that summer, he remarked that the information the latter had conveyed "inundated one with horror."²

But that horror did not deter An-sky in his quest to aid, and equally importantly, to write about Jewish war victims. In October 1914, he wrote on the

¹ S.M. Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni. Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia: Materialy dlia istorii moego vremeni*, ed. Viktor Kel'ner (Saint Petersburg: Evreiskii universitet v Moskve/Rossiiskaia natsional'naia biblioteka, 1998), 336.

² Ibid., 338.

pages of *Rech'* (Speech), newspaper of Russia's liberal Constitutional Democrat party, about the plight of Jewish refugees in Minsk. He described their desperation and uncertainty, as well as his own efforts to secure shelter for them from local municipal authorities.³ In November, he visited a Jewish hospital in Moscow, where he interviewed wounded soldiers and wrote about their frontline experiences for another Russian liberal paper, *Den'* (Day).⁴ In late November and December, he traveled in and around Warsaw, which had been flooded by 80,000 Jewish refugees from the vicinity, and in January he returned to Petrograd to report on their conditions.⁵

During the first months of the war An-sky set his sights on a region further west: he wanted to secure permission to become a civilian aid worker in Galicia, the easternmost province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that the Russian Army had invaded and occupied in September 1914. On January 23, 1915, after an exhausting attempt to acquire papers that allowed him as a civilian to enter occupied Galicia, he arrived in Brody, a major city in eastern Galicia with a significant Jewish population.⁶

For the next five months in Galicia, he worked on behalf of the Jewish emergency relief organization that had been established the previous August in

³ S. An-skii, "Putevyia zametki," *Rech'* no. 279 (October 16 [29], 1914), 2.

⁴ S. An-skii, "V evreiskom lazarete," *Den'* (November 28, 1914), 324.

⁵ For An-sky's visit to Warsaw and surrounding towns in late 1914, see Part One of *Der Yudisher Khurbn fun poylen galitsye un bukovina, fun tog-bukh 1914-1917*, in *Gezamelte shriftn in fuftsien bender* (Vilna, Warsaw, New York: Farlag "An-sky," 1928), vol. 4-6 (hence, GS, followed by volume and page, here 4:5-119). I follow An-sky's biographer Gabriella Safran, citing and in some places adapting from the published English translation of *Khurbn Galitsye*, which, as Safran notes, is incomplete and occasionally incorrect: S. Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I*, ed. and trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002) (hence N page number). The statistic of refugees in Warsaw is from Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 138; see also Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 17.

⁶ An-sky, diary entry of January 23, 1915/ RGALI, f. 2583, op.1, d.5, l.17.

Petrograd, the Jewish Committee for the Relief of War Victims (*Evreiskii komitet dlia pomoshchi zhertvam voyny*, or EKOPO). An-sky distributed aid to war victims on behalf of EKOPO in the cities and far-flung small towns of Galicia, where a population of nearly one million Jews had come under Russian military occupation.⁷ As a traveling relief worker he came face to face with those he sought to help, often in the places where they lived, or in places where they had found temporary shelter as refugees or deportees.

In the opening pages of *Khurbn Galitsye*, the memoir he completed after the war, An-sky wrote that 1914 had marked the "beginning of one of the darkest moments in Jewish history."⁸ Jews became the subjects of wildly false rumors, and the Russian military regarded them collectively as internal enemies who should be removed from front zones by all necessary means. What was worse, wrote An-sky, the liberal Russian intelligentsia believed every anti-Jewish lie and urged passivity toward the government and military. Likewise, England and France turned a deaf ear to Jewish problems. In short, Russian Jewry had faced the outbreak of war "in a disorganized, chaotic state."⁹

When An-sky described his own personal contribution as a relief worker, he framed it as a panacea to the ubiquitous passivity and chaos that had left Jewish civilians without help: "I resolved to muster all my strength," he wrote, in order to

⁷ According to a 1910 census, the Jewish population in Galicia was 871,906 or 11% of the total population; the Jewish population of Bukovina (southern Galicia) was 102,919, or 13% of the total; from Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

⁸ GS 4: 6.

⁹ GS 4: 12.

"travel amongst the destroyed towns, determine the extent of the catastrophe and poverty, and return [to Petrograd] with factual materials."¹⁰ An-sky did indeed travel and collect a great deal of information on his own. In *Khurbn Galitsye* he recalled many instances of being the sole being in town capable of and interested in organizing help for people.

An-sky portrayed his own efforts as a solitary, Promethean struggle to save Jewish lives and to document their wartime experiences. Indeed, his dramatic and moving account was so persuasive that later scholars accepted it at face value. In the words of literary scholar David Roskies, the journey that An-sky presented in *Khurbn Galitsye* resembled a "one-man rescue operation to save the lives, livelihoods, letters, and legends of Jews victimized by the war."¹¹ An-sky's self-presentation led to a historically misleading conclusion, however; namely, that he acted in isolation, without parallel and lacking relations to his contemporaries.

In response to this assumption, this chapter describes the social and historical setting in which An-sky carried out his relief, rescue and documentation efforts during World War I. Building on recent studies of An-sky, I contribute important new insights to the study of his life and works by showing that they were integral to, and cannot be understood apart from the broader efforts of Russian Jews to save lives and to document the experiences of Jews in the war zone.¹²

¹⁰ GS 4: 16.

¹¹ David G. Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 19.

¹² Gabriella Safran's recent biography provides a great deal of historic context for his war efforts, and I rely on it throughout this chapter: *Wandering Soul: S. An-sky, Creator of the Dybbuk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), esp. 225-257. For other important studies of An-sky's life and work,

To place An-sky's wartime efforts in context, it is important to know two things about Jews in Russia during the First World War: first, that tens of thousands of Jewish civilians as well as Jewish troops experienced unprecedented forms of persecution, including mass expulsion, surveillance, and censorship, at the hands of the Russian military. Second, Jewish activists, including liberals, Zionists, and socialists alike, responded to that persecution, chiefly in the form of relief work, but also through documentation efforts.

The responses of Jewish activists to these extraordinary challenges reinforced the collective sense that Jews constituted a distinct national group within the Russian Empire. Jewish national activists also recognized these challenges as an unprecedented political opportunity. They felt compelled to mobilize in self-defense and to promote their collective interests in an autocratic empire whose political situation was widely expected to be transformed in the course of the war.¹³

Jewish intellectual activists, including An-sky, Dubnov, and many others, framed their relief, rescue and representation efforts as national missions. They

see David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999); *The Worlds of S. An-sky: A Russian-Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century*, eds. Gabriella Safran and Steven Zipperstein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); *Photographing the Jewish Nation: Pictures from S. An-sky's Ethnographic Expeditions*, eds. Eugene M. Avrutin, Valerii Dymshits, Alexander Ivanov, Alexander Lvov, Harriet Murav, and Alla Sokolova (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2009); Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹³ Several scholars have written about World War I as a moment of both crisis and opportunity, observing how in various communities, initiatives launched during the war served as a foundation for projects to promote cultural and political autonomy in the interwar period; Steven Zipperstein writes about Petersburg Jewry in "The Politics of Relief"; Samuel Kassow writes about Vilna Jewry, in "Jewish Communal Politics in Transition. The Vilna Kehile, 1919-1920," in *YIVO Annual* vol. 20, ed. Deborah Dash Moore (Northwestern University Press and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1991), 61-91; Ezra Mendelsohn writes about Polish Jewry, in *Zionism in Poland. The Formative Years, 1915-1926* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

documented Jewish military and civilian experience in various forms, including statistical analyses, polemical newspaper articles, ethnographic travelogues, political pamphlets, and documentary compilations. These documents represented a collective effort to create a national narrative of wartime experience.

These activists' efforts to document anti-Jewish violence during the war also drew upon pre-existing traditions of communal responsibility and historical documentation. During the exceptional circumstances of wartime, Jewish activists appropriated these pre-war practices and invested them with urgency, as well as political and financial legitimacy. Activists documented the needs of civilians and war victims in order to fulfill concrete and immediate functions. First, they sought to raise funds for the vast network of relief organizations that provided aid to war victims. Second, they wanted to provide evidence and written proof, especially in the form of official documents, that could serve as political capital in the charged domestic and international political arena—where Russia's Jewish political activists had been waging a struggle for Jewish civil rights for nearly two decades.

The subject of how An-sky and his contemporaries represented Jewish wartime experience—and equally importantly, the goals they sought to fulfill by doing so—are neglected topics in the scholarly literature of this period.¹⁴ Although

¹⁴ For social and political histories of Jews in Russia during World War I, see Salo Wittmayer Baron, *The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 187-200; Mordechai Altschuler, "Russia and her Jews: The Impact of the 1914 War," *The Wiener Library Bulletin* no. 30-31 (1973-74): 12-16; Steven J. Zipperstein, "The Politics of Relief: The Transformation of Russian Jewish Communal Life during the First World War," in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry IV: Jews and the European Crisis*, ed. Jonathan Frankel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): 22-40; Samuel Kassow, "Jewish Communal Politics in Transition: The Vilna Kehile, 1919-1920," in *YIVO Annual* vol. 20, Deborah Dash Moore, ed. (Northwestern University Press and the YIVO Institute for Jewish

scholars have studied the social, political and cultural history of Jews during World War I, the subjects of war documentation and history-writing have hardly been broached. The primary reason why is because scholars have assumed that since written communication in Hebrew and Yiddish was heavily censored in Russia during the war, efforts among Russian Jews to record create a comprehensive documentation of Jewish war history were doomed from the start. In a study of Jewish historical documentation projects before and after the Holocaust, Laura Jockusch has written that "the efforts of An-ski [sic] and his friends to compile a comprehensive documentation failed, largely because wartime censorship banned the Hebrew and Yiddish press and barred the sending of Hebrew characters in the mail."¹⁵

Research, 1991), 61-91; Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, *The Tsars and the Jews: Reform, Reaction and Anti-Semitism in Imperial Russia, 1772-1917* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 323-406; Aviel Roshwald, "Jewish Cultural Identity in Eastern and Central Europe during the Great War," in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918*, eds. Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 89-126; A.I. Khaesh, "Vyselenie Evreev iz Litvy vesnoi 1915 goda," (Moscow: Jewish Heritage Society, 2000), available at <<http://www.jewish-heritage.org/prep56.htm>> (accessed 31 August 2011); Eric Lohr, "The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I," *Russian Review* 60 (July 2001): 404-419; Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 137-150; Viktor Kel'ner, "The Jewish Question and Russian Social Life During World War I," *Russian Studies in History* 43:1 (2004): 11-40; Semion Gol'din, "Russian Jewry under Tsarist Military Rule during World War I," (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 2005) [Russian]; Alexander V. Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland: War, Ethnicity and Anti-Jewish Violence in East Galicia, 1914-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); *Mirovoi krizis 1914-1920 godov i sud'ba vostochnoevropetskogo evreistva*, eds. O.V. Budnitskii, O.V. Belova, V.E. Kel'ner, V.V. Mochalova (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005); Konrad Zieliński, "The Shtetl in Poland, 1914-1918," in *The Shtetl: New Evaluations*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 102-120; Andrew Noble Koss, "World War I and the Remaking of Jewish Vilna, 1914-1918," (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2010).¹⁵ Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25. Jockusch's view follows David Roskies, who has argued that efforts to record Jewish history during World War I "largely failed" because "the tsarist government closed down the entire Jewish-language press, imposed strict censorship on all news from the war front, and banned the use of the Hebrew alphabet in the mails," in *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past*, 19.

The assumption that Russian Jews failed to document their wartime history due to censorship has obscured the very important fact that they gathered and generated vast amounts of documents. That material was written not primarily in Hebrew or Yiddish, but in Russian. Although much of it was subsequently lost or scattered in personal collections, various documents were published in Russia and abroad during, and in the years immediately after the war. In the pages that follow we will retrace the story behind those documents: how they were written, the context in which they were produced, and the goals that Russian Jewish activists meant for them to serve.

"An Unreliable Element:" Jews in Russia during World War I

An-sky's choice to be an aid worker and chronicler of catastrophe addressed the circumstances that faced Jews in Russia during the war. On the one hand, these were challenging times for the Jewish masses and intellectuals working on their behalf. A Tsarist decree of July 16, 1914 placed nearly all of European Russia under Russian martial law. The territory of Poland became the first major theater of conflict. Then in September 1914, the Russian military invaded and occupied Galicia, a territory with nearly one million Jews who formed nearly twelve percent of a population otherwise mainly composed by Ukrainians and Poles.¹⁶ As enemy forces

¹⁶ According to a 1910 census, Jews numbered 871,906, or 11% of the total population in Galicia and 102,919, of 13% of the population in Bukovina, alongside roughly equal numbers of Poles and Ukrainians. In Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15. Rozenblit (66) cites the estimate of 157,630 Jewish refugees from Galicia in western Austria at the end of 1915, though the actual number is difficult to ascertain as people did not register as refugees or sought to return home after fleeing.

bombed and shelled the region where hundreds of Jewish civilians lived, the Russian military began to forcibly displace entire populations along the Eastern Front.

On July 24, 1914, four days after the Russian Army began to mass its forces against Germany, the historian, lawyer, and Jewish civic rights activist Solomon Pozner (1876-1946) wrote in the Russian-Jewish weekly *Novyi voskhod* (New Dawn) that Jews had to fight on behalf of two causes: first, they were obligated to defend "the country in which we have lived for hundreds of years and from which nothing—neither persecution nor tyranny—can possibly sever us." Second, Jews would have to fight for themselves, in a war that would take place, as he wrote, "on our own territory, threatening those of us who live there—our wives, children, and elderly parents."¹⁷

Pozner did not write these words from within the war zone. He lived in Petrograd along with a community of nearly 35,000 other Jews.¹⁸ Although Petrograd was hundreds of miles from the fighting and military activity in the Empire's western and southern borderlands, Pozner asserted that Jews at the home front had intimate ties to their counterparts in the war zone, and hence a moral imperative to aid and defend them. Like An-sky, nearly all of them hailed from and still had family in the shtetls and cities of the Pale.¹⁹ Pozner's remarks suggested that the presence of

¹⁷ S.V. Pozner, "Voyna," *Novyi voskhod* no. 29 (24 July 1914), 3.

¹⁸ Population figure cited from Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 92.

¹⁹ Through the acquisition of special residence permits granted to certain members of occupational guilds, relatively small numbers of Jews had since the mid-nineteenth century begun to move from the Pale to Russia's interior cities. For the history of Jews in St. Petersburg, see Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, 81-198; Mikhail Beizer, *The Jews of St. Petersburg: Excursions through a Noble Past* (Philadelphia and New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989).

millions of Jewish civilians in "our own territory" would require a means of bridging the psychological and geographic distance between the home front and war zone.

When their "own territory" became a theater of fighting, Jews faced more threats to their well-being than other ethnic groups along the Eastern Front. The common wartime practices of price fixing, requisitions and bans on smuggling, for example, disproportionately affected the place of Jews in local economies early on in the war. Even more catastrophic for Jewish civilian populations, however, was that Russian military and neighboring populations widely suspected them of harboring loyalties to the German and Austrian enemy. Suspicions led to rumors of espionage at first. Based on the rumors, the military undertook concrete steps to monitor Jewish civilians and combatants. Together with the Empire's German subjects, Jews in Russia became enemy aliens in the eyes of the military that was defending their homeland, armed forces in which Jews themselves were sacrificing their lives.

The Russian Army was granted authority to forcibly remove not just individuals but entire populations of groups whose presence was regarded as dangerous to militarily strategic areas. The military's policies included allowances for the expulsion, deportation, and surveillance of entire communities of Jews. A large number of orders were issued in multiple locations. The orders were unevenly applied, and allowed for situations in which troops could violate civilians without fear of punishment. Troops exercised this small amount of autonomy by robbing, raping and sometimes killing Jews.

The Russian Army's atrocities against Jewish civilians—what historian Eric Lohr has referred to as "military pogroms"—were unprecedented in the history of the Russian Empire. Whereas earlier waves of pogroms in the Russian Empire (notably from 1881 to 1884, and 1903 to 1906) had been instigated by local mobs, and *not* the Russian government, during the war, the Russian military played a decisive role in fomenting and executing pogroms. These were carried out on the pretext of what Lohr calls a "legitimized framework for anti-Jewish violence," or actions that were justified as protective measures against so-called "enemy aliens."²⁰

Why did Russian Jews become victims of the military that was fighting on behalf of their own country? Scholars have found that the Russian military's violence against Jewish civilians was rooted in a pre-existing belief among military elites that Jews collectively constituted an unpatriotic population. Moreover, the military had regarded their presence in the empire's western peripheries as a security threat for decades before the war. Military discourse in the late nineteenth century described Jews as an undesirable, unreliable, and unpatriotic "element."²¹ A negative association in military consciousness between Jews and frontier security could be traced as far back as the reign of Nicholas I, who decreed that Jews could not live

²⁰ Eric Lohr, "The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I," *Russian Review* 60 (July 2001): 404-419, here 406-407. The landmark volume in which scholars showed that the Russian government had not been responsible for starting pogroms is *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²¹ Peter Holquist, "To Count, to Extract, To Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia," in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 115. On connections between pre-war and wartime anti-Semitism of Russia's military elites, see Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827-1917: Drafted into Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 250.

within fifty kilometers of the western frontier.²² Reservations about their supposed "unreliability" extended to Jewish combatants as well. During the war, officers received questionnaires designed specifically to assess the likelihood of whether Jewish soldiers under their command would commit treason.²³

Rhetoric about Jewish espionage came from the very top of the military's chain of command. Both the Commander in Chief (until August 1915) Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, as well as his Chief of Staff Nikolai Ianushkevich became obsessed with the idea of Jewish espionage. Their views circulated widely among the military elite. This rhetoric also reinforced popular associations between Jews and treason among civilian populations and Russian Army troops alike. Some troops who came from distant parts of the empire encountered Jews for the first time during the war. Their first impressions were undoubtedly colored by the messages from their superiors that Jews collectively constituted enemy aliens.

Jewish civilians' use of a "foreign" language was particularly conducive to suspicion. Troops could have easily confused the Jews' use of Yiddish for German, an ignorance, as Peter Gatrell has written, that "only reinforced the message from their superiors that Jews were not to be trusted."²⁴ Indeed, in 1915 the Jewish lawyer and activist Maksim Vinaver publicly acknowledged before Russia's political elites that the "alien" qualities of Jewish civilians, particularly religious ones, had helped give rise to troops' wild imaginings, or what he called "fantasies of impossible things

²² Gatrell makes this point in *A Whole Empire Walking*, 16.

²³ For Russian Army questionnaires soliciting information on "the conduct of Jews in the Army" and also on "the attitude of the Jewish population to the war," see "Dokumenty o presledovanii evreev" *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii* 19 (1928): 253, 259, 263-65.

²⁴ Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, 17.

concerning these dark, strangely dressed, frightened and hiding people—fantasies which became entirely believable."²⁵

During his travels along the Eastern Front, An-sky also observed that in the popular imagination of civilians and combatants alike, Jews were thought to possess an intelligent curiosity that made them privy to Russian and German military actions. People simply assumed they harbored resentment for Russia's war effort. Even ostensibly sympathetic gentile observers, who like An-sky served the civilian Russian war effort, could be found repeating the canards about Jewish espionage. In Skierniewice, Poland, the British nurse and volunteer Violetta Thurstan saw an "an old Jewish man with white hair in a long, black gabardine, strips of colored paper in his hand with which he had been caught signaling to the Germans." Thurstan noted furious Russian soldiers beating the supposed "spy," whose face was "ashy-white with terror, and one of his hands...dripping with blood." In Thurstan's eyes, the man's fearful look and the punishment being meted out to him in public were evidence of his guilt. Although the soldiers' brutality "sickened" her, she concluded that "it was quite right that he should be shot as a spy."²⁶

In Russian-occupied Galicia the military expressed its mistrust of the Jewish population in a more brutal manner. Military violence against Jews in Galicia assumed three forms: unsanctioned pogroms by passing military units, and Cossack troops especially; widespread practices of expulsion and hostage-taking; and finally,

²⁵ M. Vinaver, "Doklad po evreiskomu voprosu," in "Iz 'chernoi knigi' rossiiskago evreistva: Materialy dlia istorii voyny 1914-1915 g.," *Evreiskaia starina* no. 10 (1918), 209-210.

²⁶ Violetta Thurstan, *Field Hospital and Flying Column: Being the Journal of an English Nursing Sister in Belgium and Russia* (London, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), 148.

an unrealized scheme concocted by Ianushkevich and the Grand Duke to implement a far-reaching and extreme anti-Semitic program—a plan to cleanse Galicia of the presence of Jews by any means necessary, including killing them.²⁷

This widespread belief in and fear of Jewish espionage also became a pretext for policies aimed to totally eliminate the presence of Jews along the Army's Northwestern front. The first phase of war from July 1914 until January 1915 was characterized by sporadic deportations and expulsions. In April 1915, a German offensive forced the Russian Army into a retreat across hundreds of miles of Lithuanian and Polish territory. The army forcibly expelled some 3.3 million people as it withdrew, including Poles, Germans, and Jews, all by the end of 1915 alone.²⁸ The orders that local Russian military authorities received employed pre-war military discourse, stating that Jews should be expelled from given locales in order "to cleanse this region of an unreliable element" (*ochistit' etot raion ot nenadezhnogo elementa*).²⁹ Estimates of Jews expelled from Baltic provinces alone range from 500,000 to one million.³⁰

²⁷ Peter Holquist, "The Role of Personality in the First (1914-1915) Russian Occupation of Galicia and Bukovina," in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, eds. Jonathan Dekel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan M. Meir, and Israel Bartal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 52-73, here 54.

²⁸ Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, 3.

²⁹ "Telegramma komendanta Kovenskoi kreposti generala V.N. Grigorieva glavnomu nachalniku Dvinskogo voennogo okruga inzhener-generalu kn. N.E. Tumanovu, 24 maia 1915 g.," cited from Eric Lohr, "Novye dokumenty o Rossiiskoi armii i evreikh vremena Pervoi mirovoi voiny, *Vestnik Evreiskogo Universiteta* 8: 26 (2003): 245-260, here 262. I thank Sibelan Forrester for pointing out the precise translation of *nenadezhnyi*.

³⁰ Lohr, "The Russian Army and the Jews," 404 n.1. Zipperstein cites the figures from spring and summer deportations of 1915 as more than 40,000 Jews from Courland, 120,000 from Kovno province, 30,000 from parts of Grodno, in "The Politics of Relief," 24.

During the spring and summer of 1915, homeless Jews on foot, in wagons and in military-operated trains moved east in huge numbers, past the borders of the Pale of Settlement toward the Russian interior. Their numbers included both refugees, or *bezidentsy*, who had fled voluntarily, as well as expellees, or *vyselentsy*, who had been deported by military decree. Some of them suffered from pogroms before they were expelled, and had lost their belongings and homes to fires and looting. Traveling on the open roads brought the risk of attack, and some were robbed and beaten on their journeys. Others died from exposure, and their bodies had to be left in graves along the road.³¹

The Tsar's Ministers, local populations, and Russian-Jewish activists reacted to this humanitarian disaster with grave concern.³² The Russian government initially resettled expellees in Poltava and Ekaterinoslav, provinces in the easternmost part of the Pale of Settlement. However, the new arrivals exacerbated overcrowding in the already densely populated region. Local civilian authorities became outraged and petitioned the government to stop the arrival of more Jews. Finally in August 1915, the Tsar's Council of Ministers voted to provisionally expand the borders of the Pale. They did not do so primarily for humanitarian reasons, but as a pragmatic response to overcrowding, and a conciliatory, if also cynical gesture to appease anger in Allied countries which had flared up over Russia's policies towards Jews (a response that in

³¹ Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, 3.

³² The Ministry worried primarily about the disastrous effects of mass deportations on Russia's war effort and image abroad; see A.N. Iakhontov, "Tiazhelye dni: Sekretnyia zasedaniia Soveta Ministrov 16 Iulia - 2 Sentiabria 1915 goda, Sostavleno A.N. Iakhontovym," *Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii XVIII* (Berlin, 1926): 5-136, and esp. 12, 32, 42-51, 57. These documents are translated in Michael Cherniavsky, *Prologue to Revolution: Notes of A.N. Iakhontov on the Secret Meetings of the Council of Ministers, 1915* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), 39, 56-64, 65-72, 85-86.

part, as we shall see, was evidence that Russian Jews' attempts to gain civic rights by publicizing Jewish civilian experiences had produced results, albeit indirectly).³³

The government's de facto abolition of the Pale did not elicit a sense of victory among Jewish activists, however. The Council of Ministers granted Jews permission to settle in the towns and cities of the Russian interior, with the exception of Moscow, Petrograd, and Cossack regions. The countryside remained barred to them as it had been in the Pale, and they could not buy property. Not surprisingly, contemporaries began to characterize the lands where they were resettled as a "new Pale" (*novaia cherta*).³⁴ Tens of thousands of destitute people arrived in unfamiliar and crowded territory with the need for jobs, homes, food and medicine. Local populations perceived them as outsiders who had been branded as traitors and spies.

Borne from a sense of xenophobic Russian nationalism and fueled by the imperial state's intent to forcefully "extract" certain populations from military sensitive territories, the Russian Army's anti-Jewish campaign fostered an unintended outcome: it bolstered Russian Jews' sense of national identity and desire for self-determination. Policies of wartime censorship, which will be discussed in greater detail below, also compounded the Russian military's persecution of Jews.

Jewish activists' heightened sense of victimization *as a people* had two primary effects. First, Russian Jews mobilized a vast network of civil society

³³ The Council of Ministers debated and agreed to temporarily offer additional territories for Jewish settlement in their meetings of August 4 and August 6, 1915, as found in "Tiazhelye dni," 42-50. These documents are translated in Michael Cherniavsky, *Prologue to Revolution*, 56-72. For a discussion of the meetings, see Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, *The Tsars and the Jews: Reform, Reaction and Anti-Semitism in Imperial Russia, 1772-1917* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 328-34.

³⁴ For one example of the use of this term, see the Petrograd-based Russian-Jewish relief work journal *Delo pomoshchi* no. 1 (1 June 1916), 1-2.

initiatives, many of which had been set up in the pre-war period. They began to address the overwhelming needs of hundreds of thousands of Jews who had been displaced from their homes in the war zone. Second, they documented Jewish wartime experience, both so that the collective suffering endured during wartime would not be forgotten or falsified, and because activists believed that these documents could be utilized to improve the national and political status of Jews after the war.

Relief, Rescue and Representation: Russian Jews Mobilize

Russian Jewish intellectuals in Russia were not alone in recognizing that the way their nation's wartime history was told would take on political significance in the post-war period. Jews in Russia knew that the borders of the empire where they lived would likely change after the war. One significant expectation of change was that the Russian government would grant Poland, home to nearly three million Jews, its long-awaited national independence. Propaganda distributed by both the Russian and German governments to win the loyalties of Poles had reinforced these expectations.³⁵

The looming prospect of Polish national independence worried many Jews. It also added urgency to initiatives to record Jewish wartime experiences. Polish-Jewish

³⁵ Commander in Chief Nikolai Nikolaevich made statements suggesting that in the event of a Russian victory, the imperial state would consider recognizing an autonomous, reunited Poland; see "Proclamation of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief [Grand Duke Nicholas]," 14 August 1914, in *Documents of Russian History, 1914-1917*, ed. F.A. Golder (New York: The Century Company, 1927), 37-38. Fritz Fischer has pointed out that German propaganda also promoted national sentiments among civilian populations. In attempts to win the loyalties of minority groups, propaganda included promises to extend rights in the event of victory. See Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967), 237-38; Ezra Mendelsohn makes a similar point about the impact of German propaganda on Jewish national identity in *Zionism in Poland*, 39-45.

relations had been strained before the war, and Polish nationalist leaders had called for an economic boycott against Jews in 1912. On January 9, 1915, a Jewish teenager in Siedlce, Poland named Anne Kahan expressed a common sentiment when she wrote in her diary that it had become "important to gather all facts about anti-Semitic acts in Poland" in order to oppose a bill for autonomy that Poles were expected to submit to the Russian Duma. Kahan explained that

"should the bill pass, the Jewish problem would be left to the Poles, for them to solve according to their precepts of justice and fair play. But the Jews know they cannot depend on the justice of the Poles."³⁶

Russian Jews seeking revolutionary change also gathered evidence of anti-Semitic acts in the efforts to opportunistically promote their various political goals, including that of class struggle. The documentary efforts of the Bund (the anti-Zionist socialist party founded in 1897) are a notable example. From the headquarters of the Bund's Foreign Committee in Switzerland, the veteran theorist of Jewish socialism Vladimir Kosovskii (born Nokhem Mendel Levinson, 1867-1941) compiled official documents and information about the expulsions and pogroms. He gleaned these accounts from personal testimonies and by combing the Russian, Polish and Yiddish presses.³⁷ In July 1915 and again in January 1916, in partnership with the Russian Social Democratic Worker's Party (made up by the Bolshevik and Menshevik

³⁶ Anne Kahan, diary entry of January 9, 1915, in "The Diary of Anne Kahan: Siedlce, Poland, 1914-1916," *YIVO Annual of Social Science XVIII* (1983), 150. The original manuscript of the diary, along with photographs of the author, is part of the Khana Safran Bially Papers, YIVO RG 680.

³⁷ On the Bund's stance towards anti-Jewish violence during pre-war pogroms, see Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), esp. 103-114, 143-158, 191-200, 209-210. On Kosovskii's wartime activism on behalf of the Bund, see *Doyres Bundistn*, ed. J.S. Hertz, 3 vol. (New York: Farlag "Unzer Tsayt", 1956), 1: 41-44.

factions), the Bund published pamphlets containing detailed narratives of the pogroms and expulsions, along with reproduced documents, in both Russian and Yiddish translation.³⁸ Kosovskii explicitly accused the Russian military of the pogroms and explained them according to the classic Bundist, or rather, Social Democratic line: the Russian government had orchestrated a wartime anti-Jewish campaign in order to deflect the masses' from their struggle against their true class enemies. Given the evidence that Kosovskii had demonstrated—that Jews had as a group become victims of state and military violence—he demanded that Russian Marxists place the issue of anti-Semitism at the center of the Social Democratic struggle to overthrow Tsarism.³⁹

Jewish activists utilized the acts of documenting and publicizing anti-Jewish violence to promote a range of political platforms during the war, including the socialist one. However, Kosovskii's polemical arguments about anti-Jewish violence were atypical among Russian Jewish documentary efforts due to the fact that he wrote from exile. His position abroad allowed him the liberty to level accusations against the Russian government in print. Among Jewish activists still in Russia, however, this was not possible—primarily due to wartime censorship in Russia, and equally importantly, as we will explore further below, because Jewish political activists, especially the liberals among them, aimed to maintain ties to the Duma to support their efforts to secure civil rights for Jews.

³⁸ Vladimir Kosovskii, *Razgrom evreev v Rossii*, 2 vol. (Bern, Switzerland: Izd. Zagranichnogo komiteta Bunda, 1915-1916). In Yiddish translation see idem., *Der Yidisher khurbn in Rusland* (New York: Tsentral Ferband fun "Bund" in Amerika, 1915).

³⁹ "Deklaratsiia tsentral'nago komiteta Bunda o presledovaniakh evreev v Rossii," in *Razgrom evreev v Rossii*, 1: 45-46.

Beyond the prospects of Polish national independence and revolution in Russia, Jews in Russia became vigilant about how their wartime history would be told due to military censorship. A decree of July 20, 1914 granted the military censor control over the press, mail and telegraph systems, and public speeches.⁴⁰ Written communication in Yiddish and Hebrew was heavily censored (as it was in Russian), but not banned completely. For example, military censors intercepted letters that Jewish troops wrote in Yiddish.⁴¹ But the Warsaw Yiddish paper *Haynt* (Today) continued to be published in weekly installments during the war. Like the Russian-language Jewish press, however, it mainly reproduced translations of official military communiqués, or previously published material from the Russian-language press.⁴²

Military censors consciously sought to prevent information about Jewish suffering and heroism from circulating in print. Pogroms and other atrocities were not generally reported; and further, Jewish-sounding names of soldiers—all except for the first letter—were removed from published lists of soldiers who received St. George's Crosses. Of course, the blank spaces produced by this form of censorship

⁴⁰ D.A. El'iashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat' v Rossii 1797-1917: Ocherki istorii tsenzury* (St. Petersburg and Jerusalem: Mosty Kul'tury - Geshtarim, 1999), 488.

⁴¹ Soldiers' letters in Yiddish captured by the military censor are cited in Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army*, 259-260. They can be found in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem (CAHJP), HM 2/8344. The original document is "So svedeniami, postupivshimi iz Glavnoi voenno-tsenzurnoi komissii ob otnoshenii evreev k voinskoi povinnosti v voinu Rossii s Germaniei i Avstro-Vengrii, 10 marta-15 maia 1915 g." at RGVIA f. 400, op. 19, d. 106, ll. 3-30b.

⁴² Chaim Finkelstein, *Haynt: A tsaytung bay yidn, 1908-1939* (Tel Aviv: Farlag "Y.L. Perets," 1978), 61-62.

immediately signaled to readers, or at least the Jews among them, the absence of a Jewish name.⁴³

The Jewish press reacted to the censorship of heroism by featuring photographs and short biographies of Jewish soldiers who had received awards. Entire papers were even established to publicize Jewish soldiers' contributions to Russia's war effort. One of them, the short-lived *Voina i evrei* (War and the Jews) devoted itself to "gathering in one place as much factual, thoroughly verified material as possible about the efforts of Jewish combatants." Its editors spoke of the attempt to dispel, "like smoke, the new support for anti-Semitism," fueled by the assumption that Jews were shirking their obligations to the homeland.⁴⁴ Censors shut down *Voina i evrei* in May of 1915.⁴⁵

Although and because military censors attempted to hinder information about Jewish heroism from reaching the public, such information ultimately became a crucial source for documentary efforts like the one that Dubnov led in Petrograd. In 1917, Dubnov wrote that in 1914 and 1915, at the height of the military's anti-Jewish campaign, many soldiers' letters and other documents that "could not be published at the time passed through my hands." Dubnov added that these sources would, "at some point, comprise a 'black book'—a terrible chronicle of Jewry during these black

⁴³ICKRE, 219. Throughout the war, weekly runs of *Novyi voskhod* (closed down in April 1915 and reopened the following month in Moscow as *Evreiskaia nedelia*) featured photographs and short biographies of Jewish soldiers.

⁴⁴ *Voina i evrei*, no. 1 (1914), 1.

⁴⁵ El'iashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika*, 492-493.

years."⁴⁶ The project to which he alluded would in fact become the largest archival collection of documents pertaining to Jews in Russia assembled anywhere during the war. We will return to that important archive in Chapter 3.

In addition to undermining official censorship, Russian Jews' collective efforts to document Jewish wartime experience also served another urgent task: organizing relief for war victims throughout the empire. Accurate information about civilians in the war zone became vital for this effort, yet difficult to access. There were two related reasons why: first, precise information was needed as a corrective to the censored or propagandistic news published in the Russian press; and second, activists in EKOPO's headquarters in Petrograd needed to know what was happening over "there," hundreds of miles to the west. The territory between Petrograd and Galicia had become difficult to traverse due to shifting fronts, and—An-sky discovered firsthand during his maddening search for trains to transport medical supplies to Galicia—the government's notorious mismanagement of the wartime transportation infrastructure.

At the time that EKOPO was founded in August 1914, Jewish philanthropists and relief workers in Petrograd began to describe themselves as a "center" of information and planning. They envisioned their organization as the hub of a vast network of relief effort in cities and towns throughout the empire, from Odessa to

⁴⁶ Dubnov, "Istoriia Evreiskago soldata 1915 goda: Ispoved odnogo iz mnogikh," *Evreiskaia nedelia* no. 19-20 (21 May 1917), 65.

Warsaw and Minsk.⁴⁷ In order to serve war victims in such a vast territory, however, EKOPO needed people on the ground. To that end, its director, the lawyer Genrikh Borisovich Sliozberg (1863-1937) and secretary Leontii Moiseevich Bramson (1869-1941) turned to people like An-sky.

In November 1914 Sliozberg and Bramson hired An-sky to represent EKOPO among local Jewish communities in Galicia.⁴⁸ His job was to distribute funds on behalf of EKOPO, and just as importantly, to bring back firsthand evidence and observations from the war zone. To secure an official permit to enter Galicia, which was under Russian military occupation, An-sky volunteered as a civilian aid worker for the Russian public war effort, managed by the Zemstvo Union (*Zemskii soiuz*) and Union of Towns (*Soiuz gorodov*). Both of these civil organizations had been established before the war, and during the war they took on responsibility, respectively, for assisting rural and urban populations.⁴⁹ The Union of Towns arranged for An-sky's documents to enter Galicia after he agreed to accompany train cars carrying medical supplies to a hospital at the front.

While attempting to complete his dual mission for the Union of Towns and for EKOPO, An-sky shuttled between military hospitals, local communities of Jews in

⁴⁷ The language of "center" and "provinces" was used in articles that discussed the need to avoid duplicating relief efforts and wasting scarce communal resources. See "Tsentr i provinstii," *Novyi voskhod* no. 33 (21 August 1914), 6.

⁴⁸ Safran, *Wandering Soul*, 227-228. Sliozberg and Bramson's letter to An-sky, dated November 20, 1914, is at the Jewish Section, Manuscript Division of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine (Natsional'naia Biblioteka Ukrainy imeni Vernadskogo, hereafter NBUV) f. 339, ed. kh. 441.

⁴⁹ On the *Zemskii soiuz* during World War I, see William Gleason, "The All-Russian Union of Zemstvos and World War I," in *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government*, eds. Terence Emmons and Wayne S. Vucinich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 365-382. On An-sky's appointment to the Unions of Towns and Zemstvos, see Safran. *Wandering Soul*, 231.

the war zone, and EKOPO committees in Petrograd and Kiev, where he reported on his observations in Galicia.⁵⁰

During the first year of the war, EKOPO's executive committee reported having twenty so-called "traveling inspectors," who served as "actual and active local organs of the Committee" in the field. It is possible that An-sky was included among that number, for he certainly played that role in practice. These travelers were described as educated, experienced social workers; some, like An-sky, had reputations as "famous journalists and authors" who possessed "special knowledge," and were thus prepared for the task of gathering and relating large amounts of information.⁵¹

The language of EKOPO's reports showed that activists framed emergency relief work and documentation efforts both as missions on behalf of the Jewish people. In a report of July 1, 1916, EKOPO officials claimed that owing to the efforts of its delegates in the field, "no national organization has such a full record of the life of the respective communities as have the Jews [as EKOPO has]."⁵² One aid worker wrote that the ability of relief organizations to meet civilians' needs depended to a great extent on an "awareness of everything taking place in localities," and that therefore the organization's "informational department assumed enormous significance...from the very start" of the war, when this division ordered that

⁵⁰ For An-sky's report to the Kiev branch of EKOPO see his diary entry of January 14, 1915/ RGALI, f. 2583, op.1, d.5, l.5-6. He also spoke to the executive committees of the OZE in December of 1916; see An-sky, letter of December 4, 1916 to Roza Nikolaevna Ettinger (née Monoszon), in "Pis'ma S. An-skogo," *Novyi zhurnal* 87 (1967), 153.

⁵¹ "Financial Report of the Central Jewish War Victims Relief Committee," in the David Mowshowitch Papers, YIVO RG 348, F 108/MK 14495-14506, here 14504.

⁵² Ibid.

"surveys and the most detailed documentation of populations in need be immediately organized in every location."⁵³ The geographic range and quantity of places that the documentation effort reached is reflected by the numbers of war victims that EKOPO and its delegates managed to assist: 240,000 people by the end of 1916.⁵⁴

Because aid workers like An-sky served as the human links between EKOPO and local communities, their duties entailed a great deal of record-keeping. Relief workers tracked the allocation of funds to local communities, monitored the budgets of local relief committees, and compiled eyewitness reports about the conditions of refugees and expellees. The stores of information they compiled made them EKOPO's eyes and ears on the ground. Their expertise also made them logical choices to serve as liaisons between local Jewish communities and several state and civilian institutions, including the police, the Town and Zemstvo Unions, the War Industries Committee, and the railway authorities.⁵⁵

Relief workers and organizations also publicized the data they collected about Jewish war victims in public forums that emerged specifically to promote that topic. In December 1915, aid workers in Petrograd founded the journals *Pomoshch* (Relief) and *Vestnik trudovoi pomoshchi sredi evreev* (Journal of Vocational Relief among Jews). In June 1916, *Delo pomoshchi* (Relief Work Affairs) succeeded *Pomoshch*.⁵⁶

⁵³ "Tsentr i provinstii," *Novyi voskhod* no. 33 (21 August 1914), 6.

⁵⁴ Anastasia Tumanova, "Evreiskie obshchestvennye organizatsii v gody Pervoi mirovoi voyny," 124-142. *Mirovoi krizis 1914-1920 godov i sud'ba vostochnoevropeiskogo evreistva*, ed. O. V. Budnitskii, O. V. Belova, V. E. Kel'ner, V. V. Mochalova (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005), 124-142, here 128.

⁵⁵ "Financial Report of the Central Jewish War Victims Relief Committee," 1 July 1916, YIVO RG 348, F 108/MK 14495-14506, here 14504.

⁵⁶ For the first edition see *Delo pomoshchi: zhurnal, posviashchennyi voprosam pomoshchi evreiam--zhertvam voyny* no. 1 (1 June 1916). For examples of economic reports by the well-known social

In those bi-monthly journals and in Russian Jewish papers, well-known social scientists like Boris D. Bratskus (1874-1938) debated platforms for rebuilding the economic life of Jewish refugee communities in the Russian interior. Like other documentary projects that grew out of the Jewish war effort, the attempts of Bratskus to quantitatively assess and plan for the needs of the masses demonstrated that wartime activists used social science methods and planning to defend and promote Jewish national interests.

Documentation efforts during World War I not only served the immediate goal to aid war victims; they were also the expression, and in many ways a culmination of a growing sense of historical consciousness among Jews that had emerged during the decades preceding the war. As Laura Jockusch has eloquently put it, "the experience of the First World War generated a *distinct Jewish historical consciousness*, which expressed itself in documentation efforts that aimed both to defend Jewish rights in the changed international arena and to preserve Jewish culture threatened by growing modernization and damaged by the upheavals of war."⁵⁷ Russian Jews' wartime documentation efforts drew on earlier projects to promote national self-determination and cultural autonomy.

In an essay published during the new year of 1915, An-sky, along with the prominent Yiddish writers I. L. Peretz and Yankev Dinezon expressed a momentous sense of historical consciousness that they believed the war had generated. The three

scientists Boris D. Bratskus, see *Evreiskaia nedelia* no. 18 (20 September 1915), 1-14; *Evreiskaia nedelia* no. 19 (27 September 1915), 12-15; see Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, 18, for a discussion of Bratskus's article in the Russian-language press, "Ekonomicheskaia polozeniia evreev i voina," *Russkaia mysl* no. 4 (1914), 27-45.

⁵⁷ Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*, 27 (my emphasis).

writers issued a so-called "appeal" in the Yiddish papers *Haynt* and *Moment*, in which they exhorted their readers to realize that they were living through a world-changing historical event. The writers asserted that after the war, borders of nations would be redrawn, and all peoples would have to fight for their rights and resources on the basis of what they had endured. They depicted the war as a "painful global process in which the life of man, the life of hundreds of thousands is reduced to a speck of dust that falls onto one side of the gargantuan scale that weighs the histories of nations and races."⁵⁸ The writers called on Jews to take control of how their wartime history would be represented:

"Become historians yourselves! Don't depend on the hands of strangers! Record, take it down, and collect!...Record everything, knowing thereby that you are collecting useful and necessary material for the reconstruction of Jewish history."⁵⁹

The writers also stressed the political exigency of recording and later being able to reconstruct the Jewish nation's part in the war. They explicitly linked wartime suffering to post-war political entitlements. For without a record of suffering to reference, they argued, "our account will be empty...and our name will be erased from the page on which the world records its terrible and painful process as entitlement for better times."⁶⁰ If Jews were to determine who would write their history, how it would be written, and how it would be interpreted and used in the political arena, then they would have to write that history themselves.

⁵⁸ I. L. Peretz, Yankev Dinezon, S. An-sky-Rappoport, "Oyfruf," *Haynt*, no. 292 (19 December 1914/1 January 1915), 3; cited from idem., "Appeal to Collect Materials about the World War," trans. David G. Roskies, in *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*, ed. Roskies (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), 209.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

An-sky's call for Jews to write down and collect their wartime history was consistent with a now-famous appeal that Dubnov had issued twenty-five years earlier. In that appeal, Dubnov had argued that Jews constituted a people, and that as a people, they had yet to discover their own inheritance—their history, languages, literature and culture. Until they did so, Dubnov wrote, Jews would not be able to recognize themselves as, nor aspire to the political status of a contemporary European nation. In his pioneering Russian-language essay of 1891, "On the Study of the History of Russian Jews and on the Establishment of Historical Societies," Dubnov called for Jews of all kinds—workers and poor people, religious and secular, educated and bourgeois alike—to begin collecting source material for the contemporary and future writing of Jewish history.⁶¹ Dubnov's appeal appropriated a Yiddish term for collecting, *zamlung*. He declared that "every one of you can be a collector of material, and aid in the building of history."⁶² An-sky, Peretz and Dinezon's appeal to "become historians yourselves" amidst the momentous conditions of 1915 echoed and invested the statements Dubnov had made in peacetime with moral and political urgency.

