

Shelter from the Holocaust

Rethinking Jewish Survival
in the Soviet Union

Edited by Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick,
and Atina Grossmann



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Jewish Refugees in Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India

Lost Memories of Displacement, Trauma, and Rescue

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Earlier chapters in this book have sketched the convoluted overall trajectories of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union, their encounters with Soviet Jews, on the one hand, and with antisemites, on the other.¹ Later chapters explore the complex identities they would assume during and after this journey, and the complex ways in which their experiences were included and excluded from Holocaust testimony and memory.² This chapter focuses our attention on the role of colonial and semicolonial regions in these processes of displacement and identity formation: Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India. It “remaps” the history of Jewish wartime experience, away from the Polish epicenter controlled by the Nazis and thereby moves the “periphery” of Holocaust history toward the center.³

This story begins in the summer of 1941, with Molotov’s stunning radio announcement that the German-Soviet pact had collapsed and hostilities begun. Shortly after the German invasion, with the Soviets in

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dire need of Allied support, Stalin and the Polish government-in-exile, subject to British and American pressure from its seat in London, negotiated an “amnesty” for all imprisoned Polish citizens. The 30 July 1941 Sikorski-Maiskii Agreement provided for two key developments: the formation of a Polish army under General Władysław Anders (just released from prison in Moscow) intended to eventually fight for the fatherland in the European theater and the release of Poles, Jewish and not, from the camps and special settlements to which they had been deported from the territories occupied by the Soviets in the fall of 1939.

There followed another confusing chaotic migration, with freed deportees intently studying unfamiliar maps for potential destinations within certain permitted zones. Following “rumors of warm climates and abundance of fruits and other food products” or sometimes simply an attractive-sounding place-name and the associations provided by a well-known novel with the enticing, if dangerously misleading, title *Tashkent, City of Bread*, the “amnestied” embarked on a rush south to what they imagined were better and safer conditions in the Central Asian republics.⁴ Huddled in and around train stations, forced to keep moving when denied entry to the overwhelmed Uzbek capital, refugees were greeted instead by widespread hunger, severe overcrowding and poverty, typhus, dysentery, cholera, crime, and despair. The general confusion and hardship were exacerbated by the upheaval of mass evacuations of Soviet citizens, particularly the cultural, technocratic, and educational elite, as well as entire industrial plants, away from the advancing front into Uzbekistan, a gargantuan undertaking later stigmatized in antisemitic terms as the “Tashkent Front” where “Avram speculated while Ivan fought.” After “liberation” from the horrors of the camps and special settlements came another catastrophic situation in Central Asia; in some ways conditions became even worse, because now the former deportees were refugees without even the promise of bread for work. As a Viennese internee insisted, perhaps atypically, about her camp in Karaganda (Kazakhstan), “Come snow-storm or summer drought, the Soviet authorities never failed to feed us.”⁵

Memoirs (and photographs) offer starkly diverse representations of the Central Asian experience. Refugees found and recorded not only horrific misery but also an amazing variety of wartime improvisations, from evacuated universities, factories, and theater troupes to Red Army

recruiters, People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) agents, and local ethnic groups. Central Asians, mostly Muslims undergoing their own difficult and ambivalent process of Sovietization, were bewildered by, and often resentful and suspicious of, this sudden influx of Christian and Jewish "western" Soviet evacuees and Polish refugees and sometimes, however, also astonishingly generous given their own poverty and deprivation. These close everyday encounters with strangers who were perceived as both "primitive" and "exotic" by "Westerners" (later themselves called "Asiatics"), and in whose mud huts the refugees rented rooms, were mediated, it is important to add, in gendered ways that require much more research. Men were more likely to work the black market or in Soviet enterprises (or be drafted into the Red Army), while women engaged in negotiations over food, medical care, social mores, and housing.⁶

From 1941 to 1942 (and according to some records, into mid-1943), all Polish refugees, Jewish and Christian, were at least minimally supported by the London-based Polish government-in-exile, which in turn was dependent on its British host government and private donations, including from North America, for its funding. The government-in-exile maintained an official embassy in the temporary wartime Soviet capital Kuibyshev on the Russia-Kazakhstan border (now Samara) and some 300 welfare offices throughout Central Asia.⁷ Thousands of Jews, often half-starved survivors of labor camps, still Polish citizens, flocked to the Anders army recruiting stations in the Volga region and in Kuibyshev. Initially, they were a virtual majority of potential recruits, between 40 and 60 percent. Polish officers, however, rejected most of them. Targets of antisemitic suspicion and branded as a potential "fifth column" for a later Stalinist takeover of Poland, they were subjected to humiliating inspections and tests and endured insinuations that they were poor fighting material and unreliable Polish patriots. Polish Jews were thereby largely excluded from the evacuation of some 115,000 soldiers and their families to Iran—the only escape route out of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the British, powerfully influential in the Polish exile seat in London, were also not eager to see large numbers of Jewish refugees cross the border into Iran and move into Iraq and then Palestine for further training. They feared exactly what did in fact transpire, that many of the Polish Jewish recruits, once arrived at their goal in Palestine, would desert. Indeed, 3,000 of 4,000

did exactly that, including the most prominent among them, Menachem Begin (although he apparently managed to secure official permission). This development worried the British, struggling to keep order in their Mandate, but did not seem to overly concern the Poles, who were just as happy to move on toward the battlefield in Italy without their Jewish comrades.⁸

Perhaps more than any other wartime experience, the recruitment process for the Anders army—the only realistic lifeline out of the Soviet Union and potentially toward Palestine—inflamed tensions between Jewish Poles and the government-in-exile. In the event, the Poles and Soviets managed to blame each other for limiting the number of Jews in the Anders army, and it was the continually wavering Soviet commitment to provide support and materiel for the exile army that ultimately forced its rather quick exit to Iran.⁹ Jewish representatives also accused the Polish authorities of allowing (or coercing) Jews to be granted Soviet citizenship at a dangerously fast rate, thus undermining their professions of loyalty and assuring that fewer Jews would ever be able to return to a liberated Poland. In a poignant indication of how the situation in Nazi-occupied Europe was (mis)understood by those isolated in the Soviet Union, Jewish Poles complained in 1942 that this policy represented “an easy way to get rid of a great number of Jews” and that it “may create extremely great difficulties for these people when hundreds of thousands will want to return to their families after the war.”¹⁰

Between mid-1942 and early 1943, the situation of Polish refugees, who already had to contend with hunger, epidemics, and housing shortages, as well as the death and separation of family members in an entirely alien environment, became even more precarious. The final breakdown of steadily worsening relations between the Soviet Union and the London-based anti-Communist Polish government-in-exile—ostensible anti-Nazi allies—came in April 1943, after Stalin rejected an investigation of the Katyn massacre graves which had been, in a major propaganda coup, discovered by the Germans. Jews, who had been aided, albeit in an often discriminatory fashion, along with all other Polish refugees, by their national representatives, were now mostly on their own in an exotic, unfamiliar, and volatile exile.

In response to this new emergency, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the major Jewish transnational relief

organization, established in the United States at the beginning of World War I, set up an operation headquartered in Tehran. Together with the Jewish Agency and various *landsmannschaften* (hometown associations) of Polish Jews in Palestine, it sent donated food and supplies to suffering relatives in Central Asia. The JDC first inaugurated a modest parcel service through the so-called Persian Corridor from Tehran into the Soviet Union beginning in August 1942. The JDC operation began, not coincidentally, after the Anders army arrived in Iran with over 100,000 Polish soldiers and civilians, perhaps 115,000 in all, starting with a first wave in March–April 1942, followed by another group at the end of August. Despite bitter protests from Jewish volunteers and organizations, only a very limited number of Jews, probably around 6,000 altogether (4,000 soldiers plus women and children), were able to join this exodus from Central Asia. They included somewhere between 700 and 1,000 children, who endured a nightmarish journey through Uzbekistan to the port city of Krasnovdsk in Turkmenistan, on the shore of the Caspian Sea, about 1,800 kilometers west of Tashkent, and then by ship to the Persian port of Bandar-e Pahlavi (now Bandar-e Anzali) or in some cases overland from Ashkhabad to Mashhad.¹¹ In transit camps run by the Polish army, children, many of whom had been transferred from an orphanage in Samarkand, experienced their first showers with soap, medical inspections, and immunizations. Some happily remembered a sense of having finally arrived in civilization; “It was an entirely different world from the one we had just left,” with “tanned, well-dressed, smiling people,” and “each day was an adventure where we began to learn to play again.”¹² Others recorded much harsher experiences, with starving, ill, and terrified children left to sleep under tents in the blazing sun after a horrific sea voyage. Even the sudden bounty of chicken and pita bread, fed to children who were “not used to eat[ing],” left them initially ill and depleted. At the same time, Jewish Agency representatives or young delegates from Zionist youth movements tracked down Jewish children who had smuggled themselves into Polish transports and tried to convince these wary youngsters that it was now safe to disclose their Jewish identity, perhaps to remove a crucifix that had facilitated the escape from Central Asia with Polish orphans. They moved on to transit camps outside of Tehran, in the shadow of Mount Damavand, passing through, as one refugee child later described, “a modern city . . . a bustling modern metropolis [that]

appeared before our eyes, with brightly lit shops, noisy traffic, and crowded streets.”¹³

