

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

JUNE 12, 1942, KHMEL'NIK GHETTO, REICHSKOMMISSARIAT UKRAINE

June 12, 1942 divided twelve-year-old Israel G.'s¹ life into two unequal parts—before and after the day when the young Jews of Khmel'nik were shot during the Children's Aktion. Israel's travails began a year earlier, when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. His father was drafted into the Red Army, while Israel, his mother Alexandra, and a younger brother Venyamin, tried to escape to the Soviet hinterland. They reached Kyiv, but needed a special permit to cross the Dnieper River and continue further east. After considerable effort, Alexandra was able to obtain the necessary paperwork—only to have it stolen by another Jewish family fleeing Khmel'nik. She and her children were forced to return to their town, which had since been occupied by the Germans.

Israel's family was better off than most local Jews. His grandfather, David G., was a coppersmith and the Germans needed his labor. The family also had money. Israel G. was named after his great-uncle, Israel Pinchefskey, who had immigrated to the United States before World War I, was drafted when the United States entered the war, and was killed in France. Until the German invasion, Israel Pinchefskey's mother, who remained in Khmel'nik, received a pension from the United States government.

On January 2, 1942 the Nazi authorities forced the Jews of Khmel'nik, about 4,500 people, into a ghetto. Two weeks later, only 1,000 to 1,500 skilled workers and their families were still alive; the rest had been shot by German mobile killing squad *Einsatzkommando 5* and its local collaborators. Then, following several uneventful months, the June 12 Aktion came. The Nazis ordered the ghetto inhabitants to the town's main square, in front of the police building, where all of the children and several old people—360 people in total—were rounded up. By that time Israel G. had already seen enough to understand what would follow. "I somehow made a decision to escape no matter what. . . . Not go to the pit, not to undress, not to wait submissively (*pokorno*) to be shot," he recalled. The police building

had large pieces of plywood covering the windows. Israel G. hid behind them and then ran away while seven-year-old Venyamin stayed with the other children. Israel thus became the only survivor of the Children's Aktion, but he never forgave himself for not going with his brother toward certain death. "It is naturally my biggest pain," he admitted in 1995. "Back then, as a child, I didn't understand that, but the older I become the more painful, sharper [the memory] is."

Having lost her younger son and fearing the imminent liquidation of the ghetto, Alexandra G. decided to make another desperate run for her life. With her remaining money she arranged fake IDs in the names of Alexandra and Vasili Donets, both ethnic Ukrainians, and fled the ghetto with a non-Jewish guide. They crossed the border into Romanian-occupied Ukraine and snuck into the Zhmerinka ghetto, which was considered relatively safe; at this point the Romanians were confining Jews to ghettos but were not killing them *en masse*. Alas, this sanctuary was short-lived. Alexandra and Israel were expelled by the local Jewish authorities for trying to obtain food outside the ghetto. The Jewish police of the Zhmerinka ghetto knew perfectly well that, if caught, Israel G. and his mother would be shot, but they also feared that the refugees' smuggling of food might endanger the entire community. Israel and Alexandra then moved to Murafa, where after bribing Romanian officials they were allowed to remain until liberation in March 1944.²

The Puzzle

The story of Israel G. and his family is not unusual. Many, if not most, survivors have similar stories to tell. Dates, places, and details vary, but the basic narratives are tragically similar: survivors recount losing family members, underscore their grief and pain, and emphasize luck and outright miracles. The underlying, but rarely explicitly stated theme of these stories is that of *choice*. Even if under impossible constraints, each and every Jewish person had to decide how to react to Nazi persecution. Lawrence Langer famously calls these "choiceless choices," because no matter what the Jews did, death was the most likely outcome—yet choices they were nonetheless.³ Each Jew had to select a survival strategy, or sometimes several. Israel G. and his mother first decided to escape, then they coped for a time with the evolving situation inside Khmel'nik ghetto, and then finally escaped a second time. The Zhmerinka ghetto Jewish police *chose* to collaborate with the Holocaust perpetrators—even though their actions put the lives of Israel and

Alexandra, fellow Jewish victims, in grave danger. There were also those who fought back, weapons in hand. The Khmel'nik ghetto had an underground resistance group that obtained weapons and planned to flee to the forests to join Soviet guerilla units.