Dubnov's call to collect and record Jewish history helped to foment a cultural movement among East European Jewry that came to play a critically important role in the effort to rescue Jewish culture during the war. In St. Petersburg in 1908, Dubnov

⁶¹ S.M. Dubnov, *Ob izuchenii istorii ruskikh evreev i ob uchrezhdenii istoricheskogo obshchestva* (St. Petersburg, 1891). For a survey of the development of historiographical traditions among Russian Jews, see Benjamin Nathans, "On Russian-Jewish Historiography," in *Historiography of Imperial Russia: The Profession and Writing of History in a Multinational State*, ed. Thomas Sanders (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 397-432.

⁶² Dubnov published a Hebrew version of the appeal a year later to reach Jews who couldn't understand Russian, as *Nahpesa venahkora: kol kore el ha-nevonim ba-am, ha-mitnadvim le-esof homer le-binyan toldot bene yisrael be-polin ve-rusiya* (Odessa, 1892), 23-24 (translation from Dubnov's Hebrew version cited here from David E. Fishman, *Embers Plucked from the Fire: The Rescue of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Vilna* [New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2009], 2).

had helped to found a Jewish Historical Ethnographic Society (*Evreiskoe istoriko-etnograficheskoe obshchestvo*, or EIEO), to oversee the collection, classification, and preservation of source material for the study of Jewish history and culture. By 1914, the EIEO and its network of scholars and institutions had established an infrastructure for the study of Jewish history in St. Petersburg and satellites throughout the Pale of Settlement (just prior to the war, for example, the EIEO had served as the hub for An-sky's ethnographic expedition).⁶³

In 1915, the EIEO declared its role as an important institution for Jewish historical documentation by asking the public to send valuable materials to its offices for safe-keeping, "in view of the present-day circumstances of war, when many manuscripts and antique objects are found in private hands, and thus in great danger of disappearing."⁶⁴ Between shelling, fires and pogroms, these objects were indeed often at risk of disappearing. During the war, the EIEO coordinated the evacuation of sacred objects of "great national value," including Torah scrolls and *pinkasim* (community record books), and even attempted to temporarily relocate entire synagogue and yeshivah libraries.⁶⁵ An-sky, whom EIEO described as a "tireless

⁶³ On An-sky's expedition and its relation to EIEO, see Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Safran, *Wandering Soul*, 247-248. The EIEO also provided physical space for the materials An-sky collected and stored in its building on Vasilevsky Island in Petrograd. On the emergence of public institutions for the study of Jewish history in the period from 1905-1917, see Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Jewish Public Culture in Late Imperial Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), esp. 229-291.

⁶⁴ "Arkhir i Muzei Evreiskago Istoriko-etnograficheskago Obshchestva," *Evreiskaia starina* no. 8 (1915), 428.

⁶⁵ "Ob evakuatsii pamiatnikov stariny i narodnogo iskusstva i predmetov kul'ta," *Delo pomoshchi* no. 3 (1 July 1916), 15-18. In the town Luninyets a woman named Dvoyre Kutnik recalled that Cossacks burned her family's library of Yiddish books before retreating from the Germans (Yizkor kehilot Luninyets, cited from "The First Yiddish Library," in *From A Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry*, ed. and trans. Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, 2nd ed. (Bloomington and

collector of our national treasures," contributed to these efforts. When he passed through the shtetl Lutsik in June 1915, just prior to the expulsion of the town's residents, he ordered crates to be built, and packed up "rare holy objects" from the shtetl to haul back to the EIEO offices in Petrograd.⁶⁶

The continuity between pre-war *zamlung* traditions and the emergence of a collective Jewish historical consciousness propelled Jews throughout the Empire to document their wartime experiences. In Vilna, which came under German occupation in the summer of 1915, Dr. Tsemakh Shabad (1864-1935), a community leader and close acquaintance of An-sky's, led a collective effort together with Moshe Shalit, a fellow activist. The two men organized the compilation of two volumes of personal documents and literary narratives. Their goal was to reflect and promote the Vilna Jewish community's demonstration of resilience during wartime. On the basis of the collected documents Shalit and Shabad produced a *Vilner zamlbukh* (Yiddish: Vilna Collected Anthology).⁶⁷ In a similar project far south of Vilna in Odessa, the war medic and writer Gershon Levin (1868-1935) planned a book to be called *Di milkhome* (The War) for which he also solicited contributions from An-sky and other prominent Jewish writers, including Bialik.⁶⁸

Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1998 [1993]), 140.

⁶⁶ "Ob evakuatsii pamiatnikov," 16. See also GS 5:122.

⁶⁷ *Vilner zamlbukh*, eds. Tsemakh Shabad and Moshe Shalit, 2 vol. (Vilna, 1918). On this effort and its impact on Vilna's interwar Jewish political culture, see Kassow, "Jewish Communal Politics in Transition," esp. 64-70, 87-88.

⁶⁸ The wartime memoir of Gershon Levin, *In velt krig* (Warsaw, 1923), is discussed in Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 15-17. I haven't found records that Levin's planned Odessa anthology saw the light of day. Levin's proposed volume is discussed in an undated letter (1916 or 1917) from Aba Lev to An-sky, NBUV f. 339, ed. kh. 620.

Other individuals also independently undertook efforts to chronicle Jewish experience while traveling in front zones. In July of 1915, the prominent revolutionary, ethnographer, and political activist Lev Shternberg (1861-1927), a man who had helped to edit An-sky's massive ethnographic questionnaire before the war, traveled to Lithuania. During the week he spent there he witnessed the expulsion of an entire community, nearly 2,500 people from the shtetl Onikshty. In a little-known but fascinating seven-part Russian-language article called "Among the Expellees" published in *Evreiskaia nedelia* (Jewish Week), Shternberg detailed every step of the community's journey towards the Russian interior.⁶⁹ With his native knowledge of Yiddish he freely communicated with the expellees. He conveyed people's daily struggles to find food, a sanitary and safe place to sleep, and observe Jewish rituals (he described how at one point the community was given a few hours to pack up and leave a town on the holiday of Shavuot, forcing them to break the ritual law against traveling on a holiday).

Shternberg also revealed the challenges faced by local relief committees as they worked to relocate an entire town of people, which he portrayed as a microcosm of the Jewish nation, across hundreds of miles of war zone. Among the most striking scenes in Shternberg's article are descriptions of local relief committees organizing transportation for people who could not make the arduous journeys on foot: people with infectious diseases, women in the final stages of pregnancy, and those who had

⁶⁹ L. Ia. Shternberg, "Sredi vyselentsev," *Evreiskaia nedelia* no. 12 (9 August 1915), 18-21; no. 17 (13 September 1915), 21-29; no. 20 (4 October 1915), 16-20; no. 21 (11 October 1915), 12-17; no. 22 (18 October 1915), 17-20; no. 24 (1 November 1915), 19-23; no. 26 (15 November 1915), 25-28.

taken their livelihoods with them, such as one man carrying hundreds of bags filled with flax. Shternberg stressed EKOPO's role in facilitating the entire effort to relocate the "nation": "it is with particular emotion that people speak of the 'great committee' in Petrograd," he wrote. "In their eyes—and this is true everywhere—this committee embodies Providence."⁷⁰

Alongside veteran activists and long-time revolutionaries like Shternberg and An-sky, there were younger Jews who aided and wrote about refugees, expellees and other war victims. Some Jewish soldiers in Russian Army used their position at the front in order to interact with Jewish civilians on the ground, and offered them aid and moral support. Thirty-two year-old Jewish soldier Aba Lev (another person who had helped An-sky collect folklore in the Pale of Settlement during the ethnographic expedition!) recalled being inspired during the war by the venerable An-sky, who "helped our people so much with words and deeds." Lev also praised the energetic efforts of EKOPO aid workers F. E. Lander, I. Giterman and S. Gornel'ski.⁷¹

Together with ten other Jewish soldiers in his unit stationed in Buczacz in the fall of 1916, Lev had collected desecrated Torah scrolls and buried the bodies of pogrom victims. On a return trip to Petrograd, he met with Dubnov, and reported about an outbreak of cholera among Jews in Galicia. Dubnov asked Lev that he use his position as an eyewitness at the front to "carefully gather materials and record all

⁷⁰ L. Ia. Shternberg, "Sredi vyselelntsev," *Evreiskaia nedelia* no. 17 (13 September 1915), 21-29, here 28. For more on Shternberg during the war years, see Sergei Kan, *Lev Shternberg: Anthropologist, Russian Socialist, Jewish Activist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 224-237.

⁷¹ Lev, "Razgrom galitsiiskikh evreev v krovavye gody mirovoi voyny: Otryvok iz dnevnika," trans. Bella Aizenberg, *Evreiskaia letopis'* 3 (1924): 169-176, here 173.

facts that possessed historical value."⁷² Interestingly, although Lev went on to become an anti-religious crusader in the 1920s for the Evseksiia (Jewish Section of the Communist Party), he joined the Jewish Anti-fascist Committee during the Second World War, where he helped collect and edit materials about the heroism of Jews in the Red Army, and also served as the organization's archivist.⁷³ Lev's trajectory is revealing of just how enduring the experience of war could be, as well as the lasting effect it had on the identities and choices of the Russian Jews who witnessed World War I and later became Soviet Jews who chronicled the Holocaust.

Conclusion:

Anti-Jewish persecution at the hands of the Russian military inadvertently generated a coordinated civic society effort at the "home front" among Jewish activists in Russia during the First World War. Jewish activists provided emergency relief to war victims at the same time that they compiled archives of information in the service of their rescue and relief missions. Documentation efforts by individuals like An-sky, Shternberg, Shabad, Lev and others and others played a central role in publicizing the needs of victims. These victims were located in far-flung cities and towns, far from the centers of politics and organizational efforts; their experiences were silenced by military censorship and their reputations tarnished by accusations against which they could not defend themselves.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ "Aba Movshovich Lev" is listed as "Library Manager" in the October 1948 roster of Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee employees, GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 939, l. 89 / USHMM RG 22.028M, R. 238, F. 939, p. 39. For more on Lev's role at JAC, see Mordechai Altshuler and Sima Ycikas, "Were There Two Black Books about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union?" in *Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* 1:17 (1992): 37-55, here 39.

Although Jews in Russia and Poland had been collecting records of their history for more than two decades, the outbreak of war added a sense of urgency and momentum to the Jewish national struggle in the Russian Empire. Prospects of Polish independence, redrawn national borders, and a revolution in Russia compelled Jews as individuals and in social organizations like the EIEO and Bund to collect and publicize the suffering of Jewish civilians. Documents collected in archives and published in pamphlets therefore became capital in political campaigns to secure emancipation and rights both domestically and in the international arena. The Jewish documentation effort became an issue of burning national significance due to military censorship practices, which not only silenced descriptions of Jewish civilian suffering, but also the contribution of Jews to Russia's war effort.

An-sky was one of the activists who undertook a long journey as one of EKOPO's "traveling agents" from 1914 to 1917. Until now we have observed An-sky's individual journey across the Eastern Front through a wide-angle lens. The next chapter zeroes in on his actions on the ground, and the multi-part process through which he created a distinctly Jewish national wartime narrative.

Chapter 2

The Witness as Translator: S. An-sky's 1915 War Diary and Postwar Memoir, *Khurbn Galitsye*

"Woe to the people whose history is written by strange hands."
-S. An-sky, Y. L. Peretz, Y. Dinezon, "Appeal" (1915)¹

While trekking across the Carpathian Mountains during the winter of 1916-17 near Buczacz, Tarnopol and Czernowitz, An-sky observed the toll that three and a half years of war had taken on locals. In a letter to his friend Roza Monoszon of February 4, 1917 he wrote lyrically about people's loss of hope: "tears fall more easily from eyes," he wrote, "than words from the tongue."² It seemed that only folksongs "bathed in tears" could adequately express the stark poverty, loneliness and loss that he saw in people. In Khorostkov, as he listened to musicians pour their sorrow into song, he mused that "there are moments when tears...take the place of words. That happens when words have utterly lost their power, when there is no one left to speak to."³ Yet his own role as a relief worker and chronicler of people's stories—his being there as a witness—belied any claims that no one was left to speak to, or to listen.

¹ Y. L. Peretz, Yankev Dinezon, S. An-sky-Rappoport, "Oyfruf," *Haynt*, no. 292 (19 December 1914/1 January 1915), 3; cited from idem., "Appeal to Collect Materials about the World War," trans. David G. Roskies, in *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*, ed. Roskies (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), 209.

² An-sky, letter of February 4, 1917 to Roza Nikolaevna Ettinger (née Monoszon), in "Pis'ma S. An-skogo," *Novyi zhurnal* 89 (1967): 115-131, here 119. For earlier letters from An-sky to Ettinger see "Pis'ma S. An-skogo," *Novyi zhurnal* 87 (1967): 142-165.

³ Quoted from *Sefer Khoroskov*, the memorial book of the town that An-sky visited. Translation cited from S. Ansky [An-sky], "In Khorostkov During the First World War," in *From A Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry*, ed. and trans. Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, 2nd ed.

An-sky's path through the war zone had taken a toll on him as well. Everything had started to blur, and he wondered if the years he had spent doing traveling relief work—which, in a skeptical moment, he referred to as "haphazard one-time donations I handed out in one or another town"—had had any impact at all.⁴

In his letter to Monoszon of February 1917 he conveyed a disoriented state of mind:

"Every night I leave one place for another; every day there are new faces, new impressions—all new, and yet it's all the same old scenes. Finally everything has gotten confused in my memories. Whom did I see in Khorostkov? Whom did I speak to in Kopychyntsi? What did I hear about in Probuzhno? I can't recall. It's only individual personalities and individual episodes that stand out in relief."⁵

An-sky confided that he had grown numb to the misery and unending needs of the dozens, perhaps hundreds of people he had observed and aided. Indeed, by the time he wrote that letter he had traveled the war zone as a relief worker for nearly fifteen months during two different trips. From late 1914 until September 1915 he traveled almost without pause between the Russian interior and the war zones in Poland and Galicia. By the fall, he was back in Petrograd, thoroughly exhausted and walking the streets in his military uniform.⁶ In June 1916, the Russian Army re-occupied Austria-Hungary a second time following the Brusilov Offensive, and An-sky returned to Galicia and Bukovina in December 1916. As he had done during his first trip, he aided and wrote about Jews, wrote down folk tales, arranged transportation for refugees and expellees, distributed money and food, procured

(Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1998 [1993]), 179.

⁴ GS6:8 / N225.

⁵ "Pis'ma S. An-skogo," *Novyi zhurnal* 89 (1967), 118.

⁶ Aba Lev, "Razgrom galitsiiskikh evreev v krovavye gody mirovoi voyny: Otryvok iz dnevnika," trans. Bella Aizenberg, *Evreiskaia letopis'* no. 3 (1924), 176.

medical supplies and treatment, and packed up crates of sacred ritual objects to haul back to Petrograd. Before the end of February 1917, he would hastily leave Galicia to take part in the revolution that, as a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, he had been working towards for nearly three decades of his life.

After the Provisional Government collapsed and the Bolsheviks seized power in early November that year, An-sky turned back to his memories of the war. Fortunately, he had ample access to them through the many pages he had written in Russian, including copies of his letters to Monoszon, newspaper articles, notes, and his own diary. On May 5, 1917, he wrote again to Monoszon with news that he had sold the publishing rights to a forthcoming book about Galicia to the Stybel Press, an important new Hebrew publishing house founded in Moscow that same year.⁷ An-sky worked on that book about Galicia for three years and completed it in February 1920, nine months before his death.⁸ While he had mainly written in Russian before the war, he made a significant decision to translate and publish his war writings in Yiddish after the war. He produced a four-part, six hundred-page memoir (the longest work he would ever write) known as *Khurbn Galitsye* (The Destruction of Galicia).⁹

As An-sky wrote and revised his war writings in Yiddish, he selectively drew on the memories of "individual personalities and individual episodes" that he had

⁷ Ibid., 122. See also F. Shargorodskaya, "O nasledii An-skogo," *Evreiskaia Starina* no. 11 (1924), 309 note 2.

⁸ Gabriella Safran, *Wandering Soul: S. An-sky, Creator of the Dybbuk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 287, 291. On the founding and history of Stybel Press, see Kenneth B. Moss, "Stybel," in the YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe <<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Stybel>> (accessed May 26, 2013). Bialik's Hebrew translation of *The Dybbuk* was published by Stybel's journal *Ha-Tekufah* in 1918.

⁹ Safran, *Wandering Soul*, 286-287.

seen in small towns like Khorostkov. He used these distinct scenes and figures to structure a lengthy, sometimes repetitive, and often poignant chronicle about his journey across the war zone. His diary, letters and essays brought him back to the events that he had seen, as he put it, "with my own eyes" (*mit eygene oygen*).¹⁰ They were his first drafts about the historical events that he witnessed, but they would not be the final drafts.

This chapter examines what An-sky produced during war, as well as the account that he wrote in retrospect, *Khurbn Galitsye*. We will trace the multi-part process through which An-sky created a narrative of Jewish national war experience. The first stage of An-sky's construction of a Jewish national narrative began with his role as a relief worker who, by virtue of his presence in the war zone, became a witness to the Jewish civilian experience of the Eastern Front. In a second stage, he translated and wove together his Russian-language diary, letters and essays into the Yiddish *Khurbn Galitsye*. Before we attempt to reconstruct these two distinct stages, however, it is important to take a step back and consider, why did An-sky choose to translate his Russian war writings into Yiddish? And why did he choose to travel the war zone so extensively as a relief worker when so many of his contemporaries, like Dubnov, for instance, remained in Petrograd throughout most of the war?

An-sky wrote in Yiddish with a specific vision of how he wanted to depict the war. Namely, he wanted to present it as a significant event in Jewish history. He knew that the Yiddish language was not a neutral medium, but rather, conveyed a

¹⁰ GS 4:24/N 15.

worldview that could be described as distinctly Jewish. He knew this not only because he was a native speaker of the language, but also from everything he had learned about Jewish folk culture during the three years he conducted ethnographic work in shtetls.¹¹ He was very aware, for example, that Yiddish contained allusions to Biblical imagery and laws, and Jewish folk culture; that the language allowed speakers to locate the events, places, and people around them within the context of Jewish beliefs and traditions. As I will argue, An-sky used terms from Yiddish in *Khurbn Galitsye* in the attempt to situate the World War within a distinctly Jewish frame of reference. By employing terms for Yiddish, he sought to inflect the subjects of death, communal dissolution, and history itself, with associations to Jewish folklore. At the same time, his use of Yiddish terms also revealed the extent to which wartime violence had transformed the original meanings of those terms.

An-sky's choice to write *Khurbn Galitsye* in Yiddish was therefore inextricably linked with his pre-war interests in Jewish ethnography. Indeed, his pre-war efforts to create an archive of material about the Jewish folk work also determined his choice to become an aid worker during the World War. As we will see, his unique method of wartime relief work, which brought him face to face with, and made him a witness to the war victims he sought to help, had its roots in his pre-war ethnography. In the first part of this chapter, then, we will explore a number of parallels between An-sky's pre-war approach to Jewish ethnography, and how they influenced his encounters with Jewish civilians as well as the war chronicles.

¹¹ Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

Another significant reason why An-sky rewrote his war chronicle in Yiddish had to do with his self-conscious desire to present himself in a particular way. An-sky's memoir became a site where he could construct, or fashion his own Jewish identity. As I will argue, An-sky depicted himself in *Khurbn Galitsye* as a prophetic and fatherly figure, one more effective than—even a replacement for—the figures who had traditionally served as leaders in Jewish society. An-sky in fact repeatedly criticized those whom he regarded as ineffective and aloof rabbis, philanthropists, and lawyers, none of whom he believed were capable of ensuring the survival of the embattled Jewish people. He fashioned his own image—and the role he believed he had played in Jewish history—in reaction to them.

One striking aspect of An-sky's decision to fashion his self-image in response to fellow Jewish leaders is that during the war itself, we know that he did not solely devote his attention to helping or observing Jews. In his Russian-language diary, his identity as a Russian intellectual and his admiration for certain Russians is prominent—and in some instances, extremely problematic. Bearing this in mind, it makes sense that An-sky would have opted to selectively translate parts of his diary.

We can pause here to note just one example of a remarkable difference between the diary and memoir, a difference that An-sky's biographer Gabriella Safran has presented as emblematic of his dualistic persona. In one of his diary entries, An-sky wrote about a group of Russian soldiers that he met in Galicia in February 1915. He described their hardships and fears of death with genuine admiration and idealism, in Tolstoyan fashion. Yet these were very likely the same soldiers who one day

before in a nearby town had ridden their horses over Torah scrolls in the street, and desecrated the synagogue—with human feces. In fact, An-sky had visited that town, Tuchów, earlier the very same day that he met the soldiers. He had sympathetically listened to the Jews cry as they told him their stories, and he had recorded their stories in his diary.¹² When he revised these episodes in his Yiddish memoir, An-sky emphasized his empathy for the Jewish war victims, on the one hand, and silenced his expressions of admiration for the Russian soldiers, on the other.

My goal, then, is not to show whether An-sky translated word for word from Russian to Yiddish, or, to use the terminology of translation theory, whether there is linguistic equivalence between his wartime and postwar writings. The example above reveals that An-sky did not produce a strictly equivalent account. However, his Yiddish rewritings should not be dismissed as mere apologetics or a deliberate falsification of his own identity and past. Rather, they suggest a larger cultural phenomenon. They can be read as a quintessentially Jewish mode of translation—as evidence of the moral and political choices that An-sky made as he constructed a vision of Jewish history. Integral to this vision was the role he believed he had played in that history—that is, as an integral, yet unique member of the Jewish people who had helped to ensure the survival of their history.

My interpretation of An-sky's war writings is indebted to Naomi Seidman, who has argued that "translation cannot be separated from the material, political,

¹² Safran, *Wandering Soul*, 1-3.

cultural, or historical circumstances of its production."¹³ A consideration of these circumstances, argues Seidman, leads to "the notion that not only the *integrity of Jewish culture* but also *Jewish political survival* somehow depends on strategic mistranslation."¹⁴ Thus, at various points in history when Jews translated to or from Jewish languages (including their *own* works, as in An-sky's case), they did so with a strategic purpose in mind. One of these intentions, as it clearly was for An-sky, was to convey a sense of allegiance and fidelity to their own people. And as Seidman concludes, "fidelity...means faithfulness to one's embattled community rather than to any abstract ideal of linguistic equivalence."¹⁵ An-sky thus chose to express the primacy of his allegiance to the Jewish people by rewriting—and in the process, strategically mistranslating—his narrative of Jewish catastrophic history in Yiddish. His editorial choices can be read as attempts to reconcile, in Josephus-like fashion, the dualistic persona that is present throughout his wartime diary. Writing in Yiddish allowed his identity as a Russian intellectual to recede into the background; it allowed him to make claims about who he was, and who he was not.

My approach to An-sky's war narrative builds upon earlier studies of his life and works, but also departs from them in some crucial ways. In a pioneering study of Jewish literary responses to catastrophic events, David Roskies focused on An-sky's use of the Hebrew term *khurban*, or destruction, as the name for his memoir.¹⁶ As

¹³ Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Differences and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 (my emphasis).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶ David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

Roskies argued, An-sky's use of *khurbn* as an archetype signified a comparison between the events of World War I and the destruction of the Temple in ancient Jerusalem.¹⁷ An-sky's conceptual choice reflected an old rabbinic practice of conflating disparate events into a single date, a practice that allowed him, as Roskies wrote, to "locate the catastrophe on a continuum."¹⁸ Calling the World War a *khurbn* imbued the event with "biblical sanction," and even served a transcendent purpose, as an act that could "alert God to the grand design of history and...assure the survivors of their own place on the continuum."¹⁹ Hence, Roskies argued that An-sky believed the Jews would survive the war precisely because a covenant bound them to God, for "angry as God might be" with the Jewish people, "He never withdrew from the covenant."²⁰ According to Roskies, An-sky's rescue and relief mission during the war stemmed from the belief that his own actions would "alert" God to intervene in history and ensure the continuity of the Jewish people.

Yet as Steven Zipperstein first observed, Roskies' pioneering and influential interpretation of *Khurbn Galitsye* neglected to consider the importance of An-sky's identity as a secular Jew and a Russian intellectual. The assumption about An-sky's views of God overlooked the cultural and psychological distance between An-sky and the civilians he wrote about, a distance that An-sky himself clearly revealed in *Khurbn Galitsye*. Many of the Jews An-sky encountered in the war zone did not

¹⁷ The notion that Jewish memory functions according to belief in a continuum, or atemporal understanding of discrete events in Jewish history, is the central argument of Yosef Haim Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 17, 20.

¹⁹ Ibid., 23.

²⁰ Ibid., 21.

expect to survive the war, and in fact, actually *hoped* that the catastrophic war would bring about an apocalyptic end to history.²¹ An-sky consciously distanced himself from these beliefs in his efforts to help communities weather the war and rebuild.

In an attempt to recover the Russian half of An-sky's identity as a Russian Jewish intellectual, Gabriella Safran's recent critical biography has provided an elaborate picture of his intellectual influences. After Safran's study, we now that the far-ranging ideas and projects that engaged An-sky throughout his life revolved around his identification with both Russian *and* Jewish culture.²² In the case of An-sky's war writings, Safran was the first to show that An-sky based *Khurbn Galitsye* on earlier drafts of Russian-language texts, a discovery made possible in part by greater access to the archives in the post-Soviet period. Safran made the important observation that An-sky's Russian-language war writings divulge "the author's ambivalent identification with both the victims of violence *and* their oppressors."²³ One of Safran's most important insights for us is that while revising his writings from Russian to Yiddish he emphasized his Jewish loyalties, while he downplayed, or, as Safran put it, "muted his own Russian sympathies."²⁴

While my findings here draw extensively upon earlier scholars' work, I also part ways with David Roskies in one critical respect: I do not believe that An-sky used the *khurbn* concept to symbolize the enactment of a divine covenant between God and the Jewish people. Strikingly, there are no references to God in *Khurbn*

²¹ See Steven Zipperstein, "Ashkenazic Jewry and Catastrophe," *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies* 1 (1986): 327-335.

²² Safran, *Wandering Soul*. An-sky's war efforts are the subject of Chapter 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 240 (my emphasis).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

Galitsye. For An-sky, who was a secular thinker, God did not play a role in "redeeming" the Jews and ensuring their place on the continuum of human history. However, he did believe that the relief worker and chronicler could play that role. In order to present a secular vision of Jewish history, I argue that An-sky used terms in Yiddish that were inflected with religious and historic significance, and that his use of those terms allowed him to radically *redefine* the concept of *khurbn* based on his secular understanding of reality. As I read it here, *Khurbn Galitsye* is a narrative not about God, but about individuals like An-sky who ensured the continuity of the Jewish people through concrete actions undertaken to rescue them in a time of crisis, and through efforts to exhaustively record and preserve their wartime history.

Constructing a Jewish National Wartime Narrative, Part 1: An-sky's 1915 Diary

An-sky wrote and collected a vast amount of material during the war years. Unfortunately, only fragments of it have survived. Of the massive archive that he collected—originally 502 documents and 1,371 objects—a mere handful of essays, letters, and notebooks remain today. Several of them are held by the Jewish Manuscript Division of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine in Kiev.²⁵ His once massive archive came to Kiev from Petrograd, where it was initially held by the Jewish Historical Ethnographic Society (*Evreiskoe istoriko-etnograficheskoe obshchestvo*, or EIEO). When Soviet authorities closed the EIEO as a "bourgeois Jewish organization" in 1929, its holdings, including parts of An-sky's war archive

²⁵ In Ukrainian, *Natsional'naia Biblioteka Ukraini imeni Vernadskogo*, or NBUV. A bibliography of NBUV's collection of An-sky documents has been published in Ukrainian, in Irina Sergeeva, *Arkhivna spadshchyna Semena An-s'kogo* (Kyiv: Dukh i litera, 2006). On the original number of documents and objects, see Shargorodskaya, "O nasledii An-skogo," 309.

and ethnographic collections, were acquired by the Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture in Kiev (*Institut evreiskoi proletarskoi kul'tury*, or IEPK).²⁶ The IEPK operated between 1929 and 1936 in association with the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, and the latter organization kept its archival collections at the Vernadsky Library.²⁷

An-sky kept a Russian-language war diary throughout the war years, but like his archive, the vast majority of that text disappeared after the war. It was most likely lost when in September 1918, An-sky fled from Moscow to Vilna. Earlier that year, Bolshevik authorities had classified his political party, the Socialist Revolutionaries, as an enemy group, and An-sky fled to escape arrest, torture and murder that the Cheka (Secret Police) had already begun to inflict on fellow SRs.²⁸ In his haste, he abandoned several important texts, including his war diary, materials from his ethnographic expedition, and the manuscript of his Russian-language play *The Dybbuk*.²⁹ Other than the two fragments of his war diary that ended up in Moscow's Russian State Archive of Art and Literature, the whereabouts of the manuscript remain unknown.

The first surviving fragment of An-sky's diary covers the period from January 1 through March 8 of 1915, during the first of his two trips to Galicia. This material

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ For a history of the IEPK, see Vladimir Bilovitsky, "Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture," in *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online at <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Institute_of_Jewish_Proletarian_Culture> (accessed November 21, 2012).

²⁸ Safran, *Wandering Soul*, 280.

²⁹ A Hebrew translation of *The Dybbuk* by the poet Haim Nakhman Bialik was first published in 1918; see S. An-ski, "Bein Shnei Olamot," trans. H. N. Bialik, *Hatekufah* 1 (1918): 225-296.

corresponds primarily to the second (of four) sections of *Khurbn Galitsye*.³⁰ A second surviving fragment of An-sky's diary covers the period from September 9 through October 10 of 1915, following the Russian army's retreat from Galicia, Poland and the Baltic region.³¹ An-sky lived at the time in Petrograd, where he maintained an active interest in Jewish war relief efforts, but also began to focus on other causes, including the goal to stage *The Dybbuk* in Russian, and his fervent promotion of Vladimir Jabotinsky's militant Zionist cause. Insofar as it did not relate directly to his relief work or the experiences of Jewish civilians in the war zone, An-sky did not incorporate these parts of his diary into his memoir. Thus, An-sky's Russian-language diary can be compared to his Yiddish memoir only for the period between January and March of 1915, during his first trip to Galicia.

An-sky's diary entries present a remarkably detailed reflection of his daily experiences. He meticulously described conversations with wounded soldiers in hospitals, fellow Russian and Jewish aid workers, Russian military and civilian authorities, and Jewish civilians in Galicia and parts of the Pale of Settlement. In some instances he wrote multiple drafts about his experiences. Over the course of two to three days he once drafted several versions about a traumatic bombing that he witnessed in the Galician town of Tarnów in mid-February 1915.³²

An-sky's attention to a broad range of human experience in general and to Jewish experience in particular did not arise with the war, however. Both his relief

³⁰ RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 3-63.

³¹ RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 21-40.

³² For two versions taken down in a notepad, see NBUV f. 339, ed. kh. 39, ll. 1-14; for a second in his diary, see RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, ed. kh. 5, ll. 43-47.

work and the way he wrote about his wartime experiences represented the culmination of a journey he had begun decades earlier in the guise of a revolutionary organizer, Jewish national activist, and an autodidactic ethnographer of Jewish folk culture. While it is important to point out that he made no formal references to ethnographic practices or principles in his diary, the mode in which he recorded the diary, as well as the contents themselves, exhibit striking continuities with his pre-war ethnographic work.

An-sky's turn to ethnography prior to the war embodied a complex combination of Russian and Jewish cultural and political principles that had preoccupied him throughout his life.³³ As we noted in the Introduction, An-sky fashioned himself into a Russian intellectual and gravitated to the Russian populist movement from a young age. Yet years before the World War, he began to consider how populist ideals and the ethnographic study of the Russian folk might also be relevant to the Jewish people. As part of a vanguard of activists in St. Petersburg in the decade that followed 1905, he sought to forge a distinct discipline of Jewish ethnography.

A number of scholars have noted that An-sky's efforts to study Jewish folk were preceded by earlier projects.³⁴ However, in some ways his plan represented the

³³ The following summary of An-sky's ethnographic influences draws from Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent*, 1-15.

³⁴ On earlier Jewish ethnographic projects in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including those of Moshe Berlin and I. L. Peretz, see Simon Rabinovitch, "Positivism, Populism, and Politics: The Intellectual Foundations of Jewish Ethnography in Late Imperial Russia," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2005): 227-256; Deborah Hope Yalen, "Red Kasrilevke: Ethnographies of Economic Transformation in the Soviet Shtetl, 1917--1939," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 2007), 51-58; Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent*, 29-32.

most ambitious and innovative one ever proposed. His ethnographic expedition through the Pale of Settlement between 1912 and 1914 is also remarkable because it brought him full circle back to the populist ideals that had first inspired him to study the Russian *narod* more than twenty years earlier. He had come to regard Hasidism, for example, as "an organically Jewish form of Populism in its own right," as Nathaniel Deutsch has put it.³⁵ He envisioned that the relics he collected—sacred objects, folk tales, legends, songs, photographs, books, and everyday customs—would become "living sources," the basis for a cultural life that would be experienced not in the shtetl, but in museums, theaters, archives, encyclopedias and books.³⁶ As Deutsch has argued, An-sky practiced what anthropologists today would call "salvage," and also, redemptive ethnography. That is, in reaction to a growing awareness of migration and secularization, he sought to collect, preserve, and showcase Jewish cultural artifacts from the Pale of Settlement, partly from fear that the people who had produced those objects would change, and that their traditions would be lost without a trace.³⁷

³⁵ Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent*, 41.

³⁶ In November 1915, the objects collected by An-sky's ethnographic expedition were transferred to the EIEO Museum in Petrograd. One condition of the transfer was that "a list must be compiled of objects which, on account of their unique character, should be transferred to a Jewish Museum in Palestine, if a legally sanctioned refuge for Jews is to be created there," in "Otchet Evreiskago Istoriko-Etnograficheskago Obshchestva za 1915 god," *Evreiskaia Starina* T. 8 (1915): 11. On An-sky's wish to develop Jewish museums, see Benjamin Lukin, "An Academy Where Folklore Will Be Studied: An-sky and the Jewish Museum," in *The Worlds of S. An-sky: A Russian-Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century*, eds. Gabriella Safran and Steven J. Zipperstein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 281-306.

³⁷ Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent*, 28. Safran (205) writes that by displaying objects like photographs, human remains, and *kvitlekh* (notes of supplication left at the gravesites of famous rebbes), An-sky sought to inspire "assimilated Jews to create secular Jewish art."

When in 1914 three armies overran the very same region in the Western Russian Empire where he had spent the previous three years collecting sacred objects and mining individuals for their knowledge of customs, spells and songs, An-sky's sense of an end, and of his own personal struggles against that end, must have seemed prophetic indeed. The outbreak of war forced An-sky to suspend his ethnographic expedition. Now as a relief worker, he returned to much of the same region he had visited as an ethnographer, including towns in Podolia and Volhynia.

The various principles and methods that An-sky had developed to study Jewish folk culture continued to characterize his wartime efforts in three ways. First, he emphasized the quantity, rather than quality, of his data. Second, just as he had sought to collect folklore and help people in multiple locations, rather than root himself to one place in particular, he chose to become a traveling aid worker. Third, he had previously led his expedition to dozens of shtetls, believing that it was important to collect folklore at the site of its creation, to be present with people as they told stories. This desire to be present, to "be there," as it were, is a crucial factor that led An-sky into the war zone as a relief worker.

Each of the three characteristics that defined his ethnographic expedition expressed themselves in his wartime work. In regard to his emphasis on the quantity of ethnographic material he collected, for example, Safran has noted that "rather than stressing the quality of his data, An-sky justified his [ethnographic] work by emphasizing the amount of his data."³⁸ Indeed, by the outbreak of the war, his team

³⁸ Safran, *Wandering Soul*, 196.

had collected 1,000 tales and 1,500 songs, taken more than 2,000 photographs, recorded nearly 500 wax cylinders of music, and purchased or received 700 objects for the EIEO museum.³⁹ He also compiled a questionnaire to learn about folk customs for each stage of the Jewish life cycle which contained 2,087 questions.⁴⁰

An-sky's emphasis on quantity and scope continued to guide his wartime efforts. The appeal of early 1915 that he issued with the Yiddish writers and activists Y. L. Peretz and Yankev Dinezon (mentioned earlier in Chapter 1) insisted on the need for a comprehensive account, that

"each drop of our spilled blood, each tear, each act of suffering and sacrifice must be entered into our historical account...see to it that nothing is lost or forgotten of all that happens in our life during and because of the war: all the upheaval, the sacrifice, the suffering, the acts of valor, all the facts that illuminate the attitude of Jews to the war and of others toward us; all the losses and philanthropic efforts—in short, record everything."⁴¹

During his ethnographic expedition An-sky had similarly sought to "record everything"—and in as many places as possible. His insistence on cataloguing the geographic diversity of Jewish culture in multiple locations constituted a unique approach to ethnographic work. Whereas many ethnographers study one group of people in a specific location over an extended length of time, An-sky sometimes spent as little as a day in any one shtetl before moving on. Originally he had planned to collect folklore in 300 shtetls, but for logistical reasons, his team managed to see (only!) sixty.⁴² This approach reflected his belief that no single Jewish community,

³⁹ Ibid., 203; see also Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent*, 11.

⁴⁰ The history of the questionnaire is discussed in Chaps. 3 and 4, and appears in annotated translation, in Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent*.

⁴¹ Peretz, Dinezon, An-sky-Rapoport, "Oyfruf," 3/"Appeal," 209, 210.

⁴² Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent*, 11.

town, or individual was representative of "Jewish culture" as a whole. In this respect, as Deutsch has written, An-sky appropriated a Hasidic belief when studying Jewish folk culture. He believed that "songs, tales, and, indeed, all Jewish folk traditions possessed a spark of the Jewish people's creative spirit or soul." Hence, for An-sky it was consequently "never enough to collect *representative* examples of a particular type of song, tale, or amulet."⁴³

During the war, An-sky covered even greater distances than he had during his expedition. The range of locations in the vast Russian interior and war zone that he managed to visit lent his diary a travelogue-like and encyclopedic quality.⁴⁴ On January 1, 1915, we find him in Rovno, at Russia's border with Galicia; on January 3, he leaves for Moscow, nearly 750 miles to the northwest; the day after that, he travels another 500 miles to Petrograd. On January 14, he journeyed 750 miles south to Kiev; two days later, he was nearly 300 miles to at the western border between Russia and Galicia, in Radziwiłłów. On January 23, he crossed the border into Galicia. He stopped first in Brody, then moved on to Lvov on January 27.⁴⁵ He kept up this pace of travel throughout the war, an unusual feat given that trains in wartime Russia, at least by one estimate, tended to average twenty miles per hour.⁴⁶

To be sure, An-sky's ethnographic habits cannot entirely explain his pace of wartime travel. Russia's front lines shifted dramatically throughout the war, and the

⁴³ Ibid., 43 (my emphasis).

⁴⁴ David Roskies described *Khurbn Galitsye* as an "encyclopedia of popular response to catastrophe," in *Against the Apocalypse*, 137. Similarly, Deutsch has called An-sky's questionnaire an "encyclopedic ethnographic questionnaire," in *The Jewish Dark Continent*, 13, 65-66.

⁴⁵ RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 1-25, *passim*.

⁴⁶ Malcolm C. Grow, *Surgeon Grow: An American In the Russian Fighting* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1918), 44.

Russian occupation of Galicia alone covered tens of thousands of square miles. In addition, An-sky's official role as a traveling agent on behalf of both EKOPO and the Unions of Towns and Zemstvos necessitated constant travel. But his ethnographic work made him especially suited—and hence willing—to take on the job of traveling relief worker in a vast empire at war.

Moreover, other relief workers remained in one location. F. E. Lander was a doctor and relief worker who, like An-sky, served on behalf of EKOPO in Russian-occupied Galicia. However, Lander chose to work exclusively in the Tarnopol and Czortkov provinces of Bukovina. An-sky admitted that while his own relief efforts had been somewhat random, men like Lander, by rooting themselves to one place, had provided "systematic assistance that had saved hundreds, even thousands of Jewish souls from starvation."⁴⁷

The third and final factor that links An-sky's ethnography and wartime work was his belief in the importance of gathering folklore *in situ*, or at the site of its creation. During the expedition, he had stressed the connections between local legends, the history of the place where they were collected, and physical spaces like cemeteries and synagogues.⁴⁸ This approach reflected the importance for An-sky, mentioned earlier, of firsthand experience, or being present at the site of folk creations.

⁴⁷ GS 6: 8/N 225. An-sky praised Lander's efforts elsewhere, describing him as a rare example of a Jewish doctor in the war zone who devoted himself with "mesiras-nefesh" (Hebrew for self-sacrifice) to the needs of Jews, GS 4: 155/N 81. Aba Lev also characterized Lander as an effective aid worker in the Bukovina region ("Razgrom galitsiiskikh evreev," 172, 176).

⁴⁸ Safran, *Wandering Soul*, 201.

Similarly, whenever he arrived in a new place during the war, he would immediately seek out civilians, soldiers and authorities in order to hear and record their stories and perspectives. When he transcribed these conversations, many of which contained accounts of pogroms and other traumatic events, they acquired a different value, namely as testimonies. They became written accounts that reflected the eyewitness perspectives of victims, survivors, and bystanders in a time of crisis.

Yet as we noted earlier, the act of taking testimonies did not take place in a vacuum. An-sky's wartime efforts to be present as a witness and to testify to human catastrophe in writing expressed the dual influences of Russian populism and Jewish ethnography that had shaped his earlier endeavors. Like his previous projects, the chronicling of Jewish civilian testimonies during wartime contributed to An-sky's goal to create an archive of Jewish historical experience. His relief work and chronicling efforts also bolstered the quasi-spiritual image he wanted to promote of himself as a prophetic gatherer of the sparks that formed the soul of the Jewish people.

These three interrelated aspects of An-sky's ethnographic stance—quantity of data; extensive travel to exhaustively collect unique, or individual examples; and the collection of folklore *in situ*—are elements that bridged his pre-war and wartime projects. We now turn to the question of what An-sky did *after* he "recorded everything." How did he transform his ethnographically-inspired war writings into a narrative that, as stated in his January 1915 "appeal," would contribute to the composition of "our [Jewish] historical account"?

Constructing a Jewish National Wartime Narrative, Part 2: *Khurbn Galitsye*

Khurbn Galitsye was published posthumously in 1921 in the fourth, fifth and sixth volumes of An-sky's fifteen-volume collected works.⁴⁹ The structure and order of the memoir generally followed that of the daily account recorded in his Russian diary. However, when reflecting back on the war, An-sky sought to provide a broader context for his own limited experiences. He opened the memoir by describing the historical origins of the military's persecution of Jews, the simmering economic tensions between Jews and Poles that led to intensified rumors concerning Jewish espionage at local levels, and the anti-Semitic atmosphere that pervaded all levels of Russian society, including its educated class. The army's violence against Jews represented a kind of ephemeral madness, he wrote, which had precipitated the view that Jews were considered guilty of treason simply for being Jews.

The war had, in short, generated a form of mass psychosis, or what An-sky called "one of the darkest moments in Jewish history:" the destruction of hundreds of shtetls, expulsions of entire communities from their place of residence, widespread impoverishment and epidemics, and the endangered lives of nearly 250,000 Jewish children who found themselves in a war zone.⁵⁰ In *Khurbn Galitsye* An-sky sought to make meaning of that chaos: to impose a moral vision on to that dark moment in Jewish history, and to simultaneously carve out a place for his own contributions to that history. As we will see, the Yiddish language played a preeminent role in his

⁴⁹ These collected works, *Gezamelte shriftn in fuftsen bender* (Vilna, Warsaw, New York: Farlag "An-sky," 1928) were published in Vilna, Warsaw and New York during the 1920s. Bibliographic records list the publication dates of this collection variously as 1920, 1928, 1922-1925, and 1925-1929 (Safran, *Wandering Soul*, 300).

⁵⁰ GS 4:11/N6.

attempt to name the victims as Jews, and to assign meaning to their lives and deaths according to a Jewish frame of reference.

Naming the Victims

When An-sky arrived in Galicia on January 23, 1915, he already knew from rumors and bits of information leaked in the press that the Russian Army had carried out military pogroms four months earlier in Lvov and Brody (respectively the largest and second largest cities in Galicia). In his diary for January 27, 1915, An-sky recorded his conversation with an official of the Jewish community in Lvov, Herman (Yankev) Dimant. When Dimant first saw An-sky's uniform, he assumed a Russian policeman had come to arrest him, but felt immediately reassured when An-sky revealed himself. The men then discussed the pogrom in Lvov that had taken place on September 27 and 28, 1914.

Among the most violent and deadly pogroms in the region to follow the entry of the Russian Army, estimates of Jews killed in Lvov range between twenty and fifty, with more than 100 wounded.⁵¹ An-sky wrote in his diary that according to Dimant, in Lvov eighteen "Jews were killed" (Russian: *ubitykh evreev*).⁵² When An-sky translated this account into Yiddish for *Khurbn Galitsye*, however, he used a

⁵¹ For background on the Lvov pogrom see Alexander Victor Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland: War, Ethnicity and Anti-Jewish Violence in East Galicia, 1914-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 30-32. On anti-Jewish violence in Galicia during World War I, see Peter Holquist, "The Role of Personality in the First (1914-1915) Russian Occupation of Galicia and Bukovina," in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, eds. Jonathan Dekel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan M. Meir, and Israel Bartal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 52-73.