Remarkably, U.S. State Department files reveal that the arrival of large numbers of Polish children in the camps near Tehran generated intense shock among American officials, for whom the condition of children entering from the Soviet Union apparently provided their first encounter with the extreme ravages of war and displacement. On 5 April 1942, in a letter that began by expressing condolences to the head of the American Red Cross, whose wife had just died, the organization’s representative in Tehran wrote to his headquarters in Washington about a humanitarian crisis that he termed “this awful holocaust.” By this time one would have expected Red Cross officials to be aware of, for example, the siege of Leningrad, if not the precise conditions in Nazi ghettos and camps, not to mention the general harshness of life during wartime in the colonial Middle East. Yet, Maurice Barber could not contain his panic about what he had already termed, in a report to the Red Cross director for the Middle East stationed in Cairo, “perhaps the greatest civilian emergency of the war.” “The sick children,” he wrote, “are haunting shadows—literally skin and bones” and warned that the situation among the Poles in southern Russia was even more tragic. “They are dying by the thousands,” he informed Washington, stating that “fifty percent of all Polish children in Russia have already perished from starvation, exposure and disease.” He concluded, “I did not mean to make this letter so long and please forgive me—but I have never in my life been more moved than I have been by the tragedy of these Polish refugees in Russia and now in Persia.”¹⁴

A young Zionist activist, who had himself just escaped from Central Asia and been recruited as the director of the Jewish children’s camp, set up on the grounds of a former Iranian military base outside Tehran, remembered his charges as “pale, gaunt and famished.” As he recounted: “They had a haunted expression in their eyes. . . . They were like little battle-weary soldiers, exhausted by gunfire, expulsion, imprisonment, and wandering across Siberia’s endless, forgotten wastelands to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and other places whose names they had never heard until they were dragged through them like beasts in cattle trucks . . . boils, ringworm, scabies—I saw them defecating in public, unable to control their bowels because of intestinal and stomach diseases.”¹⁵ These depictions of

trauma, composed at the time and decades later, both foreshadowed and rehearsed the early sketches of liberated Holocaust survivors. The children, whether Jewish or not, stole and hoarded food and clothing and clung to each other, tormented by desperate promises made to their parents—which they had often not been able to keep—that they would take care of younger siblings. Visually as well, the photographs of the Polish and Polish Jewish refugee children taken before or shortly after their arrival in Iran are strikingly similar to the images we associate with Holocaust survivors.¹⁶ Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, in his foreword to the 1981 collection of testimonies *War through Children's Eyes*, described the catastrophic conditions bluntly: “Children see their parents disappear; they do not know where they went, whether they are still alive, or already dead. They watch their mothers and fathers, their brothers and sisters, die of overwork, starvation, and mistreatment, helpless to prevent it.”¹⁷

As similar as these depictions are and as terrible as the conditions of the Polish refugees seemed to American officials, Jewish activists complained that the Jewish refugees suffered particular hardship, left on their own or actively discriminated against by the representatives of the Polish Red Cross and the Polish government-in-exile. The children, who were housed in a separate tent camp adjacent to the Polish one, reported anti-semitic taunts and much tension between the groups. At the same time, however, in one of the paradoxes more familiar to us from the postwar displaced persons (DP) camps, the Zionist promise provided a sense of futurity that the Polish children in Soviet exile did not have. As David Laor, the young camp director saw it: “[The] Polish children were actually envious of the Zhids they tormented as the onion stinkers. . . . They knew that the Jewish children would soon be on their way to Palestine, their homeland. Whereas they had left a defeated homeland and would soon be sent to another exile, never knowing when they would return home. This was a different, new encouraging feeling—Poles envying Jews.”¹⁸

Hoping to alleviate the critical situation of the Jewish children, Harry Viteles, a JDC emissary, traveled to Tehran from Jerusalem via Baghdad, in November and December 1942. His goal was to gather information about the situation in the Soviet Union from Jews in, or traveling with, the Anders army, to organize a local JDC relief committee in Tehran,

and to investigate increasing “general relief” for the much larger number of refugees in Central Asia. Viteles’s maintained a hectic schedule; he spoke with diplomatic, military, and civil authorities of the American and British governments and the Polish government-in-exile; officials of the American Red Cross, the Polish Red Cross, and the Polish Delegation for Refugees; residents of the American and British and Iranian Jewish communities; representatives of the Jewish Agency; emissaries of pre-state Palestine (Yishuv); and numerous refugees from both Central and Eastern Europe. Some sources have estimated that there were as many as 450,000 refugees altogether in Iran during the war, most of them from the Soviet Union, but Viteles reported that fewer than 1,800 of some 26,000 Polish civilians, most of them housed in refugee camps, were officially registered as Jews.¹⁹

Viteles did note some resistance by Iranians to this rather large group of refugees on their terrain, already basically occupied by the British and Soviets, observing that “the more religious and conservative section of the Iranian population was reported to be much concerned about the effect of the purported ‘idleness and gay life’ of the Polish refugees.” Moreover, the substantial local Jewish community itself seemed particularly anxious about “the increase of immorality among the young women” included in the small number of Jewish refugees, some 150–200, who had settled outside the camps in the Iranian capital itself. “About 20 Jewish ‘Bar Maids’ and ‘Waitresses,’ most of them from very good families,” apparently supported themselves in a quite disreputable manner. The JDC representative was careful to stress, however, that, “thus far, there has been no direct criticism against Jewish refugees; the Iranians and others always refer to Polish refugees.”²⁰

At least some of the small numbers of Western and Central European Jewish refugees already in Iran, most of them in Tehran, were drawn into working with the evacuees from the Soviet Union and the JDC. The experience and activity of those refugee Jews who worked and lived in Tehran over a longer period certainly bears considerably more investigation. They, too, had lost their homes, livelihoods, professions, and contact with families left behind, with no sense of what future they might face. But they were also Europeans, oddly privileged, adventurers, in exotic colonial or semicolonial non-Western societies. As described in a marvelous unpublished memoir by a female refugee physician from Munich,

“We are all uprooted and put down in this utterly alien culture” replete with “adventurers, spies, foreign agents” and the “wildest rumors.” At the same time, these German and Central European Jews, who generally arrived in the 1930s, were often able to find first refuge and then work in the forcibly modernizing Iran of Reza Shah Pahlavi (and then in occupied Iran) as engineers, architects, construction managers, teachers, legal advisers, secretaries, and physicians. “Things [were] so much more colorful than they had been under ‘normal’ circumstances at home,” Marianne Leppmann mused even as she also wrote about suicides, breakdowns, and the risks faced by “young European girls,” who “were rare” and much coveted.²¹ Wartime conditions for refugees in Iran were, it should be said, relatively luxurious, with only some rationing. Their fortunate circumstances were highlighted by the dramatic arrival of the Polish orphans in hideous condition, whom refugee physicians helped to care for under the supervision of the chief medical officer assigned to the American Military Mission in Iran. Major Abraham Neuwirth was credited by American officials with having organized the medical relief that saved the lives of countless severely ill women and children refugees from the Soviet Union. But, in an indication perhaps of how much these refugees had to learn before they could become, as Leppmann eventually did, “new Americans,” this American Jewish officer was described by his nonplussed colleague as a “a life form which I had not known till then, a typical New York Jew,” who was “quick, enthusiastic, energetic, goodhearted, but terribly tactless and pushing.”²²

Viteles, for his part, was particularly concerned with the Jewish children’s camp, where between 700 and 900 youngsters (officially “orphans” but often children placed in orphanages by a desperate parent hoping to secure them a route out of the Soviet Union and eventually to Palestine) who had escaped with the Polish army were awaiting transit to Palestine. After multiple delays and diplomatic wrangles, largely due to Iraq’s refusal to sanction a quicker overland journey, the children finally left Tehran on 3 January 1943, traveling by truck on terrifyingly serpentine roads to the Persian Gulf port of Bandar Shahpur. They then endured a miserable two-week sea journey, ducking mines and German submarines, to Karachi, where they spent two weeks in a camp, supported by Indian Jews and a mysterious (British) Indian army officer, who turned out to be a German Jew working as an undercover Haganah operative.

