

East European Politics & Societies

<http://eep.sagepub.com/>

Wartime Lies and Other Testimonies : Jewish-Christian Relations in Buczacz, 1939-1944

Omer Bartov

East European Politics and Societies 2011 25: 486

DOI: 10.1177/0888325411398918

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://eep.sagepub.com/content/25/3/486>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

American Council of Learned Societies

Additional services and information for *East European Politics & Societies* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://eep.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://eep.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://eep.sagepub.com/content/25/3/486.refs.html>

Wartime Lies and Other Testimonies

Jewish-Christian Relations in Buczacz, 1939–1944

Omer Bartov

Brown University

This article analyzes events in the East Galician town of Buczacz during World War II on the basis of wartime and postwar accounts by the Jewish, Ukrainian, and Polish inhabitants of the town. The article argues that such testimonies should be treated as historical documents and that they are valuable in reconstructing the events of genocide and communal massacre during the German occupation of Eastern Europe both because they provide different insights into these events from those available in official documentation and because they “save” from oblivion events that cannot be found at all in other documents.

Keywords: *Buczacz; Holocaust; Poland; Ukraine; World War II*

I

The borderlands of Eastern Europe were sites of interaction between a multiplicity of ethnic and religious groups. For city- and town-dwellers, as much as for villagers, living side by side with people who spoke a different language and worshipped God differently was part of their own way of life and that of their ancestors. Ethnicity and religion often also meant a different position within the socioeconomic scale and thus differentiation, bringing with it resentment and envy, status and wealth, poverty and subjugation. As new national narratives began to supplement the old religious and social differentiation between groups, they also provided a new retrospective meaning to the past and a new urgency about mending the present in a manner that would conform to the perceived historical rights and correct former injustices. In the national movements' fantasy, the future belonged to them, or not at all. Past coexistence, which had been the norm, with all its benefits and shortcomings, friction and cooperation, as well as occasional outbursts of violence, came to be seen as unnatural, as a problem to be solved, often by radical social surgery. Cutting off unwanted, seemingly malignant, and allegedly foreign elements would, it was said, enable the newly discovered and supposedly eternal national body to thrive.

It is, however, exceedingly difficult to understand and analyze how this transformation occurred on the ground and how it was perceived by its social protagonists.

How was it that zones of coexistence were turned into communities of ethnic cleansing and genocide? To be sure, it was largely external forces, in the shape of occupying states or far-flung national movements, that determined the general course of events and provided the ideological impetus for population policies, mass displacement, and mass murder. But the way such policies and ideas were implemented on the ground had to do not only with the interaction between perpetrators and victims but also with the actions and interactions of the different local groups upon whom these policies were enacted. A close look at what happened in small communities on Europe's eastern borderlands provides us with much insight into the social dynamics of inter-ethnic communities at times of extreme violence. Yet such a view from below of borderland communities also necessitates making use of records of the past often eschewed by historians.

This article makes a case for the integration of personal accounts, or testimonies, into the historical reconstruction of the Holocaust as documents equal in validity to other forms of documentation. By testimonies, I mean all forms of evidence provided by individual protagonists in historical events. These include contemporary accounts and diaries, as well as postwar interviews; written, oral, audio, and videotaped testimonies; courtroom witness accounts; and memoirs. Such testimonies were given by people belonging to all three categories we have come to associate with the Holocaust and other genocides, namely, victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. But to a large extent, one benefit of using materials of this kind is that they largely, though not entirely, undermine this very categorization.

From the point of view of the historian, the single most important benefit of using testimonies is that they bring into history events that would otherwise remain completely unknown, since they are missing from more conventional documentation found in archives and mostly written by the perpetrators or organizers of genocide. Hence personal accounts can at times save events from oblivion. But they also provide a very different perspective on events that *are* known from conventional documentation. This other perspective has in turn two additional advantages. First, it may serve as a factual correction to official accounts; second, it provides the historian with a different vantage point and thereby helps in producing a richer and more complete—in a sense, a three-dimensional—reconstruction of the event as a whole. Finally, by virtue of being personal, or subjective, such testimonies provide insight into the lives and minds of men, women, and children who experienced the events and, thus, tell us much more than any official document about the mental landscape of the period, the psychology of the protagonists, and the views and perceptions of others.

Historians have traditionally been wary of using testimonies as historical evidence. Some have eschewed their use altogether, calling them subjective and therefore unreliable.¹ Others have preferred to use only testimonies offered soon after to the event itself and have largely avoided those given decades later.² Others still, most conventionally, have used personal accounts only to illustrate the nature of an historical event whose reconstruction is based on seemingly more reliable documents

culled from official archives.³ This practice, to my mind, has greatly impoverished our understanding of the Holocaust, as it would that of any other historical event. There is no reason to believe that official contemporary documents written by Gestapo, SS, Wehrmacht, or German administrative officials are any more accurate or objective, or any less subjective and biased, than accounts given by those they were trying to kill. Moreover, the use of testimonies only as confirmation of events already known through other documentation condemns to oblivion events only known through testimonies. Finally, the quest to understand the mentality and motivation of the perpetrators, which has already produced a small cottage industry, would have benefited a great deal from knowing what their victims said about them and how these victims described the perpetrators' actions. And of course, testimonies can tell us a great deal about the lives of those subjected to German occupation and the relations between the different ethnic groups that came under German rule.

As noted, some historians have argued that testimonies, if used at all, are more reliable the closer they are given to the time of the event. Those given decades later are said to be suspect both because of the eroding effects of time on memory and because of the cumulative influence of other forms of representation and commemoration that mold the content and form of an individual's recollection. There is of course some truth to this argument. But anyone who has worked with large numbers of testimonies will know that there are two major qualifications to this assertion. First, and especially in the case of those who survived as young teenagers or even children—that is, those most likely to have still been alive six decades later—their experiences in the Holocaust could often be recounted in full only after they reached greater maturity, thanks to the healing effects of time on their traumatized souls, and only long after rebuilding their lives and establishing new families. Second, in some though not all cases, testimonies given decades after the event have all the freshness and vividness of a first account that one may find in some early postwar testimonies. This can be explained not least by the very fact that the memory of the event was kept sealed inside the mind and never exposed to the light of day through telling and retelling, let alone contaminated by the “noise in the system” of external discourse and representation.

These “memory-boxes” were finally unlocked and opened up due to the advancing age of the witnesses and their desire to leave a record of events, whether only to their own children and (especially) to their grandchildren, or more generally to posterity, at a cultural moment more attuned to listening, designated by one scholar “the era of the witness.”⁴ Such testimonies are also strongly motivated by the urge to recall and inscribe in memory and history the names of the murdered that would otherwise sink into total oblivion with the passing of the witness, and at times also to record the names and actions of long-forgotten perpetrators, collaborators, and especially of rescuers. Hence such testimonies contain much of the clarity and emotional impact of accounts given immediately in the wake of the events.

There has been, of course, a great deal of writing about testimonies as a form of memory, a confrontation with trauma, a literary device, a means to gain insight into

the psychology of survivors, or even as a therapeutic tool.⁵ But what I am arguing for is that testimonies are also historical documents of invaluable importance that have been grossly underused by historians, especially in the case of the Holocaust, despite the fact that this is a historical event that has produced a vast amount of such materials. Clearly, personal accounts do not tell a single story and are full of contradictions, errors, misjudgments, and untruths, though no less so than any other document. They should be treated with the same care and suspicion as any other piece of evidence pulled out of an archive, but also with the same respect as yet another more or less important piece in the puzzle of the past. That they are concerned with traumatic events should not deter us from using them; quite to the contrary, the nature of those events must indicate to us that we would never be able to fathom them without making full use of the accounts of those who experienced them.

Integrating all these materials into a single text is clearly a difficult and complex undertaking. What one quickly realizes is that apart from such matters as chronology and geography—and not always even then—different protagonists saw and remembered the same event quite differently. Indeed, from the most elementary optical perspective, they did, since they were, so to speak, standing in different places, and because no two individuals can see the same event with precisely the same eyes. But beyond the optical perspective, such differences in views emanate from the fact that each person played a different role in the event. This, in turn, has also determined the manner in which they each remembered it and in which they were willing or able to recall it in words or in writing.

There is, of course, nothing unique in this condition of historical documentation. Herodotus and Thucydides, whose different methods of treating their sources still guide us today, were already aware of this conundrum. The use of testimonies makes it more difficult to say what precisely happened at a given place and time; testimonies tell us more—perhaps more than we would like to know—about what happened, and they tell us that different people experienced, and in some cases remembered and recorded, the same events differently. We may decide to deliver a verdict on what actually happened on the basis of our documentation; or we may prefer to say that we are unable or unwilling to determine precisely what occurred and can simply report several versions or points of view.