⁵² RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, l. 22.

different term, originally from Hebrew, to describe the victims—*korbanos* (victims, a term whose meaning will be explained further).⁵³

An-sky wrote about other pogroms that the Russian Army carried out in Galicia. In one account, he quoted from a letter in Yiddish that a Jewish soldier had sent him. The soldier wrote that when the Russian military entered a town, advance units of Cossacks raped women in the streets, slashed their breasts, and left them "to die in their agony" (*men lozt di...goysisn*).⁵⁴ The soldier employed the Yiddish word for a dying person, or *goyses*.

An-sky used the terms *korban* and *goyses* elsewhere in *Khurbn Galitsye* to describe Jewish victims. As he followed the Russian Army's retreat across the Pale of Settlement in mid-1915, he passed through Kobrin, near Brest-Litovsk. In the synagogue there, he sought to save newborn twins whose mother, a homeless refugee, had died from cholera after giving birth, and whose father had gone mad and disappeared. The wet nurse, doctor and nurse that An-sky had arranged to care for the babies never arrived. One of the two babies died immediately. The second baby started dying after not taking any food for two days—"dos kind hot ge'goyses't," as he wrote in Yiddish.⁵⁵ An-sky wanted desperately to save the baby, but he faced a hopeless situation. "My heart filled with tears," he wrote, "as I gazed at that silent victim of the war" (*dem shtiln korban fun der milkhome*).⁵⁶ Here too he used the Hebrew term *korban* (victim) as a name for the baby.

⁵³ GS 4:13/N 8.

⁵⁴ GS 4:14/N 8.

⁵⁵ GS 5:202/N 211.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

An-sky would have known that the terms *korban* and *goyses* carry many associations from Biblical and rabbinic texts, as well as Jewish folk belief and ritual. In Biblical and Talmudic discourse, the Hebrew word *korban* referred to a gift, offering or sacrifice to God, often an animal sacrifice.⁵⁷ In medieval and modern usage, the term acquired theological significance. It came to mean a human victim whose death represented an act of martyrdom.⁵⁸ The association perhaps drew on the Biblical notion that people and animal sacrifices may be interchangeable, as in the story of the *Akedah*, where Abraham is about to sacrifice his son Isaac when God tells him to substitute a ram in Isaac's place (Genesis 22: 1-19).⁵⁹

The word *goyses*, derived from Aramaic and also used in modern Yiddish and Hebrew, meant a person in a rapid state of decline, one likely to lead to death. In Talmudic debates, the terms *goyses* and *gesise* (process of dying) had Halakhic, or legal significance, as they marked the stage at which a mortally ill person had passed the point of possible recovery. Indeed, as one opinion in the Talmud stated, "frequently, the majority of those believed to be dying, really die" (*Rov goesesim l'mitah*) (Gittin 28a).

By naming the war victims with these Yiddish (originally Hebrew and Aramaic) terms, An-sky evoked for his readers, and perhaps for the victims themselves, the untranslatable associations between *korbanes* and martyrdom, and

⁵⁷ The system of sacrificial offerings ceased after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, but the rituals for carrying out sacrifices are discussed in detail throughout the Bible.

⁵⁸ The use of the Hebrew term *korban* to mean both victim and martyr became more common after the Holocaust. "Holocaust" is itself a Greek word meaning "burnt sacrifice."

⁵⁹ For examples of associations between mass martyrdom and the *Akedah* in Jewish chronicles compiled during the First and Second Crusades, see Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 42-44.

between *gesise* and the end of the Jewish life cycle. Indeed, An-sky would have been well aware from his pre-war ethnographic work among Jews in the Pale of Settlement that, as Deutsch writes, "the moments leading up to death were richly inflected with folk beliefs and rituals."⁶⁰ In the ethnographic questionnaire that he compiled in 1913, An-sky devoted a section with sixteen questions that inquired about various aspects of *gesise*, among them: Is there a belief that before the *goyses* dies, his parents or other dead people appear before him and call him to them? In which hours, days, weeks, and months is death considered easier or harder? Do people see to it that the dying person says the verses that begin "Hear O Israel" at the moment of death?⁶¹

To underscore the distinctly Jewish frame of reference evoked by An-sky's use of Yiddish and Hebrew, we can compare the passages cited above from *Khurbn Galitsye* to a similar account of victims written by Aba Lev in his diary. Lev was the younger folklorist whom we met briefly at the end of Chapter 1, and had helped An-sky's pre-war expedition.

While serving as a soldier with the Russian Army in Bukovina, Lev aided and wrote about Jews there in 1916.⁶² Like An-sky, Lev kept a diary during the war, but in Yiddish. A fragment from Lev's diary, however, was translated into Russian and published in 1924. Lev wrote that in Buczacz, locals had recognized him as a Jew and led him to see fellow Jewish victims of Russian and Cossack atrocities. In Buczacz he saw

⁶⁰ Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent*, 85.

⁶¹ Ibid., 269, 267, 268. See 266-269 for questions about *gesise*, numbered 1671-1686.

⁶² An-sky mentioned Lev's contributions to his ethnographic expedition, as well as the good example he set as a Jewish soldier in the Russian Army who selflessly aided Jews in Galicia (GS 4:153-154/N 80).

"a dead woman who had been raped and then beaten so that she died the very same day in terrible agony (*umerla v strashnykh mucheniiakh*)...People pointed out many other Jewish houses to me where dead, strangled and burnt people (*mertvetsy, udavlennye, sozhzhennye*) lay, among them people who were sick, swollen from wounds, beaten up, raped" (*bol'nye, opukhshie, izbitye, iznasilovannye*).⁶³

Lev's descriptions also testified to the pain of the wounded, dying and dead victims. To be sure, the human tragedy in Lev and An-sky's descriptions is equally disturbing, regardless of language. Yet it is important to recognize that An-sky's Yiddish chronicle conveyed a distinctly Jewish perspective on death and dying that could not be translated. Moreover, by employing the terms *korbanes* and *goyses* An-sky at once registered the significance of these concepts for his audience, and the extent to which the traditions associated with these concepts had been destroyed by the violence of the war itself. With the term *goyses*, An-sky suggested that an integral part of the Jewish life cycle had been brutally taken from the victims. The death of civilians by cruelty and starvation had robbed them of the awe and dignity that the rituals associated with *gesise* were meant to bestow on a dying person. War not only injured bodies, it also destroyed an integral component of Jewish national culture.

War is *Gehenem*: Hell and Other Jewish Places

An-sky's ethnographic impulses led him to look for expressions of Jewish life in the people and places he saw. In early December 1914, he observed an eight year old Jewish girl in Warsaw at a refugee shelter managed by Y. L. Peretz. The girl stood next to An-sky, listening intently as refugees told stories of Cossack brutality, hunger, and homelessness. An-sky wrote that her "big black eyes already expressed

⁶³ Aba Lev, "Razgrom galitsiiskikh evreev," 174.

the depth of an ancient, millennial Jewish sorrow..." (*der alter, toizendyehriger tifer Yudisher troyer...*)⁶⁴ An-sky depicted this little girl's face as the face of war, but whose expression embodied timeless Jewish memory.

The Jewish past and present were inscribed only on the bodies of the people, but also in the spaces they inhabited. An-sky noted frequently in his diary that synagogues had ceased to be places for prayer and study. For the Russian military occupiers, they had become storage facilities, or targets of desecration. For Jews, they had become places of refuge, to gather or sleep. In the Galician shtetl Tukhów, he saw the army using the synagogue as a horse stable. Another synagogue in the same town was being used as a prison.⁶⁵ In Kobrin, An-sky found the synagogue packed with homeless people, among them children suffering from cholera and measles.⁶⁶

In Brody, An-sky reflected back on the famous and old synagogue there (*di alte Broder shul*), and had stressed its importance for Jewish cultural life: "A whole epoch of Jewish life was bound up with Brody and its synagogue."⁶⁷ But now, as living repositories of the Jewish past, synagogues had become sites of memory and loss—places of shelter for the homeless and dying.

Brody's streets also revealed ways that the war was transforming Jewish history. In his diary for January 24, 1915, An-sky noted an "unusual scene:" a Jewish drayman driving a large wagon, loaded down with furniture, and an elderly Jewish couple walking behind him. What made the scene unusual was that it took place on

⁶⁴ GS 4:24/N 13. Neugroschel's translation removes the Jewish descriptor in An-sky's original, and has "her big, black eyes expressed an eternity of sadness."

⁶⁵ RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, l. 33, 34.

⁶⁶ GS 5:198/N 206.

⁶⁷ GS 4:140.

the Sabbath—the couple had been expelled from their homes after being given a few hours' notice, and were now walking the streets in search of shelter.⁶⁸ When An-sky reflected on this scene in *Khurbn Galitsye*, he added that although many onlookers in the streets noticed the couple, who were flagrantly violating the prohibition against traveling on the Sabbath, no one reproached them for "desecrating the Sabbath in public" (*khilul shabes befarhesye*).⁶⁹

Befarhesye is originally from the Aramaic and means "in public space." The term relates to transgressions that are committed out in the open and therefore viewed as acts that set a bad example of behavior in the community. (Rabbis in the Talmud, for example, were of the opinion that breaking the laws of the Sabbath "*befarhesyah*" obligated a person to surrender their life [Sanhedrin 74a]). An-sky's use of the term indicated that the homeless couple's search for shelter was so pressing that they had no choice but to violate the Sabbath in public. Yet by explicitly stating that no one reproached them, he may have meant to excuse, or simply explain their "transgression." Russian military policy had introduced contingencies that justified or at least explained the couple's public desecration of the Sabbath. An-sky's portrayal of the community's response implied that they too understood this contingency that had made it impossible to keep Jewish law.

Just as An-sky marked buildings and streets as Jewish spaces being transformed by war, he also located the larger, or universal landscape of human suffering within a Jewish frame of reference. This move is critically important for

⁶⁸ RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 19-20.

⁶⁹ GS 4:140/N 73.

understanding his process of revision from diary to memoir, and from Russian to Yiddish language.

As I mentioned earlier, An-sky did not only write about Jewish civilians in his diary and memoir. He wrote sympathetically about Germans who also became targets of xenophobic nationalism during the war, and like the Jews, had suffered pogroms and expulsions, including four days of violent rioting in Moscow in May 1915 that caused damages costing nearly 70 million rubles.⁷⁰ An-sky also described Russian troops and Austrian POWs, many of whom he met in hospitals or on trains. Among the moving descriptions of human misery in An-sky's diary are those of wounded or dying soldiers. These recall Tolstoy's writings about the wounded soldiers in Sebastopol, images that for Tolstoy embodied the "authentic" idea of war as a site of unmitigated "blood, suffering, and death." In a Rovno military hospital on January 1, 1915, for example, An-sky met a teenage boy who had been shot in the chest, had a broken jaw, several missing teeth, and a broken leg bound by a splint that had chafed his skin and exposed the flesh.⁷¹ An-sky described each of these wounds, and sympathized with the boy's agony.

Elsewhere in his diary, An-sky described combat as hell, or what he called an inferno (in Russian, *ad*).⁷² Aba Lev's account of Buczacz published in Russian used the same term ("living hell," or *zhivoi ad*; also "Galician hell," or *Galitsiiskii ad*).⁷³ In Yiddish, however, An-sky used a Jewish term when describing the landscape of war.

⁷⁰ On the riots, see Eric Lohr, "Patriotic Violence and the State: The Moscow Riots of May 1915," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4:3 (2003): 607-626.

⁷¹ RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, l. 1.

⁷² RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, l. 32.

⁷³ Lev, "Razgrom Galitsiiskikh Evreev," 169, 171.

He witnessed the Russian Army withdraw from Galicia in the spring of 1915, and later described the long columns of soldiers walking with bandaged and bloody body parts as a "funeral procession." The scene struck him as a "true picture of Hell" (*emiser gehenem-bild*).⁷⁴ He described war itself, in terms that echo Tolstoy, as "a Hell of blood and inhuman anguish (*a gehenem fun blut un unmenshlikhe leyden*)."⁷⁵ An-sky's attention to human pain was universal in scope, but his choice to describe suffering as a kind of *gehenem* enabled him to place that universal suffering within a Jewish context.

An-sky knew that *gehenem*, or Hell, had many association in Jewish written and oral tradition. In his ethnographic questionnaire, he had asked about people's beliefs regarding the location of *gehenem*, its size and various sections, the types of people who inhabited the different sections, the punishments they received, and the specific roles played there by demons and other tormentors.⁷⁶

And while *gehenem* referred to the Jewish underworld, the term *ad* would have called forth a different association for readers of Russian, as that is the word used for "Inferno" in the translation of the famous section from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Thus, in Russian, writers who depicted war as *ad* might have been alluding to the topography of Hell in Dante's work (Grossman, for example, called his 1944 documentary essay about Treblinka, *Treblinskii ad* [The Hell of Treblinka, or Treblinka Inferno], where he explicitly stated that Dante could never have imagined

⁷⁴ GS 5:58/N 137.

⁷⁵ GS 5:145/ N 177. For two other uses of *gehenem* see GS 5:157/ N 184; GS 5:191/N 204.

⁷⁶ See Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent*, 307-310. There are 23 questions, nos. 2042-2064, concerning *gehenem* and its different parts.

the kind of death camp inferno that the Nazis created).⁷⁷ An-sky's use of *gehenem* to describe the meaning of war underscored that *Khurbn Galitsye* was a Jewish national narrative about a war in which all people had suffered.

Khurbn: A New Kind of Covenant

Although An-sky praised the efforts of aid workers like Aba Lev, Dr. Lander, and others throughout his war writings, he more frequently noted the failure of Jewish leaders to address the needs of poor Jews living near front lines. He reserved his harshest words for Jewish military doctors, people whom, as he put it, "try to forget that they're Jews."⁷⁸ Some Jewish doctors he knew of refused to openly assist fellow Jews in the war zone. As he likely knew, recent military decrees had forbidden civilian relief groups, including the one for which he worked, from employing Jews. And because the military suspected Jews of spreading revolutionary propaganda among soldiers, they had issued orders forbidding Jewish doctors from riding on trains. Despite the threatening atmosphere, An-sky maintained a generally critical view of doctors who concealed their identities.⁷⁹

An-sky was also skeptical of the prominent rabbis, philanthropists, and other educated professionals whom in his view were doing far too little to help poor Jews at the front. In early December 1914 near Warsaw, An-sky met the famous Gerrer Rebbe (Avraham Mordechai Alter), member of the well-known Hasidic dynasty and

⁷⁷ Vasily Grossman, "Treblinskii ad," *Znamia* no. 11 (November 1944), 121-144, here 138.

⁷⁸ RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, l. 58

⁷⁹ An-sky may have even known about the order requiring Russian relief organizations, including the Red Cross and Unions of Towns and Zemstvos, to "dismiss all individuals of Jewish faith" (reproduced in "Dokumenty o presledovanii evreev," *Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii* XIX [Berlin, 1928], 245-284, here 276).

preeminent spiritual leader among Polish Hasidim. An-sky had just arrived from Warsaw, where he had seen Jewish activists like Y. L. Peretz struggling to address the most basic needs of Jewish refugees who had fled there from nearby towns. An-sky described the Rebbe as naive, childlike and aloof from the crisis that faced his own community. For instance, the Rebbe had forbidden people from eating at a soup kitchen set up by a local Jewish relief committee, on the grounds that the food did not meet his standards of *kashrut*.⁸⁰

Even the best-known liberal Jewish activists appeared to An-sky to be out of touch with the reality of economic, social and psychological devastation affecting poor, provincial Jews. A few days after he met the Gerrer Rebbe, An-sky crossed paths with Oskar Gruzenberg, the well-known lawyer who had helped defend Menachem Beilis against blood libel charges in 1913. Gruzenberg was traveling with Baron Aleksandr Gintsburg, of the famous family of Jewish nobles. They had gone to the front to meet with Russian military commanders and bring the troops gifts on behalf of Petrograd Jewry. Gruzenberg marveled at the warm welcome they had received from the troops. He proclaimed that he and Gintsburg's gesture signified a successful diplomatic response to the Russian military's persecution of Jewish civilians: they had "finally," as he told An-sky, "found the right way to battle the nightmare hanging over Jewry!"⁸¹ Cynical of this claim, An-sky inquired whether

⁸⁰ GS 4: 95-96/N 50-51.

⁸¹ GS 4:103/N 55.

Gruzenberg had discussed military pogroms with the commanders or spoken with local Jews about their needs, to which Gruzenberg replied that he had not.⁸²

Khurbn Galitsye depicted Jewish society in a moment of crisis, marked by its leaders' failure to meet the needs of war victims. As I mentioned earlier, the memoir also contains no references to God. An-sky did not hold or express the traditional Jewish belief that God would intervene and thereby fulfill a covenantal promise made with the Jewish people to ultimately redeem them. The combination of factors that An-sky described as having afflicted the Jewish people—physical devastation, brutality, displacement, poverty, and the inadequacy of responses, including his own lack of faith in God—resounds with a premonition that the people will not, or cannot, continue to function after the war as they did before.

In the framework of this narrative—the Jewish nation "on the brink" of destruction—An-sky depicted his own mission to rescue Jews as much more than an act of relief work. Indeed, he depicted it as an act of prophetic significance. The force that would ensure the sustenance and regeneration of the Jewish nation was not God, nor the venerable authorities of the past, like Hasidic rebbes, Jewish lawyers and noblemen, but rather, the relief worker and chronicler—people like himself. An-sky presented himself as a prophetic and fatherly figure who in his official capacity as a relief worker could provide a replacement for the rebbe, doctor, lawyer, and even God, all of whom had been unable to mitigate the disaster, or *khurbn*.

⁸² GS 4:104/N 56.

As he assisted Jewish refugees and expellees throughout the Pale of Settlement during the summer of 1915, An-sky wrote that people who faced difficult decisions often came to him for advice. In Yiddish, the word he used was *etzeh* (from the Hebrew *etzah*), which means advice, plan or counsel.⁸³ The Jewish community in Kristianopol, for example, asked for his *etzeh* whether they should obey a military decree to evacuate; An-sky advised them to appeal directly to the local military commander that same day.⁸⁴ He also gave an *etzeh* to place barrels of water in their homes to prevent fires, and to guard their synagogue against theft.⁸⁵ In several towns, An-sky gathered rabbis and local householders (*baalei beysim*) to organize transportation, food, medicine, and money for local residents. In each of these places, he wrote that these men had sought his *etzeh*.⁸⁶

In Jewish tradition, *etzeh* means more than advice. The term refers to rabbinic counsel on Halakhic and personal issues, for example. The word also appears throughout the biblical books of Prophets and Proverbs: in one case, the prophet Akhitofel gives an *etzah* to King David and his son Absalom that is likened to "the word of God" (II Samuel 16: 23).⁸⁷ And as An-sky would likely have known from his ethnographic work, many Hasidism visited their *rebbe*s hoping to receive an *etzeh* and a blessing from their spiritual authorities. Hasidim regarded their rebbe's advice

⁸³ For one example, see GS 5:134/N 172.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ GS 5:101/N 157.

⁸⁶ For Ludmir, see GS 5:135/N 172; for Lokatsch, N 171; for Sviniokhi, see GS 5:127/N 168.

⁸⁷ Given the outcome of the prophet's advice, however, in modern Hebrew, "etzet Akhitofel" means "bad advice."

as a form of inspired guidance that spoke directly to their individual spiritual condition. Thus, the term was inflected with prophetic and mystical significance.

By applying the term *etzeh* to himself, An-sky suggested that he—an impoverished, itinerant revolutionary—had replaced the men who had been spiritual leaders and communal patrons before the war. An-sky employed *etzeh*, an established category in Jewish law and mysticism, to present himself as someone whom other Jews considered to be an authority. People who had previously gone to rabbis and wealthy men for an *etzeh* now came to him. Even the Gerrer Rebbe, head of an important Hasidic dynasty, had "looked at me," An-sky wrote, "helplessly...as if I held the power to control his life and death in my hands."⁸⁸

An-sky also depicted himself as a father figure among the Jewish folk. In Kobrin, where he had watched the newborn baby boy dying in the synagogue, he wrote in his memoir that "I felt as if my own child were dying."⁸⁹ Three days earlier, he had accompanied a group of Jewish refugees fleeing the German advance across Belorussian territory. He traveled with them from Kobrin to Pinsk, and then to Gomel. In Gomel, Russian civilian authorities refused the refugees permission to stay and forced them to continue several hundreds of miles to the east. They had to choose whether to proceed to either Penza or Tver, cities in the Russian interior. Ever mindful of the pragmatic needs of war victims *and* the imperative to preserve the Jews as a nation, An-sky figured they should go to Tver, where they might more easily find jobs and where a Jewish community already existed. He wrote that the

⁸⁸ GS 4: 96/N 50.

⁸⁹ GS 5: 202/N 210-211.

refugees tearfully agreed with his advice: "we'll obey you like our own father!" they told him.⁹⁰

An-sky used parent and child metaphors elsewhere in *Khurbn Galitsye* to describe his relations with Jewish civilians. He often recounted, for example, the people who burst into tears from astonished gratitude after receiving money from him. In the early summer of 1915, in the Galician shtetl Mosti-Velki, he gave a donation of six hundred rubles on behalf of EKOPO to a local relief committee, made up of five elderly Jews. They had had no outside help since the arrival of the Russians the previous fall. An-sky recalled that

"this unexpected help, which seemed to have fallen from heaven, as well as my warm behavior, moved these poor, terrified, defenseless people so deeply that they burst out crying. It was terrible to watch five elderly Jews...loudly sobbing and weeping like children, hastily wiping away the tears that rolled down their mustaches and beards."⁹¹

And finally, because he wore a Russian officer's uniform and spoke Russian fluently, An-sky sometimes found himself in a position of being able to defend Jews from physical harm. As the Russian Army retreated from Galicia during the late spring of 1915, they carried out pogroms in many places. An-sky witnessed a pogrom in the shtetl Kristianopol. A Cossack detachment arrived at six in the morning, followed by Russian Army troops and local peasants who grabbed merchandise and personal belongings that lay scattered in the streets. An-sky tried to take matters into his own hands. He set about driving the soldiers out of stores, and at one point, pulled a Cossack out of a cellar and threatened to shoot him unless he emptied his pockets

⁹⁰ GS 5: 183/N 201.

⁹¹ GS 5:69/N 144.

on the spot. Jewish store owners nearby saw this happening and called out to him for help. Their words resembled prayers to God, but appealed to An-sky: "Come to me! Have pity!" (*Kumt tzu mir! Hot rokhmones!*)⁹²

Before the war, the advice that Jews might have sought from their Rebbes, they now sought from An-sky. And the entreaties for protection that they might have addressed to their mothers and fathers, or to God, they now directed to An-sky. *Khurbn Galitsye* thus presented a vision of a new kind of covenant: it suggested that the continuity of the Jewish people no longer depended on the relationship between the people and God, but between the people and the individuals who could, and more importantly, *had* helped to promote and defend their survival as a people—the compassionate and fatherly aid worker, and the chronicler who recorded their suffering for the future.

Conclusion

An-sky completed *Khurbn Galitsye* in February of 1920, and died in November of that same year. The book was published the following year. It received critical attention in the years immediately following publication, some of which reveals that An-sky's legacy as a war chronicler and witness was not uniformly interpreted. In 1922, the young historian Yankev Shatzky reviewed the memoir. Like An-sky, Shatzky had experienced the war first-hand, but on the other side of the front. He had fought in Jozef Piłsudski's Polish Legion against the Russian Army.⁹³ Shatzky

⁹² GS 5:103/N 158.

⁹³ Shatzky later became well-known as a historian of Warsaw Jewry. See Robert Moses Shapiro, "Yankev Shatzky," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shatzky_Yankev> (accessed November 28, 2012).

argued that An-sky had derived too much of the information he conveyed in *Khurbn Galitsye* from secondhand sources. He had put "too much trust" in the people he interviewed, without bothering to check their facts, which, according to Shatzky, were incorrect in at least two cases.⁹⁴

Shatzky also found it problematic that An-sky had used conventional sources for history-writing in what was supposed to be a memoir, for example, by reproducing military documents. As a result, "the text," wrote Shatzky, "blurs the boundary between a memoir and a documentary compilation."⁹⁵ Yet as he noted, a documentary compilation about the war had already been published in 1918, so An-sky had offered readers little new information in that regard. (Shatzky referred to "The Black Book," which we will turn to in the following chapter).⁹⁶ He concluded that while psychologists and folklorists might find value in An-sky's memoir, the work would be of little use to historians in the future.

Other contemporaries regarded *Khurbn Galitsye* more favorably, judging the very same things that bothered Shatzky—the use of subjective eyewitness accounts and documents—as marks of an empathetic, moral and creative thinker with a deep sense of historical consciousness. In 1924, F. Shargorodskaiia wrote that An-sky's wartime actions and writings expressed a sense of keen foresight about what kinds of material would be important to scholars in the future. She referred specifically to the documents and testimonies that An-sky had collected in his war archive:

⁹⁴ Yankev Shatzky, *Bikher Velt* no. 2 (January-February 1922), 171.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Iz 'chernoi knigi' rossiiskago evreistva. Materialy dlia istorii voyny 1914-1915 g. [From 'The Black Book' of Russian Jewry. Materials for a History of the War, 1914-1915], *Evreiskaia starina* 10 (1918): 195–296.

"Among these 502 documents, one finds documents that testify to the horrors that Jews suffered during the war, documents showing that An-sky's empathy for common, individual suffering was not dulled to the point of indifference...He movingly, carefully collected the suffering of each individual person and, like a genuine artist, he did not overlook the significance of phenomena that paled amidst a flood of spilled Jewish blood. An-sky collected all of this material with a genuine feeling for history...In this respect, these documents have become valuable materials for the historian."⁹⁷

Whereas Shatzky critiqued An-sky for confusing genres by including official documents in a memoir, Shargorodskaya claimed that An-sky's attention to such documents, in combination with his profound compassion for human suffering and individual detail, reflected his own unique aesthetics as a writer, and more importantly, his ethical approach to history-writing. An-sky had acted on the principle that historical records should represent the experiences of individuals.

Shargorodskaya's gloss brings us back to the idea with which we began this chapter, namely that An-sky's tremendous capacity to capture the range of experiences of many individuals and distinct events was a defining characteristic of his wartime efforts. These qualities invested his pre-war ethnography, his wartime efforts on behalf of Jews, and the memoir in which he created a national narrative with a moral vision of Jewish history. They also allowed him to fashion his own identity as an ethnographer, relief worker and chronicler who had helped to perpetuate that history. As we will see in the following chapter, An-sky's approach to writing a Jewish national wartime narrative distinguished him from his notable contemporaries like Dubnov. In contrast to An-sky's empathy for the "suffering of each individual person," and his need to differentiate and name the victims whose

⁹⁷ Shargorodskaya, "O nasledii An-skogo," 310.

stories he often encountered face to face, Dubnov sought to create a document about Jewish suffering that conformed to regnant standards of political and legal evidence—something he sought to do specifically by generalizing or avoiding the kinds of individual details and stories that An-sky had so "movingly, carefully collected" with a "genuine feeling for history." The question for us is whether or to what extent Dubnov succeeded in meeting his goal.

We can turn to American literary scholar Marcus Billson for a final word about An-sky's memoir. Billson has argued that memoirs can be read as historical texts insofar as an author's purpose in composing a memoir is, as he writes, to "embody his own moral vision of the past"—not to necessarily present events "as they were," but rather, to *represent* history as it subjectively appeared to and was experienced by him.⁹⁸ *Khurbn Galitsye*, as I have read it here, is a Jewish national war narrative in which An-sky imposed his own moral vision on a dark moment that he witnessed of Jewish history.

⁹⁸ Marcus Billson, "The Memoir: New Perspectives on a Forgotten Genre," *Genre* 10 (Summer 1977): 259-282, here 264.

Chapter 3

Reconstructing a Lost Archive: Simon Dubnov and 'The Black Book of Russian Jewry,' 1914-1915

"We must direct all of our attention to one goal: to undertake pragmatic action at the moment when the fate of nations will be decided."
-Simon Dubnov, diary entry of April 5, 1916.¹

Like other Russian Jewish intellectuals during World War I, the historian Simon Dubnov viewed the act of documenting Jewish wartime experiences as a mission both on behalf, and in defense of a beleaguered Jewish nation.² In carrying out this mission, Dubnov sought to address the present and future needs of the Jewish people. With an eye to the future, he documented the catastrophic war, intending that these documents serve as a foundation for the future study and writing of history. Dubnov also recorded the experiences of Jews in order to fulfill a more urgent and pragmatic goal: to assist Jewish civilians in the war zone, and to fight for their political rights in Russia.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Russian Jews managed to document the war in the service of their historicist goals and relief efforts, even though the government heavily censored written communication in Hebrew and Yiddish. Most of what was collected and published appeared in Russian. Among the most important of the texts

¹ S.M. Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni. Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia: Materialy dlia istorii moego vremeni*, ed. Viktor Kel'ner (Saint Petersburg: Evreiskii universitet v Moskve/Rossiiskaia natsional'naia biblioteka, 1998), 362.

² The concept of wartime history-writing as both a defensive tradition and a national mission is taken from David Engel, in "Writing History as a National Mission: The Jews of Poland and their Historiographic Traditions," in *Emanuel Ringelblum: The Man and the Historian*, ed. Israel Gutman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2010), 117-140.

published in 1918, and discussed in detail for the first time here, was an anthology edited by Dubnov called "From the 'Black Book' of Imperial Russian Jewry: Materials for a History of the War, 1914-1915" (*Iz 'chernoï knigi' rossiiskago evreistva: Materialy dlia istorii voiny 1914-1915 gg.*), or simply, "The Black Book."³ This one-hundred page compilation drew on a much larger body of documents (hence the exact title, "From 'The Black Book,'""). It appeared in the groundbreaking journal edited by Dubnov, *Evreiskaia starina* (Jewish Antiquity). The text consisted of narrative essays, reports and transcripts of speeches, and reproductions of official documents, especially military decrees concerning Jewish soldiers and civilians.

Apart from Dubnov, the other contributors identified within the text of "The Black Book" included the liberal lawyer Maksim Vinaver (1862 or 1863-1926), and the Bundist activists David Zaslavskii (1880-1965), and Genrikh Erlikh (1882-1942). Divided into four parts, "The Black Book" explained the policies and practices that the Russian Army had directed against Jews during the war: suspicions of collective Jewish espionage, expulsions, pogroms, and the taking of hostages (*zalozhniki*) in order to prevent treasonous actions among communities.⁴

The subtitle of "The Black Book"—"Materials for a History of the War"—clearly indicated Dubnov's intention that the work be used as a source for just that—the future writing of Jewish history. Indeed, several historians have used it to that

³ "Iz 'chernoï knigi' rossiiskago evreistva: Materialy dlia istorii voiny 1914-1915 g.," *Evreiskaia starina* no. 10 (1918): 195-296 (hereafter, ICKRE).

⁴ Although Dubnov's name is not listed anywhere as editor of "The Black Book" in the volume of *Evreiskaia starina* where the work was published, he did identify himself as such in a bibliographic citation, located in the final volume of his ten volume *World History of the Jewish People*: see S.M. Dubnov, "Epilog: Evreiskii mir posle mirovoi voiny. Obzor poslednikh desiatiletii (1914-1938)," in *Noveishaia istoriia Evreiskago naroda*, T.3 (Riga: Dzive un kultura, 1938), 468.

very end.⁵ However, we still do not know how a document that remains among the most important sources for studying Jewish history during the First World War was produced.⁶ In this chapter, I will first explain the political and cultural context in which "The Black Book" was compiled and edited; then provide a material history of how Dubnov and his colleagues acquired, edited and compiled wartime documents; in a final part of the discussion, we will look closely at how Dubnov attempted to create a Jewish national wartime narrative. It is my assertion that in "The Black Book," Dubnov attempted to create a document that would be accepted as a form of evidence in the eyes of international opinion, yet had tried to convey the suffering of a nation of people using poetic and moving terms. "The Black Book" is therefore a hybrid text—a work of history and elegiac commemoration, and a document, whose multiple qualities reflected the multiple audiences it was meant to address.

As we know from Dubnov's own diary, he approached the first days of the war with mixed feelings of hope and doubt. During the first days of war, on July 27, 1914, he expressed a widespread aspiration of Russian Jewry that that the war might bring about the emancipation of Jews in Russia, a cause for which he had fought for

⁵ ICKRE is cited as a reference in Löwe, *The Tsars and the Jews*, 323-406; Lohr, "The Russian Army and the Jews," and idem., *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 137-150; Gol'din, "Russian Jewry under Tsarist Military Rule"; John Klier, "Kazaki i pogromy: chem otlichalis' 'voennye' pogromy?" in *Mirovoi krizis*, 45-70; Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, trans. Timothy J. Portice (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 225-240.

⁶ The history of Dubnov's role in creating "The Black Book" is briefly mentioned in V. E. Kel'ner, *Missioner istorii: Zhizn' i trudy Semena Markovicha Dubnova* (St. Petersburg: "Mir," 2008), 457-460, 501-2.

decades. As we noted earlier, it was also expected that the territory of the Kingdom of Poland, home to millions of Jews, would be granted national independence.⁷

Dubnov and contemporary political activists understood that in order to demand legal rights for Jews, whether from the Duma or an international congress after the war, they would need to produce evidence of the Jewish people's wartime history—a history that within the first several weeks of war they understood would be a lachrymose one. Dubnov immediately set about collecting documents that provided evidence of the military's inhumane treatment of Jews. Thus, military persecution, in addition to having a deeply traumatic impact on Jewish civilian populations, had inadvertently provided an opportune moment for Jewish activists to join the growing chorus of those seeking to discredit and indict the Tsar, who was already distrusted by his own Cabinet Ministers, Duma and the general population alike. Dubnov and fellow contributors hoped that the documents they collected and published in forms like "The Black Book" would serve an instrumental purpose as the struggle for Jewish civic rights gathered momentum, both domestically and in a highly charged international arena.

Knowing that its creators framed "The Black Book" as a document of historic and political significance raises a number of questions about representation and the

⁷ Commander in Chief Nikolai Nikolaevich made statements at the start of the war suggesting that the Russian state might recognize an autonomous, reunited Poland in the event of a Russian victory; see "Proclamation of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief [Grand Duke Nicholas]," 14 August 1914, in *Documents of Russian History, 1914-1917*, ed. F.A. Golder (New York: The Century Company, 1927), 37-38. Fritz Fischer has pointed out that in attempts to win the loyalties of minority groups, German propaganda promised to extend rights in the event of victory, in *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967), 237-38; Ezra Mendelsohn makes a similar point about the impact of German propaganda on Jewish national identity in *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1915-1926* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 39-45.

writing of Jewish history. What type of documents and evidence did Dubnov use to construct a national narrative of Jewish wartime experience? How did Dubnov and his contemporaries represent the experiences of individuals in the context of collective, or national disaster? How did they select sources of information that they believed constituted incontrovertible evidence? These problems of representation were certainly not limited to Dubnov's efforts during World War I. Indeed, the case of "The Black Book" implicitly anticipates what the next generation of Jews throughout Europe, and in the Soviet Union in particular, would face as they attempted to chronicle the tragic experiences of Jews during the Holocaust. For as we know and will return to discuss in Chapter 5, the Soviet Jewish descendants of An-sky and Dubnov's generation responded to the catastrophe in their midst with a second, much longer *Black Book* at the end of World War II.

"The Color Black" and the Writing of First World War National Histories

Jews in Russia recognized that the way they told their nation's wartime history would have political significance in the post-war period. As a national minority in Europe, they were not alone in this realization. Throughout Central and Eastern Europe, Poles, Ukrainians, Serbs and other groups pinned their hopes for rights on postwar concessions or the establishment of national independence that they expected to follow the collapse of the Russian and Habsburg empires.⁸ Documenting and publicizing the atrocities they had suffered *as national groups* thereby became an

⁸ See Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 61-66.

important characteristic of Central and East European national politics during World War I.

Ukrainian intellectuals, for example, collected four volumes of material about the Thalerhof concentration camp in the Austrian Alps, where at the start of the war, Austrian and Hungarian authorities interned 30,000 Galicians of Slavic descent, as well as those suspected or known to have Russian sympathies. The prisoners included elderly people and children who were detained without formal charges. Thousands died from starvation and diseases that broke out by the winter of 1915.⁹ Elsewhere in Europe, "atrocities commissions" were established in France, Britain, Austria, Serbia and Bulgaria during the first weeks of war to document (and in some instances, to fabricate) stories of massacres, mutilations, starvation, rape and physical torture of both civilians and soldiers.¹⁰

Descriptions of enemy atrocities were commonly compiled in books with colors in their titles. Thus, Belgian intellectuals compiled a "grey book" documenting atrocities against innocent Belgian civilians under German occupation, while the Germans sought to refute these claims with a "white book."¹¹ In his introduction to

⁹ The four-volume account is *Talergofskii Al'manakh. Propamiatnaia kniga avstriiskikh zhestokostei, izuverstv i nasilii nad karpato-russkim narodom vo vremia vsemirnoi voiny 1914-1917 gg.* (L'vov: Talergofskii komitet, 1924-1932). The account published by Ukrainian nationals during wartime was by Ivan Petrovych (Ivan Krypiakevych), *Halychuna pidchas rosiis'koi okupatsii: serpen' 1914-cherven' 1915* (L'vov: Politychna biblioteka, 1915). For a list of Ukrainian, Polish and Russian national war histories, see Paul Robert Magosci, *Galicia: A Historical Survey and Bibliographic Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 167-173.

¹⁰ James Morgan Read, *Atrocity Propaganda 1914-1919* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 3, 285.

¹¹ See John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 229-249.

"The Black Book," Dubnov explained the choice of the color black for the title of a book about anti-Jewish atrocities:

"In international affairs it is customary to report on the most important political events in 'blue,' 'white,' 'yellow' and other books of various colors of the rainbow. Apparently the color black has yet to be used: it has been left for the fate of the Jewish people, who are more an object than a subject of diplomacy."¹²

For Dubnov, black symbolized the tragic experiences of Jews during the war, as well as their standing as a people who lacked political power, visibility and recognition as a distinct nation among European nations. The people were ostensibly doomed to languish at the hands of other powers. Yet by publishing a book meant to stand alongside other nations' wartime sufferings, Dubnov expressed the paradoxical nature of writing Jewish wartime history: the act of documenting and publicizing their status as victims might overcome this "fate." Writing about atrocities and publicizing them was therefore an overtly political act. Indeed, throughout "The Black Book" it was emphasized that Jews became war victims because the Russian military regarded them as "beyond the law" (*vne zakona*), and that as a result violence against Jews could go unpunished.¹³ By writing their nation's wartime history, Jews sought to define themselves as subjects and arbiters of their political future—not only as victims of history, or, as Dubnov had put it, an object of diplomacy alone. Yet in order to become subjects of their own future, and acquire recourse to legal protection and rights, Jews would need to gather and present evidence of their victimization in the past.

¹² ICKRE, 195.

¹³ ICKRE, 269, 295.

At the time that it was compiled in 1914 and 1915, contributors to "The Black Book" planned for the document to be used as a weapon in the struggle for the civic emancipation of Jews in Russia and what might become an independent Poland. Due to wartime censorship, the book could not be published until 1918. And by then, as we know, the Pale of Settlement had been abolished and Jews had been formally emancipated. However, even after the revolutions of March and November 1917, Dubnov still envisioned a role for the book, namely as a form of evidence to be used at the postwar proceedings at Versailles. As he wrote in 1918, "The Black Book" would "reveal the truth that, due to the oppressive wartime censor, has not yet been exposed to all belligerent nations." It would provide documentary material to "assist those political activists who will have to put the Jewish problem before the opinion of the nations at the forthcoming world congress."¹⁴ The goal to achieve postwar minority rights at Versailles was reflected in how Dubnov chose to represent the people's history in "The Black Book."

Reconstructing the Lost Archive of "The Black Book"

The effort to document and archive the experiences of Russia's Jews during the war, which culminated in the publication of "The Black Book," was initiated by a so-called "Collegium of Jewish Communal Activists" (*Kollegiia evreiskikh obshchestvennikh deiatelei*).¹⁵ The Collegium was known among its members as the

¹⁴ Ibid. According to Dubnov, *Evreiskaia starina* could not be published in 1916 or 1917 due to paper shortages (*Kniga zhizni*, 370).

¹⁵ The name "Kollegiia evreiskikh obshchestvennikh deiatelei" was used to identify the group in an introduction to a compilation of military decrees published by Russian-Jewish émigrés in Berlin in 1928: "Dokumenty o presledovanii evreev," *Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii XIX* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1970 [Berlin, 1928]), 246.

Political Bureau (or Politbiuro).¹⁶ According to Dubnov, the Politbiuro had an executive committee of fifteen people, and approximately eighty members in total.¹⁷ The Politbiuro had been established after the 1905 Revolution as a forum for communication between Jewish deputies elected to the first State Duma, and leaders of four major Jewish political parties (excluding socialist ones), that went above-ground following the revolutionary political reforms.¹⁸

During the World War, the Jewish deputies to the Fourth Duma included Naftali M. Fridman (1863-1921), M. B. Bomash, and I. B. Gurevich, all members of the mainstream liberal Constitutional Democrat (Kadet) Party. Despite differences of opinion in regard to matters of Jewish national identity and language, members of each of the four parties that constituted the Politbiuro regarded national and civic rights for Jews as their primary cause: Dubnov represented the *Folkspartey*, which championed his principle of extra-territorial Jewish national and cultural autonomy; Vinaver led the Jewish People's Group (*Evreiskaia narodnaia grupp*a), which fought for Jewish civic equality and full rights as a national minority (with the prominent ethnographer Lev Shternberg as one of its chief ideologues); the Jewish Democratic Group represented those to the left of the Kadets within the Politbiuro, including

¹⁶ In his memoirs, Iakov Frumkin uses "Politbiuro" in reference to the same group, as do S. An-sky and Dubnov in their diaries; see Ia. G. Frumkin, "Iz istorii Russkogo Evreistva: Vospominaniia, materialy, dokumenty," in *Kniga o Russkom Evreistve ot 1860-kh godov do revoliutsii 1917 g.*, (New York: Soiuz Russkikh Evreev, 1960), 50-107, esp. 81-84; An-sky, unpublished diary, January 6, 1915, at the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva, RGALI) f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, l. 3; Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 337-355, *passim*. Dubnov identifies the "Political Bureau" as the organizers of "The Black Book" archive, in ICKRE, 196.

¹⁷ Diary of August 1, 1914, in Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 337.

¹⁸ For the history of the four parties that took part in the Politbiuro, see Christoph Gassenschmidt, *Jewish Liberal Politics in Tsarist Russia, 1900-1914: The Modernization of Russian Jewry* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 45-71.

Iakov Frumkin, Leontii Bramson (1869-1941), the lawyer and EKOPO director Genrikh Sliozberg (1863-1937), and the high-ranking official at the St. Petersburg Public Library, Aleksandr Braudo (1864-1924).¹⁹

Aside from scholars like Dubnov and Shternberg, the Politbiuro was prepared for the work of documenting the military's anti-Jewish campaign because it was primarily composed of lawyers. These lawyers had had nearly two decades of experience assembling evidence and seeking to disprove the false claims that often served as pretexts for anti-Jewish persecution, such as blood libel accusations. In this regard, the wartime documentary effort demonstrated an important continuity with Jewish liberals' pre-war struggle for civic emancipation. The Politbiuro had been founded by lawyers with the explicit goal of replacing the figure of the *shtadlan*, or intercessor, often a role played by wealthy Jewish elites, who had been intervening with Russian authorities on behalf of Jews since the mid-nineteenth century. By defending Jews in courts of law, rather than behind the closed doors of private offices and homes, these lawyers pioneered the use of Russia's legal system in the struggle for Jewish civic equality.

The Politbiuro's wartime documentary effort originated with Jewish lawyers' attempts to use—and more importantly, to reform—the judicial system, rather than solely rely upon channels of personal influence in the effort to defend Jews against outbreaks of violence. The documentation of anti-Jewish violence had served the legal reform movement already decades prior to World War I. During a pogrom in

¹⁹ The names of members in the Politbiuro executive are mentioned in Frumkin, "Iz istorii Russkogo Evreistva," 82.

Odessa in May 1871, the Jewish lawyer and self-taught historian Il'ia Orshanskii took action against the violence with four other Jewish lawyers. They sought to reconstruct the origins of the violence in order to make a case against Odessa city authorities, who were widely perceived to have been complicit in the public's violence against Jews. To make their case, Orshanskii and fellow lawyers interviewed victims, perpetrators and bystanders, and compiled a report based on their testimonies.²⁰

In 1900, a group of Jewish lawyers sought to institutionalize the tradition of documenting anti-Jewish violence by forming a clandestine "Defense Bureau." Although its attempt to reform anti-Jewish legislation proved unsuccessful, the Defense Bureau achieved recognition among the Jewish masses for its efforts to defend Jewish victims in courts of law during pogroms that broke out between 1903 and 1906, the worst of them in Kishinev, Gomel and Odessa.²¹ In 1905, several lawyers in the Defense Bureau, including Vinaver, Sliozberg, and Frumkin, became part of the Politbiuro. They were still serving on the Politbiuro's executive committee when war broke out in 1914. In June of 1915, Vinaver explicitly tied the work of publicizing anti-Jewish atrocities that the Politbiuro was doing to the struggle for civil rights, referring to it as a "protest against the attempts of reactionary forces to sever [Russian Jewry's] ties to the army and society on the basis of the Jewish Question."²²

²⁰ Orshanskii's efforts following the 1871 Odessa pogrom are discussed in Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 320-322. On responses of Jewish intellectuals to pre-war pogroms, see Brian Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), Chapter 5.