Outfitted with British colonial tropical helmets, the “Teheran Children” then boarded another ship, sailing through the Red Sea, past the port of Aden, where they were not allowed to disembark due to British fears of Arab unrest, and on to Suez. Having crossed the Red Sea, they were, in a resonant partial (but as far as I can tell so far, not articulated) reenactment of the Exodus story, transferred to Egyptian trains that finally, after years of exile in the Soviet Union and months of transit in the Middle East and South Asia, carried them into Palestine. Some 1,230 children, adolescents, and accompanying adults arrived at yet another camp in Atlit, near Haifa, on 18 February 1943—just as the ghettos in their homeland were being liquidated—to a warm but shocked welcome from Yishuv officials and Jewish soldiers. “The soldiers stood watching with tears in their eyes, looks of pity on their faces,” probably wondering, as the men of the Jewish Brigade did a couple of years later when they first encountered the camp survivors in the DP camps, whether these desperate wounded children could ever become the pioneers or the soldiers, the “human material,” that the Yishuv needed. As so often happens in this wartime story, the moment of relief also produced new anguish: “The children were suffering from the trauma of leaving the place they had lived for six months [Tehran] in comparative security. . . . Another step further away from the families in Russia. Another journey into the unknown.”²³

Approximately 21,000 non-Jewish Polish civilian refugees with no particular destination except the desire to escape the Soviet Union and eventually return home were distributed by the British among their colonial territories in Africa (Uganda, Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland) and India. The children were first taken to nearby British India and settled in two orphanages. The Maharajah of Nawanagar offered his princely estate in Jamnagar by the sea in northwestern India as a home for some 1,000 children, leaving the administration to a strict Polish priest, who tried to run the camp with military-style regimentation. A larger camp, set up in Valivade, eventually expanded to three kindergartens, four elementary schools, a middle and secondary school, a trade school for boys, a domestic training school for girls, and a teacher training academy, serving a total of some 2,500 students.²⁴

Viteles, in the meantime, had grasped the central point that “the presence of eighteen hundred Jews in Teheran, 75 percent of whom [were]

certificated for Palestine, [was] in itself not a serious problem.” The more critical issue was, as the JDC envoy urgently noted, “the hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees still in Russia—whether they remain there or eventually are evacuated.” Tehran was already a center of wartime intrigue and operations by the time JDC activity moved into full gear; indeed, between 1942 and 1945, Iran was arguably one of the most important—albeit noncombat—theaters of the Second World War. Alarmed by German influence in officially neutral Iran, the invasion of the Soviet Union and Axis victories in North Africa, and determined to protect precious oil supplies, British and Soviet forces moved into Iran in August 1941. The Allied action divided the country into southern and northern occupation zones and caused, as reported by one refugee memoirist, three days of “rather perfunctory fighting” in Tehran. But it preempted any further flirtation with the Nazis by deposing Reza Shah Pahlavi (whose policies had benefited a small number of emigrating German Jews who were more likely to be admitted as technical experts or academic advisers) and installing his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as titular leader.²⁵ By the end of September 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had ordered the formation of a U.S. military mission in Iran, launching what would become the Persian Gulf Command. This crucial Allied supply operation brought some 30,000 U.S. uniformed personnel and thousands of civilian workers into Iran from 1942 to 1944 and shipped millions of tons of materiel, including some 5,000 planes and 200,000 trucks, to the Soviets. It is worth noting that Viteles’s JDC-sponsored mission not only followed the influx of Polish military forces and refugees in the spring and summer of 1942 but also preceded by only a few days the arrival of the first American troops at the port of Khorramshahr on 11 December 1942.²⁶ Reflecting Iran’s key role in the war effort, in late 1943, Roosevelt, Stalin, and Winston Churchill confirmed mutual war aims at the Tehran summit conference.

The Iranian capital became, therefore, the center of a major Jewish relief effort focused on shipping vital goods for consumption and trading to the much larger number of Jews (Viteles estimated 200,000–300,000, but the figures vary in virtually every report) trying to endure the war in the Soviet Union. Interestingly, the JDC recognized, as expressed in Viteles’s confidential report, that the success of the planned extensive relief effort emanating from Middle Eastern countries would depend on

the JDC's "not be[ing] suspected of Zionist or any political activities." This position of public neutrality in regard to Zionism necessarily led to ongoing (but contained) conflicts with the Jewish Agency and would ultimately shift only in the aftermath of the Holocaust.²⁷

"Thin indeed was the ice on which we were skating on in wartime Iran," wrote Marianne Leppmann, remarking on both the German threat and the more immediately threatening Russians, whose presence as occupiers was "felt to be something sinister and dangerous," and added that "several people we knew failed to come home after an errand in the city and were never heard from again." Yet, on the rare occasions when David Laor, the director of the Jewish orphanage, found time to go into the city, usually to collect precious medications from a Persian Jewish pharmacist, he incredulously wandered the crowded streets, "gazing into the showcases of the many jewelry shops, where the jewelry glittered as though there were no war anywhere in the world."²⁸

Tehran did appear to the refugees, whether they came from Poland or Central Europe, as fantastic and exotic, simultaneously modern and "primitive," but always firmly in the "Orient" and far from Europe. The Iranian capital might have been the only place in the world where refugee Jews actually begged German diplomats to stamp a *J* in their passports in order to evade the rumored British roundup of German nationals as enemy aliens. Previously, even as the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) had already established a local branch in 1933, followed by a Hitler Youth group and a "working group of German women abroad," German mission officials had maintained extensive contacts with Jewish refugees in Tehran at least through the late 1930s. They routinely queried the Gestapo in the refugees' hometowns as to whether there were objections to renewing any passports, including those of persons identified as *Jude*. Almost always, a letter, its bright red borders on thick paper still well preserved in stark contrast to the other disintegrating records in the mission's foreign ministry files, arrived, assuring that there were no qualms (*Bedenken*) about another one-year renewal. Only in 1940 did the Gestapo add the proviso that Jewish Germans must make no effort to ever reenter Germany, on the danger of imprisonment.²⁹ The British closed the German mission and ordered all German nationals detained in summer 1941; the men were transported to internment camps (called concentration camps by their inmates) in Palestine, India, or even

Australia, and the women and children sent back to Germany. German Jews, however, were given shelter for an entire week in the courtyard of the British embassy's summer residence, ensuring that they would avoid being picked up by local police, who, it was said, were unlikely to be able to distinguish among Jewish and "Aryan" Germans. Those German passports renewed with a *J* were, as Leppmann remembered, "worth their weight in gold."³⁰

Refugees from Axis countries under direct British control were not so lucky; in India, where the British feared both anticolonial agitation and Nazi infiltration, German, Austrian, and Italian Jews were interned, sometimes for the duration of the war, as "enemy aliens" and even as suspected "enemy agents." In February 1941, as England was waging a lonely battle against the Nazis, Gerda Phillipsborn, a German Jewish refugee held in the Purandhar parole center, had already eloquently expressed to a British refugee aid committee her frustration about the curious position of being a prisoner of the very nation with which she wished to ally to fight the mutual National Socialist enemy:

I know perfectly well that our personal fate is absolutely unimportant at present, that we have no reason to grumble, we who are here safe, well fed, looked after remarkably well all the time. With all strength of my imagination I probably cannot imagine the ordeal you all have to undergo since many months—days, nights—and the future may be more difficult still. I need not tell you how deeply I admire you all for standing it so bravely—but I also envy that you are allowed to face it. It is so terribly bitter to be not only excluded from helping but also being suspected. I never imagined that something could be so hurting.³¹