Clearly, there are limitations to this kind of documentation. To my mind, testimonies can be most profitably used on two conditions. First, one must collect a critical mass of them, rather than relying on merely a few, if that is at all possible—although I would still argue that even a single testimony that “saves” an event from historical oblivion should and must be used. Second, such testimonies gain immensely from being focused on one locality and a relatively limited span of time and cast of characters. Within such a context, one can much more easily cross-check many testimonies that recount the same events from different perspectives, as well as integrate these individual perspectives into a historical reconstruction that uses all other available

kinds of documentation. In the case of the Holocaust, this would mean especially official reports by police, military, and civil administration; as well as documentation of postwar trials; and, finally, scholarly secondary literature.

One last issue cannot be avoided. The use of testimonies of trauma is a very difficult exercise for the historian. It is first of all difficult psychologically because these accounts almost invariably reveal aspects of human nature that one would rather not hear or know about. They are, in that sense, traumatizing. They may also undermine our trust in the historian's craft itself, since it is ultimately based on rationalist and Enlightenment values, on the alleged ability to divine the truth of the past and to identify humanity's progress and improvement. Testimonies also make it very difficult to retain the necessary detachment from the material; in other words, they may hamper the practice of the methods and undermine the philosophical assumptions that have come to be associated with good scholarly writing since the birth of the modern historical profession.

This is possibly the more profound reason for the reluctance of many historians to use testimonies. In other words, historians want to protect their own psychology from the damage they fear might be caused it by, and to protect their profession from the undermining potential of, such testimonies. Yet these accounts are about an event that itself posed the greatest challenge to the values and methods on which the work of historians still bases itself today. These testimonies emanate from the very heart of that historical moment and site of darkness, and because they recount an historical event, they too are part of the historical record, perhaps the most crucial part of all.

Historians cannot escape the event and its implications for them as historians, as individual human beings, and as members of humankind, simply by leaving these accounts to gather dust in crumbling boxes. Historians need to face this challenge and cope with it as best they can. After all, these are accounts by individuals who were determined that what they experienced and saw and remembered would not be forgotten. Historians have largely betrayed these witnesses. By now the vast majority of them are dead. But their recorded accounts can and should still be used, not merely to respect those who left them behind, but to set the historical record straight.

In what follows, I will use testimonies given by residents of the Eastern Galician town of Buczacz and by people who spent some time there during the German occupation in order to explore some aspects of death and survival in an interethnic town in a time of genocide. In this region, the majority of the rural population was Ukrainian, while Poles and Jews constituted the majority of town and city dwellers. Buczacz belonged to Poland in the interwar period, was occupied by the Soviet Union from 1939 to 1941, and was ruled by the Germans from 1941 to 1944. My general argument here is that one of the central questions of historical research on the Holocaust in Eastern Europe—namely, that of the impact of local interethnic relations on the genocide of the Jews—must be analyzed through a close reading of testimonies by the

protagonists in these events. I further suggest that this can be accomplished especially by examining a wide range of testimonies from a geographically limited locality.

I also make several more specific points based on these testimonies: first, that much of the gentile population in this region both collaborated in and profited from the genocide of the Jews. Second, I argue that most of the few Jews who survived the genocide in this area were helped by their gentile neighbors for a variety of reasons, which included both greed and altruism. Third, I suggest that the distinction between rescue and denunciation was often blurred and at times nonexistent, as was the distinction between perpetrators and victims; and that the category of bystander in these areas was largely meaningless, since everyone took part in the events, whether he or she suffered or profited from them. Fourth, I note that what we call the Holocaust and associate largely with mass murder facilities and gas chambers was played out more intimately in the form of communal massacres in vast parts of Eastern Europe, where the majority of Jews lived and were murdered. Finally, I point out that crucially important events—such as the otherwise sparsely documented chaotic and extraordinarily violent disintegration of the German occupation of this region in spring and summer 1944—have simply vanished from the historical record because such testimonies have not been used.

I begin with an examination of testimonies on collaboration, betrayal, and denunciation, and then proceed to analyze evidence of rescue and resistance. However, as will become clear, there is both a fair amount of overlap between these categories and a degree of inner contradiction depending on the nature, the timing, and the audience of each eyewitness report.

II

Approximately half of those murdered in the Holocaust perished in ghettos and mass executions at or near their places of residence, in open-air, often public events. Of the five hundred thousand Jews living in Eastern Galicia in 1941, more than 90 percent of whom were murdered, half were deported to the extermination camp of Belżec and half shot in situ. Even when the shootings were conducted in slightly more isolated forests or cemeteries, the preceding brutal roundups, or *Aktionen*, which were accompanied by a great deal of gratuitous violence, took place in public view. Killing sites were frequently close enough for the shots to be heard by other residents. In most cases, locally recruited auxiliary troops and policemen actively participated.

Such spectacles, rarely portrayed in any detail in official documentation or postwar historiography, are amply documented in contemporary diaries, postwar testimonies, courtroom witness accounts, and memoirs. These eyewitness reports shed new light on interethnic coexistence and violence in Eastern Europe and reveal both the peculiarities of the Holocaust and its affinity to other instances of modern genocide. Because the

Holocaust in Eastern Europe was often experienced as a communal massacre, it left a deep and lasting imprint on all surviving inhabitants of these areas. In much of Central and Western Europe, the Jews were “simply” deported to the “East,” and the few who returned rarely recounted their experiences or found willing listeners for many years thereafter. Conversely, the peoples of Eastern Europe, Jews and gentiles alike, were direct witnesses to and protagonists in a genocide that became an integral, routine, almost “normal” feature of daily life during the war, whether it targeted or spared or was exploited by them.⁶

It bears stressing what this “normality” of communal genocide literally meant. For in Eastern Europe large numbers of Jewish victims were slaughtered in front of family members, friends, and colleagues, in the cemeteries where their ancestors were buried, on the forested hills where they had strolled with lovers or picnicked with children, in the synagogues where they had prayed, in their own homes and farms and cellars.⁷ Many postwar inhabitants of former Jewish property retained vivid recollections of the previous owners and the circumstances of their murder. This, too, is a characteristic of communal massacre, which is almost the exact inverse of industrial killing in the extermination camps. Communal massacre devastates lives and warps psyches. It belies the very notion of passive bystanders: everyone becomes a protagonist, hunter and prey, resister and facilitator, loser and profiteer. Often, in the course of events, people come to play several roles. And the resulting sorrow and shame, self-deception and denial, still infuse the way in which people remember, speak, and write about that past.

Nothing demonstrates these aspects of the Holocaust more clearly than testimonies. They expose its intimate, personally devastating effects as much as they reveal the opportunities it presented for greed and violence. Most important, testimonies repeatedly illustrate that even in the midst of the horror there was always a measure of choice, and that such choices could and did save lives and redeem souls. In these conditions, claims of indifference and passivity are meaningless: for what does it mean to remain indifferent to the murder of your classmates under your own windows, or to the sounds of shots and screams from the nearby forest? What is the meaning of passivity when you move into a home vacated by your neighbors whom you have just heard being executed, when you eat with their silverware, when you tear out their floorboards to look for gold, when you sleep in their beds?

Interviewed sixty years after the Holocaust, some non-Jewish residents of Buczacz could still remember the events they witnessed during the war. They recalled seeing “how the Hitlerites committed crimes against the Jews . . . how those people dug their own graves . . . how they buried them alive . . . and how the ground was moving over the people who were still not dead.”⁸ The Germans, recalled another witness,⁹ conducted regular roundups, after which “we could see . . . corpses of women, men and children lying on the road . . . infants . . . [thrown] from balconies onto the paved road . . . lying in the mud with smashed heads and spattered brains. . . . We could

hear machine-gun fire” from the nearby killing site.¹⁰ Yet such witnesses also describe relations between local Jews and non-Jews in positive terms. “Our people,” says one, “Ukrainians and Poles alike—tried to help them however they could. They made dugouts in the ground, and the Jews hid there. Secretly people would bring food to those dugouts. . . . We pitied those people, for they were beaten, always scared for their lives and never knowing what would happen to them next.”¹¹ Another reported that although “the local people were very careful about associating with the Jews . . . others did help, but very cautiously.”¹²

Jewish witnesses interviewed at about the same time provide a different perspective. Stories of local collaboration and denunciation, at times by the very people who had been hiding Jews, are a frequent feature of such accounts. Anne Resnik’s family bunker was betrayed by the barber whose shop was over it, and most of her family was murdered. Her sister was shot shortly before the first liberation by “the same people that were pretending to hide” her.¹³ Regina Gertner’s sister was also denounced by a Polish neighbor and killed just before the end of the occupation.¹⁴ Yitzhak Bauer and other witnesses reported that the Polish dogcatchers Nahajowski and Kowalski specialized in discovering Jews and handing them over to the Germans.¹⁵