²¹ The Defense Bureau is discussed in Gassenschmidt, *Jewish Liberal Politics in Tsarist Russia*, 8-18.

²² ICKRE, 226.

Aside from their experience as political activists and legal reformers, many Politbiuro members were influenced by and important contributors to the Jewish national-historicist institutions that Dubnov himself had helped to establish twenty-five years before the war. These organizations, mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, included the EIEO, which had overseen the collection, classification, and preservation of source material for the study of Jewish history and culture since its founding in 1908. Both prior to and during the war, Politbiuro members had comprised the leadership of every major Jewish philanthropic, cultural and political institution in St. Petersburg. Vinaver served as chairman of the EIEO and contributed his own scholarship to its major historical publications. Sliozberg directed EKOPO. Many others actively contributed to organizations that supported Jewish education, culture, health and labor, all of which became divisions of EKOPO during the war.²³ Thus, the lawyers' efforts to document and defend Jews against violence, and the larger historicist goal of creating archives, dovetailed during the war through the efforts of the Politbiuro.

Members of the Politbiuro were responsible for assembling the large archive of material from which documents for "The Black Book" were selected. As Dubnov wrote in the preface, the documentary materials published in "The Black Book" comprised only a "small part" of the vast number of documents that the Politbiuro had

²³ Bramson, Vinaver and Sliozberg were all active with the Society for the Spread of Enlightenment Among Jews (*Obshchestvo dlia rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdu evreiami v Rossii*, or OPE), founded in 1863; the Society for the Improvement of the Hygienic and Health Condition of the Jewish Population in Russia (*Obshchestvo okhraneniia zdorovia evreiskago naseleniia*, or OZE), and the *Obshchestvo dlia remeslennago i zemledelcheskago truda* (Society for Artisan and Agricultural Labor, or ORT), founded in 1880. The finances and management of these organizations all came under the auspices of EKOPO during the war.

gathered "from the start of the war until the start of the 1917 revolution."²⁴ The history of the Politbiuro's documentary and archival effort can be pieced together from diaries and memoirs written by various participants, including Dubnov and Frumkin, as well as Solomon Pozner and David Mowshowitch (1887-1957).²⁵

Mowshowitch played an important, though largely behind the scenes role. He had been affiliated with the Politbiuro prior to emigrating to England shortly before the war. In London, he became Foreign Secretary for Lucien Wolf, who was then head of Britain's Jewish political lobby, the Conjoint Foreign Committee.²⁶ Mowshowitch returned to Russia in 1914 to report on the Eastern Front. As a native speaker of Russian and Yiddish, a self-taught historian with a strong interest in Jewish national rights, and a talented translator (in 1936 he translated Dubnov's two-volume survey of world Jewish history into English), Mowshowitch was a logical choice to serve as Wolf's liaison with the Politbiuro during the war.²⁷ Wolf, himself a long-time observer of Jewish life in Russia, had been in close contact with the Politbiuro since 1906.²⁸ During the war, Wolf used materials gathered by Mowshowitch in Russia as a basis for conducting diplomatic discussions with the British Foreign Office. Wolf would become famous for his efforts at the Paris Peace

²⁴ ICKRE, 196.

²⁵ Ia. G. Frumkin, "Iz istorii Russkogo Evreistva," esp. 81-84; David Movshovich, "A bleitl yidishe nay-geshikhte (1915-17)," *YIVO Historishe shriftn* b. II (Vilna, 1937): 549-60. I use the common English spelling of Mowshowitch's name in the text, though I transliterate the spelling of his name from Yiddish and Russian when citing references written in those languages.

²⁶ Mark Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe: The Diplomacy of Lucien Wolf, 1914-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 182-183.

²⁷ Mowshowitch translated Dubnov's *Uchebnik evreiskoi istorii* (1901-1905) as *A Short History of the Jewish People* (London: M.L. Cailingold, 1936).

²⁸ Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe*, 67. In his journal *Darkest Russia*, Wolf had monitored and publicized the conditions of Russian and Polish Jewish life for two decades before the war. He was forced to cease publication when Britain became allies with Russia.

Conference in 1919, where he helped to secure national minority rights in East European countries that gained their independence after the war.²⁹

Wolf's diplomatic efforts in London and Paris required the collection, translation and distillation of vast quantities of intelligence that could not be gleaned from the censored Russian press, nor from the biased perspectives of British diplomats and correspondents who reported from the Eastern Front (most notably, the British attaché to the Russian high command Alfred Knox, who repeated the canard that Jews ran the German spy system in Poland to his home office).³⁰

Mowshowitch thus gave Wolf nearly unmediated access to the nerve center of Russian-Jewish documentary and political efforts. Although he is virtually unknown to history except as Wolf's secretary, in the long run, Mowshowitch served as an important figure in the Politbiuro's attempts to publicize the fate of Jews in the war. It is possible that the largest collection that remains from the Politbiuro's war archive are the documents that Mowshowitch personally collected and later donated to YIVO.³¹

²⁹ The Conjoint had waged a public campaign to defend Jewish rights abroad and in the Russian empire specifically since 1881, as much in efforts to stem the tide of emigration of east European Jewry to Britain as to export a "liberal world order" to places where Jews had not yet been emancipated, thus helping align British foreign interests with those of British Jewry. See Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe*, 2-19. On diplomatic efforts to restrict the emigration of East European Jews to Britain, see Todd Endelman, "Native Jews and Foreign Jews in London, 1870-1914," in *The Legacy of Jewish Migration: 1881 and its Impact*, ed. David Berger (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 109-130.

³⁰ Levene (*War, Jews, and the New Europe*, 54) writes that the British Foreign Office easily accepted Knox's claims. See examples of such canards in Knox's memoirs, *With the Russian Army, 1914-1917* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1971), vol. 1: 120, 145-146.

³¹ The David Mowshowitch Papers can be found in the Lucien Wolf Collection at YIVO, Record Group 348. For materials on Jews in the Eastern Front of World War I, see folders 57, 58, 59, 67, 107, 108a-c, 109a-b, 129a-b, 130.

On July 31, 1914, Dubnov, Shternberg, Vinaver, Sliozberg and others attended the first meeting of the Politbiuro executive to take place following the outbreak of war.³² The group met thereafter at least once a week, usually at night, and meetings often carried on into the early morning hours. Solomon Pozner, also a member of the group, recalled meeting once a week on Tuesdays, and often at Deputy Fridman's home.³³ More than a year later, on October 23, 1915, Dubnov lamented that "at the end of the work day I often sit and hear reports at the Bureau about the evils of the day."³⁴ Meetings often concluded shortly before dawn and Dubnov, for one, left them full of angst, only to begin his work-day a few hours later.

Managed by quintessential purveyors of documents—historians and lawyers—the Politbiuro executive immediately created a special division (also apparently housed in Fridman's home) to handle the collection of documents related to the war. This "Information Bureau" maintained its own permanent staff, and its tasks included the verification, editing, briefing and circulation (typically through unofficial means) of materials concerning anti-Jewish persecution. Frumkin later claimed that government authorities "knew, of course," about the existence of the Politbiuro and its Information Bureau: "permission for them was never granted and never requested," he recalled, "but these bureaus did not encounter any obstacles to their work. One could say they led a semi-legal existence."³⁵

³² Dubnov, diary entry of August 1, 1914 in *Kniga zhizni*, 337. For Shternberg's role in particular, see Sergei Kan, *Lev Shternberg: Anthropologist, Russian Socialist, Jewish Activist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 224-228.

³³ Pozner's recollections about the Politbiuro are cited in Kel'ner, *Missioner istorii*, 457-8, note 161.

³⁴ Dubnov, diary entry of October 23, 1915, in, *Kniga zhizni*, 355.

³⁵ Frumkin, "Iz istorii Russkogo Evreistva," 84.

Despite its semi-underground status, the Information Bureau made an important impact on Duma officials by publicizing the military's abuse of powers in the war zone. The Bureau circulated copies of selected documents among approximately 200 to 300 government officials and political activists. The historian Elias Tcherikower (1881-1943) later described the Information Bureau's manner of gathering materials as "confidential" and "dangerous," given the intensity of police surveillance at the time.³⁶ A native of the Russian Empire, Tcherikower spent the war in New York closely monitoring the situation of Jews under both Russian and German occupation.³⁷ He returned to Russia in 1917 and continued the Politbiuro's documentary efforts in Ukraine, by compiling a massive archive of documents and testimonies about Jewish victims of the Russian Civil War.

The Politbiuro's collection efforts yielded a massive quantity of documents. According to one eyewitness, by the end of the war the group had collected enough to fill five published volumes.³⁸ Unfortunately, as Frumkin recalled, unforeseen circumstances prevented those volumes from seeing the light of day. A majority of the Politbiuro's members left Russia following the October Revolution and parts of

³⁶ E. Tcherikower, "Tsu D. Movshovitsches artikl," *YIVO Historishe shriftn* b. II (Vilna, 1937), 561. This article is an appendix to Movshovitch, "A bletl yidishe nay-geshikhte (1915-17)."

³⁷ Tcherikower reported on the hardships of Jewish life under German military occupation for *Evreiskaia nedelia* on the basis of articles by the war correspondent Herman Bernstein published in the American Yiddish daily *Der tog*. See his articles in *Evreiskaia nedelia* no. 3 (17 January 1916), 19-25; no. 4 (24 January 1916), 11-13.

³⁸ Noted in the preface to a compendium of wartime documents about anti-Jewish persecution published in Berlin in 1928: "Dokumenty o presledovanii evreev," *Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii* XIX (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1970 [Berlin, 1928]), 245-246. The author of this preface was likely I.V. Gessen, editor of the important liberal paper *Rech'* (Speech) during the war, and former member of the executive committee of the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society. After the revolution, Gessen left Russia for Berlin, where he edited the twenty-two volume *Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii* ("Archive of the Russian Revolution") series. He published the documents in the nineteenth volume. In his memoir, 108, Frumkin recalls that he personally gave a copy of the documents to Gessen in Berlin.

the archive became scattered and lost in their possession. Copies sent to the British Museum, Paris National Library, and to Palestine failed to reach their destinations; another copy deposited at the St. Petersburg Public Library under the care of Alexander Braudo could not be located after his death in 1924.³⁹

How did the Politbiuro and its constituent Information Bureau carry out their "dangerous" and "confidential" work under conditions of intense military censorship and surveillance? The Bureau received news of the front and exchanged material through several sources. Perhaps the most widely circulated documents (and ones that would be prominently featured in "The Black Book") were thousands of military orders, protocols and transcripts of judicial proceedings.⁴⁰ It is not entirely clear how Politbiuro acquired copies of these military documents. These orders could hardly have been published in the press during the war, given the evidence they provided that the Russian Army had legitimized the mass persecution of Jews.

The Information Bureau also collected materials other than military communiqués. The differences between the picture of Jews presented in official documents and those gleaned from so-called human documents—testimonies, correspondence and other eyewitness accounts—are striking. Military documents could be interpreted to show that the Jews had become a nation of victims, a people whom the military declared to be an "undesirable element," an internal enemy, and as a population to be extracted from militarily sensitive regions. In contrast, the human documents represented the war from the victims' point of view, which in some cases,

³⁹ Frumkin, "Iz istorii Russkogo Evreistva," 108.

⁴⁰ ICKRE, 196.

revealed the war in a more nuanced light. Some of these accounts expressed the victims' sense of horror and incomprehensible tragedy; others, a sense of personal agency and resilience.⁴¹

Letters of petition sent to Jewish political leaders in Petrograd constituted one kind of source that reflected individual experiences. Following the tradition of *shtadlanut*, or intercession, Jews from across the Empire sent requests to Fridman asking for his help with compensating their personal losses. One Yankel Vilner had been arrested for selling bread to occupying German soldiers in his native shtetl in eastern Poland (an act, he claimed, in which Jews and Christians had participated in equal measure). Vilner sought Fridman's help to retrieve a promissory note he had received prior to his arrest for the amount of 3,350 rubles, even promising to donate some of the recovered funds to the local Jewish relief committee of Bakhmut.⁴²

Information reached the home front not only in the form of documents but also from actual people. News from individuals came in various forms. Relief workers who traveled the front, as we have seen, became important sources of information. On January 6, 1915, just days before he departed from Petrograd for Galicia, An-sky appeared before the Politbiuro to present his observations about the growing numbers of Jewish refugees in Warsaw, where he had been the month before. He made three specific recommendations: to provide help to individual refugees so that they might become self-sufficient, rather than be forced to rely on

⁴¹ For examples of revisionist works that challenge the representation of Jewish soldiers and civilians solely as victims, see Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army*; an analogous revisionist treatment of Polish-Jewish relations during the war can be found in Zieliński, "The Shtetl in Poland, 1914-1918."

⁴² The letter, dated August 9, 1915 was written in Russian by a law student, Semion Abramovich Tsukublin, on behalf of the "illiterate" Iankel Elias Vilner, NBUV f.321, op.2, d.367, ll.1-2.

communal soup kitchens; to implement an executive of two to three workers to oversee relief efforts; and to open a Russian-language newspaper in Warsaw.⁴³ When An-sky reported to the Politbiuro again at the end of the summer in 1915, following the Russian Army's disastrous retreat, Dubnov noted the strong impression his reports had made: "An-sky was here in his military uniform after his travels throughout Galicia and Volhynia. He's seen plenty of horrors."⁴⁴

The presence of thousands of wounded soldiers and refugees in home front areas also contributed to the circulation of information about Jewish experiences in the war zone. As Peter Gatrell has written, the war changed the status of *all* of Russia's ethnic minorities. As Poles, Germans, Jews and others fled or were expelled from the empire's scorched borderlands and reconstituted themselves in the Russian interior, they became "immediately visible," and their "hastily created communities provided an opportunity to draw attention to the losses they had incurred."⁴⁵

Hospitals and shelters, for example, became two places where journalists and other activists, including An-sky and Dubnov, encountered and wrote about populations of wounded soldiers, refugees and expellees.⁴⁶ Soldiers could be readily located in hospitals because the Russian-Jewish press regularly published the names of wounded Jewish soldiers receiving care in hospitals in Moscow or Petrograd from the Red Cross.⁴⁷ Similarly, on August 7, 1915, following the mass expulsions of Jews

⁴³ An-sky, diary entry of January 6, 1915/RGALI, f. 2583, op.1, d.5, l.3.

⁴⁴ Dubnov, diary entry of September 10, 1915, *Kniga zhizni*, 355.

⁴⁵ Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, 5.

⁴⁶ S. An-sky, "V evreiskom lazarete," *Den'* (November 28, 1914), 324.

⁴⁷ For one list of Jewish soldiers in Moscow hospitals, see *Novyi voskhod* no. 38 (25 Sept. 1914), 18. *Novyi voskhod* was closed by wartime censors in April 1915 and reopened the following month under

from Polish and Lithuanian territory, Dubnov visited refugees from the shtetl Malkin in a shelter located near the EIEO archives in Petrograd. The refugees told him that a Cossack regiment had set fire to their town a few hours after issuing an expulsion order, and that many Jews, unable to escape in time, had perished in the flames. Dubnov relayed the story the following day at a Politbiuro meeting.⁴⁸

Depositions comprised another category of personal documents that found their way into the Politbiuro archive. Some of these were taken from Jewish soldiers who had returned to Russia from the front. One Jacob Hershhorn spoke about the year he spent in a German POW camp between May of 1915 and 1916. His deposition conveyed a remarkable picture of Jewish POW life. He described activities that virtually mirrored that resembled a microcosm of what EKOPO had accomplished throughout an entire empire: the prisoners organized a relief organization in the camp, held regular prayer services, staged concerts on Chanukah and Purim, and ran a school to teach Russian and Yiddish to illiterate soldiers.⁴⁹ Hershhorn even knew of fellow Jewish prisoners who after returning to Russia had sent money back to support the "Association" in the POW camp! As with other depositions in the YIVO archives, it is not clear where, under what circumstances, or with which interlocutor Hershhorn recorded his statement. It seems likely, however, that the statements were originally transcribed in Yiddish or Russian, ended up in the Politbiuro archive, and were later translated into English by Mowshowitch, and sent to Wolf.

the name *Evreiskaia nedelia*. On the closing and reopening of *Novyi voskhod* and other papers during the war (including the Zionist *Rassvet* and *Evreiskaia zhizn*), see Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 348, 350; see also ICKRE, 201.

⁴⁸ Dubnov, diary entries of August 7 and 8, 1915, in *Kniga zhizni*, 353.

⁴⁹ "Deposition of Jacob Hershhorn," undated, YIVO RG 348, F108/MK13077-13088.

A "Tragic Book"

Materials in the "Black Book" chronologically cover the first fifteen months of war, from July 1914 until October 1915. The book focuses geographically on events in Poland and Lithuanian provinces. It is divided topically into four parts: 1) Reports by Dubnov and Vinaver on general conditions of Jews in the first year of war (these were transcripts of reports they had given to Duma officials and the Tsarist Council of Ministers), appended with official documents as supporting evidence;⁵⁰ 2) An account of the expulsions of Jews from the northeastern front, focusing on the Kovno and Kurland provinces of Lithuania, authored by the Bundist David Zaslavskii and also appended with official documents;⁵¹ 3) Descriptions of hostage-taking among Russian Jews, along with official documents (no author was named for this section);⁵² 4) Descriptions of pogroms in Galicia, Poland and Lithuania during the retreat of the Russian army between the spring and summer of 1915, authored by the Bundist, Genrikh Erlikh.⁵³

Thus, the contributors to "The Black Book" included the liberal Vinaver, the autonomist Dubnov, and the Bundists Zaslavskii and Erlikh. As socialists, Erlikh and Zaslavskii would not have participated in the predominantly liberal Politbiuro; however, from Dubnov's diary we know that Erlikh attended the groups' meetings,

⁵⁰ M.M. Vinaver, S.M. Dubnov, "Polozhenie Evreev v pervii god voiny (iul 1914-iun 1915)," ICKRE, 197-231.

⁵¹ D.O. Zaslavskii, "Vyseleniia Evreev," ICKRE, 231-254.

⁵² "Zalozhniki--Russkie Evrei," ICKRE, 254-267. The author for this section is not named.

⁵³ G.M. Erlikh, "Razgrom Evreiskago naselenia Litvy i smezhnikh gubernii letom i oseniu 1915 g.," ICKRE, 267-296.

and was also well-informed about the condition of Jews as a reporter for the Kadet paper *Rech'* (Speech).⁵⁴

In his preface to "The Black Book," Dubnov explained that the purpose of the book had been to gather a "broad range of factual material that will serve the future historian as a basis for representing the fate of a nation that was almost entirely absorbed with the course of the World War."⁵⁵ Yet it is not self-evident what Dubnov meant by the term "factual material." A close look at its contents suggests that the types of documents included in "The Black Book" reflected important assumptions about what constituted evidence during the period of World War I.

In general, claims about wartime atrocities were only regarded as factual if they could be corroborated by multiple sources. If they could not be substantiated, they had to be "laid to rest with other products of folklore and imagination."⁵⁶ (This argument goes a long way in explaining why, as we saw in the last chapter, historians like Yankev Shatzky meant to discredit An-sky's memoir by dubbing it "folklore," rather than evidence about the past). The contents chosen for inclusion in "The Black Book" reflected this widely held view. To produce a Jewish national narrative of the war, Dubnov aspired to use a "broad range of factual material," as he put it, to create an objective and credible record of the war whose claims could not be disputed. This explains why he leaned heavily on the side of official documents in "The Black

⁵⁴ Erlikh's connection with the documentary effort as a socialist would have been legitimate in no small part since he was the husband of Dubnov's daughter Sophie. For Erlikh's attendance at Politbiuro meetings, see Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 340.

⁵⁵ ICKRE, 195, 197.

⁵⁶ James Morgan Read, *Atrocity Propaganda 1914-1919* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 49.

Book," while rarely relying on eyewitness accounts. Personal stories and eyewitness accounts were considered the least verifiable, least credible, and therefore, least useful sources of material for documenting Jewish wartime experience.

Other published texts that documented Jewish wartime experience expressed similar principles: the paper *Voina i evrei* (War and the Jews) requested that the public send in materials referring to acts of heroism among Jewish soldiers, but only "materials that have been thoroughly verified, so that no one may accuse us of distorting facts."⁵⁷ These ideas also appeared in the discourse of philanthropic reports, notably in a ninety-seven page EKOPO report of October 10, 1915 about Jewish expellees. This report is significant because it became the basis of a narrative and documentary compilation published in the United States in 1916 (*The Jews in the Eastern War Zone* in English, and *Der shvartser bukh* [The Black Book] in Yiddish, though it bore no relation to Dubnov's Russian text).⁵⁸ The authors of the EKOPO report listed the nine types of sources they had used as evidence for their findings, ranked by "order of credibility." It is telling that official government documents and decrees were ranked first, whereas "private correspondence and. . . personal narratives" were ranked ninth.⁵⁹ The same list appeared again in *The Jews in the*

⁵⁷ *Voina i evrei*, no. 1 (1914), 1.

⁵⁸ *The Jews in the Eastern War Zone* (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1916); in Yiddish, *Der shvartser bukh*, trans. William Poyznaiak (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1916). No reason is given as to why the Yiddish translation was entitled "The Black Book" in the text. The American Jewish Committee published these two pamphlets to raise additional funds from various constituencies of the American Jewish public. For more on fundraising for Jewish World War I victims in the U.S., see Albert Lucas, "American Jewish Relief in the World War," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* vol. LXXIX (September 1918): 221-228.

⁵⁹ The ninety-seven page report dated October 10, 1915 was sent by EKOPO to request funds from the American Jewish Committee, in whose archives the document is now located. See "Condition of the

Eastern War Zone, a compilation that was meant to serve as a "body of evidence from non-Jewish sources, which must condemn the Russian Government in the eyes of the world."⁶⁰ Similarly, Dubnov's "Black Book" reprinted military decrees in each of its sections, thereby further defining the work's status as a document containing factual evidence.

Although official documents ranked first in terms of credibility, Dubnov indicated that "The Black Book" also included "not only the documents themselves," but also narrative summaries (*svodki*).⁶¹ The combination of documents *and* narrative summary revealed another of Dubnov's principles of history-writing: official documents were necessary, but insufficient for representing the Jewish experience of the war. These summaries occasionally took the form of a list, or catalogue of documented events. In a section about hostages taken among Jewish communities throughout the war zone, the names of individuals hostages were listed, for example, as well as the dates and places from where they had been arrested. The author of this section (whose name was not listed) added that "the facts brought here are sufficiently clear in and of themselves and do not require additional explanation or commentary."⁶²

What purpose did these *svodki*, or summaries, serve? For one, the use of summary and narrative reflected the historical reality (as An-sky's memoir showed) that Jews had been victims of pogroms, expulsions, rape and other violence in

Jews in Belligerent Countries: A Preliminary Survey with Special Reference to the Jews in Russia," October 10, 1915. AAJC Box 26, Folder 1, pp.1-97 (here from 10).

⁶⁰ *The Jews in the Eastern War Zone*, 12. The list of "credible" sources of information is on p. 18.

⁶¹ ICKRE, 196.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 263. For the section on hostages, see 254-267.

hundreds of cities and towns throughout the war zone. The military's anti-Jewish persecution targeted Jews collectively, resulting in inestimable variations in individual experience. Yet given Dubnov's intent to represent the "fate of the nation," as he had it put, summary and simplification were essential.

It is interesting to reflect on how Dubnov's mode of creating a Jewish national wartime narrative contradicted An-sky's encyclopedic approach to the same task. Rather than generalize or draw representative examples from multiple accounts, as Dubnov did, An-sky, as we saw in the previous chapter, chose to chronicle individual details and distinctions about wartime experience to an often exhaustive degree. In contrast, the use of *svodki* in "The Black Book" also lent the narrative a seemingly objective quality. The hand of the individual writers was hardly evident, and left no traces of an authorial "I," or of the narrator's personal relationship to the events that were described. The anonymity of its authors contributed to the sense that "The Black Book" was both an "official" document, and could also serve as a national narrative of wartime experience.

The narrative and thematic framework in "The Black Book" focused on the relationship between the Russian government's victimization of Jewish civilians and the unredeemed sacrifices of Jewish soldiers. As Dubnov stated in his introduction:

"The majority of material for this tragic book comes from the fate of Russian Jewry, with whom the Tsarist government and Judeophobic society waged a war of destruction at the very moment when Jewish blood was being spilled at the front in defense of Russia."⁶³

⁶³ Ibid., 196.

"The fate of Russian Jewry" was described throughout "The Black Book" as the victimization of the nation, represented in turn by soldiers, elderly people, women and children.⁶⁴ Among them, one could hardly find a family that was "not related to a soldier."⁶⁵ Throughout the text, descriptions of soldiers and civilians functioned as a synecdoche to represent the historical experiences of hundreds of thousands of Jews.

Dubnov used the technique of synecdoche when he spoke about the Jewish nation in other essays that he published during the war. In a multi-part article called "The Story of a Jewish Soldier in 1915: One Confession Among Many," Dubnov described the trials of one N. Gol'denshtein, who had been wounded during the retreat of 1915 and later died in a Kiev hospital.⁶⁶ Dubnov framed the soldier's biography as an iconic representation of the collective history of Jews in Russia under the old regime: "The biography of one person, who was born in the era of the 1881 pogroms and who died in the ranks of the Russian army," asserted Dubnov, "is the biography of an entire generation."⁶⁷

One could argue that by conflating individual experience with that of the nation as a whole, Dubnov and the writers of "The Black Book" avoided the problems associated with using individual testimonies—sources, as we have seen, that skeptical critics could potentially and in some cases did dismiss as "products of folklore and imagination." On the other hand, by simplifying, or flattening complex events like

⁶⁴ Ibid., 235, 241.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 240.

⁶⁶ Dubnov, "Istoriia Evreiskago soldata 1915 goda: Ispoved odnogo iz mnogikh," *Evreiskaia nedelia* no. 19-20 (21 May 1917), 65-70; no. 21 (28 May 1917), 35-40. The series was republished as a separate pamphlet: *Istoriia Evreiskago soldata 1915 goda: Ispoved odnogo iz mnogikh* (St. Petersburg, 1918).

⁶⁷ Dubnov, "Istoriia Evreiskago soldata," *Evreiskaia nedelia* no. 19-20 (21 May 1917), 65-66.

war, which inevitably generate a broad variety of individual experiences, a national narrative based on tropes could call its own claim to historical accuracy and evidence into question. "The Black Book" is therefore characterized by an unresolved tension between the editor's stated aspirations to produce a document filled with incontrovertible evidence, and its narrative content as a "tragic book" about "the fate of Russian Jewry"—a narrative which did in fact utilize individual details and distinctions, albeit in a highly selective manner.⁶⁸

Nowhere is the conflict between "evidence" and "tragic" narrative in "The Black Book" more acute than in descriptions of rape victims. In addition to the experiences of Jewish soldiers cited above, "The Black Book" featured many stories about female victims of war. The author of this section, Genrikh Erlikh, wrote that the tragedy that Jewish women had endured "deserve[d] its own place in a wartime martyrology of Russian Jewry."⁶⁹ The closing pages of the book are filled with a veritable catalogue of horrific stories of the rape of girls and women, all drawn from eyewitness accounts. The violators were invariably identified as Cossacks. In all of the cited cases, the victims' husbands, fathers and sons had either died trying to defend them from rape, were absent because they were fighting at the front, or, had been previously arrested. In the shtetl Onikshty, a father and son were killed for trying to defend the mother and daughter in their family, while a man in Piskurno was killed trying to defend his daughter, who was then raped.⁷⁰ Several stories referred to

⁶⁸ I am grateful to Lisa Kirschenbaum for drawing my attention to this discrepancy.

⁶⁹ ICKRE, 292. For crimes against women, see 292-295.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

women who had sought to escape their attackers. Some tried to drown themselves or throw themselves from windows. The perpetrators dragged the women from the water or picked them up from the ground and raped them. No one was spared: eleven and twelve year olds, women more than seventy years old, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and the wives of soldiers all became victims.⁷¹

It is difficult and in some cases impossible to know whether these accounts were accurate. Nor can one discount the possibility that they may have been written in an apologetic spirit, in defense of the Jewish men who tried to but could not defend their women. In addition to these possibilities, these accounts must also be viewed as part of the national narrative that Dubnov sought to construct about the fate of the Jewish nation. The choice to describe atrocities against women as part of a political and historic document about national suffering was by no means unique to Russian Jewish intellectuals. In a study of atrocities against women committed by Ottoman Turks in Palestine and Armenia during World War I, Billie Melman writes that memoirs and accounts of the period conflated women's victimization with that of the beleaguered nation as a whole.⁷² The inability of men to defend their women, and the violation of masses of women, mothers and daughters, literally destroyed hundreds of families. The broken family, in turn, symbolized the degradation of the nation.

Melman's argument is profoundly relevant for understanding the narrative of anti-Jewish atrocities presented in "The Black Book." The stories of violated women

⁷¹ Ibid., 293.

⁷² Billie Melman, "Re-Generation: Nation and the Construction of Gender in Peace and War, Palestine Jews 1900-1918," in *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930*, ed. Billie Melman (New York: Routledge, 1998), 121-140, esp. 133-134.

and powerless men, both civilians and soldiers, epitomized the catastrophic and tragic quality of the Jewish national war narrative. The inability of men to defend their women's bodies threatened the nation's future in a most fundamental way. Yet in a paradoxical fashion, stories of women's suffering bolstered Dubnov's prime goal and assumption—that "pragmatic action," taken at "the moment when the fate of nations will be decided," had the potential to ensure the continuity and postwar rebuilding of the Jews as a nation. A nation that lacked a record of wartime suffering could not hope to confront the forces—brutality, violence, and the absence of legal rights and protections—that were believed to threaten the very future of its existence.

Conclusion

Dubnov wrote that "The Black Book" included only a "small part" of the vast amount of material that had been gathered by the Politbiuro between 1914 and 1917. In the future, he wrote, additional documents would be published in editions of *Evreiskaia starina*, including eyewitness testimonies of the war, the conduct of the wartime civil administration towards Jews, the experiences of Jews in the Town and Zemstvo Unions, and the destruction of Galicia.⁷³ Although additional volumes of *Evreiskaia starina* were published until 1930, none of these plans came to fruition.

One could find many potential reasons why additional "Black Books" from the World War never appeared. Perhaps most importantly, the scale of slaughter of Jews in Ukraine during Civil War pogroms that erupted after the Bolshevik Revolution completely eclipsed the violence that Jews had suffered during the

⁷³ ICKRE, 197.

preceding war. Indeed, several of the individuals who had worked on amassing material about the First World War, including Dubnov, Tcherikower, and Vinaver, turned their attention to documenting pogroms from 1918 to 1920.

Among those who chronicled the pogroms in a unique, though as we will see, not entirely unprecedented way, was a young Russian-Jewish man in the ranks of the Red Army. Like An-sky and Dubnov, Isaac Babel was interested in politics. However, in the midst of war, it was not the struggle of the Jewish nation that preoccupied him, but the fate of the Bolshevik revolution and the war that would shape that fate. We turn now to the story of his own journey across a war zone in Galicia and Ukraine in 1920.

Chapter 4

Witness Behind a Mask: Isaac Babel and the Polish-Bolshevik War, 1920

"The Jews have lost their identity and are now searching for it."
-Viktor Shklovskii, *A Sentimental Journey* (1923)¹

Isaac Babel's writings and encounters with Jewish civilians during the Polish-Bolshevik War in 1920 constitute a distinct chapter in the history of Russian-Jewish war writing. Babel brought a Jewish perspective to bear on the era of revolution and Civil War. For Babel and his contemporaries, the years from 1918 to 1921 seemed like an "intermission" between the history of what had come before, and an uncertain future under Communism.² From our vantage point in the present, Babel's actions as a witness and chronicler also appear like an intermission between a recent past and a future he could not foresee—represented, respectively, by An-sky's efforts in World War I, and Grossman's experiences during the Holocaust.

The diary that Babel kept in the summer of 1920, which serves as the main source for this chapter, describes ten weeks of his service as a propagandist and journalist for the Red Army.³ As a document, it blurs together the categories of diary,

¹ Viktor Shklovskii, *Sentimental'noe puteshestvie. Vospominaniia, 1917-1922* (Moscow and Berlin: Gelikon, 1923), 273; cited from idem., *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs, 1917-1922*, trans. Richard Sheldon (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984 [1970]), 194.

² My interpretation of Babel's war writings draws from Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolution Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), here 24, and 21-26, 40-48, *passim*. Murav discusses the theme of revolution as "intermission" and "stillbirth" in the works of Babel, Semen Gekht, Perets Markish and David Bergelson.

³ Isaak Babel', *Dnevnik 1920 goda*, in *Sochineniia v 2kh tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), vol. 1: 362-435 (hence B page number). All translations cited or adapted from Isaac Babel, *1920 Diary*, ed. Carol J. Avins, trans. H.T. Willetts (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) (hence A page number).

as well as testimony, elegy, and field notes. Babel's diary has served scholars as a source about his literary development as a Russian-language writer, and as a historical representation of Jewish communities in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands that had endured six continuous years of wartime deprivations and anti-Jewish atrocities.⁴ Here I shed new light on Babel's war diary by reading it as the representation of his historic encounter with Jews in a particular region—the territory of Volhynia and Galicia, where part the Polish-Bolshevik War took place. This was precisely the region that An-sky had traversed multiple times as an ethnographer and relief worker before and during World War I. Like An-sky, Babel often posed as a Russian—he used the very Russian-sounding Kiril Vasilievich Liutov as a pseudonym and wore a military uniform. And like An-sky, he also persistently engaged with Jews and chronicled their experiences. An-sky's example therefore serves as a point of reference throughout this chapter for exploring Babel's experiences and writings in 1920. At the same time, I interpret Babel's approach to representing Jewish civilians with the intent to identify what distinguished him from his precursor, as well as what he introduced to the history of Russian-Jewish war writing.

Several new questions about Babel are explored here, including: How did Babel approach the Jews of the war zone? What influences or ideas did he bring as a

⁴ See Carol Avins, "Kinship and Concealment in *Red Cavalry* and Babel's 1920 Diary," in *Slavic Review* 53:3 (1994): 694-710, and idem., Introduction to Isaac Babel, *1920 Diary*, ed. Carol J. Avins, trans. H.T. Willetts (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995); Ephraim Sicher, *Jews in Russian Literature After the October Revolution: Writers and Artists Between Hope and Apostasy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86-98; Alice Stone Nakhimovsky, *Russian-Jewish Literature and Identity: Jabotinsky, Babel, Grossman, Galich, Roziner, Markish* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train*; Sicher, *Babel' in Context*.

Russian (and Soviet) Jew to the war, and how did these impact his representation of Jewish civilians? What did his encounter with Jewish civilians reveal about his concept of Jewishness? What explains the differences between Babel and An-sky's individual responses to similar dynamics of violence and destruction?

To understand the complex dynamics of Babel's encounter with the Jews of Volhynia and Galicia, we must first situate that encounter amidst the momentous historical changes that occurred in Russia between 1917 and 1920. We will then explore some of the motives that compelled him to become a Red Army military journalist in the summer of 1920. One of his motives stems from his quest, as a Russian-language modernist writer, for ethnographic material—that is, for written information about the culture of distinct peoples drawn from firsthand observation (in Babel's case, primarily Jews and Cossacks).⁵ I argue that Babel's search for ethnographic material informed his literary work as much as it did his diary. His journey with the Red Army became an opportunity for him to collect Jewish folklore in a "native setting" and to observe the impact of war on Jewish life in particular, and on human life more broadly.

While pursuing ethnographic material, Babel, like An-sky, became a witness to catastrophic Jewish history. Unlike An-sky's actions in the war zone, however, Babel often deliberately concealed, or masked his Jewishness from *fellow Jews* in the war zone. His stance towards the Jews of the war zone distinguished him from An-

⁵See Marietta Chudakova, "Thinned and Diluted: Babel in Published Russian Literature of the Soviet Period," in *The Enigma of Isaac Babel: Biography, History, Context*, ed. Gregory Freidin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 116-135.

sky, whom as we saw in Chapter 2, energetically intervened to help Jews again and again, and moreover, reveled in being recognized, or "outed" as a Jew (by fellow Jews, at least). To be sure, in his diary Babel described one remarkable instance of having defended a Jewish family from marauding Red Army Cossacks. And while he adopted a Russian pseudonym during the war, Kiril Vasilievich Liutov, it is significant that he wrote articles under that name that graphically (and propagandistically) described anti-Jewish pogroms for the Red Army's newspaper *Krasnyi kavalerist* (Red Cavalryman).⁶ The mystery we must unravel, therefore, is why Babel, who masked his Jewishness and remained indifferent to Jewish suffering in so many instances, nonetheless still chose to act as a witness to and chronicler of Jewish experience.

I believe that the source of Babel's differences with An-sky stems from their divergent concepts of Jewishness: whereas An-sky entered the war zone on the assumption that the Jewish nation would be able to weather the upheavals of war with the active assistance of aid workers like himself, Babel felt the situation of Jews in the region was "hopeless." For Babel, the Jews he encountered were of the past: for "the life of these little towns," he wrote of Galicia on August 26, "there is no salvation."⁷

Further, whereas figures like An-sky and Dubnov had represented the World War as a crucible for acquiring Jewish national rights and a consequent transformation of Jewish life in Russia, Babel regarded the future life of the Jewish

⁶ Babel defended the Uchenik family. The four articles Babel published in *Krasnyi kavalerist* are translated in *1920 Diary*, 102-108.

⁷ B422, 424 / A82, 84.

people with great doubt. Rather, he viewed the Soviet vision of the world as the future, while the Jews represented an archaic remnant of the past. What did it mean, then, that he became a witness to the Jews of Volhynia and Galicia on the eve of the Bolsheviks' assumption of power? Why did Babel remind himself again and again in his diary to "describe," "remember," and "not forget" the Jewish towns he saw?

This chapter argues that in the summer of 1920, Babel framed his task not as the salvaging of Jews or their culture, nor in openly identifying with the people, but as the act of seeing, listening, and interpreting their experiences at a time of profound uncertainty and devastation. Yet while An-sky too had sought to observe, hear and interpret fellow Jews' wartime experiences, he also repeatedly revealed his solidarity with the Jewish civilians of war zone. That is in part because An-sky recognized and represented their plight, and indeed, his own mission as well, as part of a national struggle. Babel did not. Babel's diary and the stories he created on their basis are narrated by a witness in disguise. This masked witness laments the destruction—the historicity or *pastness* of the Jewish nation—even as he identifies with and serves (albeit with grave reservations), the Soviet power which he knows is responsible for inflicting that destruction.⁸ Babel viewed the war as a crucible in which the *Soviet*

⁸ My analysis of Babel's encounter with Jewish civilians follows Efraim Sicher (*Jews in Russian Literature*), who interprets Babel as a Russian intellectual who felt the need to dissociate himself from the shtetl Jew in order to gain credibility among Russian intellectuals. Sicher, in turn, appropriates ideas from Sander Gilman's study of German-Jewish authors (Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986]). However, as I will argue in this chapter, Babel adopted an anthropological stance during the war that allowed him to mediate the distance he wished to impart between himself and his subjects, especially Hasidim, who were a source of embarrassment to him, but also embodied what he saw as the authentic and dying Jewish past.

future would be forged, not as an opportunity to further the national struggle and aspirations of the Jewish people.

And while the figures of a previous generation of wartime chroniclers such as An-sky and Dubnov articulated their ties to fellow Jews in national terms, Babel framed his association with Jewish civilians in spiritual, rather than national terms. As Efraim Sicher has suggested, Babel expressed nothing more than emotional affinity with the Jews of Volhynia and Galicia.⁹ This spiritual notion of Jewishness explains why Babel wore a mask of indifference to Jewish suffering in a time of crisis and uncertainty, even as he witnessed and described that moment in history as a tragedy.

Epilogue to Pogrom, Prologue to Genocide: Violence and Its Witnesses, 1918-20

The revolutions in March and November 1917 ushered in a new social and political order in Russia. Among the Jewish population of the former Russian Empire, the abolition of Tsarist restrictions on their rights of residence, education, and professions generated reactions ranging from unbridled enthusiasm and sympathy to uncertainty and loathing for the Bolsheviks and their proposed "dictatorship of the proletariat." On the one hand, the revolutionary ethos inspired a renaissance of Jewish cultural and national-political activity in the Russian, Hebrew and Yiddish languages. It also propelled masses of Jews into the ranks of various ideological and national movements, most prominently a series of attempts to establish an independent state in Ukraine.¹⁰ At the same time, Russia's withdrawal from the World War sparked a fresh

⁹ Sicher, *Jews in Russian Literature*, 87.

¹⁰ The descriptive term "renaissance" is drawn from Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). On the participation of Jews in the Ukrainian national independence movement, see Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government:*

series of conflicts that devastated much of the former Eastern Front zone. At the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty on March 3, 1918, the Bolsheviks renounced territorial claims on the vast tract of multi-ethnic lands between the Baltic to the Black Seas. Their withdrawal created a veritable shatter zone of national and ideological turmoil in precisely the region where the majority of the Imperial Russian and Austro-Hungarian Jewish population had endured World War I.¹¹

Multiple combatants vied for control of these lands during the Russian Civil War from 1918 to 1921. Among those groups who occupied the region at various points in time were the German Army, anti-Communist Whites, Bolshevik Reds, Ukrainian and Polish national armies, anarchists, and free-agent warlords. Several minorities suffered horribly as a result of the conflict, notably Mennonites in Ukraine, who were pacifist by religious doctrine.¹² However, the violence disproportionately affected Jews because much of the conflict centered in the territory of Ukraine, where some million and a half Jews lived. Of some 1,236 pogroms that occurred from 1918 to 1920, more than eighty percent took place in right-bank Ukraine (the provinces of Kiev, Podolia, and Volhynia, where An-sky had led his ethnographic expedition).¹³

Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917-1920 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). A survey of Jewish social history during the Revolution and Civil War is Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, trans. Timothy J. Portice (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

¹¹ For a summary of these conflicts, see Alexander V. Prusin, *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870-1992* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 72-97; Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*.

¹² See Terry D. Martin, *The Russian Mennonite Encounter with the Soviet State, 1917-1955* (Waterloo: Conrad Grebel College, 2001).

¹³ Based on a total figure of 1,236 pogroms and "excesses," 41.7 percent were committed in Kiev province, 23.7 percent in Podolia, and 16.3 percent in Volhynia (N. Gergel, "Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1918-1921," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 6 [1951]: 237-252, here 239). See also Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government*, 113.

As Babel's contemporary Il'ia Erenburg observed, most of the pogroms were carried out by armies in retreat. Erenburg, who lived in Kiev for much of 1919 and witnessed the multiple regime changes there, later remarked that "when soldiers occupy a city, they are in good spirits; when they are forced to retreat, they are full of rage, and one should stay out of their sights."¹⁴

The Civil War pogroms represented a radical exacerbation of the anti-Jewish violence that had begun during the World War.¹⁵ A major reason why is that the power vacuum created by the Bolshevik coup in November 1917 left Jews without a state power to defend them. Historians have also underscored the role of political ideology, arguing that the Civil War marked the starting point for combatants' use of ideology as a pretext for killing. Some of the most brutal killing was carried out by anti-Bolshevik forces, including Whites, Ukrainians, and Poles—all groups that perceived and mythologized Jews as Bolshevik sympathizers. In fact, more than fifty percent of people killed in 1918 and 1919 fell victim either to Ukrainians or the Whites.¹⁶ Ukrainians under the independent Ukrainian government, or "Directorate" led by Symon Petliura, slaughtered Jews in the region near Kiev in January and February of 1919. During the second half of 1919, the Volunteer Army under former Tsarist officer General Anton Denikin carried out another wave of pogroms in much of the same region.

¹⁴ Il'ia Erenburg, *Liudi, Gody Zhizn'*, ed. B. Ia. Frezinskii, 3 vol. (Moscow: Tekst, 2005), 1: 300.

¹⁵ This argument follows Budnitskii, *Russian Jews*, 225.

¹⁶ For pogroms committed by White forces, see Peter Kenez, "Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War," in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 293-313. On pogroms carried out by Ukrainian national forces loyal to Petliura, see Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government*, 108-140; see also Budnitskii, *Russian Jews*, 216-274.