By 1942, Iran emerged as the center of a dramatic Allied confrontation with the ravages of war as the Polish refugees—several tens of thousands, including women and children—poured in from the Soviet Union. They confronted American diplomats and Red Cross officials not only with a humanitarian disaster—which was eventually controlled—but with an even more complex geopolitical dilemma. The Americans, in a rehearsal of Cold War conflicts, had to navigate the competing demands of virulent Polish anti-Communism, the United States' commitment to lend-lease

and support of the Soviet war effort, and British ambitions for semicolonial control of southern Iran. For all their sympathy with the plight of the refugees from Central Asia, American officials were exasperated with Polish insistence on diverting all aid intended for the Soviets to their compatriots as well as their aggressive purchasing of scarce food and medicine, which threatened to cause a political and humanitarian crisis in Iran. Given the dire wartime circumstances, the Americans were not inclined to let “these Poles, a stubborn as well as gallant race,” disturb their relations with either the Soviet ally or Iran. As the State Department clearly recognized, Iran was “vulnerable to Axis propaganda directed at all the Near Eastern countries,” especially “since the Axis has already been making capital of what it calls ‘soviet brutality’” in connection with the Polish refugees.³² “I need hardly say,” an officer in the Department of State, Division of Near Eastern Affairs, added in his 27 May 1942 warning to the American Red Cross in Tehran not to make Iran a “dumping ground” for wartime refugees, “that Iran occupies a most important place in the current Near Eastern picture, and this Department is anxious to do everything possible to maintain our relations with that country on a cordial basis.”³³

Not coincidentally, given its multinational cosmopolitan military and civilian population and its central position for lend-lease and refugee relief efforts, Tehran also became the key site for arguably the most extensive and challenging Jewish relief and rescue mission during the Holocaust. Between July and November 1943, the JDC, cooperating somewhat uneasily with the Jewish Agency, both operating out of Tehran, worked out the details of what would become a lifeline to the several hundred thousand Polish Jews scattered throughout Central Asia. The JDC agreed to acquire supplies, some purchased and some donated from lend-lease stocks; do major fund-raising in the United States; and run the parcel program, for which it set up a central warehouse and virtually independent post office to avoid Iranian customs dues and inspections. The Jewish Agency undertook to raise smaller amounts of money from friends and relatives of the “Asiatics” in Palestine; the goal was to ship at least 5,000 parcels a month. Since the Soviets banned all aid shipments to “sectarian” groups, each approximately ten-pound parcel, filled with everything from blankets to sugar and tea and soap and matzoh—both for immediate use and for black market barter—had to be addressed to

individual recipients, whose names and locations were laboriously gathered by refugees and Anders army members now working out of Tehran and sometimes Jerusalem. It is not clear how many of these painstakingly constructed parcels actually reached those who most needed them, but by 1944 some 10,000 packages a month were making their way on Red Army trucks from Tehran to the Iran–Soviet Union border and then onward via various routes for delivery throughout Central Asia. Remarkably, JDC records indicate that between 80 and 90 percent of 230,000 parcels shipped from Tehran “reached their destinations”; by January 1947, “130,000 official acknowledgements of receipt,” with thousands more waiting to be mailed, had been forwarded from Iran to the JDC’s Office for the Middle East and Balkans.³⁴

This extraordinary JDC operation, multifaceted, exhausting, and sometimes dangerous, was spread across the Middle East. It had outposts in Cairo, Beirut, and Jerusalem, as well as in British India, where other European Jews survived, many of them as internees in camps for “enemy aliens.” Others, especially non-Axis nationality Polish Jews as well as the local Jewish community (in particular wealthy Baghdadi Jews), worked out of the Jewish Relief Association in Bombay. In 1944, the relief association counted 409 members and was cooperating with the JDC on the same relief “scheme” for Jewish refugees in Russia as well as on a special fund for Polish Jewish refugees in transit.³⁵

Rescue efforts were headquartered in Tehran, with its small collection of German and Austrian Jewish refugees, thousands of Poles, and relatively easy access to Soviet Central Asia. Palestine was one node in this circuit—it was certainly not uninvolved—but it was only one, and not the main site. The process involved delicate negotiations with multiple parties: the Soviet Union, Iran, Great Britain, the United States, the Polish government-in-exile, the Polish Red Cross, and various international Jewish aid groups including the JDC, the Jewish Agency, the Jewish socialist Bund, and numerous smaller relief groups from Australia to South Africa, India, and London. These groups all had differing politics, about Zionism, about relations to Poles, as well as about the advisability of general aid to the USSR through the Soviet war relief effort rather than a specifically Jewish operation. But they all shared the increasingly desperate goal of rescuing those European Jews who might still be saved—and most of those were struggling to survive in Soviet Central Asia.

Indeed, it is from the testimonies of the Teheran Children collected after they arrived in Palestine that we have some of the most harrowing descriptions of the desperate conditions Jewish refugees faced in Central Asia, conditions that the Americans had described, referring to the Polish refugees in general, as this “awful holocaust” and which, in fact, are little different from the equally devastating Polish testimonies compiled by Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Jan T. Gross in *War through Children's Eyes*. The Jewish Teheran Children remembered:

My father and mother got sick with typhus. . . . They died on the same day. We cried all night and the next day buried them ourselves. . . .

There were no doctors because they had all been mobilized for the front. . . . In Kazakhstan we all got sick with typhus, and after eleven days Mama died. My eldest brother, who was nineteen, also died. . . .

My father got sick with dysentery and after days died in the hospital. Only my brother and I remained out of the entire family. . . .

Seven of us left Poland. Three died of hunger and diseases. There were seven of us, and only my twelve-year old brother Abram and I remained. . . .

Of the fifteen people in our family exiled to Russia, six remained. It was the same in other families.³⁶

Unquestionably, many who had fled to the Soviet side of what had recently been Poland, and been initially reassured by Soviet promises that “we Jews are just as equal as everybody else,” came eventually to see their wartime situation more darkly, as a passage from “Nazi inferno to Soviet hell.”³⁷ But as most realized: “Better to have been deported . . . as a capitalist and enemy of the people than to fall into the hands of the Nazis as a Jew . . . in the end we were alive. Our exile had saved our lives. Now we felt ourselves supremely lucky to have been deported to Siberia.”³⁸ When confronted with the enormity of the German “Final Solution,” their difficult refuge in the Soviet Union appeared to some, as Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky note in an excellent early article on the subject of immediate postwar memory, as a kind of *gan eydn* (paradise).³⁹

Memoirs recall utterly contradictory experiences: a parent dying of dysentery or typhus in an Uzbek mud hut or working the risky but necessary black market trade on the Lenin Streets of Central Asian cities, while children read Pushkin and Lenin in school. Young people, looking quite dapper and well fed in group photographs, pursued violin lessons and language courses or even medical training with some of Moscow's and Leningrad's most gifted artists and leading academics in makeshift evacuated high schools and universities even as, in a frequently repeated phrase, others were "dying like flies." Refugees cheered the progress of the Red Army while simultaneously condemning the NKVD and the pervasive corruption of the Soviet system. They recalled Uzbek suspicion of both Christian and Jewish "Westerners"—but also the sharing of pilaf meals and wedding celebrations, the Jacobs who became Yacoub and the Helas now Hala in order to fit into their new environment, comfortable afternoons spent in the local teahouses (*chaikhanas*) or even sightseeing at the grand mosques and mausoleums in Samarkand and Bukhara.⁴⁰

Connections with local Bukhara Jews, while intermittent, also offered opportunities for Jewish wedding and circumcision rituals. Moreover, despite the fear engendered by the NKVD, the limits of Stalinist power in Central Asia and the sheer concentration of so many Jews in one area enabled the survival of significant Jewish cultural and political life including informal networks of Zionist youth movement activists. With their expertise in forging papers and maintaining clandestine cohesion, "Asiatic" left-wing Hashomer Hatzair and Dror activists would take on early leading roles in the Bricha (flight) networks that moved Jewish survivors out of postwar Poland toward U.S.-occupied Europe. In that sense, the Soviet Union played a key role not only as a preserver of Yiddish culture but as an incubator of the Zionism that later flourished in—and is so clearly associated with—the DP camps.⁴¹ "But we survived" is the refrain of the survivors who endured in the Soviet Union. It is a statement with a very different valence than the "we survived" of those who experienced Nazi occupation.