The sense of betrayal runs deep many decades later. John Saunders, who had non-Jewish friends in school, remarked, “During the war you started to discover that they hate your guts . . . they didn’t want to help us.”¹⁶ Robert Barton also had gentile friends. He assumed a Polish identity during the war. The Germans, he noted, “could not tell who the Jew is and who is a Polack . . . [but] the Polacks . . . used to say . . . you look like a Jew, you talk like a Jew, you walk like a Jew.”¹⁷ Jacob Heiss remembered local Ukrainians on horseback chasing and killing Jewish children.¹⁸

Similar observations can be found in a multitude of Jewish accounts written during the war, in its immediate aftermath, and throughout the following decades. Arie Klonicki wrote in his diary in 1943, “The hatred of the immediate surroundings . . . knows no boundaries. Millions of Jews have been slaughtered and it is not yet satiated!”¹⁹ He and his wife were denounced and murdered shortly thereafter. Joachim Mincer wrote in his diary in 1943 that “executions in the prison yard” were carried out “mainly [by] Ukrainian policemen. . . . The main perpetrator,” he wrote, “was an individual by the name of Bandrowski. He liked to shoot Jews on the street.” Mincer was also killed soon thereafter.²⁰ Izio Wachtel recounted that in July 1941, after the Soviets retreated from his town of Czortków and “even before the Germans entered, the Ukrainians arrived at the town with . . . axes and scythes and other instruments and slaughtered and killed and robbed the Jews. With the arrival of the Germans the wild killing ceased and the murder by orders began.”²¹

Stories of false rescue are especially striking in this context. Shulamit Aberdam recalled in 1998 that “a Polish woman . . . suggested . . . [to] hide me.” Her mother refused. “After the war we heard that the Polish woman had taken another girl, and after getting all the money handed her over to the Germans.” Aberdam’s family was

ejected time and again by rescuers who robbed its members of their last belongings.²² Fannie Kupitz, who survived as a girl by living with Ukrainians and often posing as one, commented in 1994, “They were good to me but they killed others.”²³ As she told me in 2002, her German labor supervisor was fooled into thinking she was Ukrainian and wanted to send her to Germany to his wife.²⁴ The locals could not easily be fooled, and the thirteen-year-old Fannie “just decided to go on my own. . . . I always was afraid; I only wished I would get a bullet in my back. . . . I . . . used to envy the people that were already dead, I used to envy when I saw a dog that is free and not afraid.”²⁵ When she met a Ukrainian she knew in the forest, “he said to me, ‘Oh, you are still alive?’” But his wife took her in for a while. Later her rescuers returned from church citing the priest’s words: “Whoever has Jews, let them go, don’t keep them!” Shortly afterward she was denounced and fled into the forest.

Girls, especially if they did not look Jewish, had a better chance of surviving than boys. But they were also targets of sexual abuse, a phenomenon that was rarely referred to directly in testimonies. One truck driver took Fannie into the forest. “He says to me, ‘You probably had a husband.’ And I was so afraid, I was pulling my hair, I was breaking my fingers, I was crying, I said, ‘No, I don’t have a husband and I am very young,’ I said. ‘Maybe you have a daughter and somebody would do this to your daughter and what would you do?’” He then left her in the forest and drove away.

Similarly, the 1945 testimony by the thirteen-year-old Rosa Brecher, who was hidden by Polish and Ukrainian women on a farm, reveals sheer terror from her main protector’s brother-in-law, Hryń, a drunk and a collaborator: “Hryń came to the attic. . . . He hugged me and . . . [asked if] I was once before in German hands and faced death . . . and whether I was a communist. [He said] he would go to town to take part in the *Aktion*. At that moment I didn’t want to live any longer. . . .” On another occasion, “Hryń climbed up to the attic. . . . He was very drunk . . . and he asked who was my father and what organization [my parents] belonged to. . . .” Then again, “At midnight . . . [Hryń] climbed up to the attic and grabbed me by the neck but I managed to scream and began to beg him to let me go. He said give me 1,000 . . . [or] I will denounce you.” Rosa recounts that she made “a hole in the roof [of the attic] and . . . looked at the chickens [in the yard] and thought that soon I would be free.”²⁶

Much of the violence was due to greed. Fannie observed how seven of her relatives were discovered by Ukrainian police: “They knew these people . . . they told them . . . ‘We are not going to do nothing to you, just give us whatever you have, and we will let you go.’ They gave them everything, [and] when they went out, everyone separately [got] a bullet in the head.”²⁷ Some young Jews tried to prevent this kind of killing or denouncing for profit. Alicia Appleman-Jurman recounted in 1996 how her brother’s small resistance group “burned the farmer’s barn or beat the farmers up . . . as . . . retaliation, so that . . . people . . . who were hiding Jews should get a message that you can’t just betray them” for money. Eventually her brother too

“was betrayed by a Polish boy who was . . . helping out” and was hanged in the local police station. Not long after, Alicia herself, who was just twelve years old, was arrested and registered by a Ukrainian police official, “my friend Olga’s father . . . who,” before the war, “said he loved me like a daughter.” On the eve of the liberation, her mother was shot right in front of her after they were denounced by their Polish building supervisor.²⁸

Toward the end of the German occupation, the region slipped into total chaos, and the few surviving Jews were at the mercy of greedy peasants, anti-Semitic Ukrainian militias, Nazi murder squads, and local bandits of all descriptions. There is very little reliable official documentation on these last months and weeks of the war in Western Ukraine, but there are many vivid and terrifying testimonies. This is a history that can largely only be told on the basis of these accounts. It has some surprising twists and turns.

One striking account of these days was written in 1947 by the seventeen-year-old Elias Chalfen. This testimony implicates the Ukrainian police commander in Buczacz, Volodymyr Kaznovs’kyi, of taking an active part in the first mass execution there as early as 28 August 1941,²⁹ and goes on to describe many other roundups, in which “the Gestapo, with the help of the Ukrainian police, was trying to find hidden bunkers,” and “our neighbors plundered [Jewish homes], taking everything they could,” as well as collecting “valuables, gold teeth, etc.,” from the thousands of victims of mass executions near the town. By the time of the chaos that preceded the German retreat, reports Chalfen, the “peasants . . . were murdering Jews, taking their belongings and leaving the naked victims in the fields. . . . The Ukrainian bandits . . . would go . . . to the houses that had been pointed out to them as hiding Jews . . . and immediately execute them. . . . Denouncing of Jews at that time,” concludes Chalfen, “reached unprecedented levels, and the peasants themselves started murdering and chasing them out” for fear of Ukrainian nationalists.³⁰

Ester Grintal testified in 1997 how, as an eighteen-year-old at the time, she tried to survive on a forced-labor farm: “The Ukrainian militia would pass through and . . . we would . . . hide in the toilet and count the shots knowing by that how many people were killed.” As the Soviets came closer, “Cossacks and others who had collaborated with the Germans” appeared in the area. “They had never seen so many Jews, so they began murdering them. They did not have enough guns so they hanged people, or killed them with axes, etc. They came to our camp with some collaborators from the village. They locked [us] in an empty barn. . . . They began beating us. . . . They shot a line of people with one bullet . . . but the bullet didn’t reach me. Again I was put in a line, and again the bullet didn’t kill me. So they began killing people with knives. I was stabbed three times.” Even the German military doctor who examined her a few days later said, “What did the Ukrainian swine do to you?”³¹

Yoel Katz, seventeen at the time, recalled in 1995 that when the inmates of his labor camp were struck by a typhus epidemic just before the liberation, the peasants

called the police to kill them, surrounded the camp, and shouted, "All the children out, we are going to kill you!" Some were killed with axes; others put in a row and shot with a single bullet. The Ukrainians, he reports, "were very hard . . . the Germans who came from the front protected us from the Ukrainians until the Russians came."³²

Who would help and who would not was often entirely unpredictable. Joe Perl, who was thirteen years old at the end of the occupation, testified in 1996 that he and his mother were hidden by a Ukrainian nationalist who was actually in charge of killing Jews and Poles.³³ Ediza Spielberg-Flitman, liberated at the age of fourteen, recalled in 1995 how her aunt and cousins were axed to death on the day the Red Army pulled out in July 1941 by a group of Ukrainians who included the children's female teacher. Conversely, her mother was saved from being murdered in a village by her female German friend. They were eventually hidden by a "poor farmer with a wife and four children." The peasant woman said to them, "It doesn't matter how long it takes, we will share our bread and potatoes with you." Yet the peasant who hid Ediza's relatives betrayed them, and they were murdered by Ukrainian policemen.