The pogroms of 1918 to 1920 killed from 50,000 to 100,000 Jews. An additional 200,000 people were seriously wounded, while 300,000 children became orphans.¹⁷ Thus during the Civil War nearly one in every ten Jewish civilians in Ukraine was killed.¹⁸ Even the lowest estimate of 50,000 victims dwarfed the number of casualties that resulted from earlier waves of pogroms that took place in the same region from 1881 to 1884, from 1903 to 1906, and during the World War. During former pogroms, the victims had variously numbered in the tens, hundreds or at most, thousands. The deaths of individuals had been a tragic byproduct, but not a primary intention behind outbursts of public violence. The Civil War-era violence, by contrast, was characterized by repeated attempts of belligerent armies to decimate part of a population that they regarded as an enemy, and understood to be defenseless. As Peter Kenez and others have pointed out, the systematic nature and ideological underpinning of the killing—the association of Jews with Bolsheviks—made the Civil War-era violence a prologue to the Nazis' genocidal campaign twenty years later.¹⁹

By early 1920, it seemed possible that the worst of the pogroms had passed. In March 1919, the Bolsheviks established a Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and in August of that year, the Communist Party in Odessa articulated a firm stance against

¹⁷ Estimates taken from Oleg Budnitskii, "Jews, Pogroms, and the White Movement: A Historiographical Critique," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2:4 (Fall 2001): 751-772, here 751 n. 2. Outlying estimates include 200,000 killed.

¹⁸ In addition, one in every three Jewish families fled and lost their homes attempting to escape the violence. And among refugees interviewed in Bohuslav, near Kiev, in the summer of 1919, one of every five families had lost at least one family member to the killings, based on a sample of refugees interviewed by the Jewish Pogrom Relief Committee in the town of Bohuslave (Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government*, 119).

¹⁹ See Budnitskii, "Jews, Pogroms, and the White Movement," 770. Kenez makes a similar point in "Pogroms and White Ideology."

anti-Jewish violence, arguing that pogrom-mongers were "trying to drown the communist revolution...in the blood of poverty-stricken Jews."²⁰ By March 1920, the Bolsheviks had defeated the Whites in Siberia and southern Russia.²¹ But Simon Dubnov, never one to be optimistic about such things, wrote from the Petrograd offices of the Jewish Historical Ethnographic Society predicting that a "terrifying epilogue" of violence would follow.²² That epilogue came in the form of war between the Red Army and the Polish Army.

By early 1919, the Polish Army under Józef Piłsudski's command felt emboldened enough by the recent establishment of Polish independence to pursue dreams for an expanded eastern frontier. The Poles struck out in February 1919, and by the end of the year, they had captured Vilna and Minsk. In April 1920, they reached the Ukrainian interior; the following month, they occupied Kiev. The Commissar of the Southern Front, Iosif V. Stalin, immediately dispatched an elite Red Army unit composed mainly of Cossacks, the First Cavalry Army (or Konarmii), to lead a counteroffensive. Under the command of General Semyon Budyennyi, the First Cavalry was charged with driving the Poles back to Warsaw,

²⁰ Odessa Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Ukraine, "An Appeal against Pogroms," August 23, 1919, in *Documents of Soviet History*, ed. Rex A. Wade (Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press, 1991), 1: 384.

²¹ See Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919-1920: The Defeat of the Whites* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977).

²² S.M. Dubnov, *Materially dlia istorii antievreiskikh pogromov v Rossii*, eds. S.M. Dubnov and G.Ia. Krasnyi-Admoni (Petrograd: Komissiiia dlia issledovaniia istorii antievreiskikh pogromov v Rossii, pri Evreiskom Istoriko-Ethnograficheskome Obshchestve, 1919), vol. 1: xiii.

and securing Poland as a "red bridge" across which the Red Army would transport Russia's revolution to the rest of Europe.²³

The First Cavalry quickly routed the Poles, but as the Polish Army retreated west across Ukraine in May and June of 1920, they inflicted violence yet again on the Jewish population in Volhynia and Galicia. During the second week of June, the Polish Army carried out some of its worst atrocities in Zhitomir. The town lay eighty-three miles west of Kiev, and Jews formed the largest ethnic group in the city, numbering nearly 25,000 people, or forty percent of the total population.²⁴

Isaac Babel arrived in Zhitomir three weeks following the pogrom, on July 3, 1920.²⁵ He traveled with the Sixth Division, the largest of the First Cavalry's four divisions, among nearly 4,500 men.²⁶ Using the explicitly Russian-sounding *nom de guerre* Kiril Vasilievich Liutov, he served the Red Army's Political Administration as a political educator and journalist for the newspaper *Krasnyi kavelerist* (Red

²³ The language is from Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-1920* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), 66.

²⁴ Population figures for Zhitomir are from a 1926 Polish census (39.2 percent Jews, 37.1 percent Ukrainians, 13.7 percent Russians, 7.4 percent Poles, and 68,280 total population), in Bohdan Wasiutyński, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w wiekach XIX i XX* (Warsaw: Instytut popierania nauki, 1930), as found in Babel, *1920 Diary*, 110.

²⁵ B362-363 / A3. Babel listed the first date in his diary as June 3, 1920, but in dating his arrival in Zhitomir to July 3, I follow scholars who agree that Babel likely erred in dating the entry June 3. Norman Davies explains that the Red Army did not reach Zhitomir before June 11, 1920 and recaptured it a week later ("Izaak Babel's 'Konarmiya' Stories, and the Polish-Soviet War," *Modern Language Review* 67: 4 [1972]: 845-857, here 847 n. 2). The source of the error may have been Babel's use of roman numerals to mark the month (June and July are distinguished only by a single stroke in roman numerals). For more on the dates, see Babel, *1920 Diary*, 110.

²⁶ Details about the Sixth Division are from Stephen Brown, "Communists and the Red Cavalry: The Political Education of the Konarmia in the Russian Civil War, 1918-1920," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 73:1 (1995): 82-99, here 86. The first post-Soviet studies of the Konarmia are N. S. Prisiazhnyi, *Pervaia Konnaia armia na pol'skom fronte v 1920 godu. Maloizvenye stranitsy istorii* (Rostov-na-Donu: Izd. Rostovskogo universiteta, 1992); Vladimir L. Genis, "Pervaia Konnaia armia: Za kulisami slavy," *Voprosy istorii* 12 (1994): 64-77.

Cavalryman).²⁷ Babel had come to the war zone as a socialist missionary: his official duty was to strengthen the support and loyalty of troops and civilians for the Bolsheviks. He was to illuminate the principles of communism during his personal interactions with troops and civilians and in newspaper articles for the army paper. He served among an elite handful of educated Red Army workers in this capacity.²⁸

But as Babel walked the streets of Zhitomir, his political responsibilities were not foremost on his mind. Instead, he scanned the landscape for traces of the recent pogrom: "White town, not sleepy, but battered, hushed." From conversations with locals he pieced together what had happened and wrote down the sequence of tragic events in a single breathless phrase in his diary: "When our advance troops appeared the Poles entered the town, stayed for three days, there was a pogrom, they cut off beards, that's usual, assembled forty-five Jews in the marketplace, led them to the slaughteryard, tortures, cut out tongues, wails heard all over the square."²⁹

Babel was not the first outside observer to chronicle the aftermath of the June 1920 pogrom in Zhitomir. Several weeks after the Bolsheviks retook the region, a team of Jewish activists from Kiev arrived there. They represented a so-called "Editorial Committee for the Gathering and Publication of Material about Pogroms in

²⁷ The Red Army's political departments are discussed in Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

²⁸ N.S. Prisiazhnyi notes that the social composition of the Konarmiiia was representative of the Red Army as a whole, and included 71-77% peasants, 20-25% workers, and 3-4% intellectuals (*Pervaia Konnaia armiia*, 20).

²⁹ All preceding quotes from B362-363 / A3-4.

Ukraine."³⁰ The Editorial Committee had formed in May 1919 with historian Elias Tcherikower as its secretary, and the philologist Nokhem Shtif as editor-in-chief.

As we saw in Chapter 3, Tcherikower had closely followed Dubnov's project to document anti-Jewish atrocities in Petrograd during World War I. With Dubnov's support, he established a similar initiative in Kiev during the Civil War.³¹ Tcherikower's efforts produced a massive—now the largest—archive available about the 1918-1920 pogroms.³² He directed the collection of testimonies among more than 15,000 Jewish refugees in Kiev; created an archive with documentation of 1,350 pogroms in 750 places; compiled a list with the names of 17,000 victims; assembled hundreds of photographs—even films—of pogroms; and he coordinated a network of traveling representatives and correspondents to collect information from different locales and distribute aid to victims, much like An-sky had done for EKOPO during World War I.³³ Several people who had been aid workers during the World War, such as F. E. Lander (whom fellow aid workers An-sky and Aba Lev had praised),

³⁰ "Svodka materialov Redaktsionnoi kollegii o pogromakh voennosluzhashchimi pol'skoi armii v mae-iiune 1920 g. v Kievskoi gub.," (n.d., after June 12, 1920), GARF f. R-1339, op. 1, d. 424, ll. 93-101, as found in *Kniga pogromov. Pogromy na Ukraine, v Belorussii i evropeiskoi chasti Rossii v period Grazhdanskoi voiny. 1918-1922 gg.: Sbornik dokumentov*, ed. L.B. Miliakova (Moscow: Rosspen, 2007), 362-365.

³¹ As in World War I, Tcherikower's documentation efforts relied upon and also benefited the efforts of Jewish relief organizations, including EKOPO and the Red Cross. The Editorial Committee formed as partnership between the Central Committee for the Relief of Pogrom Victims (*Tsentral'nyi Komitet pomoshchi postradavshim ot pogromov*), the Folksfarlag publishing house, and the Ukrainian Jewish National Secretariat, all based in Kiev.

³² Tcherikower made three copies of the archive, and one is now located at YIVO RG 80-89. For a history of the Tcherikower Archive, see Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27-30.

³³ Tcherikower wrote about the history of his efforts in I. Cherikover [E. Tcherikower], *Antisemitizm i pogromy na Ukraine 1917-1918 gg.* (Berlin: Izd. "Ostjüdisches Historisches Archiv," 1923), 1-8; see also Z. Shaikovsky, "Di geshikhte fun dem itstikn bukh," in Eliyahu Tcherikower, *Di Ukrainer pogromen in yor 1919* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1965), 332-349.

continued to work on behalf of pogrom victims in connection with Tcherikower's Editorial Committee.

At roughly the same time that Babel was approaching Zhitomir with the Sixth Division, Tcherikower sent a team of Editorial Committee correspondents to document the pogrom. The findings of Tcherikower's team in Zhitomir presented some striking differences from Babel's diary account. Whereas Babel's compressed, telegraphic sequence captured the essence, or bare bones of what had happened, the Editorial Committee sought out detailed facts and evidence. They interviewed multiple victims in order to compare different accounts of the same events; recorded the exact dates of the pogrom (June 9 to 11); counted 44 Jewish corpses in the cemetery, some of them badly mutilated; learned that the Poles killed a total of 56 victims, most of them elderly people who had had no sympathy for the Bolsheviks; and that local Polish residents had refrained from engaging in violent acts, but had also sheltered the perpetrators and done nothing to stop them.³⁴

It is possible that Babel crossed paths with the Editorial Committee team from Kiev that first week of July in Zhitomir. But he had no ties to them, for he had come to the front not as a civilian, but with an occupying military power. He had arrived on a brightly painted train—a "blaze of light," he wrote—equipped with a printing press, a film projector, and a radio station.³⁵ One resident of the shtetl Rozhan, near

³⁴ The Committee's findings are in the report "Zapis' rasskaza gorodskogo golovy g. Zhitomira Volynskoi gub. I. P. Voronitsyna o pogromakh pol'skimi voinskimi chastiami v gorode v iune 1920 g.," GARF f. R-1339, op. 1, d. 418, ll. 86-87ob., as found in *Kniga pogromov*, 390-394.

³⁵ On the "agittrains" that Bolsheviks sent throughout the countryside to distribute literature and show films during the Civil War, see Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 53.

Warsaw, which the Bolsheviks occupied briefly during the 1920 war, recalled that within days of their arrival the army had brought Jewish religious and spiritual life to a grinding halt; as he recalled, "the entire Jewish community trembled."³⁶ Babel himself believed that the Bolsheviks represented the future, whereas the region they had occupied was "ancient," inhabited by "old men," and "black beards with a sprinkling of gray."³⁷

Yet beneath his uniform, and apart from the duties to dismantle religious life and spread the socialist gospel that came with it, Babel revealed to his private diary that he felt deeply shaken by what he had learned in Zhitomir. Although he did not document the pogrom in the same manner or with the same goals that Tcherikower's team did, he did identify himself as a witness, and planned to write more about what he had seen in the future. "How it all moves me...a staggering picture for me," he wrote that first night in Zhitomir. "Describe it," he reminded himself as he collected and recorded his initial impressions.³⁸

Babel also revealed in his diary that he had come to the region not only, and maybe even not primarily to win converts to Communism, but as a part of a personal journey, one guided by artistic aspirations: "My life is flying by," he wrote on July 13, 1920 from Belyov, in Volhynia. "No manuscripts...I am keeping my journal—it

³⁶ Khayim Raytshik, "An Escape from Certain Death," (*Sefer zikaron le-kehillat Rozhan*), as found in *From A Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry*, ed. and trans. Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, 2nd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press; Washington, D.C., United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1998), 158.

³⁷ B393 / A43; B363 / A 4.

³⁸ B362-363 / A3-4.

will be an interesting thing."³⁹ Indeed, as we now know, it would be. He later transformed the diary into stories published from 1923 to 1926, named for the unit in which he had served, *Konarmiia*. As Gregory Freidin has written, *Konarmiia* was Babel's greatest artistic achievement, a work that defined him as a Jewish writer much like Kafka, who succeeded in creating a new literary idiom within the dominant (Russian) language.⁴⁰

The text of Babel's war diary is therefore an important source for studying his literary development. However, his diary is also a record about his encounter with the Jews of the Polish and Ukrainian borderlands during a time of conflict and catastrophe. To begin to make sense of this encounter, it is important to identify the distinct motives that compelled him as a young and aspiring Jewish writer to volunteer, and hence, to become a witness to war, in the summer of 1920.

Donning a Mask: Babel's Path to the First Cavalry Army

Contrary to romantic images that Western critics like Lionel Trilling used in 1960 to familiarize English-reading audiences with Babel—the proverbial "Jew of the ghetto," or "Jewish Cossack"—we know that he was an outsider to many of the settings and characters he wrote about.⁴¹ As noted in the Introduction, Babel was

³⁹ B372 / A15.

⁴⁰ Gregory Freidin compares Babel's influence in literary history to that of Franz Kafka: both were among the "first major Jewish writers...to develop and practice a particularly literary idiom in the language of the dominant culture," in "Isaac Babel," in vol. 12 of *European Writers*, eds. William T.H. Jackson et. al., 14 vol. (New York: Scribner, 1990), cited from http://www.stanford.edu/~gfreidin/Publications/babel/Babel_Scribners_Freidin1990.pdf, accessed February 13, 2013.

⁴¹ See Lionel Trilling's introduction to Isaac Babel, *The Collected Stories*, ed. and trans. Walter Morrison (New York: Meridian, 1960), 19.

raised in an upwardly mobile and acculturated Odessan family, and by the age of seventeen, was on his way to a career in business.

Yet by his mid-twenties, this well-educated bourgeois Jew with some knowledge of the Bible and Talmud had become a Bolshevik propagandist and roving war correspondent. How can we explain this ostensible transformation? On a most basic level, Babel's path to the First Cavalry was dictated by his search, as an artist, for new ways to realistically represent the world in the Russian language. And as an artist, Babel's interest in the characters he wanted to write about (criminals and prostitutes, to cite the best known examples) led him to immerse himself in unfamiliar environments at different points throughout his life.⁴² Much like the modernist works of his contemporaries Ivan Bunin and Osip Mandel'shtam, Babel's art relied heavily on life.⁴³ He observed people in ordinary settings and like an ethnographer, collected their lore, customs and speech. This approach to art also correlated with certain strategies—namely, his choice to adopt whatever persona would enable him to "be there" as an observer.

In 1920, Babel approached the war zone and the Jewish civilians living there not as a blank slate, but with specific interests, or literary themes in mind. These literary themes, in turn, dictated the kind of observations he made about violence,

⁴² My interpretation of Babel draws on Nakhimovsky's more general observation that "in terms of Jewish self-awareness...[Russian-Jewish writers] had few literary models. The teacher, by and large, was raw experience," in *Russian-Jewish Literature and Identity*, xii. Babel also claimed that his prose consisted of "facts and observations," at a 1937 conference of the Union of Soviet Writers, cited in Isaac Babel, *You Must Know Everything: Stories, 1915-1937*, ed. Nathalie Babel, trans. Max Hayward (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1966), 216.

⁴³ Chudakova, "Thinned and Diluted," compares Babel to Bunin and Mandel'shtam, and discusses the ethnographic elements that these three writers' prose shares in common.

warfare, and the experiences of Jewish civilians. Two of the reasons why he chose to witness and chronicle Jewish catastrophic history can be traced to his writings from 1916 to 1920. Babel began during those years to write about new types of Jewish characters, ones that symbolized heroism and strength, and could react to conditions of powerlessness in ingenious ways. Another theme he pursued was one that preoccupied writers throughout Europe following the World War: the search for new literary models to depict unprecedented human experiences of violence and revolutionary upheaval.⁴⁴

In pursuit of these themes, Babel made a decisive break with his training in finance and moved to Petrograd in 1916. His great-grandson, Andrei Malaev-Babel, thinks that this move represented Babel's first attempt to break free of his bourgeois Jewish background and to assume a new persona as an artistic rebel—the first mask, as it were, among others that he would wear throughout his life.⁴⁵

Within a year of arriving in revolutionary Petrograd, Babel had connected with Maksim Gor'kii. Between March and July of 1918, the aspiring youth author published seventeen non-fiction articles in Gorkii's anti-Leninist newspaper *Novaia zhizn'* (New Life). Babel's choice of subject matter could not have contrasted more sharply with the title of Gor'kii's paper: his subjects included morgues, orphans, and

⁴⁴ The classic study of how writers dealt with and overcame inadequate tropes and codes for representing war after World War I is Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1975]).

⁴⁵ Andrei Malaev-Babel, lecture at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, March 14, 2012.

blind veterans of the World War.⁴⁶ In short, his journalism of 1918 expressed deep doubts as to whether the Bolsheviks would create a better future.⁴⁷

Yet Babel himself remained relatively insulated from the privations he portrayed. In a literary "exposé" published in 1924, Viktor Shklovskii recalled that at a time of widespread hunger and mayhem, Babel managed to live alone in a clean room, and even entertain a steady stream of guests with tea and bread.⁴⁸ Babel soon left Petrograd, however, when Gor'kii urged him to go and learn more about the life of ordinary people. Gor'kii's now legendary piece of advice would have jibed with Babel's artistic fascination with quotidian life: as he once claimed, "my motto is authenticity...I get hold of some...little anecdote, a piece of market gossip, and turn it into something I cannot tear myself away from."⁴⁹

The search for ethnographic material formed an integral aspect of Babel's quest for a new literary realism. It also correlated with his attempts to experiment with the creation of "new Jewish types"—strong and heroic characters who could counter popular images of defenseless and weak Jews, tropes that emerged during the

⁴⁶ His publications from this period are published in *Sochineniia* 1: 154-234; translated in *The Complete Works*, 487-546.

⁴⁷ Harriet Murav interprets Babel's 1918 article "Dvorets materinstva" ("The Palace of Motherhood," originally published in *Novaia zhizn'* [March 31, 1918]) as an example of the concept of "revolution as stillbirth," or the idea that the revolution had destroyed the past without giving birth to anything new in its wake (*Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolution Russia* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011], 46-47).

⁴⁸ Shklovskii "exposed" Babel's bourgeois habits in the famous essay, "I. Babel', (Kriticheskii romans)," *Lef* no. 2:6 (1924), 152-155, here 153.

⁴⁹ Cited in Milton Ehre, *Isaac Babel* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 37. Similarly, Erenburg perceived Babel as someone who was "at home wherever he went," and pointed out that following a brief stay in Marseilles, Babel was able to discuss the city's high culture, criminals, architecture and municipal elections with insight and accuracy equal to that of a local, at least according to Erenburg (I. G. Erenburg, "Babel' bil poetom," in *Vospominania o Babel'ia: Sbornik*, eds. A.N. Pirozhkova and N.N. Iurgeneva [Moscow, Knizhnaia Palata, 1989], 47).

World War.⁵⁰ For example, in a 1916 story for Gor'kii's journal *Letopis'* (Chronicle), Babel created the character "El'ia Isaakovich," a Jew whose best qualities—kindness, compassion and tolerance—emerged through the act of concealing his identity as a Jew.

Another example of Babel's pre-war interest in Jewish themes can be found in his 1918 story "Shabbos Nakhamu."⁵¹ The story is about Hershele Ostropoler, an eighteenth-century folk hero in Yiddish literature from the Polish town of Ostropol. Hershele is a trickster figure who continually averts disasters, always at the expense of rich people and ignoramuses. The title of Babel's story, a Hebrew expression meaning "Sabbath of Consolation," refers to the Sabbath that follows the 9th of Av, a day of mourning for the destruction of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.⁵² In Babel's story, Hershele successfully deceives a foolish woman into believing he is "Shabbos Nakhamu" incarnate, and has come to visit her with reassuring news from her loved ones in the world beyond. The woman then "consoles" Hershele in return by feeding him a lavish meal.

Babel's interest in Hershele is a curious one. Perhaps he saw this trickster as a kind of quintessentially modern hero, someone who could subvert an utterly bleak situation, and with humor to boot. Literary scholar Ruth Wisse has described Hershele as a fixture in Yiddish literature who symbolizes the "paradoxical notion

⁵⁰ For a discussion of Gor'kii's support for Babel's early stories on Jewish themes (especially heroism), see Gabriella Safran, "Isaak Babel's El'ia Isaakovich as a New Jewish Type," *Slavic Review* 61: 2 (2002): 253-272.

⁵¹ First published in *Vechernaia zvezda*, March 16, 1918; translated in *The Collected Works*, 88-94.

⁵² "Shabbos nakhamu" is the Sabbath that follows Tisha B'Av, which is the ninth of the month Av on the Hebrew calendar and is observed as a day of mourning for the destruction of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.

that the absurd interpretation of experience may permit optimism, whereas a rational explanation will never lead beyond despair."⁵³ Mockery, concealment and deception were among the absurd means that Hershele (and not coincidentally, Babel himself, at least during wartime) used to achieve his desired outcomes. According to this interpretation, Babel's story about Hershele also resembled An-sky's views of folklore, that it constituted a means through which poor or powerless people could transcend otherwise hopeless circumstances.⁵⁴

Another important clue that links the Hershele story to Babel's wartime journey was the story's subtitle: "From the Hershele Cycle." This "cycle" presumably would have been a series of similar stories about this trickster figure. If Babel did eventually write these stories, manuscripts have not survived. However, Babel's biographer Gregory Freidin believes that he planned to gather material about Hershele among Jewish towns of the former Pale, and that this goal partly explains his choice to volunteer for the army in 1920.⁵⁵ If this is correct, then Babel would have approached the war zone seeking to collect folklore for his art. He later portrayed himself as doing exactly that in the *Red Cavalry* story "The Rabbi." When the Zhitomir tsaddik asks the story's narrator about his occupation, he replies that he is putting the adventures of Hershele Ostropoler into verse.

A second theme that fascinated Babel in the years immediately preceding the war was the question of how people respond to conditions of brutality and violence.

⁵³ Ruth R. Wisse, *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 12-13.

⁵⁴ On An-sky's views about the implications of folklore, see Gabriella Safran, *Wandering Soul: S. An-sky, Creator of the Dybbuk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 143-148 *passim*.

⁵⁵ Personal communication with Gregory Freidin, November 30, 2009.

He had briefly experienced combat in 1917 while volunteering on the Rumanian front, and in early 1920 he published a series of stories under the title "*Na pole chesti*" (On the Field of Honor). In ironic contrast with the title, the stories depicted soldiers who caved to cowardly human instincts under pressure.⁵⁶ The stories borrowed heavily and translated directly in parts from the French writer Gaston Vidal, a former general in the World War. Nathalie Babel has written that these four stories indicate "how preoccupied [Babel] was with the subject of war and the need to find a new literary treatment for it."⁵⁷ Babel's adaptation of Vidal's stories, however, replaced the emotional and verbose original with compressed phrases, montages, and disturbing images of violence—all characteristic elements of the minimalist style he later pioneered.⁵⁸

As of early 1920, Babel had not yet created new Russian literary models for depicting new Jewish types or the human experience of modern warfare. This contribution would not become possible until he experienced war firsthand. Before he made it to the war zone in Galicia and Volhynia, he returned to Odessa in 1919, married a woman he had met as a student in Kiev named Evgenia Gronfein, and began working for Ukraine's state publishing house.

However, he soon found a chance to seek out ethnographic and folkloric material for his art in a new and somewhat foreign setting. The opportunity came when Babel ran into Mikhail Kol'tsov (1898-1940 or 1942), an acquaintance from his

⁵⁶ Published in the short-lived Odessa journal *Lava* no. 1 (June 1920), translations in *You Must Know Everything*, 77-94, and *The Collected Works*, 95-103.

⁵⁷ In *You Must Know Everything*, 77.

⁵⁸ For more on "Na pole chesti," see Christopher Luck, *Figures of War and Fields of Honour: Isaac Babel's Red Cavalry* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996).

years in Petrograd. Like Babel, Kol'tsov was a Russified Jew (born Mikhail Fridliand), and a rising star in journalism. Kol'tsov had come to Ukraine to organize a southern branch of the Russian state news agency (*Iuzhnoe Rossiiskoe telegrafnoe agentstvo*, or IugROSTA). On April 10, 1920, Babel received papers appointing him to work for IugROSTA.⁵⁹ Two months later, without any significant military service in his past, Babel donned a second mask when the Odessa Communist Party posted him, via IugROSTA, to the political section of Budyennyi's First Cavalry Army as a correspondent.⁶⁰

The aspiring writer now had a means to collect the raw material he wanted for his art. His encounter with Jews and Cossacks in the war zone would have a profound effect not only on his art, but also his personal identity and concept of Jewishness. We turn now to this encounter, seeking to uncover what Babel shared in common with his precursor An-sky, and what he introduced that was distinct and new as a Russian-Jewish chronicler of catastrophe.

Behind a Mask: Babel as Ethnographer and Witness

Like An-sky in 1915, one of Babel's intentions in the war zone was to observe traditional Jewish culture *in situ*. The region where they both traveled also largely overlapped. An-sky saw a great deal more territory than Babel (he worked for almost five years along a widely shifting Eastern Front, compared to Babel's ten weeks in a

⁵⁹ I. Babel', "Iz pisem k druž'iam," *Znamia* 8 (August 1964): 146-166, here 147. Kol'tsov's role in connecting Babel to Iug-ROSTA is mentioned in the footnote to Babel's letter to M. Kol'tsov of April 17, 1923.

⁶⁰ Gregory Freidin, "Two Babels—Two Aphrodites: Autobiography in *Maria* and Babel's Petersburg Myth," in *The Enigma of Isaac Babel: Biography, History, Context*, ed. Gregory Freidin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 16-62, here 24.

smaller region). However, both men wrote about several of the same towns in Volhynia and Galicia, including Rovno, Zhitomir, Dubno, Brody, Radziwiłłów, Vladimir-Volynsk, Kovel, Sokal, and Novograd-Volynsk. Both men were also fascinated by what they saw as the antiquity of the region, and both lamented its destruction. Babel wrote that "a mighty and marvelous life of a nation" once existed there, and felt somehow tied to it: "we are an ancient people, exhausted."⁶¹ Upon entering a town, he would invariably head for a synagogue to make contact with local Jews and observe them in prayer, just as An-sky had done. In many places, he wrote with sympathy about "badly shaken, tormented people" who had suffered from pogroms.⁶²

But there are several factors that distinguished the two figures. An-sky entered the war zone as a civilian aid worker bearing an explicit mandate to aid Jews. In his early fifties, he resembled and thought of himself as a wise, even prophetic elder or father figure to the Jews whom he met. Furthermore, he had traveled the region that became the Eastern Front as an ethnographer for years before the war, gathering a massive amount of data about the people's worldview, customs and ways of life. Babel, by contrast, represented a consummate outsider to the region: a well-educated city boy who, at the relatively young age of twenty-six and in military uniform, looked much like his fellow combatants and revolutionaries—not someone local civilians would have likely trusted.

⁶¹ B424 / A85; B382 / A28.

⁶² B422 / A82.

Moreover, in contrast to An-sky, Babel intended for his uniform to camouflage his Jewishness not only from his fellow soldiers, but sometimes from Jews as well. In several instances he remained a silent bystander as he watched his fellow Red Army soldiers humiliate and rob Jews. Indeed, Babel was precisely the kind of figure that An-sky had in mind when the latter disparagingly wrote in his diary of February 25, 1915 about the many "Marranos in hiding"—Jewish military and civilian workers at the front who could have done more to help their fellow Jews, had they not been afraid to expose their true identities.⁶³

How, then, did Babel resolve the contradiction between being intensely drawn to the people he encountered, and his choice to conceal himself from them, even to the point of passively watching them under attack? I would argue that Babel adopted an ethnographic stance towards the Jews of the borderland shtetls—that is, the stance of an outside observer who wanted to make sense of a "foreign" cultural reality that he witnessed firsthand, without necessarily associating or openly identifying with that reality. He became a witness, but a concealed one.⁶⁴

But whereas An-sky had acted as a witness *and* had energetically intervened in the war zone to save Jews and sacred relics like Torah scrolls, Babel seemed resigned to the idea that this destruction was "the fate of Jewry," as he wrote.⁶⁵ The source of the two figures' disparate reactions has to do not only with how they approached Jews in the war zone, but also with how they defined themselves as Jews.

⁶³ RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 51-52.

⁶⁴ My concept of Babel's ethnographic stance as being explanatory but one that distanced him from his subjects draws on arguments in Nancy Sinkoff, "Fiction's Archive: Authenticity, Ethnography, and Philosemitism in John Hersey's *The Wall*," *Jewish Social Studies* 17:2 (2011): 48–79.

⁶⁵ B424 / A85.

An-sky expressed his Jewishness in the form of national activism, through the act of rescuing and chronicling Jews in a time of crisis. Babel, in contrast, defined his own Jewishness as a way of seeing, listening, and writing—in exclusively spiritual, not national terms. This is what I believe he meant when he wrote that one "must have the soul of a Jew to understand" the destruction he saw taking place around him. That is, although he concealed himself from them, and did not pray like them or share their poverty, he felt that he possessed the same "soul."⁶⁶ This is how he fashioned himself as a Jew and as a witness who could interpret and chronicle one particular moment of catastrophe in Jewish history.

Notes from the Field of War

Babel's descriptions of the shtetls and towns of Volhynia and Galicia captured in often poetic fashion the external appearances of the people and settings where he billeted. Babel also described in ethnographic modes the hidden, or internal dynamics of daily life—Jewish cultural, spiritual and existential responses to often distressing circumstances. He wrote of people's homes, their distinct dress, the spoken Yiddish he heard everywhere, the marketplace and shopkeepers, different types of synagogues, and streets and neighborhoods. He sketched the main outlines of Jewish daily life, such as prayer, preparations for the weekly Sabbath, and rituals of mourning. He also noted people's reactions to him, the Red Army soldier in their midst—wariness, on rare occasions sympathy (which he invariably regarded as a sign

⁶⁶ B385 / A33.

of ignorance or pandering), but above all, profound exhaustion at the presence of yet another occupying, violent army.

Carol Avins has suggested that in some places, Babel's diary resembles an ethnographer's field notes—the musings of an outsider observer attempting to understand the very different people (namely Cossacks, but also Jews) in his midst.⁶⁷ Building on this observation, I would suggest that interpreting Babel's diary as a kind of field note illuminates an important and previously unexamined aspect of his approach to Jewish civilians. The anthropologist James Clifford's concept of field notes is also relevant here. Clifford writes that field notes serve an ethnographer as a "data base for later writing and interpretation aimed at the production of a finished account."⁶⁸ Clifford writes that diaries and field notes also both express "processes of recording and constructing cultural accounts in the field," and can form the basis for future "occasions distant from the field, for oneself years later, for an imagined professional readership, for a teacher."⁶⁹ Put differently, field notes and diaries both represent an intermediate stage of a writing process.

What kinds of findings emerge if we apply the lens of the "field note" to Babel's accounts of Jewish culture in the field of war? We know that Babel transformed his diary into the "finished" *Konarmiia* stories, that they constituted a kind of "data base for later writing." The concept of field notes allows us to rethink the notion of a diary as "raw material," by suggesting that much like field notes,

⁶⁷ Avins, introduction to *1920 Diary*, xlii.

⁶⁸ James Clifford, "Notes on (Field)notes," in *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology*, ed. Roger Sanjek (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 47-70, here 51-52.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 52, 64.

Babel's representation of Jews in his diary was already shaped by prior, outside ideas and influences. As a witness, he did not record his impressions on a blank slate, but as what Clifford would call a form of inscription. Inscription occurs when ethnographers/writers interrupt the flow of observation and "turn" to writing in order to fix an observation.⁷⁰ Babel often shows the reader his own process of inscription, or turn from action to writing: from Lashkov on August 10 he writes, "deep night. Four am...my room is lit up, I'm working, the lamp is lit."⁷¹ He is telling us that what he witnessed earlier that day is being committed to writing.

Of course, we know that writers/ethnographers do not necessarily imitate reality faithfully when they turn from action to writing, that the act of writing is inherently an act of construction. As such, it is often informed, or what Clifford calls "pre-figured" by ideas that precede and are outside of the scene being observed.⁷² Pre-existing ideas are often expressed in the writings of outsiders, or those who lack "inside," or native knowledge of the people they are observing.

Earlier I discussed that Babel approached the war zone with interests in Jewish folklore, and the folk hero Hershele Ostropoler in particular. Sure enough, he imagined Hershele in the setting of a decrepit Hasidic synagogue in Dubno where he found himself on July 23: "I am thinking of Hershele and how to describe him," he wrote in his diary later that day.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁷¹ B408 / A63.

⁷² Clifford, "Notes on (Field)notes," 64.

⁷³ Sasha Senderovich has suggested that Babel is not actually describing someone in his presence, but is rather "invoking Hershele as he thinks about how to describe the collapsing state of the Dubno synagogues and of much of traditional Jewish life that he is witnessing around him," in "The Hershele

Babel's status as an outsider with prior ideas about what he saw was nowhere more evident than in his encounter with Hasidim. He conceived of Hasidim not as flesh and blood beings, but as "spectral" figures, "visitors from another world," and as "dwarves in gabardines."⁷⁴ His descriptions of them revealed his lack of intimate knowledge about their lore and customs, coupled with an acute mixture of repulsion and fascination. In Dubno on July 23, he paid a visit to

"the Hasidic synagogue. It's Friday. Such stunted figures, emaciated faces, what it was like 300 years ago is resurrected before me...the prayer is extremely disorderly, probably the most repulsive-looking Jews of Dubno have gathered here...can it be that ours is the century in which they will die out?"⁷⁵

This passage contains two descriptions that are in fact tropes about Hasidim. First, Babel writes that the Hasidic order of prayer is "300 years old." This suggests that he does not realize that Hasidism could not have possibly existed at that time, for the Hasidic movement had only begun to spread in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, following the death of the founding figure the Baal Shem Tov. On the one hand, Babel's error should come as no surprise, for these were likely some of the first Hasidim he had ever encountered face to face. In his native Odessa, synagogue services had been conducted along Reformist lines since the mid-nineteenth century (orderly and decorous, following the German Reform model).⁷⁶ Odessa had a

Maze: Isaac Babel and His Ghost Reader," in *Arguing the Modern Jewish Canon: Essays on Literature and Culture in Honor of Ruth R. Wisse*, eds. Justin Cammy, Dara Horn, Alyssa Quint, Rachel Rubinstein (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 247.

⁷⁴ B388 / A37; B393 / A43.

⁷⁵ B385 / A33.

⁷⁶ For views on what constituted "proper and dignified" worship in Odessa's first Reform synagogues, see Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 55-62.

legendary reputation as an "anti-shtetl," a city where Jews wearing long black coats and *peyes* (sidelocks) could be seen on the stage of opera houses, not on the streets.⁷⁷

A second trope in this passage is Babel's depiction of the Hasidim as deformed, ill, perhaps even on the brink of extinction. He wonders if as a group, they will "die out" in the coming decades. Babel associated death symbolism with other Hasidim he met: in Zhitomir, he wrote about the Hasidic tsaddik and his disciples in a haughty tone: "farewell, dead men" (*mertvetsy*).⁷⁸ In Toporów on August 18, he described "Jews in their doorways like corpses, I think, what will become of you, black beards, hunched backs, destroyed houses."⁷⁹

Babel's descriptions were powerful responses to encounters that clearly unsettled him. They reveal that the Hasidic mode of worship were foreign, anachronistic, even repulsive to him. Yet he also expressed fascination, and was moved to wonder whether these men—figures who in his eyes represent the distant past—would survive the twentieth century. The Hasidim seemed especially poignant to him in light of the setting where he saw them—homes and synagogues crumbling, damaged by wartime violence.

On the other hand, Babel's gut reaction to the Hasidim had been shaped by prior influences. The idea that Jews (and Hasidim in particular) are a "dead," anachronistic, or incurably ill people reflected a longstanding trope in Western European culture, in which Hasidism had figured as an archaic, dying form of

⁷⁷ John Klier makes this point in "A Port, Not a Shtetl: Reflections on the Distinctiveness of Odessa," in *Port Jews: Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centers, 1550-1950*, ed. David Cesarani (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 175.

⁷⁸ B363 / A4.

⁷⁹ B413 / A70.

Jewishness. Babel used this trope again in three *Red Cavalry* stories with Hasidic themes, "Gedali," "The Rabbi," and "The Rabbi's Son." As Maurice Friedberg has suggested, the name of the Rabbi in the latter story, Bratslavskii, associates him with the Hasidic Breslover sect, or followers of Rabbi Nakhman of Breslov (Nakhman ben Simkhah).⁸⁰ Nakhman lived from 1772 to 1811, and during his short life, became the leader of a circle of disciples who followed and spread the message of his intricate, profound parables and distinct mystical customs.

From among different types of Jews, Babel seemed to regard Hasidim as the most iconic embodiment of the Jews' status as an "ancient people," as he described Jews in his diary. Hasidim also represented the Jews who were most threatened by the forces of modernity. Babel revisited this theme in the *Red Cavalry* story "The Rabbi." In that story the Jewish shopkeeper Gedali states that the Hasidim are standing with "blinded eyes" at "the crossroads of the winds of history."⁸¹ While the narrator Babel envisioned an inauspicious future awaiting them, Hasidim seemed oblivious, or perhaps resigned to the possibility of their own immanent extinction.

Babel clearly lacked An-sky's insider knowledge of the folklore and culture of Jewish natives of Volhynia and Galicia. A comparison of An-sky and Babel's responses to events in two of the same locations also reveals profound differences about each figures' respective concept of Jewishness. Babel often acted as a bystander, observing passively as the Red Army abused fellow Jews, even as he

⁸⁰ Maurice Friedberg, "Yiddish Folklore Motifs in Isaak Babel's *Konarmija*," in *Isaac Babel: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 191-198. As Sicher has noted in *Babel in Context*, Nakhman of Breslov told a story called "The Rabbi's Son" that Babel may very well have read in Russian translation.

⁸¹ Babel, "The Rabbi," cited from *The Complete Works*, 234.

lamented the situation and felt an acute sense of guilt. An-sky's campaign to rescue and represent Jews as a national mission in the same area five years earlier provides a point of reference here as well.

Brody and Sokal in the Eyes of An-sky (1915) and Babel (1920)

An-sky visited Brody as a relief worker in January 1915.⁸² He arrived on January 17. As he walked from the train station into town, he observed chimney columns protruding from rubble and throngs of poor children on the streets. He was looking to learn about the pogrom that the Russian Army carried out five months earlier, and recorded two discussions he had about it. He left the city later that day to travel in the nearby vicinity, but returned on January 23. During his second visit, he distributed money to children on the streets, and then baffled an elderly man whom he met standing outside a tiny, but miraculously intact home (An-sky wrote in his diary that the man's mouth fell open when he handed him money and spoke to him in Yiddish).

During the next four days, An-sky engaged in his usual litany of relief work: he assembled more accounts of the pogrom, noted instances of Jews being expelled from their homes, visited Brody's main synagogue on the Sabbath, and learned about which of the community's pre-war organizations had stopped working at the start of the conflict. As he did elsewhere, An-sky sought to address the community's immediate needs and represent EKOPO. He knew that Brody had been a cultural and demographic center for Jews, that more than 12,000 Jews had comprised two-thirds

⁸² RGALI f. 2583, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 18-20.

of the town's population before the war.⁸³ An-sky's week in Brody thus epitomized the dynamic campaign he undertook to rescue and represent fellow Jews throughout the war zone.

Babel arrived in Brody on July 30, 1920 and stayed for two days. He had been traveling with the First Cavalry for about a month when he reached Galicia. By that point the traces of pogroms he found in each town no longer shocked him. People had become "habituated to all the killing," he wrote, himself included: all of the stories of looting, murder and rape he heard had started to sound like a "broken record."⁸⁴ He described anti-Jewish violence almost as a form of providence—the "fate of Jewry," as he put it. Thus, in the shtetl Malin, he wrote that the Jewish cemetery had "seen Khmel'nitskii, now Budyennyi...this history—Poles-Cossacks-Jews—is repeating itself with stunning exactitude. What's new—Communism."⁸⁵ Whereas An-sky had sought out the multiple accounts of the Brody pogrom in the belief that its origins could be explained, its effects potentially countered, Babel saw the violence as an unstoppable, pre-determined pattern in Jewish history.

Yet Brody represented a tragedy for Babel on another level as well. He described it as an "antique" (*starinnoe*) city, with nine synagogues that marked a long and illustrious history. The once idyllic town embodied Jewish tradition itself: "This is a Jewish town," he wrote. "This is Galicia." Now, the town was "wrecked, looted." Barbed wire, trenches and felled trees formed the new landmarks of this once elegant

⁸³ The census of 1910 registered Brody's Jewish population at 12,138 people out of 18,055 total, or 67.5% (Bohdan Wasiutyński, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w wiekach XIX i XX* [Warsaw: Instytut popierania nauki, 1930], 119.

⁸⁴ B369 / A12.

⁸⁵ B377 / A23.

and prosperous border city. It had become a "tormented town" whose residents were starving, "pitiful." Three years after the end of the World War, the town had not yet been rebuilt. In 1921, the Jewish population of Brody remained at just over 7,000 people, nearly forty percent less than the 1910 figure (though Jews still comprised a significant two-thirds of the total population).⁸⁶

Thus, in An-sky's view, Brody symbolized a temporary disaster, one that could be remedied through his own efforts. But from Babel's perspective, Brody epitomized an unmitigated tragedy and loss that could never be redressed. He depicted this tragedy not as a matter of material destruction alone, but something profound and irrevocable. Brody, he concluded, was full of "people and their souls killed." The town represented the decline and death of the Jewish nation itself, and he obligated himself to commemorate it: "must not forget Brody."⁸⁷

In the weeks after he saw Brody, Babel continually noted other instances of physical and cultural damage in Galicia. It seemed that his own army was dismantling and stripping away remnants of Jewish life before his very eyes. On the night of August 29 in Komarów, "our [Red Army] men looted, in the synagogue they threw out Torah scrolls and took the velvet cases for saddles. The military orderly examines *teffilin* [phylacteries], wants to take the [leather] straps." Yet Babel himself stood by and patronizingly noted the Jews' reaction: "The Jews smile obligingly"—yet another sign, for him, that Judaism could not last in the face of the new authorities—for

⁸⁶ In 1921, Brody's Jewish population was 7,202 out of 10,083 total (Wasiutyński, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce*, 119).

⁸⁷ All quotes on Brody from B393-394 / A43-45.

"that's religion," he reasoned.⁸⁸ Two weeks later in a synagogue in Vladimir-Volynsk he watched a soldier looting while people prayed: "Bare walls, a soldier steals the electric lamps."⁸⁹ In all of these instances, Babel himself remained as passive as the Jews whose actions he censured. Yet like An-sky, Babel lamented the violence that had damaged Jewish landmarks and populations. What then explains the source of their disparate reactions to that destruction? Their respective accounts of the town of Sokal are very revealing of the convictions and self-fashioned identities that distinguished these two Jewish witnesses to war from one another.

An-sky passed through Sokal (roughly fifty miles north of Lvov and now in western Ukraine) in June 1915. The Russian Army had made a pogrom there while in retreat just a few days earlier. He walked past gutted buildings with smashed windows and bullet-riddled walls, and remarked on the eerily empty streets. As in Brody, he listened to starkly different versions of the same events: a Hasid who answered his questions in a distant and dry tone told him that one person had been killed, and many injured.⁹⁰ The next person he asked, the Jewish owner of a hotel, told him that a *few hundred* Jews had been killed, and described in "a monotone, with tears streaming from her eyes," how Cossacks had cut off her daughter's arm. An-sky had seen his share of suffering by then, and he knew that people had become numb to the brutality that struck so close to home. Yet he continued to chronicle his experiences, acting on the belief that a comprehensive account of Jewish suffering

⁸⁸ B424 / A85.

⁸⁹ B432 / A95.

⁹⁰ S. An-sky, *Der Yudisher Khurbn fun poylen galitsye un bukovina, fun tog-bukh 1914-1917*, in *Gezamelte shriftn in fuftsien bender* (Vilna, Warsaw, New York: Farlag "An-sky," 1928), 5: 98.

during the war would yield a valuable record for the Jewish people in the post-war future.