Another important, but often overlooked feature of the Holocaust is the community-level variation in victims' behavior. Quite a few people escaped, or tried to escape, the Khmel'nik ghetto, but there were other ghettos from which almost no one fled. The Khmel'nik ghetto had an underground resistance, while most other ghettos did not. The Jewish police in the Zhmerinka ghetto collaborated with the Holocaust perpetrators, whereas the Jewish authorities in the Khmel'nik ghetto are usually not accused of collaboration.

The Jewish experience during the Holocaust is not unique when it comes to variation in victims' behavior. In Rwanda, many Tutsis (and moderate Hutus) tried to escape the genocide, while some did nothing. Some Tutsis even joined the Hutu *Interahamwe* killing squads.⁴ There was organized Tutsi armed resistance in the Bisesero Hills, but not in other areas. In the Ottoman Empire, Armenian reactions to the 1915 genocidal campaign likewise ranged from armed resistance to passivity to collaboration. During the war in Bosnia, numerous Muslims reaped handsome benefits from active collaboration with Serbs.⁵ What explains this variation in behavioral choices and survival strategies?

Genocide and mass killings involve numerous people, usually divisible into three main groups: perpetrators, bystanders, and victims.⁶ In recent decades substantial attention has been devoted to studying the behavior of the perpetrators of violence in genocides and mass killings,⁷ civil wars, and uprisings.⁸ At the same time, the literature on collective violence has almost completely overlooked another crucial group of actors: *the victims*. Because collective violence is a dynamic and relational process, its trajectories and outcomes cannot be fully understood if focus is placed solely on perpetrators.⁹ Civilians, when targeted by mass violence, also have choices to make and strategies to adopt. Being targeted by mass violence does not deprive one of agency. Victims of all ages, genders, and walks of life—whether they are Jews, Tutsis, or Armenians—are ordinary people who are forced to act in the face of extraordinary dangers. The analysis of victims' behavior cannot explain why genocides happen, but it can help us to better understand how they happen and what their outcomes are. This book asks the question: *What explains the different patterns of behavior adopted by civilians targeted by mass violence?* To answer this question, I analyze Jewish behavior during the Holocaust at the individual and community levels.

The Strategies

An analysis of Jewish behavior should begin by outlining the strategies that the Jewish victims of the Holocaust had to choose from. I propose a new typology of the strategies in which the Jews could and did engage during the Holocaust: (1) cooperation and collaboration; (2) coping and compliance; (3) evasion; and (4) resistance.

Cooperation and *collaboration* mean working with the enemy by either participating in or facilitating the persecution. The key distinction between the two is the intended goal of the actions taken. Those who merely cooperated with the Nazis wanted to preserve the community and its members; those who collaborated knowingly acted to the detriment of the community's or individual Jews' survival. Cooperation is open and visible, while collaboration can be either public, as in the case of corrupt and self-serving Judenrat chairs, or private, as in the actions of paid Nazi informants.

Coping means confronting the danger and trying to survive while staying put, without (1) leaving one's community or country; (2) engaging in cooperation or collaboration with or; (3) resistance to the perpetrators. An extreme version of coping is *compliance*, which means faithfully obeying the rules that the authorities prescribe and taking no active steps to change one's situation.

Evasion is an attempt to escape persecution by fleeing; leaving the community, emigrating, or assuming a false identity.

Finally, *resistance* is involvement in organized activity that is aimed at physically or materially harming the perpetrators.

It is important to emphasize that this typology makes no normative claims regarding the choices that victims make. There is no moral scale on which I evaluate each type of behavior. Instead, I argue that individual Jews acted as they did for a reason, and that an analytical approach to these reasons is of vital importance for understanding the Holocaust.