What is curious about these last months and weeks of the occupation is that according to Jewish testimonies, the Jews often ended up being protected from Ukrainian militias and bandits by German army and administrative officers. Ediza, for instance, worked for a while as a washerwoman for a German army unit with a group of Ukrainian girls. When one of the girls denounced her as a Jew, the local German commander took Ediza, her six-year-old brother, and her mother to safety: "And he left, and he then turned back with his horse one more time and he says, 'I hope you all live well.'" Ediza was "very happy to get away from the Ukrainians because they had pogroms after the war. . . . They were so brutal. I think they were worse than the Germans. . . . They left a big scar upon me. . . . I would say 80 percent [of my family] were killed by the Ukrainians who were our friends."³⁴

The much older Mojżesz Szpigiel left a testimony of these events in 1948 at the age of forty-nine. His is a relentless account of mayhem and brutality in the last months of the occupation. When the forced-labor farm where he and his family worked was liquidated in 1943, they hid in the forest, where "we were attacked by peasants. The Ukrainians began to catch people, torture them, take their money." Szpigiel's father and his two nephews were killed by a Ukrainian. Returning to the farm, they found that all inmates who fell ill from the rampant epidemics were killed by the Ukrainian police.

In January 1944, Ukrainian militiamen murdered most of the surviving 120 Jews on the farm, including Szpigiel's fourteen-year-old son. Szpigiel writes, "It is important to state that this killing was not a German action, that it was performed by Ukrainian policemen and bandits." Szpigiel and other survivors protested to the German administrator, but most of the few survivors were butchered with knives and pitchforks in yet another bandit attack just before the liberation. Szpigiel describes "the child orphans . . . stacked up in a pile . . . victims . . . lying with open guts. . . . Everybody,"

he remarks, "said they would rather die from a German bullet than from a bandit's knife." When the German administrator left, "The Jews earnestly cried." But the new commander, a young German army officer, said to them, "As long as I am here, nothing will happen to you." Indeed, when Ukrainian policemen attacked the last remaining Jews, reports Szpigiel, a German "major . . . went [there] with his aide and hit one policeman on the head with his revolver, threw them out and ordered them to leave immediately."³⁵

The fifteen-year-old Izaak Szwarc reported on these same events shortly after the war. He recalled that at the labor camp, "the peasants . . . wanted roundups to take place so that they could rob the Jews. . . . The village head forbade the peasants to give us food. The peasants organized nightly guards around the camp so that the Jews could not escape. . . . The peasants supervised our work, they beat us, did not give us any water . . ." When the camp was liquidated, "the peasants brought out hidden Jews. . . . In the forests Jews were attacked by bandits, and the peasants did not let us in." Under these conditions, the Jews "went to a village where the Germans were. We were safer there from the bandits. . . . We sensed that the peasants intended to remove us as witnesses to their crimes." On the eve of the liberation, as the Hungarian soldiers stationed in his village retreated, "the Vlasov-soldiers [former Soviet troops serving in the Wehrmacht] arrived. . . . They did not have any guns, only cold weapons. They murdered all the Jews they caught. . . . It was impossible to stay in the villages. The peasants organized roundups of Jews, killed them, discovered bunkers. Even those Jews who were hidden in bunkers at peasants' farms were killed by their hosts. The Jews began to gather in Tlusty. The [German commander] . . . promised that the Jews would not be harmed. Three hundred Jews gathered there. . . . On 23 March the Soviets arrived."³⁶

Rene Zuroff was only seven years old when she was liberated. In 1995, she recalled roundups in which she and her three-year-old sister would lie in the bunker and hear "the Germans . . . screaming, 'Juden, Juden raus, raus!' and . . . the Ukrainians and the Poles . . . calling 'żyd, żyd!'" and then the "bloodbath in your house, outside the door, in the street, bodies everywhere." Her last recollections of the Holocaust are the most terrifying. She remembers, "We were hiding in the forest and our shelter was a field of tobacco. . . . One night we heard terrible screaming and curses in Ukrainian and running, there was a whole massacre; the Ukrainian militia came at night hunting out the Jews from the woods. . . . [They] were chasing the Jews with dogs and we heard this rampage and started running for our lives . . . we were running blindly . . . and it was the scariest thing I can remember: we saw dismembered bodies, bodies without heads, and we saw death all around us; so that was my nightmare in the tobacco fields and forest."

Rene and her family were rescued by wretchedly poor Polish peasants who by then were also being massacred by Ukrainian nationalists. They hid in a hole in a "barn . . . full of rats and other vermin . . . and when the animals urinated the urine would spill

into the hole.” But “the old Polish woman was truly a saintly and wonderful human being who risked her life and that of her daughters. She gave us seven . . . pirogi . . . on Sunday, once a week we got food and very little in-between.”

When she returned to Buczacz in July 1944, Rene was not given to compassion: “I was a little girl and we would go for our entertainment to the hangings . . . of collaborators . . . in the town square . . . we were totally happy to go to our daily hangings.” She came to the United States in 1950, majored in foreign languages, married in 1962, and has two children, one of whom is a rabbi in Israel. She suffers from neuroses, hates the dark, doesn’t like to be surrounded by people, and always has to sit near an exit, “for a quick escape.” She does not “have a great deal of . . . trust and confidence in people.”³⁷

III

The testimonies cited above should demonstrate the importance of such materials for reconstructing the typical experience of Jewish victims, especially survivors, in the small towns of Eastern Galicia and, by extension, in much of the rest of Eastern Europe. Such accounts also provide much insight into the psychological conditions that predominated during this period and thus help us understand both patterns of behavior at the time and the long-term effects of these events. In other words, these testimonies are crucial to any analysis of the mental makeup and resilience of those who endured the Holocaust and of the effects of trauma on memory, recollection, and witnessing.³⁸

Nonetheless, the picture sketched above remains incomplete without more substantial reference to rescue, resistance, and intracommunal conflict. Relatively rare in the record as a whole, rescue features prominently in testimonies, even as they recount numerous instances of betrayal and denunciation. If rescue was exceptional overall, it was a much more common experience for survivors on whose testimonies we must rely. Indeed, the memories of most protagonists have remained ambivalent on precisely this score: they lay blame and assert humaneness, expose betrayal and recall altruism and sacrifice. Accounts by non-Jews often repress or marginalize Christian complicity and collaboration, while underscoring help and compassion, and in some cases blaming victims for their own fate. Jewish testimonies, quite apart from shifting uneasily between bitterness about the treachery of neighbors and gratitude for rescue by the righteous few, also alternate between repressing evidence of Jewish collaboration and corruption, and expressing profound rage and derision vis-à-vis those identified with the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police. Finally, compassion by Germans, perhaps precisely because of their local omnipotence, appears in such accounts as the strongest evidence for the possibility of choice and the potential for goodness even in the midst of genocide.

Choice constitutes the moral core of any discussion of mass murder; it also retains an underlying psychological dimension for those directly impacted by such events and for later generations.³⁹ Evidence of choice threatened to expose and shame those whose alibi for complicity was the alleged lack of alternative. But instances of altruism, however few, provide flashes of light in what would have otherwise remained a period of utter darkness. Such glimmers of humanness, faint and far between though they might have been, should not be removed from the historical record. They should be recounted because they occurred; they should be remembered because they give us hope; and they should be contextualized because they serve to highlight the far more prevalent phenomena of glee and greed, complicity and collaboration, violence and cruelty. And there can be no more reliable evidence for gentile help, rescue, and sacrifice during the Holocaust than that derived from the testimonies of Jewish survivors.

Especially for children, survival depended on a combination of luck and the help of others, whether motivated by kindness or prospects of material gain. Safah Prüfer, a little girl from Buczacz interviewed soon after the liberation, recalled that her father “handed me and my little brother to a peasant we knew in our town.” But following “a terrible *Aktion* . . . daddy built a hiding-place in the forest. . . . One day the Ukrainian police arrived and shot everybody, only I alone survived. From that day on I began to fight for my existence on my own. I wandered alone for seven months, unable to find any shelter; then finally the Red Army liberated us.”⁴⁰

It is inconceivable that such a small girl could have survived the long winter without some help from the locals, however grudging. Non-Jews often claimed that such help was offered quite willingly. A Polish resident of Buczacz related in 2003 that during the war a young woman came running to her with a baby, “crying and exhausted. . . . At my own risk I hid them in the attic of the cowshed. . . . I fed that little girl from my own breast . . . and I shared my own food with that woman.” She stressed that this was not “the only case. I tried to help [the Jews] however I could, and my husband never objected.”⁴¹

We do not know what eventually happened to that baby, though in all likelihood it did not survive. Conversely, Emil Skamene, raised as a Christian in Prague, was in fact born to the Kleiner family in Buczacz in 1941, “in a cellar of a Ukrainian peasant, who was hiding my parents.” In desperation, Emil’s father wrote his sister in Prague, begging her to rescue the baby. She in turn sent Rudolph Steiger, a German with “some function in the SS” who, for a fee, brought the eighteen-month-old baby “in a backpack . . . over two days . . . [on] the train” to Prague. Not long thereafter the peasant murdered Emil’s parents as a means to get his hands on their valuables. Emil discovered his true identity only decades later; he subsequently also found out that both his adoptive parents were Jews. As he sees it, he owes his life to the fact that “it was very important for some people that I should survive.” Even Steiger, who “originally did it for money,” grew attached to the boy, becoming a regular guest at

his birthday parties. His goodness paid off, since “as an SS official . . . [he] would have likely been killed by Czechs after the war,” had it not been for “an affidavit from my parents.” Steiger, concludes Emil, “lived . . . his life basically in exchange for this unbelievable act of heroism.”⁴²

