

Nazi Occupation *and* Its
Aftermath *in* Soviet Belarus

GHOSTS — OF — WAR

FRANZISKA EXELER



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NAZI OCCUPATION AND ITS
AFTERMATH IN SOVIET BELARUS

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NOTE ON LANGUAGE, TRANSLITERATION, AND TERMS

In this multilingual region, where every town's name existed in several versions depending on which language one spoke, the spelling of places and names is always a difficult question. With the exception of names familiar in English (such as Moscow, Kiev, or Białystok), I usually use the official name that a town or province had at the particular time that I am referring to, for example Vil'na province (instead of Vilnius province) when it was part of the Russian empire, or Nowogródek province when it was part of interwar Poland. For Soviet Belarus itself, the situation is a bit trickier. Formally, the interwar republic had four state languages (Belarusian, Russian, Yiddish, and Polish), but the main languages in which residents of the republic interacted with the state were Belarusian and Russian. In the late 1930s, Moscow began to put a stronger emphasis on Russian as the *lingua franca* of the Soviet empire. By the time of the Second World War, Russian had become the primary language of internal party-state documents; in the postwar decades, its predominance in official and private communication further increased.

Today's Belarus has two state languages, Belarusian and Russian. For a variety of different reasons, including a lack of state support for the Belarusian language, Russian has come to be almost the sole language of communication, at least in the cities. Still, for many people, it is no contradiction to self-define as Belarusian but to speak Russian most or all of the time, whether in private or in public. For these reasons (and because readers outside of Belarus will be more familiar with Russian than Belarusian town names, with, say, Mogilev instead of Mahilioŭ), I have chosen a pragmatic and yet hybrid approach, not quite unlike lingual reality in both Soviet Belarus and present-day Belarus. I speak of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) or, in short, of Soviet Belarus (*Savetskaia Belarus'* in Belarusian) and not of Soviet Belorussia (*Sovetskaia Belorussia* in Russian). I also translate the Russian *belorusski* into English as "Belarusian." Otherwise, though, I use the

Russian names for towns and other geographical places. In the case of villages, I provide either the Belarusian or the Russian name, depending on the original source. The second map provides the Belarusian and Russian names of the republic's largest towns.

In the case of personal names, I either use the one that is given in the source (which means that many Belarusian names will have been Russianized in party-state documents) or the one that the author self-identifies with. To give an example: in the case of the well-known writer Vasil' Bykaŭ, I use his Belarusian name, as he clearly self-identified as a Belarusian who spoke and wrote in his first language. (In Soviet-era Russian-language publications, Bykaŭ's name was often rendered as Vasil' Bykov, in a Belarusian-Russian hybrid close to the original.) In other cases—for example, Vladimir Khar-tanovich, who grew up in a Belarusian-speaking village west of Minsk but published his memoirs in Russian—I decided not to Belarusianize his name, as that would have gone against his own linguistic choice and lead to confusion with the sources. For transliterations from Belarusian and Russian, I have used the Library of Congress system. All translations are my own.

A note on Soviet terms: In postwar Soviet Belarus, the *oblast* (*voblasts'* in Belarusian, *oblast'* in Russian) was the largest administrative unit below the level of the republic. It can best be translated as region. The next level down was the district (*raion* in both Belarusian and Russian). The Politburo (*politbiuro*) of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (since 1952 called the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) in Moscow represented the leadership of the Soviet Union. Its corresponding version at the level of the republic was the Buro (*biuro*) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, headed by a first secretary. Subordinated to the Buro were the regional party committee (*oblastnoi komitet*, abbreviated *obkom*), the district party committee (*raionnyi komitet*, abbreviated *raikom*), and the city party committee (*gorodskoi komitet*, abbreviated *gorkom*). The Sovnarkom of the USSR (*Sovet narodnykh komissarov SSSR*, the Council of People's Commissars), renamed the Council of Ministers in 1946, headed the executive branch of the Soviet party-state. Its corresponding version at the level of the republic was the Sovnarkom (since 1946, the Council of Ministers) of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. Subordinated to the republic Sovnarkom were the regional executive committee (*oblastnoi ispolnitel'nyi komitet*, abbreviated *oblispolkom*), the district executive committee (*raionnyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet*, abbreviated *raiiispolkom*), and the city executive committee (*gorodskoi ispolnitel'nyi komitet*, abbreviated *gorispolkom*).

Over the years, the Soviet Union's state security organs underwent many complex organizational changes and shifting divisions of tasks. In 1934, the

political police, the GPU-OGPU, was abolished and its functions transferred to the NKVD, the All-Union People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs. The NKVD was briefly divided into NKVD and NKGB in 1941, subsequently reunited, and separated again in 1943. In 1946, when the people's commissariats were renamed ministries, the two agencies were renamed MVD and MGB. In the book, I usually specify which agency I am speaking of, but I also use the shorthand "state security organs" to refer to both NKVD/MVD and NKGB/MGB, as their tasks overlapped in practice. Following further organizational changes after Stalin's death, from 1954 on most of their responsibilities were taken over by the newly formed Committee for State Security, best known as the KGB.