In July 1945, after the end of the war in May, an agreement between the Soviet Union and the new Polish regime organized the repatriation of Polish citizens to what had become, for Jews, a "vast graveyard." Refugees, probably somewhere between approximately 200,000 and 230,000, returned to Poland; earlier estimates speak of a total of 230,700 repatriates

until 1949.⁴² Some of the first to arrive were soldiers in the pro-Communist Berling army. Attached to the Red Army after the breakdown of relations between the Polish government-in-exile and the Soviet Union and the departure of the Anders army, it fought with and followed the Soviets all the way to Berlin. Most Jews returned after long, circuitous, and arduous journeys between February and July 1946—just as, not coincidentally, postwar antisemitic violence reached a climax with the pogrom in Kielce on 4 July. Others trickled back even later after their release from Soviet camps and prisons. When the trainloads of Jewish repatriates arrived in Lodz, Radom, Krakow, and Warsaw, the few survivors of ghettos, camps, hiding, and partisan units “turned out to welcome the repatriates and gape,” but “they came not to stare at rags and pinched faces—any Jew who survived the Nazis inside Poland was familiar enough with these things.” In a world where, among the 3.3 million Polish Jews “alive when Hitler invaded that land” there were “hardly more than a hundred Jewish families [that still] stood intact,” they “came instead to gaze on walking miracles—*whole Jewish families*, complete with fathers, mothers and children!”⁴³ Or as other repatriates recalled: “When the women saw our children they could not believe their eyes. They all said, ‘You still have children! Ours have all been killed by the Nazis.’” Often, despite their awareness of German atrocities on the Eastern Front, it was at these border crossings that the “Asiatics” first came face-to-face with incontrovertible evidence of the Final Solution, confirming rumors that had been hopefully discounted as Soviet propaganda.⁴⁴

Just as the liberation came at different times in different places, knowledge about the extent of the catastrophe seems to have been very unevenly received. On 30 September 1943, in a Rosh Hashanah “sermon” for Jewish internees in Purandhar, British India, a former lawyer from Berlin, who had clearly been listening to the BBC, already invoked “our brothers and sisters who unlike ourselves, had not the opportunity to escape the disaster and whom we shall never see again,” memorializing “all the hundred thousands and millions of our Jewish brethren who died as suffering heroes.” And on 13 May 1945, he turned a Victory in Europe Day speech into a Kaddish, noting, “We who, against our expressed will, were not permitted to participate actively in this battle for the freedom of all peoples can feel no true joy. . . . Above all we must think about those five million Jews, almost a third of our people, who found a hor-

rific death in the ghettos and extermination camps, on the road or in their homes and synagogues.”⁴⁵ In Iran, the refugee physician Marianne Leppmann did not begin to comprehend what had happened until she glimpsed first photographs of liberated concentration camps in *Life* magazine while attending a party at a British army base in Hamadan.⁴⁶

In Poland, the relatively large groups of Jews returning from the Soviet Union formed the core of a brief efflorescence of post-Shoah Yiddish culture in Lodz, or Stettin/Szczecin, and in Breslau/Wroclaw in the western “recovered territories” from which Germans had been expelled and where repatriates were often settled. Indeed, it is important to note that, for some young Jews, liberated Poland in the early postwar years was not only a “graveyard” but a place for temporary euphoria, with “enthusiasm and support for an optimistic and future-oriented vision of the country,” including active Zionist youth movements, Hebrew and Yiddish schools, theater, music, film, and even a baby boom (with 500 newborns delivered in 1947 in the Jewish hospital in Lodz). The liminal Jewish revival both reflected what had been preserved in the Soviet Union and anticipated and helped to shape the vibrant Zionist-dominated social and cultural life in the DP camps. The presence of unexpectedly numerous repatriates—and, it must be noted, not primarily the tragically smaller numbers emerging from the camps, partisan encampments, and hiding—served, however, not only as a catalyst for cultural and Zionist political life but also as a provocation for the postwar antisemitic violence that triggered the flight of Jewish survivors from Poland. By 1948, the Jewish experiment in postwar Poland was essentially over—a short-lived “life in transit”—having migrated to another transitional space, the DP camps of American-occupied Germany. Historians of the Holocaust and postwar Germany picked up the story of the “survivors” there, without, however, examining the experiences they brought with them.⁴⁷

Political and ideological as well as psychological factors, most importantly the pressures of the Cold War, the dominance of a unified narrative that subsumed all Jewish DPs under the rubric of the She’erit Hapletah, and the enduring sense among the “Asiatics” that their painful story was not worth telling in the face of the catastrophe that befell those who had been left behind, have shaped and distorted history and memory. The repatriates who arrived “home” in Poland starting in late 1945 became part of the undifferentiated collective of survivors that was in many ways

only invented after the war, first in Poland and then in the DP camps. Shocked by the devastation they confronted, a recognition made perhaps even more difficult to bear by the new knowledge that they had been the “lucky ones,” they accepted that role, especially as they found themselves forced to flee again. They joined the semi-organized but also panicked flight of Jewish survivors into occupied Germany and Austria. Stateless refugees, without papers or with false papers, they carried their children born in Uzbekistan, on the journey back, or in Poland, their backpacks containing the last of precious black market goods from the bazaars of Central Asia often tossed or stolen along the way. They crossed more borders from Poland through Czechoslovakia into Austria or through the Soviet zone into the American sector of Berlin. Seeking safety among the American victors, they moved now from east to west rather than west to east, hoping to emigrate further out of “cursed” Europe, to Palestine, the United States, Canada, or Australia.

Members of the historical commissions set up in Poland or the DP centers to document and commemorate the *Khurbn* (as the DPs referred in Yiddish to the catastrophe that we generally name as the Holocaust or, even more recently, the Shoah), who had themselves survived in the Soviet Union, mostly silenced their own experiences and recorded only the stories of the camps, the ghettos, and the partisans. Journalists and poets, who published in the lively DP press, focused on memoirs of persecution and resistance, Zionist politics, and everyday life of the displaced, but hardly ever on the struggle for survival in Siberia or Central Asia. Actors and actresses on DP camp stages donned striped pajamas and played victims in German camps even if they themselves had arrived as “infiltrates” from Poland after having survived in the Soviet Union. They suppressed their own traumatic stories in order to find a desperately needed home among a community of survivors. But the memories of camps, partisans, ghettos, and hiding they performed, or claimed, were not their own, a circumstance that may partly explain the reluctant response of many survivors to the call to “collect and record” events that most of them had not experienced.⁴⁸ And when Jews finally left the DP camps and communities, would-be immigrants, especially to a reluctant United States, and mindful of escalating Cold War tensions, they supported a thriving industry of false documents, backdating their entry into Germany or inventing new (later) birthdates for children to disguise their Soviet

birthplace.⁴⁹ At the same time, the early silence may very well have been not only the result of deliberate repression and privileging of the “direct survivor” story but also simply a reflection of the fact that, unlike the exceptional stories of survival under the Nazis, the Soviet wartime story was so common that it did not warrant much mention; it was the “default” taken-for-granted backstory.⁵⁰ Moreover, the desperate seeking of “normality” where “what happened during the war seemed so unbelievable, so psychotic, that we had to suppress the events in order to maintain our sanity and start a normal life again” may also have blocked much emphasis on divergent experiences.⁵¹

An overarching and often undifferentiated story of *the* Holocaust, its victims and survivors, has therefore effaced the highly ambiguous role of the Soviet Union as the site where—with critical, if limited, support from American Jewish aid organizations—the great majority of Jewish DPs had survived the war.⁵² Given such a “remapped” history, arguments about definitions of “survivors,” generally considered in terms of differences among prewar refugees and survivors of Nazi occupation, become even more vexed. In fact, if we exclude the “Asiatics,” the number of actual survivors (and their descendants) becomes dramatically smaller, with hard-to-imagine consequences for our by-now well-established rituals of commemoration, which, if anything, are expanding rather than narrowing the range of those included. Today “survivors” are counted and identified collectively, but we often do not actually know the story of individual wartime experiences. Flight survivors have been only belatedly or partially recognized, including in the struggle for even limited reparations. Indeed, anxiety about explicitly disaggregating that collective persists today, certainly, but not only, in Germany. As the generation with any living memory of the Holocaust inexorably disappears, those committed to preserving memory fear that postwar German (and Allied) accusations positioning most Jewish DPs as refugees from Communism or economic migrants from devastated postwar Poland and not “genuine” victims of Nazism might be reactivated. If the majority of survivors had in fact experienced the more “normal” horrors of wartime rather than the particular catastrophe of genocide, then, this scenario suggests, German guilt is relativized and the unique nature of Jewish persecution during World War II obscured. At the same time, however, a precisely opposite conclusion might emerge: that understanding how very few

“direct” survivors there really were and that much of the “saved remnant” (She’erit Hapletah) had survived only because it had escaped Nazi control only underscores the deadly sweep of the Final Solution. Polish and Polish Jewish testimonies about the Soviet experience reveal hauntingly similar traumas in strikingly similar language but also point to crucial differences. Jews carried the additional burden of antisemitism expressed by both Soviets and fellow Poles and in the aftermath of their Soviet exile, they, unlike non-Jewish Polish repatriates, confronted genocide, the virtually total annihilation of their prewar lives, homes, and families.