Babel saw Sokal on August 26, 1920. He depicted the town in an elegiac, mournful tone, employing the same tropes that informed his observations elsewhere. He visited the Hasidic synagogue, "a deeply moving sight, 300 years ago," and another synagogue where he admired the "beautiful altar, made by an artist, marvelous green chandelier, worm-eaten little tables."⁹¹ He portrayed the Hasidim in romantic terms as "pale, handsome boys with sidelocks," and described them engrossed in prayer, "swaying, waving their arms, wailing."⁹²

But just as he did elsewhere, he stood by as the Red Army looted and harassed the Jewish population. When they somehow learned that Babel was a Jew, the locals confronted him with an appeal that he intervene on their behalf: "The Jews ask me to use my influence to save them from ruin, they are being robbed of food and goods," he wrote. But their appeal did not move him to act. Like the Jews who had "smiled obligingly" in Komarów, Babel watched the soldiers freely rob stores and turn people's homes inside out in search of hidden food or wares. Despite whatever emotional torment or affinity he may have felt for the civilians, he responded with oblique irony, and labeled the marauders "a peculiar sort of army."⁹³

In comparison to An-sky's numerous interventions to help people under attack (recall him pulling the Cossack out of a cellar during a pogrom in Kristianopol),

⁹¹ B422 / A81.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

Babel's actions seem weak and self-serving, even relatively cowardly. Wasn't he, as an elite political worker, in a position where he could have done more? On the other hand, had Babel chosen to intervene, would he have faced fatal consequences? And what are we to make of Babel's intense and genuine sense of lament for what he saw as a Jewish national tragedy?

It is impossible to know whether Babel would have become a target of violence himself had he attempted to intervene on behalf of Jewish civilians with the Red Army. He was likely afraid, and his sense of fear cannot be easily dismissed. The brutal treatment of Jewish civilians by all enemy combatants during the wars in Russia from 1918 to 1921 makes it difficult to judge Babel's actions with certitude or moral clarity. At the same time, Babel's passivity and sense of lament were signs of the very things that defined him as a particular kind of Jew. The fact that he watched and understood the unfolding of catastrophic Jewish history from behind a mask reveals how he fashioned his own Jewish identity in response to conditions of war and destruction.

Babel watched from behind his mask again and again during the summer he spent with the Red Army. One of the most poignant, and well-known instances took place in Demidowka on July 24. It was the 9th of Av, and Babel understood that Jews were observing the day in commemoration of an ancient tragedy.⁹⁴ Thus, he felt an acute sense of anguish as he stood by and watched his army companion Prishchepa humiliate the Jewish family with whom they were billeted by forcing them to dig

⁹⁴ See Sicher, *Jews in Russian Literature*, 92.

potatoes and cook. Babel sat and ate with his heart in his throat, remaining "silent," he explained to his diary, "because I'm a Russian."⁹⁵ But as he wrote his diary from his room later that night, he listened to the words of the Biblical book of Lamentations, traditionally sung in public on Tisha B'Av. He expressed a veritable shift in consciousness, describing the destruction of the Temple as a palpable, transhistorical reality: "outside the window, Demidowka, night, Cossacks, all as it was when they were destroying the Temple."⁹⁶ Babel's observations expressed a traditionally Jewish way of seeing the past as a continually unfolding part of the present, a classic expression of collective memory. His chronicled own private lamentations and identification with the residents of Demidowka in solitude, under the cover of night and his Russian mask.

Conclusion

The last entry in Babel's war diary is dated September 15, 1920, just after the First Cavalry Army was defeated by the Poles outside of Warsaw. Although additional diary entries have not survived, we know from other sources that the First Cavalry unraveled into a band of demoralized bandits as they retreated east. In late September, the Sixth Division led a mutiny that lasted three weeks, killing their Commissar, looting and raping, burning neighborhoods, and killing Jews and supposed Communists.⁹⁷ Some of the perpetrators faced punishment, and an armistice signed on October 12 demobilized the army; but as they retreated further east towards

⁹⁵ B386 / A35

⁹⁶ B387 / A36.

⁹⁷ Brown, "Communists and the Red Cavalry," 85-86.

the Crimea (the last remaining front of the Civil War), the troops carried out pogroms yet again.⁹⁸

Babel came home to Odessa in the fall of 1920, completely exhausted and in poor health after the war.⁹⁹ By the time the prodigal son returned home, his father had been officially informed of his death, and his wife had begun looking for him among the wounded.¹⁰⁰ As he recovered, he began to transform his Jewish war diary into a groundbreaking work of Russian literature—stories whose narrator, of course, would be a Jew in disguise. Just as Babel began writing his masterpiece, An-sky, had who completed his own massive Yiddish war memoir that same year, died on November 8, 1920.

Babel's diary was lost to history for nearly seven decades while his *Red Cavalry* stories brought him immediate fame in the mid-1920s.¹⁰¹ This was partly by design: in 1930, Babel had made the claimed that the diary had been "lost," when in fact three years earlier he had given it to a friend, ostensibly for safe-keeping.¹⁰² The diary not only revealed the violence committed against Jewish civilians during the

⁹⁸ Prisiazhnyi, *Pervaia Konnaia armiia*, 3, 13-14.

⁹⁹ Avins, Introduction to *1920 Diary*, xlix.

¹⁰⁰ Freidin, "Two Babels—Two Aphrodites," 24.

¹⁰¹ Aside from fragments published in a Soviet literary journal in 1965 the diary was indeed lost from public view (for the published excerpts, see I.A. Smirin, "Na puti k 'Konarmii' [Literaturnye iskaniiia Babelia]," in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 74 [1965]: 467-482). Il'ia Erenburg mentioned the diary in his introduction to a 1957 collection of Babel's stories, the first published after Babel's posthumous rehabilitation (*Izbrannoe* [Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1957]). The diary was next published in an abridged version, "Nenavizhu voinu': Iz dnevnika 1920 goda Isaaka Babelia," in *Druzhba Narodov* 4 (1989): 238-252, and *Druzhba Narodov* 5 (1989): 247-260.

¹⁰² Cited from a talk that Babel gave to a conference of young Soviet writers on December 30, 1930, as found in Smirin, "Na puti k 'Konarmii,'" 482. It is likely that Babel gave the diary manuscript to a Kiev friend, M. Ovrutskaiia, in 1927. She later gave the diary to one Tatiana O. Stakh, who in the mid-1950s gave it to Babel's widow (by common law), Antonina Pirozhkova. The entire diary was published first in Russian in 1990. For a detailed history of the diary's peregrinations, see Avins, Introduction to *1920 Diary*, xvii-xviii, lv n. 2.

war by both enemy forces *and* the Red Army, but even more conspicuously, had bluntly exposed the failed campaign and the military leaders behind it, thus indirectly discrediting one of the Soviet regime's foundational myths. Most notably, of course, there had been Stalin at the helm of the Polish campaign, whose reputation as a military commander had been implicitly undermined by Babel's famous descriptions of the First Cavalry's inglorious defeat. Then, in the 1930s, Stalin named his old friends Budyennyi, Voroshilov, and Timoshenko as Marshalls of the Soviet Union. Their good relations with Stalin, which had originated with the Polish campaign, likely saved them from being purged along with the majority of the military elite during the Great Terror.¹⁰³

Babel survived the worst years of the purges as well, but he did not survive the period in which the Soviet Union occupied eastern Poland for a second time. The NKVD arrested Babel on May 15, 1939. Three months later, on August 23, the Soviet Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov signed the Non-Aggression Treaty with Germany, earmarking for invasion the same territory the Red Army had lost to the Poles in 1920. The Red Army invaded Poland for a second time. And this time the Army managed in a massive operation to successfully conquer Poland's eastern half in September 1939.

Meanwhile, Soviet authorities kept the famous writer who had chronicled the Red Army's first failed war with Poland in jail. In 1939, Soviet leaders once again sought to export Communist ideology and acquire Polish territory on a far grander

¹⁰³ On the relation between the Terror and the 1920 campaign, see Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 184.

scale than they had in 1920. In the process, they unleashed gruesome violence and slaughtered thousands of citizens of eastern Poland in 1939 and 1940.¹⁰⁴ In light of these crimes, they would have certainly wanted the First Cavalry's pogroms to be forgotten. Babel, who had witnessed and described the violence of that war in such well-known prose, also had to be forgotten. He was shot in Moscow in Lubianka Prison on January 27, 1940 and buried in an unmarked mass grave.

At the time of Babel's death, the vast territory between Moscow and Berlin where An-sky had traveled in 1915 and Babel had briefly sojourned in 1920 once again came under military occupation—first Soviet, then German. It would be up to other writers to witness and chronicle the experiences of the region's civilians in that war, including the Jews among them. And there would be no need for them to wear masks.

¹⁰⁴ The classic study of the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland during World War II is Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Gross (54-56) cites Babel's portrayal of local "elections" in *Konarmiia* as a point of comparison to the 1939-1941 Soviet occupation.

Chapter 5

To Carry the Burden Together: Vasily Grossman as Chronicler of Jewish Catastrophe, 1941-1945

"The Germans shot my father. He will never write anything again. And I, his son, have taken upon myself the job of describing how the shtetl of Brailov perished. I have neither invented nor added anything here—I tell it just as witnesses have told it to me."

-Efim Gekhman, "My Hometown, Brailov" (1944)¹

The German Army invaded the Soviet Union in the pre-dawn hours of June 22, 1941. Marching alongside or just behind the advancing Wehrmacht were four units of SS mobile killing units, known as Einsatzgruppen. The Nazi Party had indoctrinated both its security services (SS) and the Wehrmacht to fight a total war: a struggle to the death between Germanic and Slavic peoples, and between the ideological systems of National Socialism and Communism—the system that Nazis believed was managed by and for the benefit of Jews.² Germany's plans for the invasion of the USSR were therefore entwined with the intent to kill Jews.³ In Ukraine, the "jewel" of the Nazi empire which Hitler planned to cleanse of its native population and reengineer as a utopian agrarian colony for Germans, Jews numbered

¹ Efim Gekhman, "Na rodine: Brailov," in *Chernaia kniga*, 42; also published in Yiddish as "Meyn heym shtetl Broilov," *Eynikayt* (May 25, 1944), 3.

² On the indoctrination of the Wehrmacht according to Nazi worldview, see Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945, German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*, Second Edition (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2001), 68-105.

³ For surveys of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, see Il'ia Al'tman, *Zhertvy nenavisti: Kholokost v SSSR, 1941-1945 gg.* (Moscow: Kovcheg, 2002); Jürgen Mätthaus, "Operation Barbarossa and the Onset of the Holocaust, June-December 1941" in Christopher R. Browning, with contributions by Jürgen Mätthaus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), 244-308; Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009).

2.47 million people in June of 1941.⁴ In Soviet territory as a whole, Jews numbered over five million people.⁵

As they had done in Poland in 1939 and 1940, the Einsatzgruppen sought to eliminate potential sources of resistance to German rule in the newly conquered Soviet territories. They focused on Communists and Jews, respectively deemed political and racial enemies of the Reich. The Einsatzgruppen and Wehrmacht both followed a now-famous order, known as *Komissarbefehl*, to immediately shoot Red Army Commissars, understood to be carriers of the "Jewish-Bolshevik worldview."⁶ By late July 1941, the SS had radically expanded its victim pool and began shooting Jewish women, children and elderly people.⁷ Together with thousands of German Order Police and non-German local auxiliary policemen, and with logistical support from the German Army, the Einsatzgruppen carried out mass killings of Jews in the Baltic States, Belarus and Ukraine.⁸ Thus, in the summer of 1941, in the setting of

⁴ Figure for Ukraine taken from Alexander Kruglov, "Jewish Losses in Ukraine, 1941-1944," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*, eds. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008), 272-290, here 273. On Nazi colonial plans for Ukraine, see Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2005).

⁵ This 5 million figure for Soviet Jewish population (1941) includes Jews in eastern Galicia and western Volhynia (Polish territory from 1918-1939; present-day western Ukraine and western Belarus) who came under Soviet rule between September 1939 and June 1941. Mordechai Altshuler estimates 3,113,000 Jews in the USSR within the 1939 borders, and roughly two million additional Jews that came under Soviet rule from Poland, the Baltic states and Romania between 1939-1941, in *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust: A Social and Demographic Profile* (Jerusalem: The Centre for Research of Central and East European Jewry, 1998), 9.

⁶ This language was used in various drafts of the order, written between May 6 and June 6, 1941 (Browning, *Origins of the Final Solution*, 220).

⁷ Dieter Pohl, "The Murder of Ukraine's Jews under German Military Administration and in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine," in *The Shoah in Ukraine*, 23-76, here 28.

⁸ English translations of reported actions are published in *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads' Campaign Against the Jews, July 1941-January 1943*, eds. Yitzhak Arad et. al. (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989). Dieter Pohl ("The Murder of Ukraine's

Eastern European cities and towns like Vilna, Berdichev, and Kamianets-Podol'skyi, the Nazis began a genocide of European Jewry.⁹

Unlike Nazi victims from Western and Central Europe, most of whom died behind wrought-iron doors of factory-style killing centers, the Jewish men, women and children of the German-occupied USSR died by gunpoint, at the edge or inside of their graves. These were pits, ravines, or anti-tank ditches dug by Soviet POWs, non-Jewish locals, and sometimes the victims themselves. Victims in occupied Soviet territory usually died in the open, near the cities and towns where they lived—in the Ponary Forest near Vilna, at Babi Yar ravine outside Kiev, and near hundreds of smaller cities and towns, often within hearing or seeing distance of their long-time neighbors and friends. In Kiev, a mass killing of Jews took place ten days after the arrival of the German Army. More commonly, killings followed a period of weeks or months that German military and civilian administrations used to expropriate Jews of their property, mark and isolate them in ghettos, register them in lists, and exploit them for labor.¹⁰

By late August of 1941, the Wehrmacht had overrun several major cities and eighty percent of shtetls in territories that comprised the former Pale of Settlement.

Jews," 40), notes that much more documentation has survived about the Einsatzgruppen than the Order Police, even though the six Order Police battalions in Ukraine—the "rank and file of the 'Final Solution,'" as historian Klaus-Michael Mallman has called them—killed many more Jews than did Einsatzgruppen C and D.

⁹ The argument that the Holocaust only became possible in principle and practice after Operation Barbarossa is advanced in works like Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, as against the "intentionalist" view that Hitler began the war to carry out a preconceived plan to annihilate Jewry, as found in Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* (New York: Bantam, 1976).

¹⁰ Lower, in *Nazi Empire-Building*, 86-90, notes that in some parts of Zhytomyr district, Jews were restricted not primarily to ghettos but to any locations that would speed the process of death, including monasteries, freight cars, factories, barracks and barns.

Geography mattered a great deal in determining who lived and who died: given the fast pace of the German advance and the poor transportation infrastructure in the region, most Jews in the country's western-most borderlands had neither the time nor the means to evacuate. Jewish populations in these regions included high proportions of women, elderly people and children.¹¹ The swift and unexpected nature of the killings deprived the victims of a chance to leave records of their own, and survivors' accounts were also rare.¹² The perpetrators further sought wherever possible to destroy evidence of their crimes by exhuming and burning corpses and scattering the ashes. When the Red Army liberated these former killing fields, they often found mass graves, or empty craters filled with decomposing bones. In Ukraine, there would be nearly 1.6 million Jewish victims; in Soviet territory as a whole, as many as 2.7 million.¹³ Thus, two out of every three Jews killed by Germans in the USSR came from Ukraine.¹⁴

¹¹ Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust*, 46, argues that because 1) these locations were overrun so quickly, 2) transportation leading out of them was inferior to means of leaving bigger cities, and 3) the larger proportion of those living in shtetls did not belong to the groups that the regime was interested in evacuating at once (party elites, bureaucrats, and workers essential to war production), "it follows that the Jews of the *shtetl* suffered more in the Holocaust than did other Soviet Jews."

¹² On this point see Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine Under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 62.

¹³ Figures for Ukraine from Kruglov, "Jewish Losses in Ukraine, 1941-1944," 273. Estimates for the total number of Soviet Jews killed varies: 2,711,000 comes from Mark Kupovetsky, "Estimation of Jewish Losses in the USSR during World War II," *Jews in Eastern Europe* 24:2 (1994), 34. Mordechai Altshuler estimates between 2.5 million and 3.3 million, in *Soviet Jewry since the Second World War* (New York: Greenwood, 1987), 4. Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 525, estimates between 2,612,000 to 2,743,500 Jewish victims.

¹⁴ For studies that focus on the Holocaust in Ukraine, see Dieter Pohl, "The Murder of Ukraine's Jews," along with the other contributions to *The Shoah in Ukraine*; Shmuel Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews, 1941-1944* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990); *Katastrofa ta Opir Ukraïns'kogo evreïstva (1941-1944). Narysy z istorii Holokostu i Oporu v Ukraïni*, ed. S. Ia. Elizavetskii (Kiev: Natsional'na akademiia nauk Ukraïny, Instytut politychnykh i etnonatsional'nykh doslidzhen', 1999). For German- and Slavic-language primary sources, see the two-part bibliography by Karel C.

Vasily Grossman was among the journalists attached to the Red Army who first uncovered traces of Nazi crimes on Soviet and Polish territory. He was not only a native son of the Ukrainian city Berdichev, but also the son of a Jewish woman, Ekaterina Savil'evna, killed in a massacre of Jews at an airstrip outside that city on September 14-15, 1941. While the Nazis were murdering Jews in their newly occupied eastern Empire, Grossman was a frontline reporter for the military newspaper *Krasnaia zvezda* (Red Star). As a war correspondent, he spent over 1,000 days with the army. During that time he witnessed and wrote about several critical battles on the Eastern Front, including the siege of Stalingrad from September 1942 until January 1943.

From January 1943 until May 1945, Grossman followed the Red Army on its path of liberation across Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Germany.¹⁵ His role as a frontline correspondent determined his role as a witness to the liberation process. In 1943, he crossed Ukraine with the First Ukrainian Front; in 1944, he saw Belarus and Poland on the heels of the First Belorussian Front. In August and September of 1944, he entered the ruins of what had been the extermination camps Majdanek and Treblinka. In January of 1945, he walked in the rubble of the Warsaw and Łódź ghettos.¹⁶

Berkhoff, "Ukraine under Nazi Rule (1941-1944): Sources and Finding Aids," in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 45: 1 (1997): 85-103 / 45: 2 (1997): 273-309.

¹⁵ John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), chapters 4-6.

¹⁶ See Vasily Grossman, *A Writer at War: A Soviet Journalist with the Red Army, 1941-1945*, eds. and trans. Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), hence (AWW, page number).

Like other Soviet journalists, Grossman's job was to support the country's war effort. He did so with a sense of genuine patriotism, in part by publicizing facts about the enemy's crimes against Soviet civilians. But Grossman was not a dispassionate or neutral observer. He came to Ukraine in a double capacity: as a liberator whose writings sought to glorify the Red Army's triumphant march to Germany; and as a bereaved son who contended with his own grief, as well as the discovery of a previously unimaginable atrocity—the destruction of the Jewish population of his native city. He moved well beyond the conventions of professional journalism and war correspondence in order to write about these subjects.

Grossman was not a survivor of mass murder, but his actions during and after the war resembled those that a survivor might undertake: an attempt to find meaning in death; the search for words to adequately represent it; the expression of a moral imperative to bear witness to evil; and a sense of debt, or responsibility to the dead.¹⁷ Like An-sky and Babel, the creators of Russian-Jewish war historiographies who preceded him, Grossman translated his position as a witness into chronicles that used realistic, stark terms to describe violence against Jewish victims in the region of Ukraine, Belarus and Poland. As in previous wars where armies had overrun the same territory, these victims had left few records of their own. They died in places that were intimately familiar—indeed, often home to most Soviet and East European

¹⁷ This description of survivor qualities draws from Robert Jay Lifton, "The Concept of the Survivor," in *Survivors, Victims, and Perpetrators: Essays on the Nazi Holocaust*, ed. Joel E. Dimsdale (Washington: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, 1980), 113-126.

Jews, but were only marginally familiar to larger audiences of readers, even in the USSR.

It is important to note that the study of Grossman's role as a chronicler of Jewish mass murder contributes to the revision of two related and major assumptions about the history of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. First, the notion that the Soviet media remained silent about the Holocaust has recently been tested by historian Karel Berkhoff.¹⁸ He has found that Stalin, who personally edited many of the media reports about the killing of Jews, initiated an intent no later than January 1942, for "stripping Nazi Germany's Jewish victims of their Jewishness," generally by removing the descriptor "Jewish" in reports that identified Soviet victims of Nazi atrocities as such. Nonetheless, the few articles in the Soviet press that *did* continue to mention the Jewish identity of many of the Nazis' victims long after January 1942 is indicative, in Berkhoff's view, of "a lingering inconsistency in application of this line, even among Soviet leaders."¹⁹ One symptom of this inconsistency is that information about the suffering of Jews under the Nazis, including articles by Grossman, circulated, albeit only occasionally, in the Soviet media until the end of 1944.

A second assumption is that Soviet Jews themselves remained silent as they learned about the mass murder of European Jewry. This idea has also been refuted in

¹⁸ Karel C. Berkhoff, "'Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population': The Holocaust in the Soviet Media, 1941-45," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10:1 (2009): 61-105. This article is a longer version of a chapter on Soviet media coverage of the Holocaust in idem., *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 134-166.

¹⁹ Berkhoff, "'Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population,'" 78.

scholarship by Shimon Redlich, Harriet Murav, David Shneer and others.²⁰ Grossman's war writings testify to the assertion that Soviet Jewry sought to actively commemorate the Jewish tragedy of the war even before it had ended.

Between 1943 and 1945, Grossman published six pieces in Soviet newspapers and journals about the Holocaust—these included four newspaper articles, one documentary essay, and one short story.²¹ Five of these works appeared in major Russian-language publications. A sixth article, "Ukraine without Jews," was published in Yiddish translation in *Eynikayt* (*Unity*), the weekly paper of the Jewish Anti-fascist Committee (*Evreiskaia anti-fashistskaia komitet*, or EAK)—an organization founded on Stalin's orders in January 1942 to mobilize Jewish support for the war effort both domestically and abroad.²² Outside of these published works, Grossman chronicled his private reactions to the Jewish catastrophe in his war diary,

²⁰ While there is consensus that the Holocaust was downplayed and often silenced in postwar Soviet historiography, this was not the case among Jewish intellectuals during the war. On historiography, see Zvi Gitelman, "Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust, 1945-1991," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941-1945*, eds. Jeffrey Gurock and Lucian Dobroszycki (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 3-27. On Jewish wartime literature and journalism, see Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolution Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), Chapters 3 and 4; on photojournalism, see David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: War, Photography, and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

²¹ In order of publication, these pieces are: the short story "Stariyi uchitel'," *Znamia* no. 7-8 (July-August 1943), 95-110; the essay "Ukraina," *Krasnaia zvezda* (October 12, 1943), 3; the Yiddish essay "Ukraina on Yidn," *Eynikayt* (November 25, 1943), 3, (December 2, 1943), 3; the frontline report "V gorodakh i selakh Pol'shi," *Krasnaia zvezda* (August 6, 1944), 3; the documentary essay "Treblinskii ad," *Znamia* no. 11 (November 1944), 121-144; the frontline report "Doroga na Berlin," *Krasnaia zvezda* (February 9, 1945), 3.

²² See English translations of the short story "Stariyi uchitel'" (The Old Teacher) and "Treblinskii ad" (The Hell of Treblinka), with useful historical background, in Grossman, *The Road: Stories, Journalism, and Essays*, ed. Robert Chandler, trans. Robert Chandler and Elizabeth Chandler, with Olga Mukovkina (New York: New York Review Books, 2010), 84-115, 116-162 (respectively).

field notes and personal letters.²³ His war writings did not necessarily emphasize, but they did all point out the Jewish identity of the Nazis' victims in places like Treblinka, Sobibor, Kiev, and the shtetls of Ukraine and Poland. Even as he paid tribute to the diversity of the Nazis' Soviet victims in his published works, he insisted on the unique nature of Jewish suffering within what he called the Nazi "ladder of oppression" and "colony of European peoples."

Despite the importance that Grossman's works continue to hold for the question of how the Holocaust was represented in the Soviet Union, our understanding of his role as a chronicler of Jewish catastrophe still remains vague. His war writings have been discussed as part of two biographies as well as a number of literary studies.²⁴ In addition, a recent translation of his war diary describes the background of his wartime efforts and writings.²⁵

However, previous works have approached Grossman's war writings primarily as genres of literature or journalism. In contrast, here I approach them as representations of history that were shaped and constrained by multiple influences,

²³ Written during the war, the script of Grossman's diaries was nearly illegible, and so after the war, he organized them chronologically and dictated them to his wife, Olga Mikhailovna Guber, who typed them. They were first published, with some notable omissions, as "Zapisnye knizhki," in V.S. Grossman, *Gody Voyny* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), 244-457 (from author's personal communication with Fyodor Guber, November 11, 2010. A corroboration of this claim can be found in A. Bocharov, afterword to *Gody Voyny*, 457). Henceforth, citations from Grossman's war diary are indicated as (GV 89: page number). Corresponding translations are cited and in some places adapted from AWW.

²⁴ A.G. Bocharov, *Vasilii Grossman. Zhizn', sud'ba, tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1990); Garrard and Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev*. Literary studies include Shimon Markish, "Primer Vasilii Grossmana," in *Vasilii Grossman: Na evreiskie temy*, ed. Markish, 2 vol. (Jerusalem and New York: Biblioteka-aliya, 1985), 2: 341-532; Alice Stone Nakhimovsky, *Russian-Jewish Literature and Identity: Jabotinsky, Babel, Grossman, Galich, Roziner, Markish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 107-152; Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolution Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 122-126, 172-188.

²⁵ The 1989 edition of Grossman's war diary ("Zapisnye knizhki," in *Gody Voyny*, 244-457), was abridged and translated into English in AWW. The latter work includes previously unpublished letters and diary fragments at RGALI.

including the Soviet media, Grossman's family ties, and the desire among Soviet Jewish intellectuals to identify war victims as Jews. I explain the actions that Grossman undertook on the ground as he composed his representations of Jewish catastrophe. I also frame Grossman's writings within the context in which he carried them out; first, by discussing his role as a military correspondent and the conventions for depicting atrocities against Jews that were established by the Soviet media; and second, by explaining the approaches that his fellow Soviet Jewish contemporaries developed in response to those conventions. Finally, I attempt to identify Grossman's writings as works of Russian-Jewish war historiography that can be compared to earlier efforts of Russian Jews to chronicle catastrophe during wars that impacted Jewish civilians in much of the same region.

It is critically important to understand Grossman's work in the context of the Soviet media and its conventions for depicting atrocities. As mentioned above, the manner in which the media portrayed Nazi atrocities was determined from above. Stories that identified Jews as victims of Nazi mass killing did appear, but only rarely. The reasons for this will be explained in detail below, but at the outset it can be said that the state regarded the deaths of Soviet civilians, Jews included, in instrumental terms—as capital in a propaganda campaign intended to mobilize hatred of the enemy and desire for vengeance among the masses. In November 1942, the state institutionalized the documentation of enemy atrocities by forming an Extraordinary State Commission (*Chrezvichainaia Gosudarstvennaia Komissiia*, or ChGK) to

document Nazi atrocities.²⁶ In the goal to politicize the naming of victims, ChGK reports omitted mention of victims' Jewishness by design.

Yet wartime propaganda in the USSR was not a straightforward matter, for at the very same time that the state sought to downplay or even suppress knowledge about the Jewishness of the Nazis' victims, it engaged in a parallel campaign to mobilize domestic and international support among Jews for the Soviet war effort. As part of its larger project to appeal to the conscience, and more importantly, material resources of Jews in the West, the Central Committee of the Communist Party granted EAK permission to produce an international anthology known as *Chernaia kniga* (The Black Book), about Nazi crimes against Jews throughout German-occupied Soviet and Polish territory. Il'ia Erenburg, chosen as the book's editor, recruited Grossman in the fall of 1943 to work on *The Black Book*. When Erenburg resigned as editor in the spring of 1945, Grossman assumed the role of lead editor.

The state intended for *The Black Book* to provide documentary evidence of the enemy's crimes that could be used to mobilize hatred and secure postwar justice, not unlike the purpose of the ChGK. Authorities did not conceive of the book as a means to commemorate the suffering of the Soviet Jewish population as such. Nonetheless, initiatives like EAK (and as I will argue, the ChGK as well) inadvertently provided a social framework that emboldened Soviet Jewish writers to document the suffering of

²⁶ The full title of the ChGK was the "Extraordinary State Commission on Reporting and Investigating the Atrocities of the German Fascist Occupants and their Henchmen and the Damages inflicted by them to Citizens, Kolkhozes, Public Organizations, State Enterprises," (*Chrezvichainaia Gosudarstvennaia Komissiiia po ustanovleniiu i rassledovaniuu zlodeyanii nemetsko-fashistskich zachvatchikov i ich soobshnikov i prichinennogo imi usherba grazhdanam, obshestvennim organizaziiam, gosudarstvennim predpriatiiam i uchrezhdeniiam SSSR*).

Jews and commemorate their losses. Though they remained cognizant that their existence depended on the goodwill and monitoring of the Soviet state, both EAK members and the creators of *The Black Book* framed their task in moral and representative terms. They sought to move beyond the pale of propagandistic convention in order to tell the stories of the survivors and the dead as accurately and honestly as possible—victims with whom many, like Grossman, had blood ties.

What did Soviet Jewish intellectuals' distinct, or alternative approach to chronicling Jewish suffering look like? In early 1943, Jewish writers returned to regions of historic Jewish residence shortly after their liberation by the Red Army. Grossman initially undertook independent efforts to collect testimonies from bystanders and survivors in Ukraine. Later, as a contributor to *The Black Book*, he joined a larger community of writers who had undergone similar, often traumatic experiences of return. Together with other writers, he developed a distinctly Soviet Jewish approach to documentation of Nazi atrocities. They were able to do so in part because Grossman and fellow Soviet Jewish writers played the role of outside witnesses. They collected individual stories of suffering, gathered evidence of Nazi crimes, and represented events that stood beyond the limits of human understanding. Their efforts placed them outside the normative boundaries of how atrocities could be represented in the Soviet wartime media. At the same time, their efforts correlated with and reinforced the formation of a distinct identity for Soviet Jewish chroniclers of catastrophe: they became they intimate, yet also indirect and outside witnesses to Jewish mass murder.

"A Blood-soaked Body of War": Grossman as Soviet Military Correspondent

As a member of the Writer's Union, and with a history of tuberculosis and poor eyesight, Grossman was exempt from military service. Nonetheless, at the age of 35, he volunteered as a soldier immediately following Operation Barbarossa. Military recruiters apparently turned him down, but undeterred, Grossman offered his services a second time in late July 1941.²⁷ This time, recruiters appealed to the authority that oversaw all newspapers produced during the war: the "Main Political Administration for the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army" (*Glavnoe upravlenie raboche-krestianskoi krasnoi armii*), or GlavPUR. This Communist Party agency oversaw the ideological education of the military and civilian populations. GlavPUR considered newspapers to be the most important vehicles for disseminating propaganda.

Grossman requested to be posted to *Krasnaia zvezda*, the army's leading newspaper, and the "hot publication to work for" at the time.²⁸ Together with the government paper *Izvestiia*, the labor union paper *Trud*, and the civilian paper *Pravda*, it was one of four most widely read papers in the USSR. GlavPUR officials may well have assumed that a novelist with health problems like Grossman was not a good match for the physically demanding job of military correspondent. But David Ortenberg (1904-1998), chief editor of *Krasnaia zvezda* (and like Grossman, a Russified Jew from Ukraine), saw Grossman's literary background as an asset: "That's alright," he told them. "He knows about people's souls."²⁹ On July 28, 1941,

²⁷ AWW, 3.

²⁸ Shneer characterizes *Krasnaia zvezda* as such in *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 92.

²⁹ This encounter is recounted in a glasnost-era memoir, D.I. Ortenberg, *Sorok tretii. Rasskaz-khronika* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991), 358. The passage is translated in AWW, 5-6.

Ortenberg signed orders appointing Grossman to the paper, and as a journalist, he joined scores of writers, as many as 900 or more, in the service of his country's war effort.³⁰

One reason why Ortenberg hired Grossman is that the former sought to give his paper a "literary cast" within the constraints of wartime censorship. Stalin himself controlled the wartime media with an unprecedented level of oversight.³¹ On the third day of the war, June 24, 1941, the Central Committee of the Communist Party had established the Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinformbiuro), the first agency founded in Soviet Russia's with the explicit intent to monopolize all information about internal, international, and military affairs reported in print and broadcast media. The Sovinformbiuro oversaw GlavPUR. It also managed TASS, the telegraph wire system for all domestic and international news, as well as each of the five anti-fascist committees, including EAK. According to Karel Berkhoff, Stalin's monopoly on the circulation of information through the Sovinformbiuro surpassed even Reich Minister Joseph Goebbels' ability to single-handedly control the Nazi propaganda system.³²

Along with Grossman, Ortenberg hired several other prominent writers to his staff, including Il'ia Erenburg and Konstantin Simonov. Journalists who worked for military newspapers received military ranks, and like most of them, Grossman

³⁰ On Grossman's appointment see Ortenberg, *Sorok tretii*, 358; Garrard and Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev*, 139-140. As of April 1944 an estimated 943 journalists were enlisted in the military as correspondents, according to EAK. See Evreiskii antifashistskii komitet v SSSR, *Evreiskii narod v bor'be protiv fashizma* (Moscow: OGIZ; "Der Emes," 1945), 67.

³¹ Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 167.

³² Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 269. On the formation of the Sovinformbiuro, see *ibid.*, 12-14.

became "quartermaster of the second rank"—the humble equivalent of private. However, because they required access to all soldiers for their reports, war correspondents were granted the same respect as officers.³³ Grossman wore an officer's uniform, carried a gun, and earned a good salary—1,200 rubles per month, more than his income as a relatively well-known writer in 1938.³⁴ These advantages indicated a certain modicum of glamour that military correspondents enjoyed. However, at the start of the war, Grossman hardly cut a romantic figure. In a scene from his war memoir, Ortenberg emphasized the disparity between Grossman's earnest dedication to the war effort and the writer's rather slovenly appearance. As he recalled, Grossman looked

"completely unsuited to war...His tunic was totally wrinkled, his glasses kept sliding down his nose, and his pistol hung on his unfastened belt like an axe. He was moody, took everything seriously, and got upset whenever one mentioned his timid appearance, even in jest."³⁵

Ortenberg's description brings to mind Babel's military photo in 1920: unimposing, thoughtful eyes behind glasses—the expression of a quiet, brooding Jewish intellectual who wanted to take part in a war. Yet Grossman's request for a posting to the front had a logical basis. It was common for writers, and for Jews, to volunteer for the "Great Patriotic War." Among the 500,000 Jews who served in the Red Army during World War II, feelings of patriotism for the homeland (in Russian,

³³ Louise McReynolds makes this point in "Dateline Stalingrad: Newspaper Correspondents at the Front," in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 28-43, here 28-29.

³⁴ For this observation, see Garrard and Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev*, 140. Grossman ended the war as a Lieutenant Colonel.

³⁵ D.I. Ortenberg, *God 1942: Rasskaz-khronika* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1988), 460.

rodina), rather than self-awareness as Jews, overwhelmingly served as their motive for fighting.³⁶

Furthermore, Grossman had already written about military life prior to Operation Barbarossa.³⁷ In March of 1941, he and fellow writer Aleksandr Tvardovskii traveled to the Baltic region to collect materials about the 90th Division, which took part in the bungled Soviet invasion of Finland between November 1939 and March 1940.³⁸ Grossman may have felt justified in asking for a post to the front given his prior experience talking to commanders and working with military documents.

In addition to his brief stint in Finland, Grossman had been imagining battlefields for years before the war. One of his first fictional pieces, a little-known sketch written in 1930 called "*Moleben*" (Prayer Service), described Russian Army soldiers during World War I. The story about the revolutionary awakening of a band of soldiers unfolds in just two pages: late in the war, the ragged, hungry and bearded soldiers become conscious of their collective power over their commanding officer, and stage a quiet rebellion by refusing to pray the Orthodox prayer service.³⁹

³⁶ See Zvi Y. Gitelman, "Internationalism, Patriotism, and Disillusion: Soviet Jewish Veterans Remember World War II and the Holocaust," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, occasional paper, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, November 2005, 95-126. From his interviews with Soviet Jewish veterans, Gitelman (110-111) concludes that "their commitment and consciousness were Soviet, not primarily Jewish...They knew they were Jewish and had a clear sense of what being Jewish meant, but it simply did not matter much to them."

³⁷ A.G. Bocharov, *Vasilii Grossman*, 114.

³⁸ As editor of the important liberal literary journal *Novyi Mir* (New World), Tvardovskii would later publish Grossman's war novel *Za pravoe delo* (For a Just Cause, published in *Novyi Mir* nos. 7-10, 1952). See Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 245-258.

³⁹ Written in 1930, the story was first published in 1958, in V.S. Grossman, *Povesti, Rasskazi, Ocherki* (Voenizdat: Moscow, 1958), 15-17.

Grossman's first novel, published from 1937 to 1940 and titled after its hero, *Stepan Kol'chugin*, also contained fictional accounts of World War I.⁴⁰ These two early works, written without the benefit of firsthand experience, expressed the Tolstoyan qualities that earned Grossman tremendous popularity among Soviet readers during wartime: attention to and sympathy for the perspectives of ordinary combatants and civilians, and a remarkable talent for imagining and portraying their inner lives.

During August 1941 Grossman retreated with the Red Army across northwestern Ukraine and Belarus. His duty was to write propaganda—to spin the Red Army's catastrophic retreat into a tale of victory and heroism, according to the expected conventions. Despite these stifling obligations, Grossman evolved as a military correspondent during the first year of the war. By the time the front reached Stalingrad in September 1942, his talents as a communicator had become legendary.⁴¹ At Stalingrad, he sat with snipers inside the ruins of apartment buildings and described the siege from their perspective.⁴² In the midst of the 1942-43 winter, he crossed the Volga under enemy fire to speak with General Vasily Chuikov. The river measured three-quarters of a mile wide and was full of ice floes at the time. Before undertaking the trip, Grossman wrote to Ortenberg to ask that his family be looked after in case he didn't return.⁴³

⁴⁰ For a summary and excerpts of *Stepan Kol'chugin*, see Garrard and Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev*, 41, 49-50, 54, 58-61, 140.

⁴¹ His daughter recalled that that a Stalingrad veteran had once marveled to her that Grossman had been able to draw an entire platoon into a general conversation (Grossman, *The Road*, 65).

⁴² See his famous piece on this encounter, "Glazami Chekova" (Through the Eyes of Chekov), published in *Krasnaia zvezda* in November 1942, and reprinted in *Gody Voiny* (1945), 224-232.

⁴³ GV 89: 400 / AWW, 196-197.

Although he often managed to write powerfully and honestly about combatants in his *Krasnaia zvezda* articles, Grossman knew that the required emphasis on heroism and victory in the media was meant to mask the truth about the Soviet side's devastating losses of lives, material and territory. One of his diary entries echoed Babel's poetic and dark view of wartorn Poland as a "decrepit body shrouded in glittering garments," as Babel had put it in July 1920.⁴⁴ Similarly, in January 1942, Grossman described the disparity between the reality of the war, and the way he knew it had to be depicted: "The blood-soaked body of war is being dressed in snow-white robes of ideological, strategic and artistic convention," he wrote. "There are those who saw the retreat and those who dressed it."⁴⁵

Just as he knew that Soviet losses had been falsified by ideological "convention," Grossman also knew that calamities only sporadically reported in the media had befallen the country's civilians, and especially Jews, under German occupation. His diary and personal letters from 1941 and 1942 reveal his private motive for learning as much as possible about the treatment of Jews under Nazi rule: he wanted to know what had happened to his mother.

In the two weeks between June 22 and the German capture of Berdichev on July 7, 1941, Grossman had been unable to evacuate his mother to live with him in Moscow, the city where he and his father (who had separated from his mother during

⁴⁴ Isaac Babel, *Dnevnik 1920 goda*, in *Sochineniia v 2kh tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), vol. 1: 395.

⁴⁵ GV 89: 314 / AWW, 96.

Grossman's early youth) both lived.⁴⁶ Although he did not know it then, this decision would haunt him throughout the war, and indeed, for the rest of his life. In a letter to her son dated May 25, 1941 and sent from Berdichev, Grossman's mother recalled World War I as a prologue to the present, and expressed an ominous foreboding:

"The thing I feared most has happened. The past is repeating itself again. I remember how our apartment in Kiev burned after being shelled...I am certain that that bastard [Hitler] especially hates Berdichev for its Jewish population. But whatever will be, will be. I feel neither lonely nor abandoned."⁴⁷

Yet within weeks after the war broke out Grossman did feel as if he had abandoned his mother. His concern for her ran like a "red thread" through his wartime letters and diary.⁴⁸ On October 7, 1941, after a brief return to Moscow from the front, he wrote, "I spoke with Papa about my biggest worry, but I don't write about it. It is in my heart day and night. Is she alive? No! I know, I feel this."⁴⁹ In a letter of August 19, 1942 to his father Grossman wrote that "I am tormented by the thought about Mama's fate."⁵⁰ A sense of dread haunted his subconscious as well. In another letter of March 20, 1943 he confided to his father that

"I see Mama in my dreams. She was right in front of my eyes, and so vivid, the whole night while I was traveling. After this I felt very strange all of the following day. No, I don't believe she is still alive. I travel around all the time around areas that have been liberated, and I see what these accursed monsters have done to old people and children. And Mama was Jewish. A desire to exchange my pen for a rifle is getting stronger and stronger in me."⁵¹

⁴⁶ Garrard and Garrard suggest that Grossman's wife was partially at fault, because she opposed having his mother live in their Moscow apartment (*The Bones of Berdichev*, 136-138).

⁴⁷ Published in F.B. Guber, *Pamiat' i pis'ma: Kniga o Vasilii Grossmane* (Moscow: Probel-2000, 2007), 88.

⁴⁸ The language is taken from Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train*, 183.

⁴⁹ GV 89: 290 / AWW, 58.

⁵⁰ AWW, 113; for a discussion and excerpts of Grossman's letters to his father during the war see Garrard and Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev*, 174-176.

⁵¹ Ekaterina Vasilievna Korotkova-Grossman Papers, as found in AWW, 224.

What did Grossman see in these travels in early 1943? What led him to abandon the belief that she was still alive? He knew what other Soviet citizens had read in papers and heard on the radio over the previous two years: that the Nazis were slaughtering as many Jews as they could find. The Red Army soldier Gabriel Temkin recalled that he knew something about the occupied territories well before arriving there as a liberator: "Although I could find few details in the available newspapers...I had a pretty good idea of the calamity that had befallen the Jews under the Germans"—in part, he remembered, from reading Grossman's "Ukraine without Jews" at the end of 1943.⁵² This calamity too was a "blood-soaked body of war." And although the Soviet media dressed it according to ideological convention, many gruesome facts had already begun and would continue to reach the public during liberation. Despite his desire to take up a rifle, Grossman used his pen for revenge.

Mobilizing Hatred, Preparing for Justice: Collecting and Publicizing Information about Nazi Atrocities in Occupied Soviet Territory, June 1941-December 1942

Prior to the liberation of occupied territory, information about Nazi atrocities against Jews came from multiple sources. These included public statements by prominent Soviet Jews, as well as Soviet government statements, both of which circulated in the Soviet media and abroad. These statements often relied on information from partisans, NKVD cells behind enemy lines, escapees, and discoveries in territories that were briefly recaptured by the Red Army.⁵³ The

⁵² Gabriel Temkin, *My Just War: The Memoir of a Jewish Red Army Soldier in World War II* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1998), 160.

⁵³ See Kiril Feferman, "Soviet Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR: Documenting the Holocaust," *Journal of Genocide Research* 5: 4 (2003): 587–602, here 588. The underground NKVD

Sovinformbiuro itself closely monitored and framed information about Nazi atrocities with a specific political intent: to mobilize the public's hatred of the fascist enemy and to prepare a case for post-war reparations from Germany. Journalists were charged with documenting atrocities, and after its formation in November 1942, the ChGK played the primary role in institutionalizing this task. As we will see, the ChGK served as a frame of reference for journalists like Grossman, as well as for groups like EAK, who also drew attention to the Jewishness of the victims in their public statements and printed works about Nazi atrocities.

Prominent Soviet Jews began issuing public statements about Hitler's exterminationist intentions starting in August 1941 and continuing until December 1944.⁵⁴ These often occurred in the context of meetings of "representatives" of various groups (women and other non-Russian nationalities, for example), which the Sovinformbiuro organized to mobilize support for the war effort both domestically and abroad. The first meeting of Jewish representatives took place in Moscow on August 24, 1941.⁵⁵ Transcripts from the meeting reached Soviet audiences through radio broadcasts and a two-page report in *Pravda* published August 25, 1941.⁵⁶ At the meeting, the brilliant Yiddish theater director Solomon Mikhoels had declared that

reports that reached Soviet authorities have been published in *Dokumenty obviniaiat. Kholokost: Svidetel'stva Krasnoi Armii*, ed. F.D. Sverdlov (Moscow: Nauchno-prosvetitelnyi tsentr "Kholokost," 1996).

⁵⁴ See Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 136-139.