MAP 1. Soviet Belarus in its post-1945 borders with some of the towns, villages, and other places that are important for this book. To this day, much of Belarus is covered in forests and marshes, but except for the Pripjat marshes and the Naliboki forest, these are not shown on the map. Map by Mike Bechthold.

Introduction

Truth, Guilt, and Justice in an Illiberal State

On June 22, 1941, Ol'ga Bembel'-Dedok woke up late. The previous evening, she had attended a theater performance in Minsk, where she lived with her husband, Andrei, and two children, Klara and Oleg. As she stood in the kitchen, preparing porridge for her young son, a neighbor came running over: "What are you doing? Don't you know? Turn on the radio! It's war!" At first, Bembel'-Dedok could not believe it: "War, that seemed too abstract." On the radio, they were playing military marches. Bembel'-Dedok continued to listen to the radio: "Like a machine, I was feeding little Oleg and listening to the story about the invasion at night, about Molotov's speech. Slowly, the truth was beginning to dawn on me."¹

Earlier that day, the Germans and their allies had launched Operation Barbarossa. Roughly three million soldiers—most of them German but also Austrian, Romanian, Hungarian, Italian, Slovak, and Finnish troops—crossed the border into the Soviet Union. Their advance was accompanied by the Luftwaffe's aerial bombardment of cities and towns. The invasion caught the Soviet leadership by surprise, and in the first weeks, the Axis troops made large territorial gains. Within days, Army Group North pushed through the three Baltic countries, heading toward northwestern Russia. In early September 1941, it laid siege to Leningrad. Army Group South aimed to bring Ukraine, the southern parts of Russia, and the oil-rich Caucasus under its control. Its troops moved more slowly than those to the north, but by early

September, they had reached Kiev. On September 19, the largest Ukrainian city came under German rule.²

Meanwhile, Army Group Center marched through Belarus and western Russia, its eyes set on Moscow, the Soviet capital. Western Belarusian cities like Brest and Grodno fell within the first days of war, Minsk itself was conquered on June 28, and eastern Belarusian towns like Bobruisk and Borisov soon followed within days.³ As German planes dropped bombs on cities and towns, fires spread, and panic and chaos broke out. In Grodno, Chasia Bornstein-Bielicka and her family awoke in the middle of the night to a city on fire. The noise was deafening: “Tanks fleeing, motors roaring and steel treads clattering over cobblestones. Shutters slamming against the walls with each bomb that fell. Windowpanes shattering against eardrums for hours on end.”⁴ Zofia Brzozowska, who lived with her family on a small estate not far from Novogrudok, hid in the basement for several days. When the family reemerged, they saw clouds of smoke over the town. “German troops appeared on the street.”⁵ By the end of the month, the German army already occupied more than half of Belarus. Among the places that the Wehrmacht conquered at the beginning of July was Litman Mor’s hometown, David-Gorodok, in southwestern Belarus and Vasil’ Bykaŭ’s home village, Bychki, in the northeastern part of the republic.⁶ For a while, the German advance slowed down, making it possible for some civilians to flee to the safety of the Soviet rear. Soon, however, Army Group Center continued its march east. By the end of August, all of Belarus found itself under German occupation.

Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union marked the beginning of the single most destructive military campaign in history. During the years of war and occupation, some worlds were completely eradicated, foremost the world of East European Jewry, while others underwent fundamental change. The mass murder of the Jews—alongside the enslavement of the Slavic population, the economic exploitation of the occupied territories, and the destruction of communism as a political system—lay at the core of Nazi ideology. The German occupation regime was a regime of death and destruction, and millions of Soviet civilians and prisoners of war suffered, and died, under Nazi rule. It was also, however, a regime that depended on the limited involvement of some. In the occupied territories, the German authorities pursued different strategies toward different population groups. While Jews were singled out for destruction, the Slavic population was treated with a mix of brutality and co-optation. For civilians in occupied territory, in turn,

it was impossible not to come in contact with the occupation regime, and willingly or unwillingly, some people became complicit or entangled in Nazi crimes. In regions where Soviet partisan warfare developed, individuals were also increasingly faced with demands not just from the German but from the partisan side, too, neither of which could they fulfill without fearing punishment at the hands of the other. As the Red Army began to reconquer the territory and push German troops from the western regions of the Soviet Union, one question hovered over encounters between the returning Soviet authorities and those who had lived under Nazi rule, between soldiers and family members, evacuees and colleagues, Holocaust survivors and their neighbors: what did you do during the war?

This is a book about the ghosts of war: about the choices that people made under German occupation, the choices they were forced to make, and their political, social, legal, and personal repercussions.⁷ It is a book about extreme moral circumstances, about the intense pressures and constraints within which individuals had to act, and the many reasons why they came to be associated with the German or the Soviet side (or both or trapped in between). It is also a book about different understandings of what constituted guilt and complicity, about the search for truth and justice in the aftermath of Nazi occupation, and the ways in which this process affected the rebuilding of Soviet state authority, personal lives, and the creation of war narratives. The literature on the Eastern Front, with its heavy emphasis on German-language sources only, fills many bookshelves. In comparison, studies that explore the aftermath of the monumental Nazi-Soviet war are still few. *Ghosts of War* traces the fate of local communities torn apart by occupation; shows how individuals sought retribution, justice, revenge, or assistance from their neighbors and courts; and assesses the role of Soviet party-state officials in the processes of retribution and reconstruction. It uncovers the many absences, silences, and conflicts that were never resolved, the truths that could only be spoken in private, yet it also investigates the extent to which individuals at once accommodated, contested, and reshaped official war memory. It is often assumed that in societies that experienced war, occupation, or violent conflict, the act of seeking justice and accountability contributes to the development of free public spheres and democratic societies (a process also known as transitional justice).⁸ In contrast, this book shows how efforts at “confronting the past” played out within, and at times through, a dictatorship like the Soviet Union.