What, then, is at stake, in terms of memory politics and history, if the complex and confusing story of the Polish Jews in the Soviet Union and its connections to Iran and even India was inscribed into the Holocaust studies narrative (rather than, for example, being sequestered in Polish Jewish history or even Soviet Jewish history)? Polish and Polish Jewish experiences have been narrated separately; we need to know much more about their encounters in the Soviet camps and in Central Asia and what their differing memories signaled after the war. In Poland, certainly, the surprise repatriation of some 200,000 Jews from the Soviet Union further inflamed Polish resentment about putative Jewish collaboration with the unpopular Soviet occupation and Communist regime.⁵³ In Germany, Jewish DPs rarely, if ever, shared the implacable anti-Communism of Polish and Baltic DP “nations in exile.” We would confront more clearly the fraught slippage—in both contemporary and retrospective accounts—between descriptions of National Socialist and Soviet terror. We would have to consider the ways that the language of a “concentration camp universe” is insistently present in accounts of Soviet internment and how reactions to encounters with the traumatized, emaciated Tehran Children both anticipate and mirror depictions of Nazi camp survivors.

Furthermore, the many pragmatic rather than vengeful “close encounters” among surviving Jews and defeated Germans appear in a different light when we acknowledge that for many Jewish DPs their most recent, visceral experiences of persecution (as well as assistance) had been at the hands of Poles and Soviets rather than Nazis. The black market activities of DPs in postwar Germany, on the (in)famous Möhlstrasse in Munich or the Hermannplatz in Berlin, perceived as exotic “bazaars” by Germans and Allies, read differently when understood, not in the context of the extreme conditions of exchange in Nazi ghettos and camps or the tradi-

tions of the *shtetl*, but in relation to the barter and rationing systems that supported survival in Siberian labor camps and on Lenin Streets in Fergana, Frunze, or Bukhara. Restrictive postwar U.S. immigration politics might look different when analyzed in the context not only of antisemitism and xenophobia but of security-obsessed Cold War suspicions that immigrant Jewish DPs might harbor Communist sympathies. Jews knew, at the very latest at the moment they crossed the border into postwar Poland, that their survival was the result, if inadvertent, of Stalin's policies. And despite their profoundly ambivalent memories of the Soviet Union, many survivors, Zionists, and international Jewish organizations such as the JDC or the World Jewish Congress, as well as early Israeli political discourse, did not share the intense anti-Communism of the Western powers or Eastern Europe's "nations in exile." That ambivalent awareness, and not only bitterness about antisemitism and collaboration with the Nazis, may well have contributed to Jewish DPs' political distance from other staunchly anti-Communist Baltic and Polish DP groups with whom they shared space in occupied Germany.⁵⁴

Their confounding tales of survival, of forced labor in Soviet camps and collective farms, hardship and exoticism in Central Asia, were—and are—difficult to integrate into a coherent narrative, into personal as well as public memory and mourning rituals. It is not an accident that numerous memoirs include maps, as if they might explain to their authors as well as others these unlikely journeys, tracing routes traversing Poland, the Soviet Union, Iran, India, Palestine, and Poland again, generally followed by renewed flight and displacement to American-occupied Germany (and Austria and Italy) and continued migration to the United States, Israel, France, parts of the British Commonwealth in Australia, Canada, and South Africa, as well as to almost all other corners of the globe. Yet, if one actually takes into account the Nazi death machine and the near total devastation of Eastern European Jewry, it stands to reason that the approximately 250,000 survivors who consolidated themselves into the staunchly Zionist (in spirit, if not in destination) She'erit Hapletah could not possibly have all emerged from hiding, passing on the "Aryan side," or partisan groups or, as it were, walked out of Treblinka, where so many of the victims of liquidated ghettos were murdered. Nonetheless, ongoing anxieties still govern a certain reluctance to expose this history, to explain that the "survivors," certainly the Polish Jews, had for the most part

survived a more perhaps “normal” wartime experience of incarceration, flight, and desperate privation—with many deaths but no Final Solution and a chance at survival.

In the face of the emerging Cold War, and in a survivor culture more and more dominated by Zionism, the majority of Jewish DPs, some in camps populated almost entirely by “infiltrates” from postwar Poland who had returned from the Soviet Union, needed to negotiate their own excruciatingly complicated encounters with Nazism, Stalinism, and the “Orient.” Their trajectories remap and reconfigure the history of the Holocaust, rendering it transnational and multidirectional in new ways. They challenge us to understand the Holocaust, its victims and survivors, more deeply, comprehensively, and in comparative context.⁵⁵

Notes

1. For trajectories, see chapter 2, by Edele and Warlik; for encounters with Soviet Jews, see chapter 4, by Belsky; and for encounters with anti-Semites, see chapter 3, by Fitzpatrick (all in this volume).
2. For identities, see chapter 6, by Goldlust; for exclusion of testimony and memory, see chapter 7, by Adler (both in this volume).
3. See initial attempt in Grossmann, “Remapping Relief and Rescue: Flight, Displacement, and International Aid for Jewish Refugees During World War II,” *New German Critique* 39, no. 3 (2012): 61–79; a different later version of this article appears in “Remapping Survival: Jewish Refugees and Lost Memories of Displacement, Trauma, and Rescue in Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India,” *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 15 (2017): 71–97.
4. Quotation from Susan T. Pettiss with Lynne Taylor, *After the Shooting Stopped: The Story of an UNRRA Welfare Worker in Germany, 1945–1947* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Press, 2004), 146, diary entries for 11 and 13 December 1945. The entries record intake interviews with Jewish “infiltrates” arriving in Munich after they fled antisemitism in postwar Poland, to which they had been repatriated. On the general topic of Soviet wartime evacuation to Central Asia, see Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009). Alexander Nev-erov’s 1923 novel *Tashkent, City of Bread*, referring to the famine of 1921, had been adapted into a popular children’s book and translated into Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew and was especially well known

- among Jews. The archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) contain 156,000 registration cards of Jewish refugees who arrived in Tashkent by February 1942. See USHMM, RG-75.002.
5. Edith Sekules, *Surviving the Nazis, Exile, and Siberia* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2000), 95.
 6. Both czarist and Soviet planners had envisioned Tashkent as a kind of model colonial and then postcolonial city. On wartime conditions in Tashkent, see Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), esp. 72–144. Stronski discusses the impact of evacuation and Sovietization but barely mentions Jews, much less the Polish Jews. The prizewinning 1962 Soviet-Uzbek film *You Are Not an Orphan*, directed by Shukhrat Abbasov during a “thaw” period, depicts, in a tribute to cross-ethnic solidarity during the Great Patriotic War, the semidocumentary story of an Uzbek peasant couple who take in a multinational group of fourteen orphans, notably including a Jewish boy who is presented as especially traumatized, while their own son is doing his duty at their front. One *kolkhoz*, Phat Abad in Bukhara, managed by Uzbeks, is remembered as a particularly warm environment for Jewish children.
 7. JDC Archives, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1933–1944, Folder #422, “Memorandum: The Position of the Polish Refugees in Russia” issued by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, page 2 of 3, 31 July 1942. See also Keith Sword, “The Welfare of Polish-Jewish Refugees in the USSR, 1941–43: Relief Supplies and Their Distribution,” in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 145–60.
 8. See Menachem Begin, *White Nights: The Story of a Prisoner in Russia* (New York: Tolmitch E-Books, 2014); first published 1957, republished hardcover 2007.
 9. For detailed discussion, see David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 124–209. The government-in-exile had not been entirely opposed to a German action in 1941 that might lead to a weakened, albeit ultimately victorious, Soviet Union.
 10. Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Memorandum: Position of the Polish Refugees in Russia,” 31 July 1942. See also Georgette Bennett and Leonard Polonsky Digitized JDC Text Archive, New York Collection,

- 1933–1944, folder 422 (digital item 448812). Memo cites Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 17 June 1942; Polish Telegraphic Agency, 23 June 1942, and Jewish Labor Committee statement. See also Engel, *Shadow of Auschwitz*, esp. 114–56 (on Russia); and Yosef Litvak, “Jewish Refugees from Poland in the USSR, 1939–1946,” in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 123–50.
11. Reports vary on the numbers, composition, and timing of the Anders army as it evacuated the Soviet Union into Iran. According to the archival sources cited by Edele and Warlik in table 4 of chapter 2 of this volume, between 6,000 and 7,000 Jews left with the Anders army. The gender division among the Anders civilian evacuees is unclear; there were Polish nurses, including some Jewish women, serving directly with the army. Despite efforts—confirmed in the U.S. diplomatic files that I have so far examined—to evacuate at least 50,000 more children, Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzińska Gross report that only 15,000–20,000 were transported to Iran. Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Jan T. Gross, eds., *War through Children’s Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939–1941*, with a foreword by Bruno Bettelheim and an introduction by Jan T. Gross, trans. Ronald Strom and Dan Rivers (Stanford, CA: Hoover University Press, 1981). Even this figure highlights the very small number of Jewish children, who have nonetheless been given the name “Teheran Children.” See, among multiple sources, also the documentary *The Children of Teheran*, directed by Yehuda Cave, David Tour, and Dalia Guttmann (Israel, 2007). Note that this chapter uses the most common current English spelling “Tehran,” except when referring to, or quoting, sources where the name of the city is often written as “Teheran.”
12. Devora Omer, *The Teheran Operation: The Rescue of Jewish Children from the Nazis; Based on the Biographical Sketches of David and Rachel Laor*, trans. Riva Rubin, from the Hebrew *Hatabana Teheran* (Washington, DC: B’nai B’rith Books, 1991), 146. Interestingly, the title refers to “rescue . . . from the Nazis” when, in fact, the direct rescue is from terrible conditions in Soviet Central Asia. The second quotation is from Bob Golan, *A Long Way Home: The Story of a Jewish Youth, 1939–1949*, ed. Jacob Howland, with a preface by Bette Howland (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 90.