Some older children adopted a false identity, a precarious choice in a society replete with stereotypes and prejudices. The ten-year-old Genia Weksler testified in 1946 that she spent the last months of the occupation in a Polish village with her mother and sister: “I grazed cattle. . . . In the house they often talked about Jews. ‘Jews are cheaters.’ . . . The children always played . . . ‘manhunt’ on Jews . . . we lived as Poles until the liberation. I was often told that I have Jewish eyes, Jewish black hair. I answered that if ‘You take a closer look it is possible that I’m completely Jewish.’”⁴³ Bronia Kahane, who was ten when the Germans invaded in 1941, was initially hidden with her mother by a Ukrainian peasant who felt loyalty to her grandfather, even though his own son was a concentration camp guard. They were also saved from an execution by an Austrian SS man thanks to her mother’s excellent German and a \$10 bill. But in spring 1944 she lost her entire family and began working as a farmhand. She lived in a house filled with Jewish goods looted by the owner’s son and was told by her employer, “You do everything like a Jew.” When she returned to Buczacz after the liberation, Bronia “spoke only Ukrainian . . . I forgot everything.” She found the few surviving Jews terrified of being attacked: “I never went back to my house . . . because they said . . . ‘They’re going to kill you.’”⁴⁴

Aliza Golobov, who was fourteen when the Germans invaded, was also first saved by a German soldier, who hid her family during an *Aktion* in 1942. Although she was denounced several times and lost her entire family, Aliza was rescued by a number of Ukrainians and acquaintances of her father’s in the town of Stanisławów. The lawyers Dr. Volchuk and Mr. Krochmichek, the latter’s father, a priest, and a police inspector provided her with false papers and protected her until the liberation, receiving no compensation and at great risk to their own and their families’ lives.⁴⁵ Hilda Weitz, who was also fourteen in 1941, was sheltered by a Ukrainian family from Buczacz, despite the fact that “they were . . . very nationalistic” and that “two of the brothers were drafted to German army.” She and her younger brother were later hidden by a blacksmith’s family in a “very rough anti-Semitic town.” The man, his wife, and their child eventually fled the village, “because they were afraid they will come to . . . look for Jews.” Hilda and her brother were left alone: “I remember the light looked so beautiful, the sun, the nature, I said, ‘Oh my God, life is so beautiful, but we will never see it anymore.’ I thought this was our last day. . . .”⁴⁶ Shortly thereafter, the Soviets arrived.

In some cases love, passion, and loyalty also played a role. The sixteen-year-old Zofia Pollak jumped off a train headed to the Belzec extermination camp near the town of Rawa Ruska, only to be arrested by the ethnic German Polish policemen Smola. He said to her: “You are so young . . . and so pretty, you shouldn’t be killed.” He

took care of Zofia for six weeks. “He was really in love with me. . . . But he was a married man. And his wife and two children were on vacation.” When his wife returned, Smola sent Zofia back to her father and brother in Buczacz. She survived much of the remainder of the war thanks to the goodwill of a Polish work supervisor on the agricultural farm in which the father, a former estate manager, was employed. Almost murdered by Ukrainian partisans, they ended up in the barn of a poor peasant who had once been helped by Zofia’s father. “He said: ‘Whatever I have I will share with you. . . .’ He covered us with hay. It was very cold. . . . We were there in one position, we couldn’t move and this is how we were liberated on February 23, 1944 in that place.”⁴⁷

In other cases, youngsters were saved thanks to split-second decisions by strangers. Eighteen-year-old Cyla Sznajder hid in the attic of the German administrative office during the liquidation of the Nagórzanka labor camp near Buczacz in 1942, and “thanks to the cleaner—a Pole, who found me by chance . . . I managed to get out . . . without being seen.” During another liquidation action in January 1943, she hid with a friend in the backyard of a farm. The ethnic German peasant who discovered them there “invited us into his hut . . . ordered his wife to prepare warm food . . . fed us . . . [and] found for us some old rags.” Later she and a few others were supplied with food by another peasant woman. And at the very end, Cyla and several other Jewish girls hid in the attic of a cloister: “The nuns comforted us that things would not last long, and brought us food.”⁴⁸

Rescuers were not all of the same cast, and we have contradictory reports about some of them. In 1946 the twenty-one-year-old Shmuel Rosen testified that he, his two brothers, and their mother had hidden for nine months in a grave where they “built . . . a little apartment . . . with the help of the gravedigger” Mańko Świerszczak, in the Christian cemetery on the slope of the Fedor Hill overlooking the town of Buczacz.⁴⁹ In a 1960 testimony, Shmuel described Świerszczak as “an illiterate but a very upright man,” who, “in return for a fee,” hid “forty Jews in the attic of the cemetery’s chapel” during an *Aktion*, refusing to betray them even when the Ukrainian police “beat him up.” The Rosens paid Świerszczak “1,000 zloty every month for the supplies” in return for hiding them.⁵⁰ Shmuel’s older brother Henry depicted Świerszczak in 1997 as “a gorgeous man” and “a Christian. . . . He would say, ‘If I will turn you in, then my kids, my grandkids, and their grandchildren will have to pay for my sin.’”⁵¹ But in March 1944, a couple of months after the Rosens moved to “a shelter under the floor” of the mortuary, “a group of German soldiers came into the” house and “the floor collapsed.” The brothers managed to escape, “but our poor mother . . . could not run with her sick legs. We saw . . . how our mother was dragged out and shot.”⁵² Świerszczak later buried her.⁵³

The three boys were subsequently hidden by an old Polish acquaintance, the peasant Michał Dutkiewicz,⁵⁴ even as some of their relatives were denounced and murdered in the same village.⁵⁵ It was thanks to them that Świerszczak’s tale of heroism

became known, and in 1983 he and his Ukrainian wife Marynka were declared “righteous among the nations” by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.⁵⁶ Yet Yad Vashem’s archives also contain an account written in 1947 by Moshe Wizinger, a friend of the Rosens, who had a very different recollection of the undertaker. In June 1943 Wizinger also sought refuge in the cemetery, where he encountered a “very frightened” Świerszczak, followed by his wife, who urged him to leave or to give himself up to the Germans. Shortly thereafter he was captured by Ukrainian fighters, barely managed to escape, and returned to the cemetery. This time Marynka “started to shout at me to run . . . otherwise she herself would call the Germans.” Remarkably, at this point Wizinger was taken in by a local Polish resistance group, whose leader, Edek, decided to punish the couple for refusing shelter to a Jew. After beating up Marynka while her husband was hiding under the bed, Edek declared, according to Wizinger, “For what you did to him, I would have killed you like dogs. And only your behavior before that . . . stops me from doing it. Fear of the Germans cannot be an excuse for you . . . we will punish loyalty to German orders with death. Remember this and tell the others.”

By the standards of Edek’s moral code, then, as reported by Wizinger, according to which Polish honor required saving Jews, whether one liked them or not, Świerszczak did not pass the test. But Edek’s group was an uncommon local phenomenon—most nationalist Polish and Ukrainian partisans were at best unfriendly to Jews—and he and most of his fighters were killed. The only record of his heroism is in Wizinger’s unread account; consequently he received no recognition by Yad Vashem, and Świerszczak’s status was never challenged. This ambiguity of heroism was even more pronounced in the case of Jewish resisters. At the end of his diary, Wizinger scans the handful of Jewish fighters still left on the eve of the liberation and notes that they are “the last of a dying nation.”⁵⁷ Inquiring who they were and why there were so few of them tells us a great deal about the complexities of the historical reality and the vicissitudes of memory.