Geographically, the focus is on the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR)—in short, Soviet Belarus—an East European borderland that was

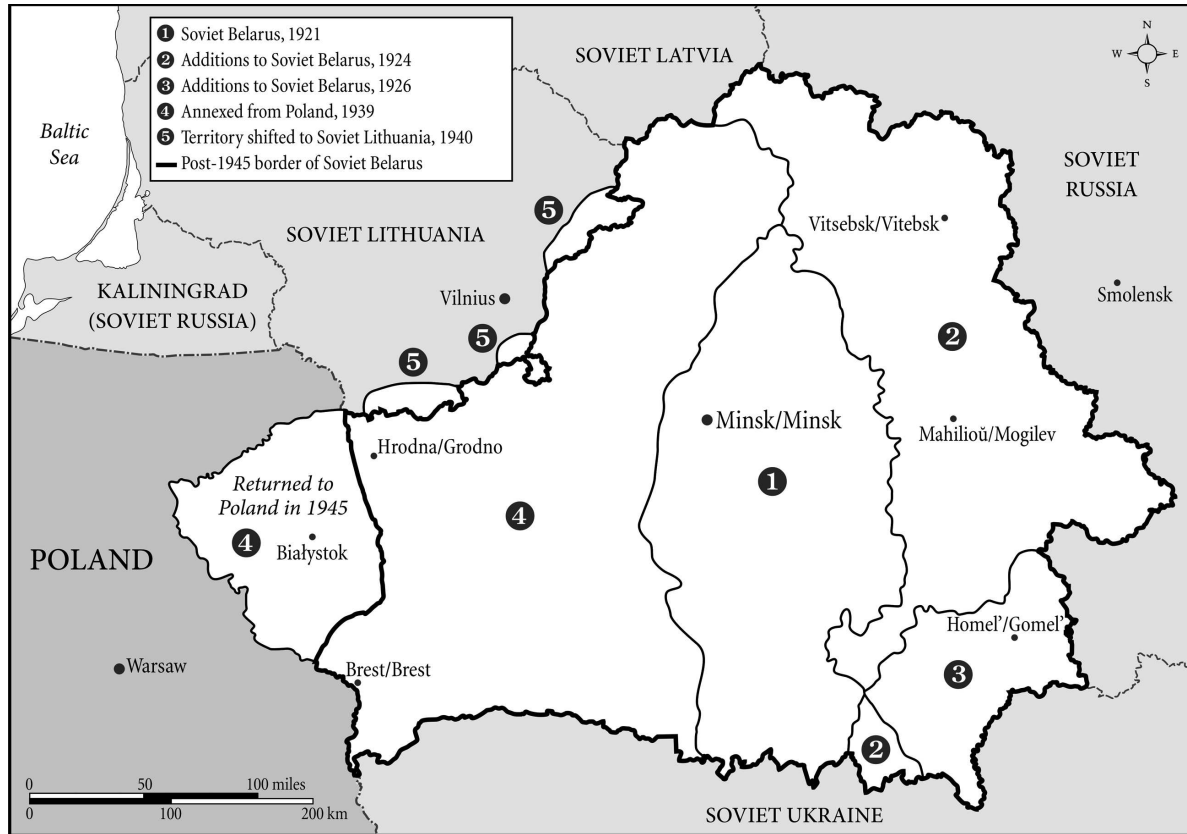
particularly affected by the Second World War. With its multiethnic and multilingual population, Belarus was one of the more than a dozen Soviet republics that, taken together, constituted the Soviet Union.⁹ Like the other Soviet republics, it was not an independent state but subordinated to the larger Union structure and ultimately the Politburo, the Soviet leadership in Moscow. Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Jews; speakers of Belarusian, Yiddish, Polish, and Russian; those who identified with one nationality or ethnicity and those who considered themselves primarily locals—all called this region their home.