My typology builds on but differs from existing work. Raul Hilberg, one of the founders of Holocaust research, suggested the following list of Jews' reactions to Nazi genocide: resistance, alleviation, evasion, paralysis, and compliance.¹⁰ However, Hilberg does not explain *why* people adopted particular behaviors. Furthermore, whereas Hilberg claimed that paralysis and compliance were the most common responses, recent scholarship has shown that other strategies were much more widespread than was previously assumed,¹¹ and that apparent compliance and paralysis in fact involved numerous additional actions.¹² Hilberg's typology also does not

account for the available, though politically and morally controversial, option of collaboration with the Nazis.

Another perspective on victims' behavior was suggested by the historian Yehuda Bauer, who argued that victims' reactions were determined by a combination of the attitude of the local population to the genocide, the nature of the occupying regime, and the traditions of victims' communal leadership.¹³ This framework cannot explain the variation in individual victims' behavior. Finally, several psychologists, sociologists, and scholars of literature discuss victims' behavior and stress the importance of norms and social bonds.¹⁴ These studies, however, focus overwhelmingly on concentration camp inmates and are strongly influenced by this very specific setting. Only a minority of Jewish victims actually experienced *life* in the camps—the vast majority were either killed near their hometowns, or sent to the gas chambers immediately upon arrival at a camp. Furthermore, these scholars do not try to classify the different types of behavior encountered, nor do they address the motivations behind each behavioral strategy. Their focus is almost exclusively on coping. The same is also true for the vast literature in the field of psychology on behavior under conditions of stress and violence.¹⁵

In political science, the most famous typology of individual behavior is Albert Hirschman's "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty" framework.¹⁶ Analytically, "exit" is similar to evasion, while resistance is a clear instance of "voice." But there is no distinct place for collaboration, coping, and compliance in Hirschman's analysis.¹⁷ My framework is more expansive and better fits the empirical realities of the Holocaust. In recent years, social scientists have also started paying increased attention to how civilians survive under conditions of violence. This research on "civilian self-protection" (CSP) is promising, but it is still in its infancy; the typologies of behavior suggested by CSP scholars are still too crude to capture the differences between various strategies, nor do they try to explain why people choose specific courses of action.¹⁸

The Argument: Who Did What, Where, and Why

This book focuses on two distinct but closely related questions: what made individual Jews choose particular behavioral strategies, and why does the distribution of these strategies vary across localities? My analysis is based on the underlying assumption that genocide is not a one-time event but a complicated social and political process that unfolds over time. During its course,

individuals can form and change opinions, gather and evaluate information, and choose and modify their behavior. Which people, then, were more likely to prefer one strategy or another? First, I will demonstrate that Jews who were politically active before World War II were substantially more likely to choose cooperation, public collaboration, or resistance than those who were not. An observable implication of this argument is that pre-Holocaust political activists would dominate both resistance groups and bodies that engaged in cooperation and public collaboration with the Nazis.

Why would people with previous political experience be more likely to engage in cooperation, public collaboration, or resistance? Or, to put it differently, why would they be willing to make sacrifices for the community and the greater good? First, those who engaged in prewar political activism were more likely to choose resistance to, or cooperation with the Germans because they had a history of prior activity aimed at helping, defending, and promoting the community. They also had stronger ties to others engaged in similar activities and had the skills and experience required for successful organization and mobilization.¹⁹ Finally, they were more visible than other members of the community, which made them more likely to assume (or to be assigned) leadership roles, especially when it came to cooperation and public collaboration. It should also be remembered that whereas contemporary political activism is correlated with education and socioeconomic status, this was not the case during the first half of the twentieth century. Back then, people from all walks of life and levels of education could become and indeed did become actively involved in politics. Previous political activism, I will show, is *the* explanation. It is not simply a proxy for education and wealth.

On the other end of the distribution there were those who were consciously willing to increase their odds of survival by harming the community and decreasing the survival chances of other Jews. These people engaged in collaboration, usually private and clandestine but at times also public. They were the corrupt Judenrat chairs, paid informers for the Nazi security services, and Jewish policemen who helped the Germans round up Jews for deportation to death camps in exchange for a promise of personal safety.

The vast majority fell between the two ends of this spectrum. They focused primarily on securing their personal survival and that of their families without either making sacrifices for the community (or ideology) or consciously harming others. These Jews chose compliance, coping, and evasion. Compliance was the strategy of a tiny minority; the majority's choices

fell between coping and evasion. This book will show that people who were more integrated into non-Jewish society were more likely to choose evasion. Those who occupied a predominantly Jewish social milieu and had Jewish support networks were more likely to opt for coping.