An outstanding example is Yitzhak Bauer, eighteen when the Germans invaded and eighty when I interviewed him in 2003. Bauer recalled that “compared to other places the Christian population” of Buczacz “was relatively all right. . . . At least they did not harm us.” Saved by a Ukrainian friend during the first *Aktion*, Bauer ended up in a small Jewish resistance group in the nearby forest. While he took action against denouncers, Bauer maintained a nuanced view of Ukrainians, noting, for instance, that even the notorious chief of the local militia, Volodymyr Kaznovs’kyi, refrained from action upon discovering that his own father, a priest, was hiding Jews. Similarly, Bauer’s Ukrainian friend Shenko, who provided the group with food, later joined the police, explaining that “the alternative was to enlist for labor in Germany or join the SS Division ‘Galicia.’” Not long after, Shenko’s house was burned down as punishment for hiding Jews. Bauer also recalled an elderly Ukrainian family friend who invited him and his brother to his home, gave them food, and parted from them saying, “I wish that you manage to survive.”⁵⁸

From a deposition he submitted to a West German court in 1968 as evidence for the trial of former Nazi perpetrators in Buczacz, however, it turns out that before becoming a partisan, Bauer had served in the Ordnungsdienst (Jewish police, or OD). He was apparently not the only one who made the transition from collaboration to resistance. Bauer noted that he joined the OD in November 1941. The police, numbering some thirty men, “carried out the orders of the *Judenrat*, but during *Aktionen* . . . we were put at the disposition of . . . the Gestapo or the local gendarmerie.” According to Bauer, on 27 November 1942, he “was assigned to participate in the cleanup of the Jewish hospital,” which “was overflowing with . . . about 100 . . . sick people. . . . The sick who could not move were shot right there and then in their beds. The others were taken out to the railroad station . . . and transported to extermination in Belżec.” Bauer personally witnessed some of the shooting in the hospital, as well as during the *Aktion* of April 1943.⁵⁹

There is no necessary contradiction between Bauer’s two accounts; it may be simply a matter of relating different segments of his experiences appropriate to the circumstances in which they were presented. But it is also possible that Bauer could not assimilate the two parts of his story into one psychological and experiential whole: to the German court he asserted his role as an OD man, in order to establish his ability to identify German perpetrators; to me he asserted his role as partisan, thus providing his survival with the more heroic aura befitting the Israeli context. Yet many of those who lived through that period would not share our understanding of the choices made by such men as Bauer or Shenko. Gershon Gross, a tough working-class twenty-four-year-old in 1941, had only contempt for the *Judenrat* and OD: “What was their job? . . . No one wants to talk about it. . . . The Germans would say they need five hundred people. The [Jewish] police went” to seize them. Gershon and his brothers refused to join the police. Of a *Judenrat* member who survived, Gershon noted dispassionately that he “had to hide, like Eichmann. If they found him they would kill him.” Jewish collaborators, to his mind, were the worst, since they turned against their own. He had more sympathy for gentiles precisely because his expectations were lower. A Ukrainian policeman, a former classmate, let him go after the OD forced him to bury victims of a mass shooting. When Torah scrolls were “hanged . . . like you hang clothes” from the bridge over the Strypa River in Buczacz, “a Ukrainian priest hid one Torah in the church,” retuning it to Gross after the liberation. And when one of his brothers was wounded in a partisan action, a poor Polish peasant sheltered and nursed him back to health. But Gross had no illusions. He knew that “Ukrainian police took” Hungarian and Czech Jewish refugees “to the Dniester River, tied them with wires and threw them alive into the Dniester.” Closer to home, his own parents were denounced by a local Polish girl, taken out to their own yard, and shot.⁶⁰

Moshe Wizinger was also harsher toward Jewish collaborators than toward gentile neighbors. He similarly remembered the “harsh protest from the Ukrainian priests,”

who demanded from “the leader of the Ukrainian bands, Dankowicz . . . to stop desecrating Holy sites,” and he noted the initiative of “the head of the Ukrainian Basilian Monastery . . . to carry the scrolls to the monastery where they would be safe.” Wizinger distinguished between “German soldiers led by Ukrainian dregs,” who in the early days of the occupation “forced their way into Jewish houses and raped young Jewish girls,” as well as murdering former communists, including “Jews, Poles and even Ukrainians,” and the Ukrainian community leaders who “were helpless” against “the leaders of the formerly secret Ukrainian bands . . . that were ruling now.” He also stressed that those “Ukrainian bands” were soon thereafter “appointed as the police forces” that constituted the main local component of future mass killings. But it was about the Jewish leadership that Wizinger wrote most contemptuously, deriding the manner in which “the countless demands by the Germans or Ukrainians were fulfilled immediately” by the *Judenrat*. The OD, for its part, “robbed the Jews of furniture, bed linen, and clothing,” so that even “in those terrible times” Jewish officials “were able to lead a very good life and to amass large sums of money,” while “Jews who were trying to hide their belongings were mercilessly beaten” by them. When Jews from neighboring smaller towns and villages were expelled to Buczacz, not only were they “attacked and robbed by the peasants,” but once they arrived the Jewish police targeted them: “The OD are robbing, killing, worse than the Germans.”

Some Jewish leaders did try to set a different moral standard. Thus, when the Germans demanded 150 Jews for work in a forced labor camp, the head of the *Judenrat*, Dr. Engelberg, “announced that he would under no condition take part in selecting the people.” But his assistants, Dr. “Seifer and Kramer Baruch . . . proposed to exchange those unable to work with healthy and young workers” and “supported their proposal with presents.” As a result, “the names taken off the list belonged to those who could pay more,” while Seifer and Kramer “made a great deal of money . . . and did not refuse to accept jewelry as well.” There were some moments of heroism. Jankiel Ebenstein, “who during his few months of work at the *Judenrat* became hated by everyone,” and “was called an agent of the Gestapo . . . was ordered to help . . . looking for hidden bunkers.” He initially “tried to convince the Chief of the Gestapo that no Jews were hiding in” a certain house. But “when . . . they started pulling Jews out of there,” he “grabbed a hatchet and tried to hit the Gestapo soldier,” only to be immediately shot down. As Wizinger wrote, “that’s how the man . . . died a hero’s death. That day he was forgiven everything.”⁶¹

The effect of German rule on intraethnic and interethnic relations is noted in many testimonies. Zofia Pollak “had very close . . . gentile friends” but “after the Germans occupied our city they wouldn’t even look at me because I was Jewish.” As for the ghetto, “the *Judenrat* was very mean and the Jewish police was very mean. They thought that by being very obedient to the Germans, they will save their own lives. So the very nice people became very ugly.” But, Pollack concluded, “at the end

everybody was killed.”⁶² Shmuel Rosen recalled that “the two hundred richest Jewish families found their way to the labor camp,” considered the last safe site in Buczacz, by paying the *Judenrat* exorbitant sums.⁶³ Soon thereafter the labor camp was also liquidated. Yet Rosen did think that wealth and corruption made a difference in survival rate. Of up to one thousand Jews who came out of hiding following the first liberation of Buczacz in March 1944, “next to a handful of upright people, only dubious characters survived—denouncers, militiamen.” To be sure, most of them were murdered when the Germans recaptured the town a few days later. Only a few managed to escape, and some became partisans. The Rosen brothers, for their part, joined the Red Army. By the second liberation in July 1944, less than one hundred Jews were still alive in Buczacz.⁶⁴

Survivors have often been reluctant to speak about internal Jewish corruption and complicity, invoking the phrase, “one does not speak ill of the dead.” Yet this was a crucial component of life during the Holocaust and of its subsequent memory. Witnesses from Buczacz also observed that the Jewish leadership opposed and hindered the creation of armed resistance. In 2002, Shmuel Rosen recalled overhearing a conversation between *Judenrat* leaders and a man called Zuhler, who “served in the Polish army before the war. . . . He said to them, ‘We want to create partisan groups and to go to the forest . . . but we have no money for weapons.’ . . . So they said, ‘Sir . . . we will not agree to this.’ And he left, and that was that.”⁶⁵

Rosen speculated that Jewish leaders “were scared,” and that while “some in the *Judenrat* . . . wanted” to organize resistance, others “were together with the Germans. Excuse me for saying that, to our regret, Dr. Seifer was one.” By this Rosen meant that Seifer preferred collaboration to resistance, and his willingness to name the man must have also had to do with the fact that of all the *Judenrat* members, it was only Seifer who survived: “They say he is in Australia.” Zeev Anderman, another survivor, who was also present at the interview with Rosen, suggested, “Let’s get off this subject, gentlemen, it is too painful. . . .” But Rosen insisted: “Look, they have to know this. . . . There were bad things in the *Judenrat* . . . they would seize a young man for work and they would exchange him [for another]. Who would [serve for the] exchange?” Now Anderman gave way: “One of the poor boys.” And Rosen concluded, “Exactly, they would get the poor kids, [in exchange for] those of the rich. . . .” And Anderman added, “My uncle, they got him. . . .”⁶⁶

These are fraught and agonizing issues. Ultimately, in conditions of communal genocide, no one remained entirely apart from the events. A passing remark by Shmuel Rosen revealed that, in fact, he too had worked in the *Judenrat*, if only in the position of a “helper” (“I made tea, coffee”). Zeev Anderman spoke with pride about his brother Janek’s death in April 1943, when he pulled out a pistol and shot a Ukrainian policeman, only to be beaten, dragged to the town square, and burned alive.⁶⁷ Yet some sources suggest that Janek had a pistol because he was or had been an OD man. Perhaps, just like Ebenstein, his heroic end made up for his past actions in the police.⁶⁸

IV

Personal accounts of genocide, by their very nature, do not allow for the creation of a single, uniform narrative of events. Rather, they offer a multitude of perspectives, some complementary, others contradictory, which, when put together, can provide an imperfect yet multidimensional picture of past reality. At times, this may be a contentious or opaque portrait, all the more so considering the extreme circumstances of World War II and the Holocaust. Yet listening closely to the witnesses allows us greater depth and nuance than can be derived from the tendentious obfuscation of official accounts. Individual, personal perspectives are all the more important in reconstructing events on the ethnically mixed borderlands of Eastern Europe.