Soviet Belarus is often thought of as a remote place, a forgotten backwater overshadowed by its bigger neighbors Ukraine and Russia. Yet what happened here during and in the aftermath of the Second World War transformed Belarusian, Jewish, Polish, and Russian history as much as it shaped Soviet and German history. Like few other places, the republic encapsulated the extremes of twentieth-century Europe. Created in 1919 out of the turmoil of war and revolution (and reestablished a year later), during the interwar years the Bolsheviks subjected the population of Belarus, like the rest of the Soviet Union, to violent transformations of its social fabric, political structure, and economic ways of life.¹⁰ In the fall of 1939, following the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the Soviet Union invaded and then annexed eastern Poland. As a result, Soviet Belarus doubled its territory and population. During the war, this westward shift of the Soviet Union's borders was confirmed at the 1943 Tehran Conference. With the exception of most of the Białystok region and a small part of the Brest region, which were handed back to Poland in 1945, postwar Soviet Belarus now consisted of two almost equally large halves: eastern Belarus, the older Soviet part with the capital Minsk, and western Belarus, formerly northeastern Poland.¹¹

In June 1941, Berlin broke the pact with Moscow and attacked the Soviet Union. By the end of August 1941, all of Soviet Belarus found itself under German rule. During the ensuing three years of Nazi occupation, the republic became a main site of the Holocaust. It was also at the center of Soviet partisan warfare against the Germans, and thus at the center of Nazi-Soviet total war. Historically, the Eastern Front is often (mis)remembered as a war between Germany and Russia—but the brunt of fighting and occupation was actually borne by the non-Russian western regions of the Soviet Union. Of all the Soviet republics, indeed of all European countries, Belarus suffered proportionally the highest human losses: About 1.7–2.1 million people, or 19–22 percent of the population that by June 1941 lived in the territories that would constitute post-1945 Soviet Belarus, were killed

or died as a result of the war.¹² This included at least 700,000 Red Army soldiers from Belarus who died at the front or in German captivity, and almost the entire Jewish population of the republic, an estimated 500,000–671,000 people. As part of so-called antipartisan campaigns, the Germans also razed approximately 9,200 villages to the ground, more than elsewhere in Nazi-occupied Europe, and killed up to 345,000 civilians—some of them Jews, but the overwhelming majority non-Jewish rural residents. The Soviet partisans in Belarus lost at least 37,378 people, but probably many more, and killed at least 17,431 people, but probably many more, in their own retributive measures.¹³

While German rule over Soviet Belarus ended in the summer of 1944, and ultimately the war in May 1945, those who survived were not able to settle down soon. Nazi occupation brought tremendous death and destruction throughout the western regions of the Soviet Union, and Belarus was among the hardest-hit places. Most cities lay in ruins, entire rural districts had been burned down, and large parts of the population were uprooted or displaced. Massive war-induced migration and displacement, combined with a Polish-Soviet population exchange from 1944 to 1946, meant that hundreds of thousands of people were moving into, out of, within, and through the republic, trying to get home or trying to avoid just that. Many of the early confrontations with people's wartime choices thus took place at a time when the Soviet state was trying to reestablish its power amid a population in flux—and over a republic that was in many respects still divided into two parts: eastern Belarus, which had been Soviet for two decades before the war, and western Belarus (formerly northeastern Poland), which had by 1944 been longer under German than under Soviet rule. What this means is that it is impossible to understand the repercussions of people's wartime choices without recognizing how prewar Soviet legacies affected individual choices under Nazi rule, and how people's experiences with the Germans in turn affected how individuals related to the returning Soviets. Consequently, the book begins at the turn of the twentieth century and extends from the war years into the postwar years. With its focus on individual choices in the most extreme moral circumstances, *Ghosts of War* conceives of Soviet Belarus as both a historical place and a lens onto larger questions of universal humanity. The comparison between Belarus and the other western republics of the Soviet Union that were under Nazi occupation, and the comparison between the republic's eastern and western parts, is woven into the main narrative. The book ends in the 1960s, yet questions of memory take it all the way to the present day.



MAP 2. Territorial changes of Soviet Belarus, 1921–1945. Map by Mike Bechthold.

Wartime Choices

In all societies that find themselves under foreign occupation or in the midst of civil war, everyday acts can suddenly acquire immense moral significance. Seemingly simple choices—whether to continue working at a particular job or to provide strangers with food—can have far-reaching consequences. Office clerks, who literally remain at the same desk, now find their position incorporated into the occupation regime’s administration, thereby becoming entangled in crimes. The strangers asking for food turn out to be partisans who can interpret the denial of their request as an act of disloyalty.¹⁴ In Nazi-occupied Soviet territory, the situation for locals was such that contact with the occupation regime, whatever form it took and whatever choices it triggered, was unavoidable; carving out a niche in which one could hope to keep one’s prewar life intact was impossible. In regions under both military and civilian rule, the German administration depended heavily on the employment of Soviet citizens, and in each district, Soviet citizens were appointed as town and district mayors. The Germans also created local police forces, which were staffed with Soviet citizens and subordinated to higher German police or military organs. In particular, in the countryside—where the German presence was, apart from large-scale punitive campaigns, scarce—the local police did much of the everyday legwork, effectively representing the Nazi regime in the localities. As the German authorities kept the organizational structure of the Soviet administration’s lower levels (cities and rural districts) intact, many who had worked as, for example, office clerks in a Soviet city administration continued to work in the same positions under the Germans.¹⁵