Finally, building on Kalyvas's argument that violence is jointly produced by macro-level factors and micro-level dynamics, I will demonstrate that the behavior of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust was determined by the interaction between individual, micro-level characteristics (e.g., education, gender, integration into non-Jewish society or political experience) and community-level factors (e.g., local history, relations between ethnic groups in the community, and the community's socioeconomic profile).

The overall menu of available strategies was identical in all locations. When faced with the Nazi onslaught, cooperation, collaboration, coping, evasion, and resistance were the only options, but the distribution of these strategies across communities varied. Some ghettos experienced high rates of evasion while in others almost no one escaped; some rebelled, others did not; and in some communities people died of hunger and epidemics in large numbers while other ghettos had quite efficient food distribution and public health services.

My main argument is that the variation in Jewish behavior was a direct outcome of one key variable: pre-Holocaust political regimes. Pre-World War II states and political regimes collapsed, retreated, and disappeared throughout the first half of the twentieth century, but their past policies continued to influence how their Jewish citizens thought and behaved. More specifically, my analysis will focus on two key sub-areas: states' policies that promoted or discouraged the Jews' integration into non-Jewish society and patterns of state repression of independent political activism.

States and governments have tools to promote or discourage minority integration into the broader society. Arguably, the most effective of such tools are education and schooling. Education and especially mass schooling have a substantial and durable impact on political behavior and attitudes, as Keith Darden and Anna Grzymała-Busse demonstrate; Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein argue that education shaped the course of Jewish history in premodern times.²⁰ Whether states promoted or discouraged the schooling of Jews in ethnically mixed educational institutions affected the Jews' political attitudes and their familiarity with the majority's culture. In the same vein, a state's willingness or reluctance to allow Jews social and economic mobility outside the Jewish community affected the integration of its Jews into the broader society, as did the government's encouragement or

lack thereof of interethnic political and social bodies in the shaping of communal relations—a finding that is supported by empirical evidence from studies of ethnic groups in various parts of the world.²¹ Governments can promote interethnic integration for a variety of reasons, not all of them benevolent and aimed at improving the well-being of a minority group as such. Yet, for our analysis, the outcomes of such policies are much more important than the reasons for their enactment.

The level of Jewish integration into broader society had several important consequences. Education, employment, and political activism affected peoples' social networks. Where states encouraged integration, social networks were ethnically mixed; where integration was discouraged, those networks were predominantly Jewish. Integration levels also affected the strength and cohesiveness of the Jewish community. Here, I view community not simply as the total sum of Jews in a certain locality, but as an *organized* Jewish society and its bodies. When the level of integration into the broader society was high, the organized Jewish community and its communal institutions were weaker than in places with little or no integration. A Jew who was well integrated into non-Jewish society could live her entire life without taking part in exclusively Jewish organizations and groups, such as book clubs, charities, schools, and political parties. In places where the level of integration was low and ethnically mixed bodies might not even exist, exclusively Jewish communal organizations enjoyed higher rates of membership and support and could more easily mobilize, coordinate, and control the majority of the local Jewish population.

The result was that during the Holocaust, places with high levels of pre-World War II interethnic integration witnessed high rates of evasion because Jews could, even if not always successfully, use their ethnically mixed social networks to escape the ghetto. More integrated Jews also had an easier time passing as non-Jews than their less integrated coethnics. At the same time, places with high levels of pre-World War II integration suffered from more chaotic coping and quite rampant private collaboration, as strong communal bodies were needed to successfully organize the former and suppress the latter. In localities that had low levels of integration the situation was the exact opposite—they successfully coped as long as the Nazi authorities allowed ghettos to exist and levels of private collaboration were low. Evasion, however, was very rarely practiced in such communities, because Jews had almost no friends and acquaintances to rely upon outside the ghetto, did not speak the local language, and were largely ignorant of the majority's culture.