Indeed, certain internal contradictions within individual accounts carry special significance for collective memory and historiography. Generalizing statements by witnesses on the conduct of entire ethnic groups tend to conform to conventional views, which are in part reflected in the overall course of events. Yet the same witnesses often cite specific cases of individual actions that belie the generalizations and, not least importantly, were vital to the witnesses' own survival. Such instances of atypical but crucial behavior provide a corrective to widespread prejudices and undermine deterministic views of the past by introducing an element of choice.

The gap between conventional generalizations and unique individual experience makes for ambivalence. This reaction comes into particularly sharp relief in extreme situations such as genocide. Jewish accounts contain a large measure of mixed feelings about Christian neighbors, reflecting a general impression of universal betrayal and individual experiences of rescue. Precisely because denunciation and murder were so pervasive, rare instances of mercy and altruism stand out all the more. And of course, witness accounts disproportionately represent gentile rescue, since survival was so heavily dependent on such acts.

But testimonies also tell us that just as perpetrators occasionally showed pity or compassion, rescuers were not always altruistic, as motivations for action ranged from pure goodness to cynical exploitation. While a few men with blood on their hands occasionally chose to save someone, others masqueraded as rescuers only to rob and betray those they sheltered; while many upstanding citizens became complicit in plunder and murder, some wretchedly poor peasants shared their last crumbs with the desperate remnants of destroyed communities. Some sought a postwar alibi, others paid back moral debts; generalizing about motivation is futile. Habitual killers may have acted kindly only once; others might have been transformed by that first pang of conscience. Some began with good intentions and then turned to denunciation; others acted out of greed but became attached to those they rescued. Ambivalence was hardly restricted to survivors.

Observing the dynamics of communal genocide from a local perspective reveals that not a few of those who perpetrated violence at one point became its victims at

another. Ukrainian nationalists collaborated with the Germans in killing Jews and massacring Poles; they were in turn targeted by the prewar Polish state, by the Soviet authorities, and eventually also by the Germans. Poles benefited from their prewar state's discriminatory anti-Jewish and anti-Ukrainian policies; in turn, they were subjected to Soviet deportations and Ukrainian ethnic cleansing. Jewish community leaders and educated youths tried to save themselves by becoming complicit in the victimization of poorer and weaker fellow Jews, only to have their illusions of power and security dispelled as they too were murdered. Some saw this turning of tables as a kind of justice, but ultimately this merely resulted from the dynamics of unbound, unrestricted violence on a hitherto unimaginable scale.

And yet many testimonies also contain a *mélange* of unspoken gratitude for the rescuers and inarticulate remorse for having failed to recognize and thank them for so long. The pervasive atmosphere of mayhem and violence, betrayal and abandonment, might have made such acts of mercy stand out all the more. Instead, they often receded into the background as survivors mourned the dead and tried to build a new life. But the testimonies tell a different story. The multitudes of the drowned have left precious little behind, yet the few who were saved have given us a detailed record of these events—of which their rescuers constituted a vital component. This is of course an unbalanced historical record. But it has the benefit of enriching our understanding of the Holocaust and its aftermath. Ultimately, beyond saving their lives, acts of rescue also saved the souls of the survivors. After all, it is astonishing that men, women, and children who lived through that era had the inner resources to rebuild their lives; and yet many of them did just that. This is testimony to their strength and resilience. But I would argue that what contributed no less to their determination to raise new families, and to their ability to instill in their children trust and humanness, was the memory of those who had selflessly saved them.

This memory remained deeply etched in the souls of the survivors. But it did not find public expression for decades, providing just enough sustenance to go on living but never completely resurfacing, perhaps because of the hardships of life after the catastrophe, or because allowing it to emerge would have brought back all the other horrors and betrayals and losses. When it did return, decades later, it came after lives had been lived, children and grandchildren had been born, and one could face the approaching inevitable end with more equanimity and sense of fulfillment. And with the memory of rescue came a recognition that those who had chosen to act then had done more than save lives and, unbeknownst to themselves perhaps, had rescued the very concept of a shared humanity—precisely that which the Nazis had set out to eradicate—by recognizing the human spark in those who were hunted down like animals.

What the witnesses I have cited here experienced hardly provides a single, one-sided lesson on human nature, or on history, or even on the events of the Holocaust. But these accounts, fraught and painful and contradictory as they are, constitute a crucial component of the past—in Buczacz and, by extension, in many other sites of

communal genocide, most especially in the borderlands of Eastern Europe.⁶⁹ Ignoring them, setting them aside, using them merely to illustrate some point or thesis unrelated to their deeper meaning not only constitutes abuse of these records of human experience; it also distorts and ultimately falsifies the historical record itself. No history should be written without listening to its protagonists, least of all the history of an event whose main goal was to silence these voices, and especially because the few who survived the disaster hoped more than anything else to transmit the memory of the events they experienced to posterity and thereby to save the multitudes of the dead from complete oblivion, statistical abstraction, and mass burial in the voluminous footnotes of scholarly publications.

Notes

1. For a forceful statement on the need for an objective and value-free use of documents, see David Engel, *Facing a Holocaust: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1943–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 1–14; at several scholarly meetings, Engel has expressed strong reservations about the use of testimonies.

2. For interesting comments on sources along these lines, see Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996), 17–21, who also writes, “Research of Jewish history under German occupation in East Galicia would have demanded knowledge of Yiddish and Hebrew, which I lack. This limitation is painful, but unavoidable” (*ibid.*, 15). See also Thomas Sandkühler, “*Endlösung*” in *Galizien: Der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz, 1941–1944* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996), 15–9. Skepticism over the use of diaries is expressed in Raul Hilberg, *Sources of Holocaust Research: An Analysis* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), 141–2, 155–9, 161–2. For a more sympathetic view that stresses the chronological proximity of accounts, see Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007), xxiv–xxvi.

3. This is ultimately the case even in Friedländer, *Years of Extermination*. A good example is Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *The Holocaust: A History* (New York, NY: Norton, 2002). A much more sophisticated discussion can be found in Alexandra Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); and Simone Gigliotti, *The Train Journey: Transit, Captivity, and Witnessing in the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2009).

4. Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

5. A few examples: Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991); Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992); Kenneth Jacobson, *Embattled Selves: An Investigation into the Nature of Identity through Oral Histories of Holocaust Survival* (New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994); and Efraim Sicher, ed., *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz* (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998). An early exception is Terence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1976).

6. Among the most harrowing texts on this “return,” see Charlotte Delbo, *None of Us Will Return*, trans. John Githens (New York, NY: Grove, 1968); and Primo Levi, *The Reawakening*, trans. Stuart Woolf (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

7. For a detailed account of one such public massacre in an East Galician town, known as “The bloody Sunday of Stanisławów” (now the city of Ivano-Frankivsk in Western Ukraine), from various

perspectives, see Pohl, *Judenverfolgung*, 144–7; Sandkühler, *Endlösung*, 150–2; Elisabeth Freundlich, *Die Ermordung einer Stadt namens Stanislau: NS-Vernichtungspolitik in Polen 1939–1945* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1986), 154–64; and Avraham Liebesman, *Im Yehudei Stanislavov bi-yemei klayah* [*With the Jews of Stanislawów in the Holocaust*] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1980, in Hebrew), 22–31.

8. Julija Mykhailivna Trembach, written on her behalf by her daughter, Roma Nestorivna Kryvenchuk, in 2003, collected by Mykola Kozak, translated from Ukrainian by Sofia Grachova.

9. Maria Mykhailivna Khvostenko (née Dovhanchuk), interview with Mykola Kozak, 2003, translated from Ukrainian by Sofia Grachova.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Trembach, 2003.

12. Tetiana Pavlyshyn, “The Holocaust in Buczacz,” *Nova Doba* 48 (1 December 2000), collected by Mykola Kozak, translated by Sofia Grachova.

13. Anne H. Resnik (née Herzog), telephone interview with me, 11 September 2002.

14. Regina Gertner, telephone interview with me, 31 July 2002.

15. Yitzhak Bauer, interview with me, Tel Aviv, November 2003, in Hebrew.

16. John Saunders, telephone interview with me, 30 July 2002.

17. Robert Barton (Bertisz), telephone interview with me, 5 July 2002.

18. Jacob Heiss, telephone interview with me, 5 July 2003, and meeting in New York City, December 2002.

19. Arie Klonicki-Klonymus, *Yoman Avi Adam* [*The Diary of Adam's Father*] (Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1969, in Hebrew), 47.

20. *Przeżycia i rozporządzenie Joachima Mincere* [*The Life and Testament of Joachim Mincer*], probably written in 1943, Yad Vashem, in Polish, translated by Eva Lutkiewicz.