It is impossible to write about the choices that individuals make under foreign occupation without writing about “collaboration.” The meaning of that term, though, continues to spark much debate. Attempts at defining collaboration are often met with the concern that the notion fails to adequately capture the complexities of wartime reality. Local contact and involvement with the Germans occurred in a multitude of different forms, of which some carried much graver consequences than others. A town mayor or policeman who held power over life and death was both physically and morally in a very different position from someone who worked as a journalist for a German-sponsored newspaper. Some individuals—in particular, town mayors and policemen—were in direct contact with their German superiors, but in many other cases, contact was much more mediated and indirect, as was the case with teachers and factory managers. The motivations underlying people’s actions were similarly diverse, covering a wide range of different,

even conflicting reasons. And what to make of coerced engagement, such as when someone who had been forcefully recruited into police service became complicit in German crimes?¹⁶ In my understanding of how local involvement with the occupiers came about, I follow Jan T. Gross in his description of it as an “occupier-driven phenomenon”—that is to say, one that depended on the roles that the occupiers assigned to the occupied (with or without local political autonomy, as active participants in murder and expropriation or not), and on the corresponding offers that they made. People’s engagement with the Germans—its logic, appeal, self-justification, and social base—thus emerged in each country “at the intersection between the occupier’s intent and the occupied’s perception about the range of options at their disposal.” This means that in each particular case, the meaning and character of involvement with the occupiers have to be carefully circumscribed in time, or else the terms on which it occurred cannot be properly understood.¹⁷ For these reasons, this book is not concerned with determining whether certain behavior would merit the label “collaboration” (contingent, of course, on one’s definition thereof). Rather, I am interested in tracing the reasons and motivations behind people’s actions, and how these in turn were perceived and assessed by others after the war.

What choices the population in the western regions of the Soviet Union made during the war, however, was not only a question of how they responded to the options offered by the Germans. It was also a question of how they related to Soviet power. In the literature, the impact that Soviet rule had on people’s wartime choices is discussed primarily with respect to relations between local non-Jews and Jews. In the summer of 1941, during the transition from Soviet to German authority, a wave of violence against Jews swept through the regions that the Soviets had annexed in 1939 and 1940. The perpetrators were usually local civilians or a mix of civilians and German-appointed local policemen. Some violence was committed before German troops arrived in a particular region or district, while other violence was committed with their direct participation or presence. Yet other pogroms took place after the Germans had already shown themselves in a given locality but then left shortly thereafter, leaving the town without clear authority for a few days. Just as German participation varied from town to town, so did the level of local anti-Jewish violence. In terms of intensity, scope, and brutality, it was highest in western Ukraine (eastern Galicia and Volhynia), in the Białystok region (from 1939 to 1945 the westernmost part of western Belarus), and in the Romanian-administered regions of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia. Mass killings of Jews with local participation also took place in Lithuania.

In Latvia and western Belarus, excluding the Białystok region, the level of local violence toward Jews was much lower. In Estonia, anti-Jewish local violence seems to have hardly taken place, probably because the republic's Jewish community (which was numerically much smaller compared to Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, or Lithuania) had mostly managed to flee before the arrival of the Wehrmacht. In the old Soviet territories that came under German occupation (eastern Belarus, eastern Ukraine, and parts of Russia), local pogroms against Jews during the summer of 1941 appear to have been almost nonexistent.¹⁸

The outburst of such personal, communal violence continues to puzzle historians and has led to much heated public debate in Poland and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere. One explanation for the regional variation in violence that is given in the scholarly literature is the impact that “double occupation” (first Soviet, then German) had on relations between Jews and non-Jews—namely, that the Soviet occupation and subsequent annexation of northeastern Poland in 1939 and of the Baltic countries, Bessarabia, and northern Bukovina in 1940 perpetuated the stereotypical image of Jews as supporters of communism. The pogroms in these regions during the summer of 1941 were thus motivated by a desire for revenge against those who supposedly sided with the Soviets.¹⁹ Another explanation offered is that pogroms were most likely to break out in places with large Jewish communities that sought national equality with non-Jews. Local non-Jews perceived this as a threat to their political dominance and seized on the opportunity that the transition from Soviet to German power offered to rid themselves of their political enemies.²⁰ Others have argued that local violence was most intense in regions where the radical political Right had a strong base of support (as the radical Polish Right did in the Białystok region) or where radical anti-Soviet nationalist groups like the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists were active. Correspondingly, violence was lower in regions where such radical nationalist groups were few or not organized in paramilitary formations.²¹ Yet others have suggested that the absence of pogroms in the old Soviet regions attested to the success of the Soviet Union's interwar campaigns against antisemitism, and the government's efforts to achieve interethnic cooperation and societal integration.²²

In these debates, it is conventional wisdom to assert that Soviet Belarus was different from the other western regions of the Soviet Union that were under German rule. According to this view, antisemitism was not widespread in Belarus, and the republic's non-Jewish population (implicitly understood in the debate as ethnically Belarusian) was more willing to help Jews than the population in neighboring Ukraine and Lithuania (or Poland).²³ Such claims

to Belarus's exceptionalism, though, are too general to be of analytical value. Neither do they take into account variations across time and place, nor can they explain the broad spectrum of local behavior under Nazi rule.²⁴ As this book shows, there were indeed important regional differences between wartime Belarus and the other western republics of the Soviet Union, most notably in terms of the existence of radical nationalist groups, which were less prominent and much smaller in western Belarus (in its post-1945 borders) than in Lithuania and western Ukraine. There also existed, however, significant similarities between Belarus and the neighboring republics, above all in terms of the microdynamics of violence and the relevance of situational factors for individual behavior. Wartime Soviet Belarus was not the complete outlier, the exception from the norm. Yes, Belarus differed from Ukraine and the Baltic countries in some ways, just as western Belarus differed from eastern Belarus in some ways but not in others—and not in the ways it is commonly thought to have been different.