13. Golan, *Long Way Home*, 92. See also the testimony of Joseph Kresch describing his arrival in Iran. USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (accessed, USC, Los Angeles, 11 April 2016). There are numerous oral histories about the Soviet Union (some including the Teheran Children) in the Visual History Archive that I have not yet accessed, although it must also be said that the number is in no remote way proportionate to the very high percentage of Polish Jews for whom this was their survival story.
14. Maurice Barber to Hon. Norman Davis, chairman, American Red Cross Headquarters, Washington, DC, Tehran, 5 April 1942, transmitted with Dispatch No. 247, 12 April 1942, from the American Legation at Tehran. Earlier—and frequently repeated—reference to “greatest civilian emergency” from telegram sent to American Legation, Cairo, from Maurice Barber, American Red Cross representative in Tehran, to Ralph Bain, director, American Red Cross, Middle East, Cairo, transmitted with Dispatch No. 239, 2 April 1942, American Legation, Tehran to Bain, Cairo. Both items are located in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), State Department Refugee Files 840.48, microfilm box 1284, roll 31.
15. David Laor quoted in Omer, *Teheran Operation*, 144. Barely older than his charges, he had managed to use both Hashomer Hatzair Zionist youth movement and Polish government-in-exile connections to smuggle himself out of the Soviet Union.
16. See the photographs in *ibid.* and also in Grudzińska-Gross and Gross, *War through Children's Eyes*.
17. Bettelheim, foreword to Grudzińska-Gross and Gross, *War through Children's Eyes*, xv–xvi.
18. Laor memoirs as quoted in Omer, *Teheran Operation*, 146ff.
19. See ongoing research by Lior Sternfeld, University of Texas at Austin; especially Sternfeld, “Reclaiming Their Past: Writing Jewish History in Iran during the Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Early Revolutionary Periods (1941–1989)” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2014). For a brief mention of the refugee crisis in wartime Iran, see Lior Sternfeld, “Jewish-Iranian Identities in the Pahlavi Era,” *International Jewish Middle East Studies* 46, no. 3 (2014): 602–5. A recent highly suggestive report estimates between 114,000 and 300,000 Polish refugees in wartime Iran, part of a larger landscape of refugee camps throughout the Middle East, including Egypt, Syria, and Palestine as

- well as Iran and India. See Ishaan Tharoor, “The Forgotten Story of the European Refugee Camps in the Middle East,” *Washington Post*, 2 June 2106.
20. Bennett and Polonsky Digitized JDC Archive, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1933–1944, folder 713, Harry Viteles, Confidential Report on Visit to Baghdad (2–9 November 1942) and to Teheran (11 November–2 December 1942) (digital item 486793); quotations from pp. 3, 7. Also in Bennett and Polonsky, Digitized JDC Text Archives, Item #866652, JDC Archives, Records of the Istanbul Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1937–1949, Folder #IS.50, This detailed report is forty-seven pages long. Interestingly I have (so far) found no mention of Viteles’s visit in the U.S. diplomatic files, which deal extensively with the crisis of the Polish refugees in Iran.
 21. Marianne Leppmann (Hempel), unpublished memoirs, with permission of the family. Acquiring visas for Persia/Iran was particularly difficult for young single women precisely because of fears that they would constitute a sexual threat as prostitutes or at least women of loose morals. This gender-specific aspect of immigration possibilities, particularly perhaps to “non-Western” destinations, requires further research. I am currently researching this group of German and Austrian refugees, who included my parents. My remarks here are entirely tentative.
 22. Leppmann, memoir.
 23. Laor memoirs as quoted in Omer, *Teheran Operation*, 247, 222. A second, smaller group of 110 arrived on 28 August 1943.
 24. NARA, State Department Refugee Files 840.48, microfilm box 1284, roll 32, British embassy memorandum, 29 January 1943, to State Department. See also Lynne Taylor, *Polish Orphans of Tengeru: The Dramatic Story of Their Long Journey to Canada, 1941–1949* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2009). Taylor (55) counts twenty-two camps for Polish refugees across British colonial Africa, in Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika, South Africa, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Nyasaland is now Malawi.
 25. Leppmann, memoir. On the Germans’ covert activity in Iran after their expulsion in 1941, see Adrian O’Sullivan, *Nazi Secret Warfare in Occupied Persia (Iran): The Failure of the German Intelligence Services, 1939–45* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

26. The history of the United States' wartime military presence in Iran and the massive efforts, undertaken under difficult conditions, by the Persian Gulf Command, to aid the Soviet Union, and of the U.S. role within an Allied mission encompassing about half a million Soviet, British, and American troops seems to be remarkably understudied. See, for example, the collection of Joel Sayre's *New Yorker* reportage in Sayre, *Persian Gulf Command: Some Marvels on the Road to Kazvin*, foreword by James Thurber (New York: Random House, 1945). See also United States Army, *Instructions for American Servicemen in Iran during World War II*, facsimile ed., with a new introduction by Steven R. Ward (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2012); originally *Pocket Guide to Iran*, 1943.
27. Viteles, Confidential Report. All quotations and references from Viteles are from his report, here 24–25. It should be noted that the JDC did fund Jewish Agency activities and that “on the ground” the two groups worked together closely.
28. Leppmann, memoir; Laor quoted in Omer, *Teheran Operation*, 205.
29. Requests (mostly approved) for extensions of German passports for Jews resident in Tehran through April 1939 are contained in Deutsche Gesandtschaft Teheran, Passport Division, Aussenamt (Foreign Ministry) files, parcel 21, III.4, vols. 7–9.
30. Leppmann, memoir. This story is based on memoir and family history accounts.
31. Gerda Phillipsborn to Lady Reading, Purandhar Parel Camp, 27 February 1941, British Library, India Office, L/PJ/8/68 Enemy Aliens in India, Enquires on Personal Cases, p. 138.
32. NARA, State Department Refugee Files 840.48, microfilm box 1284, roll 32, Maurice Barber to Ralph Bain, 13 July 1942 (comment on Poles); draft for letter to American Red Cross in Tehran, 27 May 1942, State Department, Division of Near Eastern Affairs, signed by Paul Alling.
33. Draft for letter to American Red Cross in Tehran, 27 May 1942. On 18 July 1942, Undersecretary of State Breckinridge Long noted that the State Department “believes that it would be particularly unfortunate if the Iranians were given cause to feel that they were being imposed upon and were receiving unfair treatment.” NARA, State Department Refugee Files 840.48, microfilm 1284, roll 32.
34. Bennett and Polonsky Digitized JDC Archive, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee,