⁵⁵ The meeting is discussed in Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Anti-fascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1982), 40-42.

⁵⁶ See "Brat'ia evrei vsego mira!" *Pravda* (August 25, 1941), 3-4; the article and statements from the meeting are cited from *Evreiskii antifashistskii komitet v SSSR, 1941-1948: Dokumentirovannaia istoriia*, eds. Shimon Redlich and Gennadii Kostyrchenko (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1996), 36-47.

Hitler was planning the "total annihilation of the Jewish people," while Yiddish poet Perets Markish lamented that "all that remains of shtetls and cities where Jews have lived for a millennium are mounds of corpses and ashes."⁵⁷ And in now-famous remarks, Erenburg claimed that he had been raised in a Russian city, spoke Russian as a native tongue, and was now defending his motherland in battle. But the Nazis had reminded him of something else: "My mother's name was Hannah...I am a Jew," he said. "I say this with pride. Hitler hates us more than anyone."⁵⁸ His remarks reflected widespread sentiments among Soviet Jewry: a combination of fervent patriotism and a heightened sense of solidarity with the Nazis' Jewish victims. Grossman would have undoubtedly related to these sentiments.

After the founding of EAK in January 1942, its leaders continued to speak in public about the country's Jewish wartime tragedy. As Gabriel Temkin remembered, news of their activities occasionally reached soldiers behind the front.⁵⁹ EAK's Yiddish newspaper, *Eynikayt*, established in June 1942, also published eyewitness accounts of Nazi atrocities. From June 1942 to March 1943, it was the paper's second most reported topic, after the participation of Jews in the Red Army.⁶⁰

Articles that identified Jews as Nazi victims also appeared, albeit rarely, in the Soviet media. One was published on November 29, 1941 in *Pravda*, with the title

⁵⁷ Ibid., 37-39.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁹ Temkin, *My Just War*, 93.

⁶⁰ Dov-Ber Kerler, "The Soviet Yiddish Press: *Eynikayt* During the War, 1942-1945," in *Why Didn't the Press Shout? American and International Journalism during the Holocaust: A Collection of Papers Originally Presented at an International Conference Sponsored by the Elia and Diana Zborowski Professorial Chair in Interdisciplinary Holocaust Studies, Yeshiva University, October 1995*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Hoboken: Yeshiva University Press in association with KTAV Publishing House, 2003), 221-149, here 225-226. Originally published in *Eynikayt* (March 15, 1943), 3.

"What Is Happening in Kiev."⁶¹ The German occupation had begun in Kiev on September 19, 1941. Within ten days, bombs that had been set by the retreating NKVD exploded in the city center, causing major fires and homelessness. The Germans immediately accused the Jews of setting the fires. The *Pravda* article indicated that in a reprisal "pogrom," the Germans immediately killed "52,000 peaceful residents of Kiev," among them Jews, Russians and Ukrainians. The perpetrators, in addition to the "German fascists," were described as "Petliurite assistants," a euphemism for the Nazis' local Ukrainian collaborators and reference to Symon Petliura, whose followers carried out anti-Jewish pogroms in Ukraine during the Russian Civil War.⁶²

Despite the formulaic depiction of the victims as "peaceful residents," the article did include information that revealed the identities of the Nazis' primary victims. For example, the article cited from the September 28 decree that the Germans had posted throughout Kiev which stated explicitly that "all Jews living in Kiev were ordered to appear with their belongings at 79 Mel'nik Street," supposedly to be evacuated. But as the *Pravda* reporter clarified, "the pogrom-mongers (*pogromshchiki*) were thinking not of evacuation, but of murder."⁶³ The report continued that the thousands of Jews who appeared on September 29 were led down Mel'nik Street and shot near the Luk'ianovski cemetery (the site of the Jewish and Christian cemeteries before the war, in a location adjacent to Babi Yar ravine). Using

⁶¹ P. Stepanenko, "Chto proiskhodit v Kieve (Ot spetsial'nogo korrespondenta 'Krasnoi zvezdy')," *Pravda* (November 29, 1941), 3.

⁶² Ibid. On the first two weeks of German occupation in Kiev, see Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 24-34.

⁶³ Stepanenko, "Chto proiskhodit."

indirect and thinly veiled terms, the *Pravda* article sketched the basic facts about the murder of thousands of Jews in Kiev's northwestern outskirts in late September 1941.⁶⁴

On January 6, 1942, about six weeks after the article about Kiev appeared, Soviet Foreign Minister Viacheslav Molotov sent a detailed report about German atrocities against his country's civilians and POWs to all countries that maintained diplomatic ties with the USSR. With Molotov's report, in fact, the Soviet government became the first among the Allied Powers to publicize the mass murders of Jews in German-occupied territories. The following day, *Pravda* published the report on its front and inside pages. On the inside page, towards the end of the lengthy report, the following description of atrocities at Babi Yar appeared:

"A large number of Jews, including women and children of all ages, were assembled together in the Jewish cemetery. Before shooting, all of them were stripped naked and beaten. The first group selected for shooting were forced to lie face down on the bottom of the pit and were shot with automatic rifles. The Germans sprinkled earth over the victims. Then the second party of Jews were made to lie down and were shot with automatic rifles. Many mass murders were committed by the German-Fascist invaders in other Ukrainian towns...Lvov...Odessa...Kamianets-Podol'sk...Dnepropetrovsk...Mariupol...Kerch."⁶⁵

Grossman could have learned how Nazis were killing Jews through rare, but graphic descriptions like this one, and from statements by his well-known acquaintances like Erenburg and Mikhoels. He also gathered information through his

⁶⁴ The figure for victims at Babi Yar is taken from Kruglov, "Jewish Losses in Ukraine," 275. The number is drawn from the Einsatzgruppen report.

⁶⁵ "Nota Narodnogo komissara inostrannykh del tov. V. M. Molotova: O povsemestnykh grabezhakh, razorenii naseleniia i chudovishchnykh zverstvakh germanskikh vlastei na zakhvachennykh imi sovetskikh territoriakh," *Pravda* (January 7, 1942), 1-2 (quotation on p. 2); the report was reprinted in *Izvestiia* (January 8, 1942). Molotov's report has been published in *Soviet Government Statements on Nazi Atrocities* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1946) (passage appears on 22).

own encounters with people in the military who, like himself, had close relatives behind German lines. In January of 1942, he visited a brigade in the 37th Division, twenty-five miles south of Khar'kov. There he met Commanding General of the 6th Guards Tank Brigade Abram Khasin. In his diary, Grossman wrote that

"I was told back at the front headquarters that Khasin's family had all been killed in Kerch by Germans carrying out a mass execution of civilians. Purely by chance, Khasin saw photographs of the dead people lying in a ditch and recognized his wife and children. I was thinking, what does he feel when he leads his tanks into the fighting?"⁶⁶

Grossman referred to a "mass execution of civilians," but surely he knew that a large number of the "dead people lying in a ditch" were Jews. The German Army had occupied Kerch, a major city on eastern edge of the Crimean peninsula with a significant prewar Jewish population, between November 16 and December 31, 1941. The SS immediately registered between 10,000 and 12,000 Jews in the region, and on November 28, ordered them to appear at Sennaia Square to be sent away for work; the next morning, nearly 7,000 people showed up. During the first week of December, the SS drove the Jews to an anti-tank ditch four kilometers to the west of the city and shot them.⁶⁷ The Soviet Army discovered the bodies when they liberated the region on December 31, 1941, and as Grossman's January diary entry reveals, news of the atrocities spread quickly.

In his study of Soviet Jewish photojournalists, David Shneer has written that Kerch was "one of the first places where Soviet soldiers, journalists, and photog-

⁶⁶ GV 89: 335/AWW 105.

⁶⁷ Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 206-207. An eyewitness testimony from Iosif Vaingartner, a fisherman from Kerch who survived the massacre, is included in *The Black Book*: "Rasskaz rybolova Iosif Vaingertnera iz Kerchi," *Chernaia kniga*, 202-205.

raphers saw with their own eyes the effects of Nazi occupation."⁶⁸ It is significant, however, that when photographs of the mass grave taken by Dmitrii Baltermants were published in the illustrated journal *Ogonek* (Flame), the accompanying story did not mention "Jews." Rather, as Shneer argues, readers would have found clues in the photograph captions, which described the people in them searching for their relatives, including those with Jewish-sounding names (in one case, Kogan, the Russian pronunciation of "Cohen").⁶⁹ The reports about the Kerch massacre revealed the tendency of Soviet media reports to omit mention of the victims' identities as Jews. But if they looked for this information, Soviet readers would have found it in the fine print. In tragic cases like the example Grossman cited of Khasin, who recognized his wife and children in the images, no captions were needed.

Scholars have addressed the question of why the Soviet media "buried" the Holocaust (or frequently omitted mention of Jewish victims *per se*) in a number of studies.⁷⁰ They have pointed to several factors. First, Stalin's often repeated dictum "do not divide the dead" reflected a statistical reality: the estimated 2.7 million Jewish victims represented a mere tenth of the nearly 27 million Soviet citizens killed during the war, among them troops, POWs and civilians of all nationalities.⁷¹ To grant Jews an equal, or even higher status than all other Soviet peoples on the totem pole of

⁶⁸ Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 100-101. On the Kerch photographs see *idem.*, 100-108.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 105. Baltermants took the photographs in early January but they were not published in *Ogonek* until March 2, 1942.

⁷⁰ On the politics and social impact of commemoration during and after the war, see Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 160-166; Gitelman, "Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust, 1945-1991."

⁷¹ This is based on the estimate of 2.7 million Jews killed in occupied Soviet territory (*op. cit.*). The total number of Soviet citizen casualties is a debated topic.

martyrdom would have disturbed what historian Nina Tumarkin has called the wartime "psychological economy of suffering."⁷² Others have reasoned that Stalin's concealment of anti-Jewish atrocities may have expressed the dictator's benign intent to deflect and undermine existing anti-Jewish sentiment in the USSR.⁷³

Indeed, the rise of social anti-Semitism during the war is also a factor that explains the taboos that arose against identifying the Nazis' Jewish victims as such. The wartime canard that Soviet Jews were serving as "Tashkent partisans" (that is, safely living out the war as evacuees in Central Asia rather than fighting) epitomized a disparaging perception of Jews, and one that Grossman and Erenburg had heard even from the mouths of liberal intellectuals whom they personally admired. As a reflection of growing anti-Jewish sentiments, a conspicuous number of high-level actions were taken in mid-1943 to remove Jews from prominent posts in Soviet cultural life and journalism.⁷⁴ This climate cast a shadow over the media's ability to discuss the suffering of Jews.

Yet in order to understand why the Soviet media did not often identify Jews as the Nazis' first or only victims, it is also important to know more about the broader context of Soviet wartime propaganda, and how the publicity of atrocities figured in the state's larger political schemes. As noted earlier, Stalin took steps from the first

⁷² Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 50.

⁷³ Berkhoff makes this argument, following Peter Novick's approach to explaining the wartime censorship of Holocaust reportage in the United States and Great Britain, in *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000).

⁷⁴ The firing of David Ortenberg from *Krasnaia zvezda* in the summer of 1943 is often cited as evidence of this trend. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 162-164. Shneer (*Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 124), points out that despite these purges, Jews continued working at all levels of the Soviet media after the war.

days of the war to control the collection and publicity of information about Nazi atrocities against the Soviet people. It has been established that he knew from reports dated as early as August 1941 that the Nazis were killing as many Jews as they could get their hands on. Yet he and other authorities saw no reason to reveal this information to the public because (in addition to the factors mentioned above), they regarded the suffering of Jews as inconsequential unless it could provide pragmatic value for the Soviet war effort. This attitude was not particularly geared towards the Jews, but rather, an expression of the state's generally low regard for the value of its citizens' lives, including its civilians and POWs.

The Soviet media thus described the wartime suffering of its civilians in instrumental and Manichean terms. Journalists (including notably Erenburg) often relied on references to German atrocities as a tool to mobilize a sense of righteous fury and foment hatred for the "evil" and "barbaric" Germans among "our people," the "innocent" public and Red Army troops.⁷⁵ The mass murder of Soviet civilians represented capital for the country's existential *and* mythic struggle with Germany, not a subject that deserved commemoration in its own right.

The following two examples illustrate the "uses" of enemy atrocities in Soviet wartime propaganda. They also provide the necessary context for understanding the responses of Jewish journalists like Grossman, and why they would have felt compelled to document anti-Jewish atrocities on their own terms.

⁷⁵ Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*. See also Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia* (London: Granta, 2002).

On July 12, 1942, GlavPUR's Propaganda Division issued a directive to the heads of party officials on each front. It demanded that journalists "carefully collect material...showing evidence of atrocities of the enemy to prisoners and injured Red Army soldiers, commanders and political workers and to the population." Journalists were to take photographs of "those tortured by the enemy or other victims, whether soldiers or civilians, photographs of cities, cultural institutions, historical sites, and hospitals destroyed or burned down by the occupiers." Moreover, journalists were to seek out testimonies from victims of enemy atrocities, all of which should "include signatures of the victims or those giving testimonies and should be approved by local Party and Soviet organizations or political organizations."⁷⁶ The order concluded by stating the explicit purpose of the materials. They would be published in order to "raise the hatred of each Red Army person and of the whole population to the enemy," and to prepare Soviet citizenry to mete out "merciless vengeance" for the suffering of "our people."⁷⁷

Soviet authorities regarded the publicity of Nazi atrocities as "useful" not only for the immediate purposes of wartime mobilization, but also for preparing grounds for the future influence they hoped to exercise in countries abroad—precisely those countries on its western flanks that the Germans had occupied during the war. The formation in November 1942 of the ChGK embodied this goal.⁷⁸ The ten-person

⁷⁶ Cited in Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 109. Original archival document (TsAMO f. 32, op. 920265, d. 5, t. 2, ll. 534-5) is published in V.A. Zolotarev et. al., *Velikaia Otechestvennaia* (Moscow: Terra, 1996), 161.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ M. A. Sorokina, "People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6:4 (2005): 797-831, here 801. On

executive committee of the ChGK was populated with prominent academicians, legal experts, doctors and writers. The figures were carefully selected with the intent to legitimate the ChKG's documentary efforts in the eyes of international public opinion. Its committee members were known by colleagues in their respective fields abroad, and their reputations were legitimated by their lack of formal ties to the Party. Erenburg, for example, was among those shortlisted for the central commission in October 1942, but did not make the final cut.⁷⁹

Scholar Marina Sorokina has argued that the academic veneer created for the ChGK concealed its real purposes, which she describes as follows: first, to transfer blame for Stalin's crimes (such as the mass murder of 22,000 Polish officers and nationals at Katyn) on to Hitler; second, to purposefully distort data about the Holocaust; and finally, to ensure Soviet control over the representation of the atrocities that Nazis had carried out in precisely those countries where Soviet authorities were planning a postwar future for themselves.⁸⁰

Despite having been shot through with propaganda objectives, the ChGK amassed the single largest repository of material about Nazi crimes in the occupied USSR. One hundred ChGK commissions operating in various union republics produced reports based on extensive forensic examinations of mass graves. Teams of

the ChGK see also Feferman, "Soviet Investigation of Nazi Crimes"; Marian R. Sanders, "Extraordinary Crimes in Ukraine: An Examination of Evidence Collection by the Extraordinary State Commission of the U.S.S.R., 1942–1946," (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio University, 1995).

⁷⁹ Sorokina, "People and Procedures," 814 note 54.

⁸⁰ Sorokina writes that "reports connected with the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet territories, confirmed that some of the information published by the ChGK was the result of conscious and purposeful falsification on the part of Stalinist propagandists" ("People and Procedures," 804). She refers to Lev A. Bezymenskii, "Informatsiia po-sovetski," *Znamia* 5 (May 1998): 191–99.

doctors, scientists and other forensic experts collected 54,000 statements, more than 250,000 interrogations (*doprośy*) from eyewitnesses, and nearly four million documents. However, from this collection, only twenty-seven reports were published for domestic and foreign consumption.⁸¹ The remainder of the ChGK archive was transferred to archives and closed to researchers. Newly available in the post-Soviet period, they now constitute, in Sorokina's words, "the latest Russian mass grave."⁸²

This brief overview of the GlavPUR order and the ChGK is important for our purposes because, as I am arguing, these institutions inadvertently provided a frame of reference, both positive and negative, for Jewish writers like Grossman and groups like EAK. The ChGK set an example as a major archival source that developed ostensibly objective methods for documenting atrocities. On the other hand, the ChGK falsified and omitted information about Jewish victims. In a sample of ChGK reports he examined, for example, Kiril Feferman found that no uniform policy to collect testimony about Jewish victims as such existed.⁸³ Rather, in keeping with its mandate to create propaganda in support of Soviet goals abroad, the ChGK used legal, scientific, and universalizing discourse about Nazi atrocities, without accounting for the fate of Jews *per se*.

Clearly, Jewish writers would have interpreted the meaning of civilian deaths under German occupation in very different terms than did the Soviet state and

⁸¹ Seventeen ChGK reports, published in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* from April 1943 to May 1945 are discussed in Solomon Shwarts, *Evrei v Sovetskom Soiuzie s Nachala Vtoroi Mirovoi Voyny, 1939–1965* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), 136–153.

⁸² Sorokina, "People and Procedures," 831. On the availability of ChGK material about the Holocaust in the post-Soviet period, see John Garrard, "The Nazi Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Interpreting Newly Opened Russian Archives," *East European Jewish Affairs* 25:2 (1995): 5–25.

⁸³ Feferman, "Soviet Investigation of Nazi Crimes," 592.

Communist Party. Consequently, they began to envision what could be called a distinctly Jewish approach—both in method and principle—for collecting information about Nazi atrocities. Thus, when EAK convened for a plenary session in mid-February 1943, the writer Noyakh Lurye praised the Red Army's rapid advances across Ukraine. He then proceeded to exhort members of the committee to take part in the liberation process as follows:

"We, Jewish writers, must be there when cities are liberated. We must walk in the fresh and bloody footsteps that our brothers walked. We must meet the survivors. Perhaps remnants of the local Jewish population have survived. We must come to those who have suffered and listen to their stories, and hear about the murderous actions of the Germans, and write them down...we must come to those have been liberated by the Red Army and offer them substantive help and warmth. We must carry the burden with them together."⁸⁴

These formidable proscriptions held little propagandistic value. Indeed, this mandate suggested not only a course of actions, but also an identity for the Jewish writers themselves. The Jewish writer, asserted Lurye, should be able to listen to and empathize with the emotional suffering that survivors had endured and continued to bear; they should "walk the path" of the victims. They could not remain objective or dispassionate observers, for as Jews, they too had lost family members. By virtue of their identities as Jews, they were implicated in the act of bearing witness to, and even serving a therapeutic function in the recovery of fellow Jews who had escaped death. ChGK workers might treat Jewish victims as sources of information; but as fellow Jews, Lurye pointed to the need for writers to make a human connection with individual survivors. The editor of *Eynikayt*, Shakhno Epshteyn echoed these ideas: "I

⁸⁴ "Iz stenogramm vystuplenii na plenum EAK, 18-20 fevralia 1943 g.," in Redlich and Kostyrchenko, eds., *Evreiskii antifashistskii komitet v SSSR*, 71. These statements were also published in Yiddish, in *Eynikayt* (March 15, 1943).

propose that we send Jewish writers to the liberated territories. This is extraordinarily important."⁸⁵

Psychiatrist Dori Laub has theorized about the act of giving and listening to testimony. His ideas apply with great force to Lurye's points above, as well as to the role that Soviet Jewish writers like Grossman played during and after liberation:

"The listener to the narrative of extreme human pain, of massive psychic trauma...comes to look for something that is in fact nonexistent; a record that has yet to be made...The victim's narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to...an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence...The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer...[on whom] the event comes to be inscribed for the first time...By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event...so that [it] can assume the form of testimony. The listener, however, is also a separate human being...While overlapping to a degree, with the experience of the victim, he nonetheless does not become the victim—he preserves his own separate place, position and perspective."⁸⁶

These ideas are critically important for understanding the historical role that Grossman and fellow Soviet Jewish writers played as chroniclers of Jewish catastrophe, as well as the distinct identity that they fashioned in order to carry out this role. Whereas Babel had masked his identity as a Jew while seeking out victims' stories, now, it was imperative for writers to reveal themselves. Their presence as listeners, and as fellow Jews, would enable traumatized victims to speak their testimonies and perhaps through the process to also share the burden of their grief. Yet the writer also had to maintain an outside perspective in order to fulfill a second

⁸⁵ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁶ Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening," in *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, eds. Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 221-226 (here 221-222).

function—that of creating a "record that has yet to be made," and of narrating and publicizing the record of the victim's experiences for a larger audience.

To be sure, members of the EAK were far from unanimous in their view of survivors, as well as how they identified themselves in relation to the victims. Also in attendance at the February 1943 meeting was David Zaslavskii, the same Zaslavskii whom we met in Chapter 3, who in 1915 had written a section of Dubnov's "Black Book." In the intervening years between World War I and World War II, Zaslavskii had become a highly placed figure in the Soviet cultural establishment. A Party member since 1934, he now specialized in the public denunciation of intellectuals and was a prominent contributor to *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*. In addition to serving the state and Party, he also chose to serve on the editorial board of *The Black Book* during the war.

In contrast to Lurye's sympathetic approach to survivors, Zaslavskii's opinions reflected the views of the ideological establishment, which regarded citizens who had remained in German-occupied territory with suspicion: why had they not fled? And if they had survived, how did they survive?⁸⁷ In December 1943 Zaslavskii attended one of the first war crimes trials in the Soviet Union, held in Khar'kov, and saw firsthand where the Nazis had incarcerated and murdered the city's Jews. He wrote in his private diary on December 10: "There is no doubt that the Jews left behind were the least solid and worthy part of Soviet Jewry, the part that more and more lost both personal and national dignity." Furthermore, he held the Jews as partially accountable

⁸⁷ Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, Chapter 9, and esp. 223-224.

for their own deaths: "any Jew who, for whatever reason, did not flee from the Germans and did not kill himself, condemned himself to death." Those who had kept their children with them had condemned them to death as well, and Zaslavskii considered them "traitors."⁸⁸ However, his condescending views clearly represented the minority, and his influence was marginal compared to that of Erenburg, who served as editor of *The Black Book*.

Erenburg had already begun to carry out the principles that Lurye articulated at the same February 1943 plenary meeting. Indeed, Jews throughout Soviet territory knew that Erenburg was working on a book about German crimes against Jews.⁸⁹ They saw him as a collector of Jewish stories, and someone who had the political power to be able to convey them to a larger audience. Jewish Red Army troops and survivors in hundreds of locations sent letters addressed to Erenburg to the offices of EAK and *Krasnaia zvezda*. As a result, he amassed an archive of testimonies, photographs, newspaper clippings, and many other types of documents for the planned *Black Book* and other collections of documents, including one called "Murderers of Peoples," which he published in Russian and Yiddish versions in 1944.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ RGALI f. 2846, op. 1, d. 80, l. 10 / USHMM RG-22.006M*03, p. 12. Erenburg also reported on the Khar'kov trials in *Pravda* from December 17 to 19, 1943.

⁸⁹ Erenburg's war archive is now at Yad Vashem Archive (YVA). For evidence that Jews knew Erenburg was working on a book about German atrocities, see letter from B. Cherniakova to Erenburg, n.d., sent from Liozno, Belarus, YVA P. 21.1.35, pp. 1-4.

⁹⁰ Selections of letters sent to Erenburg are published in *Sovetskie evrei pishut Il'e Erenburgu: 1943-1966*, eds. Mordechai Altshuler et. al. (Jerusalem: The Centre for Research and Documentation of East-European Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, 1993). Erenburg published almost identical collections of documents in Russian, as "Narodoubiitsy," *Znamia* 1-2 (March 1944): 185-196; and in Yiddish, *Murder fun felker*, 2 vol. (Moscow: Der Emes, 1944-1945). Il'ia Al'tman concludes that members of EAK did not regard

Aside from the work of documenting survivors' stories, EAK undertook a number of "unauthorized" humanitarian efforts in the attempt to "carry the burden" together with survivors from the western provinces, notably, for example, issuing a proposal to establish a refuge for Jews in the Crimea. The combination of humanitarian and documentary efforts conducted under EAK's auspices bore striking parallels with the goals of Russian Jewry during World War I to aid, rescue, and represent Jewish war victims.

Erenburg recruited Grossman to officially join *The Black Book* literary commission in the fall of 1943. The actions that Grossman undertook to chronicle Jewish mass death, both independently and in concert with Erenburg and the EAK, would also fulfill the precepts that had been formulated at the EAK meeting in February 1943. Grossman attempted to listen to Jewish survivors (as well as non-Jewish bystanders), share their grief, create records of their experiences, and mediate their tremendously difficult experiences to the reading public.

Return to Ukraine

The tides of war on the Eastern Front turned on November 26, 1942 when the Red Army launched a counterattack at Stalingrad. By February 2, 1943, the Soviets had encircled nearly 300,000 enemy combatants and began an offensive that ended more than two years later in Berlin. Grossman attributed profound moral significance to the Soviet liberation of German-occupied territory. He viewed the offensive as the sole factor that kept the Nazis from being able to destroy all traces of their crimes:

these texts as part of *The Black Book* ("Toward the History of the Black Book," *Yad Vashem Studies* vol. 21 [1991], 236 n.30).

"The Red Army," he declared in 1944, "is what prevented Himmler from hiding the secret of Treblinka!"⁹¹ It was journalists like himself who first saw and wrote about Treblinka who further ensured that the camp's existence would not remain a secret.

During 1943, the first year of liberation, Grossman published three works describing Nazi crimes against Jews in Ukraine: the short story "The Old Teacher" in July, an October article for *Krasnaia zvezda*, and in late November, the essay "Ukraine without Jews." In the latter essay, he issued a sweeping statement declaring that the Nazis had annihilated the country's Jewish population: "the Jews in Ukraine are silent. In Ukraine there are no Jews."⁹² How did Grossman, along with other Soviet Jewish journalists, come to and respond to this realization? In what ways did Grossman and other Jewish journalists move beyond their professional duties, such as collecting photographs, documents and testimonies for GlavPUR or their publishers, to create a particularly Jewish approach to chronicling catastrophe?

For Grossman, as for other Soviet Jewish journalists, the first encounters with what had been their hometowns proved to be personally traumatic. This compelled them to seek out stories and write down whatever they could learn from locals. Secondly, as a journalist, Grossman was aware of the need to collect evidence of the Nazis' crimes. Third, his writings revealed doubts as to whether the events could be adequately represented or understood, yet he still attempted to do just that. Through the power of imagination and empathy, Grossman sought to place readers in the position of witnesses.

⁹¹ Grossman, "Treblinskii ad," 124.

⁹² Grossman, "Ukraina bez Evreev," 2.

During Grossman's first visits to villages near Stalingrad liberated in late 1942 and early 1943, he began to learn about life and death under German occupation. In Elista, he wrote in his diary that Germans had killed 93 Jewish families and smeared the children's lips with poison, but did not specify any other details.⁹³ Further west, ChGK commissions began to uncover mass graves. The Soviet media publicized one of the commission's reports about a grave, discovered on April 15, 1943 outside Voroshilovgrad (now Luhans'k), which contained the bodies of between 1,800 and 3,000 Jews whom the Germans had shot in November 1942.⁹⁴ Grossman referred to this site in "Ukraine without Jews": "if the murdered people could be revived for an instant, if the ground above...Ostraia Mogila in Voroshilovgrad could be lifted, if a penetrating cry came forth from hundreds and thousands of lips covered in soil, then the universe would shudder."⁹⁵

By August 28, 1943, Grossman had reached Khar'kov; in October he was within striking distance of Kiev. It is roughly at this point in the fall of 1943 that Soviet Jewish journalists and Red Army troops began a journey across the historic region of Jewish residence, the former Pale of Settlement that An-sky had traversed more than two decades earlier. The Red Army's advances brought many of the troops and journalists back to their native towns. For some, their fears and suspicions were confirmed by the empty and silent landscapes they found. Grossman, as we saw, had

⁹³ GV 89: 367 / AWW, 208.

⁹⁴ The exhumation report is published in *Dokumenty obviniauiut: Sbornik dokumentov o chudovishchnykh zversstvakh germanskikh vlastei na vremennno zakhvachennykh imi sovetskikh territoriiakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow: OGIZ, 1945), 115-116; and in English, in *Nazi Crimes in Ukraine*, 54-55. The radio report was broadcast no later than August 5, 1943 (Pohl, "The Murder of Ukraine's Jews," 73 note 201).

⁹⁵ Grossman, "Ukraina bez Evreev," 8.

written of vivid dreams about his mother in March 1943. Similarly, in March 1944, as the Red Army advanced across southern Ukraine towards the Romanian border, Gabriel Temkin remembered that "more and more often I had dreams about my mother—all dreadful."⁹⁶ Writers' descriptions of their first encounters also conveyed a sense of cognitive dissonance: the ruined streets and buildings they saw were intimately familiar from their youth, and at the same time wholly estranged. The origin of the terrible silence that greeted them in every newly liberated town was like a mystery that they sought to unravel.

The photojournalist Evgenii Khaldei had worried about his family in Stalino (now Donetsk) since the fall of 1941: "Where are they and why are they silent? Did they flee? I just don't know...It's impossible for me to imagine that Germans are roaming the streets of my hometown."⁹⁷ In January 1942, Khaldei's sister told him that their father and other siblings had been killed. When he returned to Stalino in 1943, he learned of the ravine where they had been shot, and later described the visit as a major trauma. Similarly, soldier Yosef Govrin witnessed the liberation of Vinnytsia district while serving with the Red Army's Third Ukrainian Army Group in March 1944. Govrin spoke about the return home to his native Edintsy as "extremely traumatic...a town in which 200 to 300 [people] remained, out of about 8,000."⁹⁸ And when Erenburg entered his native Kiev hours after it was liberated in October 1943,

⁹⁶ Temkin, *My Just War*, 160.

⁹⁷ Cited in Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 148.

⁹⁸ Cited in Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 345.

he recalled that "I never felt so orphaned as I did standing at Babi Yar, where I imagined my friends and family lying in the sand."⁹⁹

Grossman repeatedly described the first moments of liberation from Nazi occupation as a jarring encounter with silence. The Red Army might have expected grateful cries and cheering joyous citizens, but in some places they heard nothing. Grossman opened "Ukraine without Jews" stating that even the sound of human suffering was more bearable, for "[t]his silence is more horrifying than tears and curses; it is a silence more terrifying than moans and piercing lamentation."¹⁰⁰

The horror of silence also struck the Jewish journalist Efim Gekhman, a close friend of Grossman's and fellow reporter for *Krasnaia zvezda*.¹⁰¹ In March 1944, Gekhman arranged for a transfer to the front in Vinnytsia district in order to see his hometown, Brailov. He arrived on March 23, after walking ten kilometers on a swollen foot during the *rasputitsa* (mud season). In a Yiddish essay published in *Eynikayt* and later translated into Russian for *The Black Book*, he wrote that

"more than once I had entered recently liberated cities...I traveled the road from the Volga to the Carpathians with the Red Army. Stalingrad was destroyed before my eyes...by now the site of ruins hardly surprised me. But what I encountered in my hometown shook me to the core...The village was completely intact; there was even glass in the windows of many houses. But I did not meet a single living person. My footsteps sent a lonely echo throughout this wilderness. To realize what this meant, one had to know the customs of cities and shtetls in the south. The main street had always been a

⁹⁹ Il'ia Erenburg, *Liudi, Gody, Zhizn'*, ed. B. Ia. Frezinskii, 3 vol. (Moscow: Tekst, 2005), 1: 295.

¹⁰⁰ Grossman, "Ukraine on Yidn," *Eynikayt* (November 25, 1943), 3 / "Ukraina bez Evreev," 2.

¹⁰¹ David Ortenberg recalled several instances when Grossman praised Gekhman's bravery at Stalingrad (*Sorok tretii* [Moscow: Politizdat, 1991], 313-328). For more on Grossman and Gekhman's friendship at Stalingrad, see AWW, 174, 180. The two men reached Berlin in May 1945 and were photographed together at the Brandenburg Gates (Testimony of Oskar B., Saratov, Russia, interview code 42890, segment 275, *USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education*).

place to meet and go for walks. Now I was the only one walking the streets."¹⁰²

Gekhman had not lived in Brailov for many years; indeed, he admitted that the once-familiar foods, faces and language of the town were things "I had managed to forget."¹⁰³ But he instinctively understood the significance of the empty street, that it meant the total obliteration of a human community, including the physical presence of the people, their social customs, and worldview.¹⁰⁴ He wandered the area until he found five survivors, who recognized him from his youth. Gekhman didn't remember them, but it didn't matter: he was not an "acquaintance" to these survivors, but now felt like a "close relative," for "our parents, brothers, and sisters were all buried in the same shared, terrible pit."¹⁰⁵ He also found a relative, Oskar, who survived the open-air massacre in Brailov on February 12, 1942. From Oskar, Gekhman learned how his parents and sister were killed. The two men then searched the area for graves and survivors together.¹⁰⁶

The quest to locate people and hear their stories related to a second pressing goal: to reconstruct and establish evidence of the victims' deaths and the Nazi's crimes. In this regard, writers served an important function in liberated territories by recording testimonies. Among those whose testimonies they recorded were illiterate

¹⁰² See Khaim [Efim] Gekhman, "Meyn heyml shtetl Broilov," *Eynikayt* (May 25, 1944); Gekhman translated the essay into Russian for *The Black Book*, cited here: "Na rodine: Brailov," in *Chernaia kniga*, 40-46, here 41.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁰⁴ The notion of "total disaster" as the "the physical, social and spiritual obliteration of a human community" is taken from Lifton, "The Concept of the Survivor," 113.

¹⁰⁵ Gekhman, "Na rodine: Brailov," in *Chernaia kniga*, 42; adapted from *The Black Book*, 32.

¹⁰⁶ Testimony of Oskar B., Saratov, Russia, interview code 42890, segment 275, *USC Shoah Foundation*. Gekhman wrote that his father and a Ukrainian peasant saved Oskar Shmar'ian, then sixteen years old, from the February 1942 aktion in Brailov by distracting the SS men and hiding him under a pile of clothes ("Na rodine," 43-44).

people, or those who might not have otherwise bothered or been psychologically able to write down their often traumatic memories. Stationed in Krasilovka, east of Kiev in the fall of 1943, Grossman heard and recorded this story from a local peasant, Kristia Chuniak.¹⁰⁷

"Doctor Fel'dman from Brovary. The peasants called him Khvel'dman. He was an old bachelor who adopted an old woman and a few orphans. When the Germans took him to be executed in the fall of 1941, a sobbing and weeping crowd of people interceded on his behalf. He lived for another year after that, but the new doctor whom the Germans sent wanted to get rid of him because everyone who got sick went to Fel'dman. Fel'dman tried to poison himself, but was spared from death. The Germans killed him after that. He had to dig his own grave. The peasant Kristia Chuniak in the village Krasilovka (Kiev oblast', Brovary district) told me this story."¹⁰⁸

Grossman recorded the story in his diary, and later incorporated it into "Ukraine without Jews." However, he added two significant details to the published version: first, he specified that Fel'dman had adopted not just orphans but two Christian boys; secondly, as Chuniak came to the end of the story, Grossman wrote that she sobbed and openly wept.¹⁰⁹ For Grossman, Fel'dman's actions and Chuniak's memory of his death exemplified a positive relationship between Ukrainians and Jews that he wished to emphasize. Grossman idealized the subject of Ukrainian-Jewish relations elsewhere in his essay, a literary move that may have reflected his genuine admiration for positive inter-ethnic relations, but which also belied his knowledge, which he expressed elsewhere in his war diary, about instances of Ukrainian collaboration with the Nazi occupiers.

¹⁰⁷ In *Life and Fate*, Grossman named a character after Kristia Chuniak, an elderly Ukrainian woman who shows kindness and bravery by sheltering a Russian POW that the Germans had left for dead.

¹⁰⁸ GV 89: 430.

¹⁰⁹ Grossman, "Ukraina bez Evreev," 8.

Grossman's awareness of the urgent need to gather evidence was likely fueled by rumors he heard about the Nazi retreat. A month before the liberation of Kiev, he concluded his essay "Ukraina," published on October 12, 1943 in *Krasnaia zvezda* by citing one of these rumors:

"People arriving from Kiev say that the Germans have placed troops in a ring around the enormous grave at Babi Yar, in which the bodies of 50,000 Jews killed in Kiev at the end of September 1941 were thrown. The Germans are feverishly digging up the corpses and burning them. Are they so foolish that they hope to conceal the terrible traces [of their crimes]?"¹¹⁰

In fact, the Nazis had been attempting to do just that for over a year. Beginning in September 1942, bodies were exhumed and cremated, first in the death camps of Poland and then mass graves throughout occupied Soviet territory.¹¹¹ Operation 1005, as the Nazis euphemistically called this component of their crime, reached Ukraine in April 1943.¹¹² The Einsatzgruppen commander Paul Blobel, who had overseen the massacre at Babi Yar two years earlier, returned to supervise the destruction of the corpses. An estimated 100,000 victims lay in the ground at Babi Yar, including more than 33,000 Jews shot in September 1941, as well as tens of thousands more Jews, POWs and local Roma, Ukrainian and Russian civilians shot after that date.¹¹³ On August 19, 1943, 327 prisoners, nearly two-thirds of them POWs and the remainder Jews, were brought to Babi Yar. As Grossman had written

¹¹⁰ Grossman, "Ukraina," *Krasnaia zvezda* (October 12, 1943), 3; cited from idem., *Gody Voiny* (1945), 354.

¹¹¹ Shmuel Spector, "Aktion 1005—Effacing the Murder of Millions," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5:2 (1990): 157-173. On Babi Yar, see 162-163. See also Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 347-356.

¹¹² See Pohl, "The Murder of Ukraine's Jews," 53-54.

¹¹³ It remains unclear how many victims from each group were killed and buried there. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Kiev and Babi Yar," *Holocaust Encyclopedia* <<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/?ModuleId=10005421>> (accessed January 25, 2013).

in *Krasnaia zvezda*, they had been forced to exhume the bodies and burn them on wooden planks. They then had to grind the remains and scatter the dust across surrounding farmlands. On September 29, as the work neared completion, twenty-five prisoners waged an escape attempt. Fifteen of them survived, among them Viktor Davydov, whose testimony later became part of the entry on Babi Yar written by Lev Ozerov for *The Black Book*.¹¹⁴

But testimony gathered from *Jewish* survivors of Nazi occupation constituted an exception rather than the rule. Grossman wrote about the handful of survivors he managed to meet during his travels across Ukraine. In the months he had spent wandering from Voroshilovgrad in eastern Ukraine to the Donbass region in the south, he claimed that "I met one single Jew"—one Lieutenant Shloime Kipershtein, who had been saved through efforts of his Ukrainian wife Vasilina Sokur.¹¹⁵

When Grossman reached Kiev in January 1944, he wrote to his father with news that many of his friends and relatives were dead.¹¹⁶ Before leaving Kiev for Berdichev, he wrote to his wife that in Kiev he had seen "only graves and death," and that fellow journalists who had already reached Berdichev informed him that "the city is completely devastated, and only a few people, maybe a dozen out of many thousands, tens of thousands of Jews who lived there, have survived."¹¹⁷ He no longer questioned his worst fears:

¹¹⁴ Lev Ozerov, "Kiev: Babii Iar," in *Chernaia kniga*, 24.

¹¹⁵ Grossman, "Ukraina bez Evreev," 3.

¹¹⁶ Cited from Garrard and Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev*, 174.

¹¹⁷ Ekaterina Vasilievna Korotkova-Grossman Papers, cited from AWW, 254-255.

"I have no hope of finding Mama alive. The only thing I am hoping for is to find out about her last days and her death...I've understood here how dear to each other the handful of survivors must be."¹¹⁸

Just as he inferred that survivors held a precious value in each other's eyes given the traumatic things they had endured in common, he also recognized the role that outside witnesses like himself could play in recording the victims' stories, reconstructing their last moments, and explaining the perpetrators' motives and means. In the fall of 1943, Grossman and Erenburg crossed paths near Kiev, and it is likely then that Erenburg recruited him to join the Literary Commission for *The Black Book*.¹¹⁹ Grossman then began to share the burden of documenting atrocities and listening to testimonies of grief with other writers.

Yet Grossman's attempts to document Jewish suffering belied a sense of doubt as to whether the task was even possible. In his 1943 and 1944 writings, he articulated the problem of representing events that defied the "limits of representation."¹²⁰ Long before scholars came to use the term to define events like the Holocaust, Grossman used the language of "limits." In "Ukraine without Jews" he argued that it would be impossible to ever register the full extent of the crime, for "it is impossible to list an entire people by name."¹²¹ The number of victims, the number of perpetrators, and the locations where Jews had been killed were simply too vast.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ For Grossman's mention of meeting Erenburg near Kiev, see GV 89: 429.

¹²⁰ The phrase comes from the title of the seminal anthology on this subject: *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and 'The Final Solution'*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹²¹ Grossman, "Ukraina bez Evreev," 3.

Moreover, human consciousness was structured in such a way that it prevented people from being able to grasp the idea of annihilation:

"[W]hen people read or hear about a tragedy that has claimed millions of peoples' lives, they are simply incapable of understanding the horrifying profundity of what took place. This limitation is a fortunate attribute of human consciousness because it protects people from moral suffering and insanity."¹²²

However, this safety valve, or "limit of human knowledge," as he put it elsewhere, did not absolve people from the obligation to struggle against the principles that the Nazis had practiced: the debasement of human life and the deprivation of fundamental rights. Indeed, at a time when

"the life of individuals and entire peoples has been devalued, and the value of personal freedom has been trampled under the boot of German-fascist dogma...it is precisely now, as never before, that demands for moral purity and righteousness must be raised to unattainable heights."¹²³

Claims on behalf of morality, however, depended fundamentally on the ability to substantiate the evil that had taken place, and consequently, on the act of bearing witness, recording testimony, and writing realistically about the catastrophe that had consumed millions of people. Grossman encountered the limits of representing firsthand experience when he reached Berdichev in January of 1944. He listened to a local gentile, Nikolai Nemolovskii tell the story of Garik Nuzhny, a ten year old Jewish boy who managed to escape from the massacre on September 15, 1941 after seeing his parents and siblings killed. Nemolovskii, a former friend of Garik's father, hid him for ten days until they located his uncle, who was still alive. As Nemolovskii came to describe the moment that uncle and nephew first saw each other alive, he

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

broke down: "It is impossible to tell it" (*Eto nel'zia rasskazat'*), he said.¹²⁴ Nemolovskii's inability to convey this moment that he witnessed of the emotional and tragic reunion of the living (both of whom were later killed) was a symptom of trauma, or what Cathy Caruth has called "impossible history"—a past experience that the traumatized person "carries within," but "cannot entirely possess."¹²⁵ Grossman's position as an outside witness allowed Nemolovskii's testimony to emerge, with a blank space that marked the teller's trauma, or inability to tell his history.

As the Red Army liberated more and more of Ukraine throughout late 1943 and 1944, Grossman began to develop strategies for representing traumatic, or impossible histories. One way of doing so was to place the reader in the position of a witness. He attempted this in his essay "The Murder of Jews in Berdichev." The essay documents the first days of the German atrocities against Jews in Berdichev, from the beginning of occupation on July 7, 1941, and leads up to the first major killing action, on September 15. The narrator describes these events as links "in a chain of premeditated steps for murdering Berdichev Jewry"—the Nazis' initial humiliations, killings and acts of terror; their placement of Jews outside the law (*vne zakona*) and within a ghetto; their use of POWs to dig five deep trenches at the end of Brodskaiia Street near the city airport; the collaboration of two locals, the city representative Reder and police chief Korolyuk; and finally, the arrival of SS units (*Einsatzgruppen*) on September 14, and their encirclement of the ghetto at 4am the next morning.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Grossman, "Ubiistvo Evreev v Berdicheve," in *Chernaia kniga*, 30.

¹²⁵ Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience," in *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, 192-198, here 194.

¹²⁶ Grossman, "Ubiistvo Evreev v Berdicheve," in *Chernaia kniga*, 25-28 (citation from 28).

When the killing action of September 15 is described, however, the narrator's voice is temporarily displaced by the voices of victims. The effect is profound because the reader is thrust into the position of witness. As police forced people out of their homes onto the streets and shot those who could not walk, people awoke on distant streets, as Grossman wrote, "hearing the cries of thousands of people spilling into one soul shattering sound."¹²⁷ When half-drunk SS men led the first group of forty naked people to the edge of the pit and shot them, the victims' cries hung in the air. Peasants in the vicinity ran from their homes so as not to hear those cries, "which the human heart cannot withstand."¹²⁸ Grossman left readers to imagine the sound of the cries that hung in the air.

Writing the history of the massacre of Jews at Berdichev inevitably led Grossman to his sole hope: to learn the terrible facts about his mother's last days and death. The process of learning and writing about this knowledge must have surely challenged his own personal limits. Indeed, the amount of time he spent writing "The Murder of Jews in Berdichev" might be a reflection of the private difficulty of the subject matter. As noted above, he saw Berdichev in January 1944, but only began revising his essay about the city on November 4, and completed it on December 4, 1944.¹²⁹ Whereas in 1943 he had published descriptions of Jewish mass killings within days or weeks after visiting locations, it took him almost nine months to write about Berdichev.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 29.