When the German army invaded the Soviet Union, the decisions that people in eastern and western Belarus made were initially often influenced by their prior experiences with Soviet rule, or else their relationship to the Bolsheviks. Party members or individuals who held important positions within the Soviet party-state were more likely to flee east, while many who had previously suffered under the Soviets were among those who joined the German-organized police forces. Once partisan warfare picked up in mid-1942 and civilians found themselves confronted with demands from both sides, though, people's wartime choices came to be much more determined by situational factors, including the will to survive, coercion, violence, patriotism (which was not identical with belief in communism)—or simply the proximity of one's village to either a German garrison or a Soviet partisan zone. In other words, people's decisions and their consequences varied over time, and complicity and entanglement were questions of degree. Moreover, since the partisans were by 1943 mostly people from Belarus, and since the lower organs of the German occupation regime remained overwhelmingly staffed with people from Belarus, locals found themselves fighting against other locals. In parts of western Belarus, this situation was exacerbated by the presence of the Polish *Armia Krajowa* (AK), and in southern Belarus, by the presence of Ukrainian nationalist formations. While members of these groups at times cooperated with the Germans (and some Polish units initially also with the Soviet partisans), in the end, the war behind the front erupted into a bloody, multidimensional conflict in which the Soviet partisans, the different nationalist partisans, and the Germans and their local representatives all fought each other—and civilians suffered greatly amid the violence.²⁵

Consequently, and adapting a term coined by Lawrence L. Langer, many choices that people in occupied territory made were “choiceless choices.”²⁶ By that I mean that when people were confronted with decisions, all options entailed a destructive effect on their personal lives, families, and local communities: for example, when a village head had to decide whether to hand over villagers as forced laborers to the German authorities and fear reprisals from the partisans, or refuse to do so and fear German collective punishment.

Saying that many choices under Nazi occupation were “choiceless choices,” however, does not mean that everybody had the same choices to begin with. Although all civilians found the space within which they could act circumscribed, that space was much smaller, almost nonexistent, for Jews compared to non-Jews. Within the constraints of occupation, non-Jews had a range of options at their disposal. Some of these were far-reaching, such as volunteering to work in the German-overseen police forces or giving shelter to Jews, Red Army soldiers, and partisans and risking one’s life in the process. Yet choices also included smaller, seemingly insignificant acts, such as taking furniture from a murdered Jewish neighbor’s apartment or refraining from doing so. Those who were hiding others obviously tried to keep their actions secret, but many people made choices that were publicly visible and known around the neighborhood or village. As political circumstances, and thus the terms of involvement with both German authorities and partisans, changed over time, individuals reevaluated their previous choices. War, as Stathis Kalyvas has argued, is a “transformative phenomenon.” The advent of war and the experience of violence transform individual preferences, choices, behavior, and identities, which are then continuously shaped and reshaped in the course of the conflict.²⁷

In their behavior under Nazi occupation, the civilian population in eastern Belarus—the part that had been Soviet for more than two decades before the war—did not differ fundamentally from the civilian population in western Belarus, the part that had been annexed from Poland only in 1939. The one exception to this was the extent of local anti-Jewish violence in the summer of 1941. The level of violence was high in the Białystok region (then the westernmost part of western Belarus; from 1945 on, again part of Poland), much lower in the other regions of western Belarus, and possibly nonexistent in eastern Belarus, for which local pogroms against Jews have not been recorded. However, once the Germans began to establish their occupation regime, they could depend in both western and eastern Belarus, just like in the other western republics of the Soviet Union, on the participation of a small group of people who, primarily in their capacity as local policemen and town mayors, actively took part in the Holocaust. Similarly, in their treatment of their

Jewish neighbors, the non-Jewish civilian population in western Belarus displayed the same behavioral spectrum as in eastern Belarus, ranging from acts of rescue and providing shelter to expropriating Jewish property, blackmailing or denouncing neighbors in hiding, or even taking part in the killings.