Finally, the degree of pre–World War II state repression to which the local community and its members were subject determined the sustainability of anti-Nazi resistance. Places and groups that were subject to *selective* pre–World War II repression were more likely to foster sustained Jewish resistance to the Nazi onslaught than those that were not. When pre–World War II governments targeted Jewish political organizations or parties in which individual Jews were active, this selective repression forced some individuals and groups to operate in the underground and thus to acquire the skills necessary for resistance. During the Holocaust, Jews who already knew how to operate underground were better positioned to organize sustained resistance than those who wanted to fight back but had neither the skills to effectively resist nor the time to acquire them.

“If people only appear over the edge of the epistemic horizon just as they are killing Jews, then all we really know about them is that they are killing Jews,” notes Timothy Snyder.²² The same is true for the Jewish victims of the Holocaust; if they appear in an analysis only after their confinement to ghettos and murder by the Nazis, our ability to understand their behavior is limited. The past—both of people and their communities—must be taken seriously if we want to know how and why they chose particular behaviors. That is precisely what this book sets out to do.

Why the Holocaust?

My choice of the Holocaust as the main case study was determined by a combination of theoretical and practical considerations. The Holocaust is an “index case” of large-scale state violence and arguably the best-documented such case.²³ But, despite the availability of research materials, the Holocaust—with some notable exceptions²⁴—has been almost completely overlooked by social scientists. This is an omission that demands correction. Furthermore, the Holocaust provides numerous opportunities for comparative research that seeks to identify the impact of political and social factors on patterns of violence. It took place in many countries and involved a wide range of killing methods, but several key variables—among them the ethnic and religious identity of both the key perpetrators and the key victims—remain identical. From Paris to Smolensk to Athens, the main (though not the only) perpetrators were Germans and the main (though not the only) victims were Jews.

Also constant is state strength, another crucial variable. Some regional variation undoubtedly existed, but there is little evidence that the strength

of the Nazi state in, say, Warsaw, differed substantially from its strength in, say, Kyiv. Similarly, Nazi territorial control was rather consistent—especially in urban areas of Eastern Europe where the majority of Jewish victims resided. By the time Germany started to lose power and territory in 1943, most Jewish victims were already dead. Finally, the Holocaust is a critical case study for any analysis of civilians' behavior under conditions of mass violence; a theory of victims' strategies that fails to explain the Jews' actions during the Holocaust inevitably loses a substantial portion of its validity. On the other hand, an analysis that can bridge historical studies of the Holocaust and the social science literature on mass violence would contribute to both disciplines.

Case Studies

How can we evaluate the individual and community-level impact of political regimes? To achieve this goal, the book compares three Jewish ghettos²⁵ during the Holocaust—those of Minsk, Kraków, and Białystok. These communities were selected because of their similarity in a number of important respects. They are comparable in the size of their prewar Jewish communities and in the percentage of Jews in each city. Before World War II, both Kraków and Minsk had a Jewish community of about 70,000, or roughly 30 percent of the population. Białystok had a somewhat smaller Jewish community of about 50,000, slightly less than half of the city's population.

All three cities had ghettos enclosed by a physical barrier and located in what Helen Fein calls the “zone of extermination”—no Jews were supposed to be spared in these cities.²⁶ Kraków, Białystok, and Minsk were also important Nazi administrative and government centers, which meant that not only macro-level policies, but also the level of the Nazi security services' control on the ground were comparable. Finally, during the Holocaust the Jewish residents of these three cities engaged in all of the available strategies and modes of behavior. In each ghetto there were Judenrats, created to carry out Nazi orders, Jewish police, and individuals who collaborated with and were paid informants of the Nazi security apparatus. Each ghetto also had a Jewish underground resistance. In each there were Jews who tried to escape persecution by hiding and attempting to secure non-Jewish identity papers, while the majority of the ghetto's inhabitants coped with the situation without trying to escape, rebel, or collaborate with the perpetrators.