- 1933–1944, folder 1056, “Statement on Relief Activities of the JDC for Refugees in the USSR,” 31 May 1944 (digital item 531334). For postwar inventory, see *ibid.*, folder 427, letter from Charles Passman to J. L. Magnes, 15 January 1947 (digital item 44901). See, for example, a postcard, from April 1944 addressed to Joint Distribution Committee, Teheran, thanking (in pencil-scrawled Yiddish) the JDC for a shipment of matzoh (and surely more). Found in USHMM archives.
35. Pamphlet, Jewish Relief Association of Bombay, Annual Report, 1944, personal collection. On Jewish refugees in British India, see, among other sources, Margit Franz, *Gateway India: Deutschsprachiges Exil in Indien zwischen britischer Kolonialherrschaft, Maharadschas und Gandhi* (Graz: CLIO, 2015).
 36. Henryk Grynberg, *Children of Zion*, trans. Jacqueline Mitchell (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 142–43; first published in Polish in 1994. Grynberg’s book contains “fragments of interview record compiled in Palestine in 1943 by the Polish Centrum Informacj na Wschod (Eastern Center for Information) on the basis of the testimony of Jewish children evacuated from the Soviet Union to Palestine” (ix). In a striking conflation, these reports are dedicated in equal fashion “to the memory of the fathers, mothers, and children whose bones marked the ways and stations of torture in the inhuman expanses of Eastern Europe, Siberia, and Central Asia” (v). They should be compared to the autobiographical statements by mostly (but not entirely) non-Jewish Polish children as collected by the Anders army, published in Grudzińska-Gross and Gross, *War through Children’s Eyes*.
 37. See Larry Wenig, *From Nazi Inferno to Soviet Hell* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2000), 72.
 38. Esther Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe: Growing Up in Siberia* (New York: HarperCollins, 1968), 226.
 39. Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, “Paradise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 373–99.
 40. See Regina Kesler, *Grit: A Pediatrician’s Odyssey from a Soviet Camp to Harvard*, ed. Michael G. Kesler (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009); as well as the memoir of Michael G. Kesler, the man Kesler would marry in Boston, *Shards of War: Fleeing to and from Uzbekistan* (Durham, CT: Strategic Book Group, 2010). On these very varied

- experiences, see also the memoir by Miriam Finder Tasini, *Where Are We Going?* (Los Angeles: Richard Altschuler and Associates, 2012). The photo collection of the USHMM contains remarkable (posed) photographs of well-dressed and fit-looking refugees.
41. On Hashomer Hatzair contacts in Uzbekistan, see Omer, *Teheran Operation*. On the reorganization of Zionist movements, see Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichab* (New York: Random House, 1970). On the indispensable contribution of repatriates to DP cultural life, see Tamar Lewinsky, *Displaced Poets: Jüdische Schriftsteller im Nachkriegsdeutschland, 1945–1951* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2008). David Engel, in *Shadow of Auschwitz* (121), even suggests that Polish Jewish refugees transferred Zionist ideas and movements back into the Soviet Union after 1939, a process that might well have borne fruit decades later in the Free Soviet Jewry movement.
42. Yosef Litvak, “Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union to Poland at the End of the Second World War and Afterwards,” in Davis and Polonsky, *Jews in Eastern Poland*, 227–39. Litvak estimates 230,700 repatriates until 1949, approximately 54.5 percent male and 20.2 percent children up to age fourteen. He also asserts that “between 85 and 90 per cent of all the Polish refugees in the Soviet Union were repatriated” (234). For a different view, see Albert Kaganovitch, “Jewish Refugees and Soviet Authorities during World War II,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 38, no. 2 (2010): 85–121; and Kaganovitch, “Stalin’s Great Power Politics, the Return of Jewish Refugees to Poland, and Continued Migration to Palestine, 1944–1946,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 59–94. Researchers in Russia and Israel, in cooperation with the USHMM, are trying to set up a database of Soviet and non-Soviet Jewish refugees in the unoccupied Soviet Union. See Vadim Dubson, “Toward a Central Database of Evacuated Soviet Jews’ Names, for the Study of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Territories,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 95–119.
43. *JDC Digest*, 5, no. 5 (1946): 1.
44. Sekules, *Surviving the Nazis*, 120. Yitzkhak Erlichson remembered his return: “We began to grasp the whole horror. In Russia there had been people who said that the bad news coming out of Poland was a little exaggerated. In part we had been glad that the Russian radio was encouraging a hatred of the Nazis. And in part we had tried to calm ourselves, hoping that these were indeed exaggerations. . . . But now

- the bloody spectacle lay before us.” Yitzkhak Erlichson, *My Four Years in Soviet Russia*, trans. and with an introduction by Maurice Wolfthal (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 177; first published in Yiddish in Paris, 1953.
45. Hans S. Grossmann, personal papers, in author’s possession.
 46. Leppmann, memoir.
 47. See Shimon Redlich, *Life in Transit: Jews in Postwar Lodz, 1945–1950* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), esp. 30, 31, 38, 42, 44, 65, 75. On postwar pogroms and antisemitism, see especially Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2006); and Gross with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). For detailed (and mostly anguished) reflections on immediate postwar conditions, see the quickly published reportage by Yiddish journalists who traveled to Poland from the United States; for example, S. L. Schnayderman (Schneiderman), *Between Fear and Hope* (New York: Arco Publishing Company, 1947); and Jacob Pat, *Ashes and Fire*, trans. Leo Steinberg (New York: International Universities Press, 1947). For memories of optimism, see Redlich, *Life in Transit*, 30; Kesler, *Grit*, 103–III.
 48. Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lewinsky, *Displaced Poets*; Margarete Myers Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945–1957* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. 237. On the contested place of the Soviet experience in immediate postwar memory of the *Khurbn*, see Markus Nesselrodt, “‘I Bled like You, Brother, Although I Was a Thousand Miles Away’: Postwar Yiddish Sources on the Experience of Polish Jews in Soviet Exile during World War II,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 46, no. 1 (2016): 47–67. Given the “belated” nature of this research, it should incorporate—but has not yet—many of the insights of existing feminist scholarship about the intersecting significance of gender, age, and family, as well as the specificities of women’s experience, including sexual violence, the uses of instrumental sexuality as a currency of survival, family tensions and solidarity, and the centrality of mothers in survivor memory.
 49. This strategic “lying” on DP intake cards or immigration applications may have also distorted our sense of how many Jews actually survived in the Soviet Union. For an example of a falsified birthdate, see Joseph Berger, *Displaced Persons: Growing Up American after the Holocaust*

- (New York: Scribner, 2004). Recently available International Tracing Service (ITS) records will facilitate necessary research. See also the stunning last (and long-lost) Yiddish-language feature film about the Holocaust made in Poland, *Undzere kinder* (1948, directed by Natan Gross and Shaul Goskind), in which two Yiddish comedians come to Lodz and stage a play with a song and dance routine set in a ghetto that bears no resemblance to the actual conditions some in the audience endured. The unmarked, but completely obvious at the time, subtext is that the two actors, Shimon Dzigan and Yisroel Schumacher, famous and beloved performers in prewar Poland, had not experienced the Nazi occupation but returned from the Soviet Union in 1947 after years in Stalinist prison and labor camps. See Gabriel Finder, “Child Survivors in Polish Jewish Collective Memory after the Holocaust: The Case of *Undzere kinder*,” in *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915–1953: Ideologies, Identities, Experiences*, ed. Nick Baron (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 218–247.
50. This interpretation has been quite insistently suggested to me by several friends and colleagues who grew up in DP communities, as children of both camp and flight survivors.
 51. Kesler, *Grit*, 107. See John Goldlust, “A Different Silence: The Survival of More than 200,000 Polish Jews in the Soviet Union during World War II as a Case Study in Cultural Amnesia,” *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 21, no. 1 (2012): 13–60; now in a revised version as chapter 1 of this volume.
 52. On the JDC’s determined efforts, see the Bennett and Polonsky Digitized JDC Archive, New York Collection, which contains relevant documents from 1941 to 1947 and also includes extensive material from what had previously been cataloged as the Istanbul Collection. The 1943 appropriation for aid to refugees in Soviet Russia totaled \$1,275,000; in January 1947, the JDC estimated that the total cost of the Teheran operations was about \$5,150,000. Bennett and Polonsky Digitized JDC Archive, Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1933–1944, folder 427, letter from Charles Passman to J. L. Magnes, 15 January 1947 (digital item 44901). See also Mikhail Mitsel, “American Jewish Joint Distribution Programs in the USSR, 1941–1948: A Complicated Partnership” and Atina Grossmann, “JOINTFUND Teheran: The Jewish Lifeline to Central Asia,” in *The Joint Distribution Committee: 100 Years of Jewish History*, ed. Avinoam Patt, Atina Grossmann,

- Linda Levi, and Maud Mandel (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018 [forthcoming]).
53. This is the consensus number most historians use. Note that Edele and Warlik cite lower archival numbers. See table 6 in chapter 2, and the introduction to this volume.
 54. On general DP politics in postwar Germany, see Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011). For a general overview of varied Jewish experience, see also Françoise S. Ouzan and Manfred Gerstenfeld, eds., *Postwar Jewish Displacement and Rebirth 1945–1967* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).
 55. On the concept of multidirectionality, see Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). On the ambivalence of memory and differing understandings about definitions of “survivor” among those who had survived in the Soviet Union, see chapter 7, by Eliyana R. Adler, in this volume.