The existence of a spectrum of human behavior, of course, does not preclude the existence of quantitative differences within it. In her comparison of the two neighboring regions Bessarabia and Transnistria (which correspond roughly to the territories of modern-day Moldova and southwestern Ukraine), Diana Dumitru found substantial differences in how the non-Jewish populations treated the regions' Jewish populations during the war. Until the Russian Revolution, Bessarabia and Transnistria were provinces of the Russian empire. During the interwar years, Bessarabia belonged to Romania, and Transnistria was part of the Soviet Union. In the summer of 1940, the Soviet Union annexed Bessarabia, but following the German invasion of the Soviet Union a year later, Romanian troops, with the help of their German ally, brought both Bessarabia and Transnistria under their control. As Dumitru has shown, in the subsequent years until the Red Army reconquered the two regions in the summer of 1944, the "civilian population in Bessarabia had a more antagonistic attitude, and the civilian population in Transnistria a more cooperative attitude toward the Jews during the Holocaust."²⁸ However, in the case of German-occupied Belarus—with the exception of the summer of 1941—such clear regional differences did not exist, at least not for the regions that constituted post-1945 Belarus. Where western and eastern Belarus did differ was in the type of support network that individuals could draw on. As a result of two decades of Sovietization, intercommunal relations among certain urban groups in eastern Belarus—younger people, those who no longer practiced a religion, and people who closely identified with the Soviet project—were less defined by traditional social and religious markers of identity than in western Belarus. During the war, this increased the chances that Jews in the urban centers of eastern Belarus would be able to depend on the help of non-Jewish friends or colleagues, especially if they were fellow Komsomol or Communist Party members. In this respect, higher prewar levels of interethnic integration in eastern Belarus shaped the makeup of support networks there during the war—thus reflecting a difference in how legacies of prewar Soviet rule bore on the choices that individuals in western and eastern Belarus made under Nazi occupation. It is possible that the different nature of people's support networks also translated into a numerical difference, meaning that overall, more non-Jewish urban residents in eastern Belarus were willing to help Jews than in western Belarus. However, the primary sources do not provide a conclusive picture.

If quantitative differences existed, then they would have been subtler than in the case of Transnistria and Bessarabia, where the contrast was more evident and thus probably methodologically easier to detect.²⁹

The Soviet Politics of Retribution

Beginning in late 1943, the Red Army advanced into Belarusian territory; by July 1944, the republic had been reconquered in its entirety. As three years of Nazi occupation came to an end, party-state officials and refugees, demobilized soldiers and partisans, forced laborers and Holocaust survivors returned home. Among them was the prewar leadership of the republic, headed by First Secretary Panteleimon Ponomarenko (who also headed the Soviet partisan movement during the war). For the Soviet authorities, the task that lay ahead was enormous: to rebuild the Soviet state in an utterly destroyed region and a time of great flux and population movement. Especially on the lower levels of the party-state, the party leaders were faced with a dire shortage of qualified personnel. Many of those who had occupied these positions prior to the war had been killed or were unavailable in 1944, be it because they were still fighting with the Red Army or had been assigned to different jobs elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Rebuilding the Soviet state, though, was not just about the reconstruction of institutions and cadres. It was also a question of making sure that any resistance, real or imagined, would be destroyed—and it meant reclaiming authority over a region where the population was overjoyed to see Nazi occupation end, yet where many people in both western and eastern Belarus were apprehensive about the return of Soviet power as such. In turn, party leaders and state security officers were ambivalent about the local population, given its long exposure to German rule. One task therefore lay at the heart of Soviet state rebuilding, in Belarus as in the other western regions of the Soviet Union: determining what people in Nazi-occupied territory had done during the war—and punishing those the authorities considered traitors.

But who were the traitors? On July 3, 1941, Stalin addressed the Soviet people. In his speech, broadcast on the radio, he stressed that the war with Germany was no ordinary war between two armies but rather a war of the entire Soviet people against the Nazis. In the battle between good and evil, there were no gray zones. The fight against Soviet citizens in occupied territory who were said to support the Germans, Stalin warned, would be ruthless. Those deemed traitors only deserved one fate: death.³⁰

That punishment would be harsh was repeated over and over again by Soviet wartime leaders. In a leaflet that was distributed by partisans in

occupied Belarusian territory, Ponomarenko warned village heads, policemen, and those employed in the administration and commandant offices: “We tell you openly and frankly: your crime toward the motherland is immense, and if you continue to help the Germans, you will not escape strict punishment.”³¹

During the war, the Soviet partisans dealt in their own ways with individuals considered traitors, which usually meant shooting them, sometimes including their families, thus inflicting collective punishment. Once Soviet power returned in full force, the state reclaimed its monopoly on violence, and the punishment of suspected wartime traitors was channeled into the military justice system. In absolute numbers, no country that was occupied during the Second World War prosecuted as many of its own nationals for what they had done under foreign rule as the Soviet Union.³² From 1943 (the earliest date for which data are available) until the death of Stalin in 1953 (the latest date for which data are available), almost 260,000 of those Soviet citizens who were charged with treason were specifically accused of “treason and aiding and abetting the German occupiers” (*predatel'stvo i posobnichestvo nemetskim okkupantam*). The numbers, however, are incomplete, as the figures for 1944 are unknown. Assuming that these were as high as those for 1945, one would arrive at 308,000 individuals who, charged with treason, were specifically accused of “treason and aiding and abetting the German occupiers.” The total number of prosecuted individuals was probably higher by at least a few tens of thousands, given that the Red Army began to reconquer parts of Soviet territory as early as late 1941.³³