Despite those similarities, the *distribution* of strategies varied substantially from one city to another.²⁷ In Białystok only very few Jews chose

Table 1.1. State control of Minsk, Kraków, and Białystok

	Pre-WWI	Interwar	09/1939– 06/1941	06/1941– 1944/5
Minsk	Russian Empire	USSR	USSR	Germany
Białystok	Russian Empire	Poland	USSR	Germany
Kraków	Austro-Hungary	Poland	Germany	Germany

evasion, whereas thousands escaped from the Minsk ghetto; in Kraków the Jewish underground decided to act outside the ghetto, while in Białystok there was an uprising inside the ghetto walls. In Minsk and Kraków coping was disorganized and chaotic, whereas the Białystok ghetto was known for its order and efficiency. I argue that the reason for this variation is that the three communities varied (but also overlapped) in one key variable: the nature of their pre-Holocaust political regimes. Before the Nazi occupation, Kraków was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and then of the interwar Polish Second Republic. Białystok was a part of the Russian Empire before World War I, belonged to Poland until 1939, and from September 1939 to June 1941 was occupied by the USSR. Minsk was part of the Russian Empire and after its collapse became the capital of Soviet Belorussia (see Table 1.1 and Maps 1–3). Thus, the comparison of Minsk and Białystok, which were both parts of the Russian Empire, will allow evaluation of the impact of Soviet and Polish interwar policies; the comparison of Kraków and Białystok, both parts of interwar Poland, will highlight the legacy of the Habsburg Empire and the impact of Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland in 1939–41. It is the comparison of the distribution of strategies across the three ghettos that will allow us to evaluate the effects of pre-Holocaust political regimes at the community level.

Data

The book employs both qualitative and quantitative data. The main, qualitative part of the study is based on more than five hundred Holocaust survivors' testimonies—mostly videotaped interviews and written accounts that archives and oral history projects throughout the world have collected. The bulk of the testimonies come from the Yale University Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies (HVT), the Oral History Division of the

Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (OHD; predominantly Projects 58, 110, 188, and 223), and the Yad Vashem Archive in Jerusalem (YVA; Record Group O.3). A smaller number of testimonies come from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive (USHMM) in Washington DC, the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (VHA), the Jewish Historical Institute Archive (ŻIH) in Warsaw, Poland, the Jabotinsky Institute Archive and the Massuah Institute for Holocaust Studies Archive in Israel, and the University of South Florida Libraries Oral History Program.²⁸

In addition to testimonies, I also use published memoirs and a wide range of Holocaust-era sources, such as official documents, diaries, and letters that Jewish victims of Nazi persecution produced as the Holocaust unfolded. Overall, I rely on primary and secondary data in four languages: English, Hebrew, Russian, and Polish. I do not speak Yiddish, but I am confident that the number and diversity of materials I collected compensate for the lack of Yiddish-language sources and that the inclusion of Yiddish-language materials would not have altered my findings.

My goal is to understand internal Jewish perspectives and decisions. For that reason I intentionally do not rely on materials produced by the perpetrators. This is in contrast to the currently prevalent “integrated history”²⁹ approach, in which Holocaust scholars draw on sources originating from all three main groups of actors. For the most part, the Nazi authorities knew little and cared less about what was *really* going on inside the ghettos. Moreover, their perspective was inherently biased due to the Germans’ position as an omnipotent outsider, even when local German officials did not view the world through racial or ideological lenses.

The use of survivors’ testimonies as the key data source has both advantages and limitations. I outline and discuss these in Appendix 1: Data and Archival Methods.

The quantitative data, which I use in chapter 2 and in the analysis of ghetto uprisings (Appendix 3), consists of three large-N datasets, two of which (the Jewish Ghettos Dataset and the Zionist Elections Dataset) offer an opportunity to analyze data that scholars have not previously analyzed.

JEWISH GHETTOS DATASET

For this book I have collected data on 1,126 ghettos that the Nazis established in Poland, the Baltic states, and the USSR. The dataset includes information on each ghetto’s dates of establishment and liquidation, its

population, whether or not there was a mass killing of Jews prior to the ghetto's establishment, and whether it was "open" or "closed," as well as pre-war census data on the Jewish community, and data on various forms of Jewish organized resistance.