21. Undated account by Yitzhak Shalev, formerly Izio Wachtel, sent to me by his son, Ziki Slav, on 25 February 2007.

22. Shulamit Aberdam (Freiberg), Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 28 April 1998, Haifa, Israel, in Hebrew.

23. Fannie Kupitz (Feldman), Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 25 April 1994, Forest Hills, New York.

24. Salomon and Fania Kupitz, interview with me in New York City, 10 October 2002.

25. This and all subsequent citations of this witness are taken from Kupitz, Shoah Foundation video.

26. Rózia Brecher, “Recollections from the City of Buczacz,” Yad Vashem Archives Division: 033, File: 765, E/32-3-, translation from Polish original with help from Joanna Michlic; Rosa Brecher, “Protocol, Taken Down in the Refugee House, Bucharest, Calea Mosilor 128, on 20 May 1945,” ZIH 301/4911, translation of German original.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Alicia Appleman-Jurman, Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 29 January 1996, La Habra, California.

29. See the extraordinary apologetic accounts of this man’s career, in Yefrem Hasai, “Under Police Uniform There Beat the Heart of a Ukrainian Patriot,” *Nova Doba* 16:8065(23 April 2004); Mykhailo Kheifetz, *Ukrayinski syluety* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2000), available at Kharkiv Group for Human Rights Protection: <http://www.khpg.org/index.php?r=14>, both translated by Sofia Grachova. And see records of Kaznovsk’kyi’s 1957 trial in Ternopil’, Branch State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukraïny): HDA SBU, m. Ternopil’, spr. 30466, 26874, 14050-P, 736, 3713, 14340-P, 9859-P, 8540-P, 8973-P, 14320-P, multiple documents, in Russian and Ukrainian.

30. Elias Chalfen, Yad Vashem Testimony, M1/E 1559, translated from Polish by Eva Lutkiewicz.

31. Ester Grintal (Nachtigal), Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 21 September 1997, Netanyah, Israel, in Hebrew.

32. Yoel Katz, Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 11 December 1995, Netanyah, Israel, in Hebrew.

33. Joe (Yekhezkiel, Jechezkiel, Olszy) Perl, Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 14 October 1996, Los Angeles, California.
34. Edzia Spielberg-Flitman, Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 14 March 1995, Skokie, Illinois, transcribed by Joshua Tobias.
35. Mojżesz Szpigieli, USHMM, reel 37 301/3492, Łódź, 10 March 1948, translated from Polish by Evelyn Zegenhagen.
36. Izaak Szwarc, USHMM, RG-15.084 Acc.1997 A.0125, Reel 5, testimony 327, ZIH 301/327, translated from Polish by Evelyn Zegenhagen.
37. Rene Zuroff (Tabak), Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 31 August 1995, Bellmore, New York.
38. This has been discussed especially well by Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*; and Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*.
39. Rafael Moses, ed., *Persistent Shadows of the Holocaust: The Meaning to Those Not Directly Affected* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1993); Dan Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Dan Bar-On, *Fear and Hope: Three Generations of the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
40. Safah Prüfer, USHMM, reel 49, from ZIH 301/4581, trans. Evelyn Zegenhagen, probably written in 1945–46.
41. Trembach, 2003.
42. Emil Skamene (Kleiner), Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 3 February 1998, Quebec, Canada, transcribed by Rachel Hoffman.
43. Genia Weksler, USHMM, RG-15.084 Acc.1997 A.0125, Reel 19, Testimony 1865, ZIH 301/1865, sometime in 1946 in Wrocław, translated from Polish by Evelyn Zegenhagen.
44. Bronia Kahane, Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 8 August 1995, South Fallsburg, New York, transcribed by Josh Tobias.
45. Aliza Golobov (Bernfeld), Division 0.3, Yad Vashem Testimonies, File # 10241, cassette # 033C/5361, recorded on 29 April 1997, in Hebrew.
46. Hilda Weitz, Shoah Foundation Videotaped testimony, 4 November 1998, Fort Lee, New Jersey, transcribed by Rachel Hoffman.
47. Zofia Pollak (Zonka Berkowicz), Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 23 August 1995, Brooklyn, New York, transcribed by Rachel Hoffman.
48. Cyla Sznajder (Huss), Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw (ZIH) 301/5699, Wrocław, 25 January 1960.
49. Samuel (Shmuel) Rosen, USHMM, translated from the Polish by Evelyn Zegenhagen, reel 20, *testimony 1935*, from ZIH (Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw), 301/1935, given on 6 August 1946, in Kraków.
50. Samuel (Shmuel) Rosen, Yad Vashem, 03/2055, Tel Aviv, 20 December 1960, in file M-49/1935, translated from Polish by Frank Grelka.
51. Henry Rosen, Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 10 November 1997, Chicago, transcribed by James T. Stever. A gist of Henry Rosen's story can also be found in Mordecai Paldiel, *The Path of the Righteous: Gentile Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1993), 191–3, along with a photo of Świerszczak.
52. S. Rosen, Yad Vashem, 1960.
53. Omer Bartov interview with Shmuel (Samuel) Rosen and Zev Anderman, Tel Aviv, 12 March 2002, transcribed by Raz Bartov.
54. S. Rosen, Yad Vashem, 1960.
55. H. Rosen, Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 1997.
56. The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, The Righteous among the Nations Department, Righteous among the Nations Honored by Yad Vashem by 1 January 2010, www.yadvashem.org, www1.yadvashem.org/righteous_new/vwall.html.
57. Wizinger, Moshe, Yad Vashem, 03/3799. The account was written in Cyprus in 1947. Wizinger was a radio technician from Buczacz. Translated from Polish by Eva Lutkiewicz.

58. Bauer, 2003.
59. Bundesarchiv B 162/5182: "Aufklärung von NS-Verbrechen im Kreis Czortków / Distrikt Galizien, 1941–1944, Sammelverfahren gg. Brettschneider u.a.," deposition taken on 10 January 1968, pp. 6212–4.
60. George (Gershon) Gross, Shoah Foundation Videotaped testimony, 17 June 1996, Deerfield Beach, Florida.
61. Wizinger, Yad Vashem, 03/3799.
62. Pollak, Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony.
63. S. Rosen, Yad Vashem, 1960.
64. Ibid.
65. Members of the Zuhler family in Buczacz included Prof. Zuhler, who taught German at the gymnasium in 1939 and is said to have survived the war; Herzas Zuhler, who was a prominent prewar merchant; and Regina Zuhler, born in 1907, who testified at a German trial in 1965. Stanisław J. Kowalski, *Powiat Buczański i jego zabytki* (Biały Dunajec-Ostróg: Ośrodek "Wołanie z Wołynia," 2005), 89; Adam Żarnowski, ed., *Kresy Wschodnie II Rzeczypospolitej: Buczacz* (Kraków: Wydanie Własne [privately published], 1992), 9; *Aufklärung von NS-Verbrechen im Kreis Czortków/Distrikt Galizien 1941–1944: Sammelverfahren gg. Brettschneider u.a.*, Bundesarchiv, B 162/5163, pp. 492–3.
66. Bartov interview with Rosen and Anderman, 2002.
67. Yisrael Kohen, ed., *Sefer Buchach [The Book of Buczacz]* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1956, in Hebrew), 246, 288.
68. Szwarc, ZIH 301/327. Another account mentions an Abraham Anderman, who is said to have shot a policeman during an *Aktion* in July (more likely June) 1943: Zakhar Gerber, Shoah Foundation videotaped testimony, 28 November 1996, Akko, Israel, in Russian, translated by Jane Zolot-Gassko; similarly, Moshe Wizinger mentions a certain A. Anderman who shot and killed a Ukrainian policeman in June 1943 and then escaped: Wizinger, Yad Vashem, 03/3799; and Yitzhak Bauer's above-cited 1968 deposition speaks of "Max Andermann, a former member of the OD, [who] was killed in May 1944": Bundesarchiv B 162/5182. But Dr. Max Anderman, born in Buczacz in 1907, made a deposition in Israel to a German court in 1965. According to this document, he worked in the Jewish hospital until May 1942, after which he was in hiding until the liberation: Bundesarchiv B 162/5169, *Aufklärung von NS-Verbrechen im Kreis Czortków / Distrikt Galizien, 1941–1944, Sammelverfahren gg. Brettschneider u.a.*, deposition taken on 27 December 1965, pp. 1977–8.
69. For an effective use of oral histories in reconstructing interethnic violence in another part of the world, see Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Omer Bartov is the John P. Birkelund Distinguished Professor of European History at Brown University. He received his DPhil from Oxford in 1983 and was a research fellow at Harvard, Princeton, and the Berlin American Academy, as well as receiving NEH and Guggenheim fellowships. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His books include *The Eastern Front, 1941–45* (1985), *Hitler's Army* (1991), *Murder in Our Midst* (1996), *Mirrors of Destruction* (2000), *Germany's War and the Holocaust* (2003), *The "Jew" in Cinema* (2005), and *Erased* (2007). He is currently writing on interethnic relations in Eastern Galicia.