¹²⁹ A draft of the essay dated November 4, 1944 and marked with editorial changes can be found at GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 92, ll. 197-214 / USHMM RG 22.028M, R. 40, F. 92, pp. 374-391.

Part of the explanation for this extended writing period is that he joined Erenburg's Literary Commission to work on *The Black Book* in late 1943. As a member of a larger group of writers who were all collecting materials about the murder of Jews throughout German-occupied territories, Grossman received over a dozen documents about Berdichev, primarily from Erenburg.¹³⁰ He undoubtedly spent time incorporating these sources (which included letters from survivors, testimonies from German prisoners, and local newspaper reports), into his essay.¹³¹

Throughout 1944, Grossman took an increasingly active role in Erenburg's Literary Commission. Joining the broader effort among his contemporaries allowed him access to a larger body of materials, which invariably contained multiple perspectives of victims, perpetrators and bystanders. The larger the collection of testimony from which to draw upon in the effort to reconstruct the final hours, as well as to speak on behalf of the murdered victims, the more difficult it would be to consign unfathomable crimes to the realm of "impossible" history.

Grossman's role as a chronicler of Jewish catastrophe should be understood in the context of the Soviet media's conventions for depicting Nazi atrocities against Soviet civilians. In the attempt to meet survivors, hear their stories, record their testimonies, and develop literary strategies to convey impossible histories, the efforts of Grossman and his contemporaries constituted an alternative, as well as a reaction to the narrative of the war that the Soviet media established. His expression of

¹³⁰ "Spisok materialov o Berdicheve, peredannakh tov. Grossmanu," n.d. GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 945, l. 161 / USHMM RG 22.028M, R. 239, F. 945, p. 308.

¹³¹ "Opis' gotovikh/obrabotannikh materialov dlia 'chernoï knigi,'" n.d. GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 945, ll. 25-27 / USHMM RG 22.028M, R. 239, F. 945, pp. 161-163.

solidarity with the survivors aligned him with fellow Jewish writers who returned to their native territories as liberators and as witnesses. These writers had a profoundly personal stake in learning what had happened to the victims, who were often their close relatives and friends. The writers also coped with their own sense of trauma and grief. Soviet Jewish documentation efforts constituted a family affair in both literal and symbolic terms.

While Grossman's journey across Ukraine and Poland during wartime resembled that of earlier generations of Russian Jews like An-sky and Babel, who also chronicled the suffering of Jewish civilians in these regions under military occupation, he and his contemporaries faced different and in several respects unprecedented challenges. These were determined by the unprecedented nature of total war, which had provided the Nazis with a setting for carrying out the murder of the vast majority of the Jewish civilian population and the ability to destroy vast amounts of evidence of their crimes. Through the creation of a unique approach to chronicling the Jewish mass murder, through the practices of listening to victims and bystanders, gathering evidence about and identifying the victims as Jews *per se*, creating records of the victims' experiences, and circulating those records before larger audiences of readers—Grossman and other Soviet Jewish writers who arrived in liberated territories from 1943 to 1945 were among the first in history to ensure that the story of this catastrophe would not be lost, silenced or falsified.

Until this point we have discussed the *practices* of chronicling mass murder that Grossman and his colleagues developed. It is important to note, however, that an

understanding of their practices and methods does not exhaustively explain the content of their wartime writings about Jewish mass murder. For that, we must turn to the principles and ideas that informed Grossman's Holocaust writings. As the following section demonstrates, Grossman's depictions of the Jewish people of Ukraine exhibited striking continuities with the national thought that earlier generations of thinkers, and specifically An-sky and Dubnov, had expressed.

"Where is the Jewish People?": Grossman's 1943 "Ukraine without Jews"

In his article "Ukraine," published on October 12 in *Krasnaia zvezda*, Grossman wrote that the Germans had killed all the residents of Kozary, down to the last elderly person and child, as a reprisal for alleged partisan activity. Like dozens of other "partisan villages," as they came to be known, Kozary was now a ghost town. Grossman described the single traces of evidence that remained of 750 Ukrainian families whom the Germans had burned alive in their own homes: "Crosses are standing above black ashes."¹³²

Grossman also knew that whereas crosses stood over the victims' gravesites in Kozary, no memorials marked the places where Jews lay in the ground throughout Ukraine. His essay "Ukraine without Jews," suggested a terrible counterpart, or sequel to "Ukraine." If Kozary was one place where the Germans had murdered the entire population of local Ukrainians, Grossman emphasized that there was not a single village, town or city in Ukraine where the entire Jewish population had *not* been murdered:

¹³² Grossman, *Gody Voyny* (Moscow: OGIZ, 1945), 347.

Nowhere—not in Poltava, Khar'kov, Kremenchug, Borispol, not in Iagotin. You will not see the black, tear-filled eyes of a little girl, you will not hear the sorrowful drawling voice of an old woman...Stillness. Silence. A people has been murdered (*narod ubit*).¹³³

For Grossman, the deaths of millions of Jewish people signified more than the destruction of bodies and physical spaces. The end of the Jewish people in Ukraine meant the end of an integral part of Ukraine's own history. Just as importantly, it also meant the end of the Jewish people's customs, language, oral lore, and generations of history:

This is the murder of a people (*narod*), the murder of homes, entire families, books, faith, the murder of the tree of life; this is the death of roots, and not branches or leaves.¹³⁴

Grossman had intended to publish "Ukraine without Jews" in the mainstream Soviet press, for as we know, facts about the slaughter of Jews *were* intermittently reported in the Soviet press until the end of 1944, even if the identity of the victims did not appear consistently. Yet this essay was considered too provocative. Indeed, Grossman's editors at *Krasnaia zvezda* not only refused to publish it, but his close friend, the poet Semyon Lipkin recalled that they became furious with him for taking the liberty to even submit it.¹³⁵

Nonetheless, Grossman did manage to publish "Ukraine without Jews" in two places and in two languages during the war. He published it first in Yiddish in Eynikayt, under the title "Ukraine on Yidn" in two installments on November 25 and

¹³³ "Ukraina bez evreev," in *VEK: Vestnik Evreiskoi Kultury* 4 (1990), 2.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Semen Lipkin, *Zhizn i sud'ba Vasiliia Grossmana* (Moscow: Kniga, 1990), 40.

December 2, 1943, with indications of forthcoming sections.¹³⁶ These did not appear, however, and the resulting publication amounted to less than half of Grossman's original Russian manuscript.

Much less known, however, is that Grossman simultaneously published the very first part of the article in Russian in a minor military paper, *Za rodinu* (For the Motherland) on November 28, 1943.¹³⁷ The version published in Russian included only the first several paragraphs of the essay, in which Grossman had described atrocities against Ukrainian civilians in towns like Kozary. It did however include the remarkable title declaring Ukraine to be "without Jews," as well as the two significant statements, "the Jews in Ukraine are silent. In Ukraine there are no Jews."

Grossman may have succeeded in publishing the first part of "Ukraine without Jews" in the Russian-language press because as noted earlier, the Sovinformbiuro inconsistently allowed such topics to appear in print. Grossman may have been able to get a longer portion of the essay published in Yiddish for a different reason; namely, that things that could *not* be said to Soviet audiences at large could appear before the smaller community of Yiddish readers. Grossman was not alone as a Russian-language writer who published in Yiddish during the war. Indeed, both Il'ia Erenburg and non-Jewish writer Konstantin Simonov, two of the best known Soviet frontline journalists, published articles in *Eynikayt* that did not appear in the Russian-

¹³⁶ Grossman, "Ukraina on Yidn," *Eynikayt* (November 25, 1943), 3, (December 2, 1943), 3.

¹³⁷ Grossman, "Ukraina bez Evreev," *Za rodinu* (November 28, 1943), 3. The Russian-language version is referenced, though dated incorrectly, in Eva Berar [Ewa Bérard], *Burnaia zhizn' Il'i Erenburga* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2009), 171, 258 n.49. Bérard cites a publication date of 28 November 1944, but the original newspaper copy is clearly dated 28 November, 1943 and refers to events shortly before that date. I am grateful to Karel Berkhoff for bringing Bérard's earlier reference to the Russian version of "Ukraine without Jews" to my attention.

language press.¹³⁸ Just as language divided and created boundaries around distinct communities of readers, it also enabled the emergence of different narratives of the war, including universal and inclusive Soviet narratives, as well as particular Jewish ones.¹³⁹

Yet even in Yiddish translation, Grossman's essay "Ukraina on Yidn" was censored. After comparing Grossman's original Russian text to the abridged version that he published in *Eynikayt*, I discovered that the published Yiddish version omitted several phrases from the original Russian.¹⁴⁰ Given the fate of Grossman's essay during the war, both in its Russian as well as Yiddish versions, an extant question for us is why wasn't Grossman able to publish the entire essay in Russian? And why was the version in Yiddish censored and abridged?

The content of the phrases censored from the published Yiddish version is very revealing. As I will demonstrate below, they all consisted of stark pronouncements about the extent—and equally importantly, the significance—of the destruction of the Jewish population in Ukraine. These statements forcefully underscored the meaning of Grossman's title for the essay, which conveyed a declaration about the total destruction of the Jews, *as a people*, in Ukraine, and

¹³⁸ For one example by Konstantin Simonov, see "A Bagegenish mitn Tchernovitser rav," *Eynikayt* (June 15, 1944), 3. Dov-Ber Kerler lists twelve articles published by Erenburg in *Eynikayt* between June 28, 1942 and October 5, 1944, in "The Soviet Yiddish Press," 241.

¹³⁹ I thank Gennady Estrakh for sharing this point with me. David Shneer makes a similar observation in his discussion of Yiddish culture and Holocaust photography (*Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 184-206).

¹⁴⁰ The original Russian text I cite from is Grossman, "Ukraine bez Evreev," 1-3. A copy of a longhand translation into Yiddish is at GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 498, ll. 196-219 / USHMM R. 178, f. 498, pp. 844-868. I compared these two texts against "Ukraina on Yidn," *Eynikayt* (December 2, 1943), 3. I am grateful to Arkadii Zel'ster for drawing my attention to this source.

consequently, the end of Jewish history in Ukraine. In what sense were Grossman's assertions problematic for Soviet censors?

First, we must note that in "Ukraine without Jews" Grossman portrayed the Jews as a national group, defined by a unique culture and history: as he wrote, their books, customs and ways of life had been extinguished by the Nazis along with the bodies that were killed. Such a view of Jews as a nation defined by cultural and historical qualities obviously defied the Nazi worldview, which classified Jews as a race, and persecuted them out of belief in their supposed racial inferiority.

What is more important to point out, however, is that Grossman's representation of Jews as a people (*narod*) also departed from the way that Jews were classified in Soviet nationalities discourse. In a now-famous essay of 1913, Stalin, who became the first Commissar of Nationalities after the October Revolution, defined a "nation" (*natsiia*, as opposed to *narod*, a distinction which will be elaborated further below) as a group that shared a common language, territory, economic and cultural life. Insofar as they were a scattered people who did not unanimously share these features, Stalin did not consider Jews to be a nation. Then in 1932, when the Soviet state introduced internal passports, ethnicity became a de facto marker of national identity. According to this view, one's being a Jew, or Uzbeki, or Belorussian had nothing to do with religious tradition, collective history or culture. Rather, it meant the idea that one's identity was defined by primordial and irreducible

ethnicity. According to Soviet nationalities discourse in the 1930s, one's nation was a matter of blood.¹⁴¹

The concept of *narod* is important for us because throughout "Ukraine without Jews," Grossman used it to collectively describe Jews, as "the Jewish people" (*Evreiskii narod*).¹⁴² One level this was not particularly unusual on his part, since during the war, it was acceptable to refer to Jews in the Russian press as *Evreiskii narod*.¹⁴³ Yet *narod* (the Russian word for "people," or *Volk*) was a term laden with associations in Russian culture as well. It had been used in Russia since the mid-19th century, and reflected the idea of a people's spirit, or essence, and drew from the ideas of German romantic thinker Johann Herder (1744-1803) that each people had a distinct spirit (*Volksgeist*) that was expressed in the language, culture, and traditions of the common folk (*Volk*). *Narod* is also the term that earlier generations of Russian Jewish intellectuals, including, as we have seen, An-sky and Dubnov, had used to describe the Jewish masses. It was in fact in that exact sense of the term *narod*—a

¹⁴¹ The development of Soviet nationalities policies in the 1930s is a widely studied and debated topic. For the principal positions, see Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53: 2 (1994): 414-452; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). Against Slezkine and Martin's views that Soviet nationalities policy-makers effectively retreated to a notion of ethnic primordialism, Francine Hirsch argues that policies in the 1930s expanded the Bolshevik concepts of nationality first articulated during the 1920s, in *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁴² Grossman, ""Ukraina bez evreev," 2, 3.

¹⁴³ See, for example, statements by Solomon Mikhoels, Perets Markish, David Bergelson, in "Brat'ia evrei vsego mira!" *Pravda* (August 25, 1941), 3. For Russian language coverage of the Holocaust, see Yitshak [Yitzhak] Arad, "The Holocaust as Reflected in the Soviet Russian Language Newspapers in the Years 1941-1945," in *Why Didn't the Press Shout?*, 218. See also Berkhoff, "Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population."

people defined by its common culture and history—that Grossman sought to depict the murdered Jews of Ukraine during World War II.

The study of how Grossman came to represent Jews as a people with a culture and a history (a *narod*) in "Ukraine without Jews" is not a subject that previous scholars have addressed. In part, this is because most scholars dismissed the possibility that Grossman had given serious thought to the meaning of Jewish culture and history prior to or even during the war. It has been assumed that Grossman, as a secular Jew, had a superficial and estranged understanding of these subjects. In a pioneering study of Grossman's Jewish-themed work, the literary critic Shimon Markish argued that the start of the Second World War found Grossman, a secular Jew and a socialist realist writer, "completely alienated from specifically Jewish interests, both in literature and in life."¹⁴⁴ Markish interpreted Grossman's Holocaust writings as products of a sudden, tragic and forced identification with fellow Jews. Furthermore, he argued that Grossman epitomized the secular Jew who "awoke" to his Jewishness in response to the war. Markish used a concept pioneered by the Polish Jewish poet Julien Tuwim, known as a "call of blood." According to Markish, Grossman began to self-identify as a Jew solely as a reaction to the Nazi slaughter of European Jewry, as a response to the spilling, both in literal and symbolic terms, of Jewish blood.

¹⁴⁴ Shimon Markish, *Babel' i drugie* (Jerusalem and Moscow: Geshtarim, 1997), 47. This essay is a revised version of Markish's introduction to an anthology of Grossman's Jewish-themed work: "Primer Vasilii Grossmana," in Vasilii Grossman, *Na evreiskie temy*, ed. Markish, 2 vol. (Jerusalem and New York: Biblioteka-aliya, 1985), 2:341-532.

Similarly, Yuri Slezkine has claimed that secular Soviet Jews all experienced a "call of blood" during the war in response to Nazi racial genocide. Slezkine argues that Soviet nationalities policy, which defined people by their ethnicity, inadvertently prepared Soviet Jews to understand and accept the Nazi view of Jews as a people defined by blood. In Slezkine's words, "the Nazis classified people, particularly the Jews, according to the voice of their blood. Most people, and particularly the Jews, responded by hearing their blood's call."¹⁴⁵ Slezkine referred to Grossman and his writings in particular as iconic examples of the Soviet Jewish "voice of blood."

The examples above suggest that previous scholars have focused on identifying the factors that supposedly determined, or motivated Grossman's response to the extermination of European Jewry. However, the "call of blood" theory has done little to explain the content of Grossman's writings. A close look at several passages from his 1943 essay reveals that Grossman's representation of the murdered Jewish people expressed an important set of ideas about Jews and Jewish history—ones that did not express the notion of a call of blood, and were not generated in response to that supposed call. Furthermore, as I argue, Grossman's depictions of Jews during the Holocaust resembled Simon Dubnov's descriptions of Jews as a *narod*, or what the latter had once dubbed a "spiritual and cultural nation."¹⁴⁶ Grossman's descriptions of genocide as the destruction of culture, folklore and tradition also bear striking similarities to the ideas that An-sky expressed when he collected Jewish folklore in

¹⁴⁵ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 284.

¹⁴⁶ Dubnov cited Herder's distinction between "artificial" and "organic" nations when formulating his theory of Jewish national identity, in "Pis'mo vtoroe," 33 note 1, cited from idem., "Second Letter," 27 note 25.

the Pale of Settlement prior to and during World War I. Grossman may have never read or been directly influenced by Dubnov or An-sky, yet the concept of the Jewish people, or *narod*, in his 1943 Holocaust essay is somewhat akin to ideas that these earlier thinkers had introduced thirty years prior.

Beyond a "Call of Blood"

Although Markish made the claim that Grossman had not thought seriously about Jews or Jewish life before the war, we know that this was not the case. Over a decade before the war began, when Grossman first abandoned his engineering career to pursue literary ambitions in the late 1920s, the Jews and Jewish history of Berdichev became a source of material for him, as well as an inspiration for thinking about larger issues, including the history of the Bund, and the persistence of anti-Semitism after the revolution.

In his 1929 essay, "Berdichev, Seriously—Not Joking," Grossman had recounted the contributions of the city's radical Jewish workers to the revolutionary struggle.¹⁴⁷ His overt agenda in that essay had been to undermine popular humor in which Berdichev Jews figured as uncouth and aggressive petty traders.¹⁴⁸ And Grossman's first well-known short story published in 1934, "In the Town of Berdichev," portrayed an encounter between a female Commissar during the Civil War in the late stages of an unwanted pregnancy, Vavilova, and a large, impoverished Jewish family, the Magazaniks, who adopt her newborn baby when she rejoins a

¹⁴⁷ V.S. Grossman, "Berdichev ne v shutku, a vser'ez," *Ogonek* no. 51-52 (1929).

¹⁴⁸ John and Carol Garrard write that although Grossman himself admitted that the portrayal of the town had been superficial, "the essay was in effect an attempt to rescue Berdichev's reputation and to link it to the radical political tradition to which Grossman's parents belonged," in *The Bones of Berdichev*, 87.

Bolshevik unit retreating through the town.¹⁴⁹ Because it called into question the irreconcilable nature of the commissar's revolutionary discipline and the Jewish family's sacrifices on behalf of her child, Grossman's story attracted the critique of watchful ideologues in the mid-1930s.¹⁵⁰

Grossman's early writings thus expressed an interest in the history and experience of Jews, set in the context of the revolution and Civil War. In his study of Grossman's life and works, however, Shimon Markish dismissed these works as stereotypical portrayals of quotidian, or mundane "shtetl life" (*shtetl byt'*), and as works that betrayed the author's lack of "authentic understanding of Jewish tradition or people."¹⁵¹ Furthermore, Markish interpreted them as signs of Grossman's estrangement from his Jewish identity. Given these assumptions, the argument that Nazi racial oppression forced Grossman to seriously contend for the first time with his identity as a Jew made sense.

Markish argued that Grossman's response to the mass murder of European Jewry drew from the example of the famous Polish Jewish poet Julien Tuwim. In Markish's words, "during the war the 'Tuwim syndrome' appeared among many Russian writers who were born Jews, but most of them got over it quickly; in Grossman it remained and grew stronger."¹⁵² What was the "Tuwim syndrome"? During the 1920s, Tuwim had written poetry stating that "Semitic blood flows in me/

¹⁴⁹ V.S. Grossman, "V gorode Berdichev," *Literaturnaia gazeta* no. 40 (2 April 1934).

¹⁵⁰ The critical and somewhat negative response to Grossman's early works is discussed in Iuri Bit-Iunan, "O predelakh dopustimogo: Kriticheskaiia retseptsiia tvorchestva V.S. Grossmana 1930-kh gg.," *Voprosy Literatury* 4 (2010): 155-177.

¹⁵¹ Markish, *Babel' i drugie*, 35-36.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 48.

Hot blood, passionate blood;" and elsewhere, claimed that "For me the 'Jewish Question' exists in my blood."¹⁵³ In a 1944 essay that became immediately famous, "We, Polish Jews..." (*My, Żydzi Polscy...*), Tuwim used blood symbolism to proclaim solidarity with murdered European Jewry:

"There are two kinds of blood: that inside of the veins, and that which spurts from them. The first is the sap of the body...the other kind of blood is...revealed to the world. Never since the dawn of mankind has there been such a flood of martyr blood, and the blood of Jews (not 'Jewish blood') flows in widest and deepest streams...into a tempestuous river. *And it is in this New Jordan that I beg to receive the baptism of baptisms; the blood, burning, martyred brotherhood of Jews.*"¹⁵⁴

Tuwim's words expressed torment over a failure to reconcile his "Semitic blood," as he had earlier put it, with a culturally Polish, or cosmopolitan, identity. During the war, the concept of a "call of blood" resonated among many Soviet Jews. Erenburg translated Tuwim's essay into Russian, and was apparently fond of citing the excerpt above. Grossman also acquired a copy of the Russian translation of "We, Polish Jews..."¹⁵⁵

The concept of a "call of blood" may very well indeed have held a literal significance for Soviet Jews. As we have seen, Soviet Jewish writers who chronicled the genocide did so for profoundly private and often family reasons. Their losses, and

¹⁵³ Joanna B. Michlic, "The Culture of Ethno-Nationalism and the Identity of Jews in Inter-War Poland: Some Responses to 'The Aces of Purebred Race,'" in *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry* (Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization), 136, 138.

¹⁵⁴ Emphasis in the original. "We, Polish Jews..." originally appeared in English translation in *Free World. A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Democracy and World Affairs* 8:1 (1944): 53-56. The translator from the Polish is unknown. Translation cited from *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 431.

¹⁵⁵ RGALI f. 1710, op. 1, d. 147, ll. 1-8. On Erenburg's translation of Tuwim's work, see Joshua Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties: The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 204.

the intimate connection that survivors had had with the victims, undoubtedly reinforced their heightened sense of consciousness and self-identification as Jews.

Apart from the literal significance of this metaphor, however, the argument that Grossman experienced a "call of blood" implied that he came to identify as a Jew during the war in an ethnic or racial sense—that although he did not have what Markish regarded as an "authentic understanding" of Jewish tradition (i.e., did not share the religious worldview or language of many of the Nazis' Jewish victims), Grossman believed that he shared their blood, and the same ancestry.

The argument that Grossman came to identify as a Jew in ethnic terms during the war seems dubious at first glance. His private diary makes clear that he condemned racial thinking. At one point, in fact, he compared the Jewish law against intermarriage to the Nazi principle of racial purity. In his diary in early 1942, he wrote that

"The spike of racial hatred is directed against the Orthodox Jews, who in essence are racists and fanatics of racial purity. There are two poles now: on one side are racists who oppress the world; on the other, Jewish racists, the most suppressed in the world."¹⁵⁶

Grossman's assertion is striking on multiple levels. First, it troubles Markish's claim that he experienced a "call of blood" in response to the racial persecution of fellow Jews. At the same time it is also very revealing of the extent to which Grossman's views of Jewish peoplehood distinguished him from the type of Jews—traditional, Yiddish speaking, and observant—that he later wrote about, and indeed, whom he eulogized so powerfully in his Holocaust essays, and particularly in

¹⁵⁶ GV 89: 314 / *Writer at War*, 96-97.

"Ukraine without Jews." His statements suggest that he rejected the notion that Jewish peoplehood is defined by blood ties, that it could only be determined (as Jewish law stipulates) through matrilineal descent. Significantly, none of the three women with whom Grossman had significant relationships throughout his life (including in a marriage that produced a child) was Jewish.

It could be argued that as of early 1942 Grossman may have felt more biased towards Orthodox Jews than he would have after learning about what the Germans had done to them in the name of racial thinking. Even allowing for this possible change of perspective, there is no evidence that Grossman himself ever agreed with the view that Jews are a people defined by blood or race. There is no mention of Tuwim's ideas in either his published or unpublished writings, and he never employed the idea of "blood" in order to mark victims as Jews. We can only conclude that for Grossman, the fact that Nazis had killed Jews because of the blood that ran through their veins did not mean that Jews should be defined or represented that same way.

The "call of blood" theory has overshadowed the important ideas that inform Grossman's representation of Jews in his Holocaust writings and in "Ukraine without Jews" especially. As we will see, he did not portray Jews as a people defined by blood or race, but as a *narod*—a folk, or people bound by a unique culture and history, as well as a shared wartime experience.

The Murder of a People

We began by asking why "Ukraine without Jews" was not published in Russian, and why only part of it appeared in Yiddish. The first explanation I would

like to propose is that the stark language of Grossman's essay in Yiddish translation stood out even on the pages of *Eynikayt*, which had been publishing graphic eyewitness accounts of Nazi atrocities since June of 1942.¹⁵⁷ Few other articles in *Eynikayt* made the statement that the Nazis had killed the entire Jewish people.

Yet while the version published in *Eynikayt* did include the phrase that "all of them have been killed: many hundreds of thousands, millions of Jewish people in Ukraine," some of Grossman's other statements that referred to the totality of the crime were in fact deleted.¹⁵⁸ Three of these missing phrases are quoted below, first in an English translation of Grossman's original Russian; second, in a transliteration from Grossman's original Russian; and third, in a transliteration from the Yiddish translation of Grossman's original Russian (from an unpublished manuscript from which the essay that appeared in *Eynikayt* was taken):

1. "Where is the Jewish people? Who will ask the twentieth century's Cain that dreadful question: where is the Jewish people who once lived in Ukraine?"

*Gde Evreiskii narod? Kto zadast groznyi vopros Kainu dvadtsatogo veka—
gde Evreiskii narod, zhivshii na Ukraine?*

Vu iz dos Yidishe folk, vos hot gelebt in Ukraine?

2. "The people have been murdered, trampled in the earth."

Narod ubit, zatoptan v zemliu.

Dos folk iz gemordet; dos folk iz gedrobn.

3. "The Jews who once lived in Ukraine are no more."

Evreev, zhivshikh na Ukraine, bol'she net.

¹⁵⁷ For examples of *Eynikayt's* reportage of the Holocaust, see Kerler, "The Soviet Yiddish Press."

¹⁵⁸ Grossman, "Ukraina on Yidn," *Eynikayt* (November 25, 1943), 3.

[This phrase is missing from the Yiddish manuscript].¹⁵⁹

In the statements that the censors removed from the Yiddish version of "Ukraine without Jews," Grossman had rhetorically asked what had happened to the Jews of Ukraine. He had then provided a severe answer—they are murdered, lying in the earth, and no more. We cannot definitively explain why the phrases above were deleted or as it were, considered unfit for the eyes of Yiddish readers, but they seem to have clearly transgressed the boundaries of what was acceptable to say about the Jewish catastrophe in the framework of the Yiddish wartime press.

Returning to the earlier question of why Grossman's essay could not appear in Russian, as he first intended, I would like to suggest that part of the problem lies with Grossman's characterization of Jews as *narod*. The concept of *narod*, or a people defined by culture, language and tradition, challenged the regnant Soviet, or Stalinist view of nationality developed during the 1930s, which precluded the notion that the Jews possessed a distinct way of life, language, and rituals. Furthermore, depicting murdered Jewry as *narod* also challenged the Soviet political and cultural taboo against commemorating Jewish victims *per se*, let alone declaring that their annihilation had deprived Ukraine of one of its constituent populations.

In what sense did Grossman write about Jews as a *narod*? First, he sought to convey what he called a "living portrait of Jewish people in the cities, shtetls and

¹⁵⁹ All quotes from Grossman, "Ukraine bez Evreev," (respectively) 3, 3, 4. These phrases are missing from "Ukraina on Yidn," (December 2, 1943), 3. For the unpublished longhand translation prepared for *Eynikayt* I have consulted GARF f. 8114, op. 1, d. 498, l. 199 / USHMM R. 178, f. 498, p. 847.

villages of Ukraine."¹⁶⁰ He exhorted his readers to imagine and commemorate the following scenes and images:

"Remember Sabbath days when elders walked with their prayer shawls beneath poplar trees on quiet spring nights; remember old men standing on corners carrying on sly and clever conversations among themselves; remember self-important shtetl shoemakers, sitting on rickety stools in front of the rickety doors of their shops."¹⁶¹

These familiar, even iconic images of shtetl life—elderly and religious Jews, cobblers and shops—expressed an attempt to evoke and commemorate a vanished culture. He referenced the people's distinct religion, modes of thought, self-perception, and communication. These images were almost caricature-like, the perspective of an outsider, or someone who would not have taken part in those "clever conversations"; indeed, they reflected the views of someone who may well have regarded prayer shawls and Sabbath candles as archaic and antiquated rituals.

Yet it is important to add that Grossman did not limit his description of "the people" to these few select types. He exhaustively listed the enormous variety of people who had been killed—cobblers and old men, and also scientists, musicians, engineers and working-class Jews. Jews, as a *narod*, an entire people and cultural formation, consisted of people of all ages, professions, and personality types:

"Murdered are elderly artisans, well-known masters of trades: tailors, hatmakers, shoemakers, tinsmiths;...murdered are workers: porters, mechanics, electricians, carpenters, furnace workers, locksmiths;...murdered are doctors, therapists, dentists, surgeons, gynecologists; murdered are experts in bacteriology and biochemistry, directors of university clinics, teachers of history, algebra, trigonometry; ...murdered are engineers, metallurgists, bridge builders, architects, ship builders;...murdered are teachers,

¹⁶⁰ Grossman, "Ukraina on Yidn," (November 25, 1943), 3 / "Ukraina bez Evreev (1990), 2.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

dressmakers; murdered are grandmothers who could mend stockings and bake delicious bread, who could cook chicken soup and make strudel with walnuts and apples; and murdered are grandmothers who didn't know how to do anything except love their children and grandchildren... murdered are violinists and pianists; murdered are three-year-old and two-year-old children; murdered are eighty-year-old elders who had cataracts in their dimmed eyes."¹⁶²

Grossman's descriptions of Jews also reflected the idea that as a people they had managed to distinguish themselves during centuries of dispersal among other peoples. Indeed, the generations of Jewish people who had lived in Ukraine served as evidence that as a people, they formed a distinct, but also integral and integrated component of the Ukrainian landscape:

"Our grandfathers lived here; our mothers, and the mothers of our sons were born here. So much sweat and so many tears have been shed here that no one could think to call the Jew a stranger, or say that he is alien to this land."¹⁶³

Grossman claimed that by virtue of their history as residents in the land, Jews had become natives of Ukraine; concomitantly, he made the case that their destruction, not as Soviet citizens, but as Jews *per se*, had to be commemorated by all of Ukraine for that very reason—precisely because they are *not* alien or strangers to the land, but rather indivisible from the surrounding population.

The language of the preceding passage is noteworthy because it echoes Dubnov's "Second Letter," an essay that he completed in 1906 where he had sought to establish the historical logic behind collective demands for Jewish national rights. Dubnov had argued that the Jews of Europe were justified in their demands for

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Grossman, "Ukraina on Yidn," (December 2, 1943), 3 / "Ukraina bez Evreev," 3.

political rights from their respective European homelands because they had lived there for centuries and had in effect become naturalized citizens:

"Europe has served as the homeland for the majority of the Jewish people over the course of two thousand years. The bones of our distant ancestors rest in its soil...It is not only landscapes but also precious national relics that bind us to countries that become our homeland over the centuries: our ancestors' graves, the sacred sites of our religion, and our historic monuments...How can one dispute the simple feeling of connection binding Jews to their homeland...?"¹⁶⁴

Grossman's narrative of Jewish history in Ukraine resembled Dubnov's claim that Europe had become a Jewish homeland, a place where by virtue of their physical attachment to the land Jews had earned and were entitled to the rights of natural-born citizens. Like Dubnov, Grossman spoke of the generations in which Jewish life and culture in Ukraine had been passed down, inherited, transformed and ultimately extinguished:

"This is the murder of life that toiled for generations to create thousands of intelligent, talented artisans and intellectuals. This is the murder of a people's morals, customs and anecdotes passed from fathers to sons; this is the murder of memories, sad songs, and epic tales of good and bad times; it is the destruction of family homes and of burial grounds."¹⁶⁵

Here were those forms of tradition that An-sky had exhaustively chronicled among Jews in the Pale of Settlement prior to World War I. Grossman presented Jewish folk customs as an animating spirit, body of knowledge, and collection of material objects that had been passed down through generations, then destroyed by the Germans. This was exactly the form of culture and knowledge that An-sky had

¹⁶⁴ Dubnov, "Second Letter," 32-34 *passim*.

¹⁶⁵ Grossman, "Ukraina on Yidn," (December 2, 1943), 3 / "Ukraina bez Evreev," 3.

envisioned as the basis of Jewish national identity, and had sought to capture in its complexity and entirety.

Conclusion:

The essay "Ukraine without Jews" marked one of Grossman's earliest attempts to draw attention to and mourn the Jewish people's catastrophe of the Second World War. His depiction of the Jewish victims as a people, culture, and history cannot be explained as a "call of blood." It was not influenced by Stalin's view of nationalities, nor was it a reaction to the Nazi practice of racial genocide. Rather, Grossman used the concept of peoplehood, or *narod*, to explain name the victims as Jews, and to define the significance of what had been lost. These ideas place Grossman's Holocaust writings in an arc that is connected to earlier generations of Jewish thinkers, and particularly to An-sky and Dubnov's ideas about nationality.

It is widely recognized that World War II definitively shaped Soviet identity and collective memory in the postwar period. Scholars also acknowledge that as collective memories solidified in the postwar period, it became progressively more difficult, though not entirely impossible, to realistically depict the unique nature of Jewish wartime suffering, whether in literature, arts, historiography or public spaces.

As the war drew to a close and in the years that followed it, Grossman edited *The Black Book* (before Soviet authorities censored it in 1947). During the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, he worked on his novels *For a Just Cause* and *Life and Fate*. In all of these works, the problems of how to represent the murder of the Jewish people during the war continued to preoccupy him.

In *The Black Book*, Grossman sought to compile an encyclopedia-like anthology of Jewish experiences throughout occupied Soviet territory, based on the voices of survivors and the imagined experiences of the murdered victims. In his two major war novels, Grossman moved away from the realistic descriptions of Jewish people, culture and history that featured so prominently in "Ukraine without Jews," and attempted to construct what Harriet Murav has called an "alternative space of unresolved mourning."¹⁶⁶

In this chapter we have explored the origins of Grossman's earliest attempts to make sense of the Jewish wartime tragedy, an effort that he waged well before the war had even ended. We have looked closely at the practices he developed to represent the Holocaust, the words he wrote, and the ideas that informed his writings.

Among the different generations of figures who have been discussed in this study, it is by far Grossman who is most frequently cited as the most influential thinker in the realm of ethics and morality. For example, Emmanuel Levinas, the philosopher who coined the idea of "ethics as first philosophy," and who defined ethics as a person's "infinite responsibility to the other," noted once in an interview that he had read Grossman's *Life and Fate* in the original Russian and deeply admired it. Further, Levinas cited Grossman's work as an important influence for his *own* original concept of "the face." "The face," Levinas explained, was not meant to be understood in literal terms: it is "is not an object, but...an appeal or an imperative

¹⁶⁶ Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train*, 178.

given to your responsibility," Levinas stated. "To encounter a face is straightaway to hear a demand and an order."¹⁶⁷

Levinas drew a direct link between his concept of the face and Grossman's expression of it in *Life and Fate*: "Grossman has a view of 'humanity' which has rarely, if ever been attained," he wrote. As Grossman's characters in the novel navigated dehumanizing institutions—the gulag, death factory, and concentration camp—that totalitarian regimes, both Nazi *and* Soviet, had designed to rob people of their freedom or kill them, they ultimately chose to retain their humanity, and they did so through gestures and acts of kindness. These gestures, undertaken at a time of extreme inhumanity, epitomized for Levinas the very notion of the "face" as a supreme source of all ethics and morality. "All the weakness...all the naked and disarmed mortality of the other," Levinas claimed, "can be read from [the face]."¹⁶⁸

Grossman's encounters with Jewish civilians that he met and those whose lives he commemorated during and after World War II, brought him face to face with what Levinas called the "disarmed mortality of the other." Had it not been for those encounters, Grossman may have never arrived at the vision of humanity that later influenced Levinas. Grossman's role as a witness—and his attempt as a chronicler to make sense of war, and of the Jewish catastrophic experience of war—have earned him a place as a profoundly influential voice in twentieth century thought and history.

¹⁶⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 48.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 89, 192.

Conclusion

The Face of War

Only thirty years divided the beginning of An-sky's journey across the Pale of Settlement from the end of Grossman's path through Soviet Ukraine. Between that beginning and end, Russian and Soviet Jewish chroniclers of war witnessed and chronicled what have been among the most cataclysmic events in twentieth century history. As these writers attempted to make sense of Jewish civilian suffering, they often conveyed the human experience of war, both by telling their own stories and by speaking on behalf of war victims who did not often leave accounts of their own—often Yiddish-speaking and religious Jews who lived and were killed in neighborhoods, towns, fields, and secluded spaces that were far from Moscow and St. Petersburg.

As individuals and in social groups, Russian and Soviet Jewish writers undertook the goal to witness and chronicle Jewish suffering during both the First World War and Second World War periods. A number of personal differences distinguished them; in addition, several political, military and geographic factors distinguished the wars in which they participated, but in this study we have also identified some of the elements that connected writers from these two watershed periods of 1914-1921 and 1941-1945.

Russian and Soviet Jewish witnesses to war did not write in a vacuum. They brought a multiplicity of cultural influences, as well as their own complex personal identities as Russians, Soviets and Jews to their journeys across different war zones.

Their writings reveal traces of the humanistic values they absorbed from Russian intellectual tradition, including the ethnographic foundations of Russian war correspondence, as well as the Tolstoyan impulse to look into the face of sufferers, observe their pain with empathy and compassion, and tell their stories to larger audiences.

Yet as we have seen, writers like An-sky, Babel and Grossman also brought a sense of self-consciousness as Jews to the war zone. While that consciousness expressed itself differently in each of them, it consistently surfaced in relation to their experiences of witnessing Jewish civilians become war victims. By tracing how they responded in writing, I have attempted to illuminate one aspect of the multifaceted process through which the Russian Jews who documented the First World War became the Soviet Jews who witnessed and chronicled the Holocaust.

The Jewish identities of Russian and Soviet war chroniclers emerged during wartime not simply because they traveled battlefields, but primarily because they encountered and thought deeply about Jewish civilians. How they related to those civilians—that is, how they framed the different wars as part of Jewish history, and how they articulated the idea of a Jewish people, or nation—also explains a great deal about the nature of their identities. Whereas An-sky and Dubnov saw themselves as part of a Jewish nation that they believed would emerge from the ruins of war intact (though hopefully transformed), Babel expressed reservations about the likelihood that traditional Jewish culture (with its "stunted" Hasidim and "emaciated" Jews) would survive the Soviet experiment. In spite of and perhaps also because of his

deterministic assumptions about the anachronistic nature of Judaism, Babel chronicled his encounters with Jewish civilians with an eye to the future. By doing so he elusively expressed the same Jewish cultural value that had motivated An-sky and Dubnov to document Jewish wartime experience—namely, that a chronicle of his experiences would one day be an invaluable record about (what he assumed would become) an extinguished world of shtetl Jewry.

Unlike Babel, Grossman and his contemporaries expressed a profound and tragic sense of solidarity with Jewish war victims. To be sure, the circumstances of the Second World War—including the total numbers of Jewish victims and the ways that they were killed—virtually eclipsed the scale of destruction during preceding wars. One of the most important factors that characterized Soviet Jewish writers during World War II is that the writers' own families were in many cases among the dead. These writers, who were secular and distanced from those Jews who were among the populations that bore the brunt of the Holocaust—Yiddish-speaking, less educated, less integrated into the upper strata of Soviet society, more likely to live in the country's western provinces—brought to bear their own private trauma and moral urgency on their efforts to document Jewish civilian war experience.

We have also seen how Grossman's depiction of World War II as a Jewish tragedy echoed the national discourse that characterized An-sky and Dubnov's wartime efforts. Grossman wrote sympathetically and with admiration about the murdered Jewish people. He lamented the loss of their customs and heritage, and like An-sky, he often regarded such Jews in idealistic terms. Indeed, he described the

murdered Jews as the *Evreiskii narod* (Jewish people)—those who had passed down anecdotes and folktales, kept the religious customs and followed the Jewish calendar. These men and women, wrote Grossman, had been among the poor, working class, those struggling for equality and justice, the educated, and those simply living their lives without regard for politics or personal status. Grossman's extraordinary list of people's professions and personal identities in "Ukraine without Jews" reads like an attempt to create an epitaph, memorial and eulogy for an entire people, a surrogate for names that could never be compiled in one place.

At the same time, Grossman's private and published Holocaust writings belied the idea that he identified in unreserved fashion with the Nazis' victims, or the proverbial Jewish masses. His writings revealed the cultural and psychological distances that separated him, a secular Soviet Jewish intellectual, from those Jews whose experiences he chronicled. One sign of this difference is that Grossman's views of Jewish ancestry and ethnic lineage reflected secular and Soviet views of religion. It therefore seems unlikely, though will ultimately remain a mystery whether Grossman would have lamented the decline of Jewish cultural traditions in the modern period had it not been for the terrible destruction that befell Jews collectively and him personally during the war. What we do know with certainty is that Grossman's war experience became a crucible out of which he forged a more complex and nuanced consciousness as a Jew. And as I have argued, Grossman's experiences as a witness and chronicler of Jewish catastrophe played a part in shaping the vision of humanity

that resounded throughout his Holocaust writings, and later surfaced in his great post-war novels *For a Just Cause* and *Life and Fate*.

Military censorship became another factor that correlated with heightened expressions of Jewish identity among Russian and Soviet Jewish war chroniclers during three different wars. Figures like An-sky and later Grossman documented Jewish war experience in response to state censorship, which distorted and often silenced writers' ability to represent Jewish suffering. As writers who identified culturally as Russians, figures like Dubnov and later Erenburg came up against military censorship precisely because they hoped to reach reading publics in the Russian language.

In their goal to reveal the story of Jewish wartime suffering to larger reading publics, both Jews and non-Jews, these figures faced formidable challenges, including social anti-Semitism and the regnant discourse that dictated how atrocities could be depicted. As we have seen, these challenges often bolstered Russian and Soviet Jewish chroniclers' sense of mission to tell the world about Jewish suffering—to identify war victims as Jews and to delineate the experiences that distinguished Jews from non-Jewish civilians. This was as true for Russian Jews during the Great War as it was for Soviet Jews during and immediately after the Holocaust. During both wars Jewish writers as individuals and in communities of like-minded activists tested the limits of what censors permitted. In their attempts to create and publicize narratives of Jewish war victims they actively resisted those limits, with varied degrees of success.

As he traveled the Eastern Front in 1915 An-sky wrote about the Russian military's anti-Semitic views and often brutal treatment of Jewish civilians in Galicia and the Pale of Settlement. The documents he collected and reports he made in Petrograd contributed to his contemporaries' initiatives, including an archive for which Dubnov covertly collected testimonies and documents, and later selected materials from for his documentary project, the first "Black Book" of Russian Jewry.

During the Polish-Bolshevik War Babel wrote two articles about Jewish pogrom victims under a pseudonym. As a writer of propaganda he utilized the subject of anti-Jewish violence to spark the Red Army's hatred of Polish enemy forces, even as he sometimes passively watched the Red Army engage in looting and wanton violence against Jews and other civilians throughout the war zone.

And finally, during World War II Grossman, Erenburg, and dozens of other Jewish journalists chronicled the Red Army's liberation of occupied Soviet territory. They submitted their articles for publication in Soviet Russian and Yiddish-language newspapers and journals and often managed to publish their accounts. Because the Soviet state and media throughout the war and especially after 1944 became resistant to representing the Nazi mass murder of Jews in occupied territory, and because the state's Extraordinary Commissions (ChGK) collected a massive archive of data about German war crimes that contained little to no information about Jewish war victims, Grossman and his contemporaries formulated their own distinctly Jewish approach to documenting what they understood to be a Jewish national wartime tragedy.

In the attempt to resist wartime censorship, Russian and Soviet Jewish war chroniclers created significant records of Jewish war history. They left behind their own personal testimonies of an extraordinary time and place, but not only that. They also created representations that contained insights about important events in Jewish history before and during the Holocaust. Their representations of Jewish war history took many different forms, including the composition of diaries, letters, anthologies, essays, sketches and memoirs. The writers also actively collected non-Jewish sources that were relevant to the histories they wanted to tell, including military decrees and bystander testimonies. Their works did not always precisely represent the events that had taken place, but they nonetheless continue to serve the writing of history today, insofar as they can be contextualized and compared with our ever-expanding knowledge of what took place in the past.

The works of Russian and Soviet Jewish chroniclers of catastrophe remind us that the writing of war history began with the witnesses who saw it happen. The histories that they lived through have been reconstructed here, with an attempt to understand why they chose to become witnesses to Jewish suffering, how they and their contemporaries used language to construct their different narratives of Jewish war history, and how (or more often, whether) their depictions of Jewish civilians reached their intended audiences.

I began this study by noting that Russian and Soviet Jewish war chroniclers like An-sky, Dubnov, Babel and Grossman sought to make meaning and define their identities in the face of colossal Jewish suffering that they observed as witnesses.

Their collective effort to make sense of the humanitarian devastations that were spawned by the wars of the twentieth century remains unfinished to this day. The present study, conducted at a distance of thousands of miles and a century away from its starting point, represents a contribution to that ongoing and incomplete endeavor.

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