1928 POLISH NATIONAL ELECTIONS DATASET

Out of a total of 1,126 ghettos included in the previous dataset, 677 were established in the territory of pre-World War II Poland. For each "Polish" ghetto, I have collected local-level electoral data from the communities in which the ghettos were established. I chose the 1928 election because it was the last free and fair election held in interwar Poland.³⁰

1937 AND 1939 ZIONIST ORGANIZATION (ZO) CONGRESS ELECTIONS

This dataset contains local-level returns from elections to the ZO³¹ World Congress in pre-World War II Poland. The data thus allows me to extract the number and the distribution of political preferences among politically active Zionists in Poland.

Structure

The book is structured as follows. Chapter 2 sets the stage by outlining the concept of the ghetto, its defining features, and how ghettos looked across Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe. It provides a historical overview of the Jewish communities of Minsk, Kraków, and Białystok before and during the Holocaust. Chapter 3 discusses what the Jews in the three cities knew or were likely to have known about Nazi policies and to what extent this knowledge affected or failed to affect their behavior. Chapters 4 through 7 are devoted to the strategies: cooperation and collaboration (chapter 4), coping and compliance (5), evasion (6), and resistance (7). These chapters show how pre-Holocaust political regimes impacted the level and content of Jewish political activism, Jewish integration into non-Jewish society, Jewish social networks, and the patterns of state repression in each city. They also demonstrate how the policies of pre-World War II states affected the adoption and viability of different survival strategies during the Holocaust. Chapter 8 presents conclusions and suggestions for further research on victims' behavior. Appendix 1 discusses methodological aspects of working with testimonies and oral histories. In appendix 2, based on the coding of

randomly selected testimonies, I show the distribution of strategies within and across the three ghettos. Finally, appendix 3 provides an econometric analysis of ghetto uprisings and identifies factors that made Jewish armed resistance inside the ghettos more likely.

Goals, Contributions, Limitations

The aim of this book is to contribute both to general theoretical explanations of human behavior under conditions of mass violence and to specific empirical knowledge of the Holocaust. The book is also an attempt to bridge the social sciences and Holocaust studies. Social science concepts and methods can substantially improve our understanding of one of the defining events of modern history, and yet the amount of mutually beneficial dialogue between the two fields remains minimal. It is my conviction that a “political science of the Holocaust”³² is both feasible and desirable. The Holocaust is simply too important to be ignored by social scientists.

The book contributes to several disciplines and research agendas. Its key contribution to social science is in demonstrating the impact of preexisting political regimes on individual and collective behavior, even under conditions of extreme violence and even when the regimes themselves no longer exist. Its main contribution to political violence research is in shifting the focus from the behavior and choices of perpetrators to those of victims. To Holocaust scholarship and genocide studies, the book contributes a new typology of victims’ behavior and a controlled comparison of several communities—a staple method in the social sciences research but one rarely encountered in the humanities.³³ Additionally, the book introduces new information on and analysis of three important but understudied ghettos. Finally, I hope that the personal stories and experiences of the numerous Jewish victims presented and discussed throughout the book will help readers, academics and general audiences alike, to deepen their knowledge of the period. It is crucial that the Holocaust be viewed as not simply an act of killing, but as a social and political process. Jews not only died in the Holocaust, they also lived in it.

In numerous studies of the Holocaust “implicit assumptions regarding the victims’ generalized hopelessness and passivity . . . have turned them into a static and abstract element of the historical background.”³⁴ The key goal of this book is to bring Holocaust victims from the background to front and center in the discussion, to take their agency seriously, to analyze the choices these people made and to present the entire gamut of

their behavior. In the West, Holocaust victims and survivors have acquired an iconic, quasi-religious status. This reflects a noble desire to restore the dignity of the victims—which the Nazis worked so hard to take away—but it also has the unintentional effect of somewhat dehumanizing them once again. We seem to view these people primarily through the prism of their death and suffering and all too often disregard anything that might distract our attention from the tragedies they experienced. In our effort at commemoration we overlook the entire spectrum of their actions and decisions. Would it not be better to view the Holocaust's Jewish victims for who they were—ordinary human beings? Their ordeal was not of their choosing. While enduring it, they behaved like any normal human beings would. They hoped and despaired, fell in love and broke up, promised and cheated, gave and stole, believed and lost their faith. This book tries to restore their agency, choices, and behavior—in all their positive and negative aspects and inherent complexity.

The book also has important limitations. No study can explain all cases and each person's behavior. My goal is simply to demonstrate general behavioral patterns. My argument also does a better job of explaining why a particular survival strategy was adopted than of explaining why one strategy was sometimes abandoned in favor of another. Because of this, some readers will find the analysis wanting and will view my findings as crude generalizations. Generalizations they inevitably are, though I did my best to make them as fine-grained as possible. It is also important to remember that this book is not a history of the Holocaust. It is not even a history of the Minsk, Kraków, and Białystok ghettos. It is first and foremost an attempt to understand the Jews' behavior in these ghettos and therefore, by design, it almost entirely excludes important actors such as the Germans and, to a lesser extent, the local Slavic population. The Germans, of course, were crucial in creating the context and the background of the drama that unfolded in the ghettos; they set the rules, and they decided who would be killed, when, and how. But whether to escape or stay put, enlist in the Jewish police or join the resistance, that was the choice of the Jews. Limited and hopeless as it usually was, it was still *their* choice, not that of the Germans.

Writing this book was a frightening experience, especially when it came to accounts of collaborators, paid informants, and those who stole from fellow victims. It is my duty as a scholar to distinguish right from wrong and label them as such, but in this case doing so would be an act of boundless arrogance on my part. For me, a Jew born in Eastern Europe, the question is not entirely a theoretical or normative one. The main thing that

differentiates me from Israel G. and numerous others discussed in the following pages is that I happened to be born in the 1970s rather than the 1920s or 1930s. Had I been born fifty years earlier, how would have I behaved? I like to think that I would have made morally right decisions, but I will never know for sure. If I were Israel G. on that day in June 1942, would I have hidden and survived as he did, or would I have gone to my death? And what would have happened had Israel G. decided not to escape? I do not have an answer and I do not pass judgment. I do my best to understand, but fear that I never will.

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AUGUST 12, 1990, KHMEL'NIK, USSR

Every year, in August, the Khmel'nik ghetto survivors gather to remember the dead. On August 12, 1990, Israel G. came to Khmel'nik with his wife and with a grandson who was the same age as Israel G. had been at the time of the June 1942 Aktion. The family visited a small hill on the outskirts of the town, where the victims of the 1942 Children's Aktion had been buried. Israel G. was quiet. The grandson was impatient and inattentive. His mind was elsewhere; by the end of the month he would leave Europe forever and go to live in a different land. As they walked around the hill, Israel G. began sobbing. The grandson looked at him in amazement and disbelief. Never before had he seen his grandfather, a strong, stocky man in the dark-blue uniform of the Soviet *Aeroflot* airline, crying. "This could have been my grave. This *is* my grave," Israel G. said.

MAY 4, 2016, NEW YORK, USA

May 4 is Israel G.'s birthday. Twenty-six years have passed since my first personal encounter with the Holocaust, back there in Khmel'nik with Israel G., my maternal grandfather. His videotaped testimony was the first I watched when I started this project and the last one I watched when I had finished it. He passed away a year before I began working on my doctoral dissertation, from which this book emerged. He would have likely disapproved of my focus on the Holocaust, but a part of me is still on that hill in Khmel'nik with him. At least I know something about his experiences.

My other grandfather, Lev Finkel was, strictly speaking, not a Holocaust survivor, but he was no less of a victim. Born in Borszczów when the Austro-Hungarian Empire was in its death throes, he grew up in Eastern Poland. In 1939, the Soviets came. In 1941 he was drafted into the Red Army. His family, parents, and sisters, stayed behind. A decorated artillery officer, he returned home from the war in 1945. None of his relatives were alive; they had either been shot locally or gassed at Bełżec. He never mentioned them, and I can barely recall him laughing. We lived in L'viv, less than 150 miles from his hometown but he never went there, not even once—and neither did we. Ninety-six years old, he passed away several days before I finished the first draft of this book. I never interviewed him, knowing how painful it would be for him. Now I wish so much that I had. I dedicate this book to my grandfathers and to their siblings. *Yehi zichram baruch.*