Unfortunately, the available statistics are incomplete; due to restricted archival access, they have to remain estimates. Still, these numbers provide a sense of the scale of the Soviet politics of retribution and allow for cross-regional comparisons. Conviction rates in the Soviet Union were higher than in other European countries, and the Soviet judiciary overwhelmingly upheld these convictions, which further distinguishes the Soviet case from most countries that participated in the war.³⁴ The majority of Soviet citizens who were charged with treason were convicted in secret, in quick trials that lacked fundamental standards of rule-of-law-based legal systems such as an independent judiciary, independent defense attorneys, and the assumption of “innocent until proven guilty” that form the precondition for any trial to be considered as impartial as possible. Although a variety of different actors (state security officers, military prosecutors, judges, and party-state leaders) were involved in the punitive process, the general course was always set by the leading Bolsheviks in Moscow, and as such was to be applied uniformly across the western regions of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet punishment of suspected wartime traitors was swift, harsh, and sweeping. At the same time—and contrary to official wartime proclamations—punitive practices were not static but rather varied over time, alternating throughout the postwar years between more lenient and stricter, less active and more expansive phases. The historical literature remains divided on how to explain these shifts. One argument is that the returning Soviet authorities considered those accused of having served the Germans not as by-products of the war but as eternal enemies that war and occupation had helped to uncover. The passing of time had no effect on the state's punishment policies.³⁵ In contrast, others have argued that the Soviet regime did not always live up to the harsh image that it projected. For pragmatic reasons, mostly resulting from a lack of qualified personnel, the authorities were willing to make compromises.³⁶ As this book shows, while both positions raise crucial points, framing the issue solely as one of ideology versus pragmatism does not fully capture the nature of Moscow's politics of retribution—and the kind of Soviet state that emerged after the war.

The prosecution of Soviet citizens accused of wartime treason began in late 1941, after the Red Army, in its first counteroffensive, regained territories in western Russia. In this early reconquest phase, punishment was particularly strict and indiscriminate, and the death sentence common. Soon, however, the Politburo grew alarmed by military tribunal reports that stressed the state security organs's improper qualification of crimes. Aiming to clarify the legal basis of punishment, several political and judicial central bodies in Moscow issued a series of instructions in 1943 that introduced a legal distinction between traitors and accomplices, specified the corresponding acts, and set different sentences ranging from imprisonment to the death penalty. The real turning point in the state's politics of retribution, however, occurred during the first half of 1944. By the late spring, the Red Army had pushed the Germans from western Russia, eastern and central Ukraine, including Kiev, and parts of eastern Belarus around Gomel'. During the first months of 1944, a noticeable change took place: overall, punishment became less strict. As reports by NKVD military tribunals operating in eastern Belarus show, during the first post-occupation weeks and months, the death penalty was less common than one might have expected.³⁷ The ratio of death penalty to prison sentence dropped further in the next two years. A similar trend—that labor camp sentences were much more common than the death penalty—was also observed in Ukraine between 1943 and 1945.³⁸

The moderation of punitive practices should not be mistaken for an increase in due process of law: the Soviet legal system remained illiberal. Rather, shifting political circumstances led to a recalibration of state

priorities. As the Red Army was reconquering more and more territory from the Germans, retribution evolved into a process in which different objectives and interests had to be weighed against each other: reclaiming authority by way of punishment yet portraying the Soviet state as a liberator and guarantor of justice, while facing a shortage of experienced personnel. A similar mechanism informed the proceedings of Soviet citizens accused of wartime treason that the authorities decided to open to the public. At the trials that took place while the International Military Tribunal (IMT) convened in Nuremberg from 1945 to 1946, the Soviet state took great care to draw a discursive connection between the respective local treason trials (or what today would be called collaboration trials), its ongoing domestic trials of Axis soldiers for war crimes, and the Soviet Union's participation at Nuremberg. At the same time, the authorities were determined to keep public media references about the involvement of Soviet citizens with the Germans to an absolute minimum in the first ten to fifteen years after the war. After Stalin's death, as part of limited de-Stalinization efforts, the Soviet state moderated its punitive policies and in 1955 issued a partial amnesty. In the 1960s, domestic and international changes spurred a second wave of public trials. Because a statute of limitations did not exist for treason, the prosecution of Soviet citizens accused of wartime collaboration continued until the late 1980s.

This balancing act, however, was not free of tensions and contradictions. The Soviet leaders were determined to punish local participation in German atrocities. Military tribunals sentenced numerous individuals who, usually in their capacity as local policemen, had abused, killed, or helped to kill Jewish and non-Jewish Soviet citizens during the war. Yet at its core, the search for those deemed traitors was about defining political loyalty. Correspondingly, despite the relative moderation of punishment that began in 1944, the Soviet leadership continued to regard the war as a test that revealed people's true loyalties—and thus showed no understanding for the moral gray zones of occupation. In their rulings, the military tribunals did not take external pressures or constraints into account as mitigating factors. "Choiceless choices"—that some individuals in occupied territory were forced to choose between two options that had an equally destructive effect on their communities—did not exist for the Soviet authorities. All the while, they were willing to accommodate their own pragmatic wartime choices—and did not hold everyone accused of treason accountable by the same standard. During the war, Moscow actively encouraged Soviet citizens who served in the German-organized police forces to join the Soviet partisans. This was a deliberate policy, promoted by none other than Panteleimon Ponomarenko

and approved by Stalin. “Traitors-turned-partisans” were later also the only group in whose cases Soviet military courts systematically allowed for mitigating circumstances, thus lowering their sentences significantly.

Such contradictory practices resulted from tensions between ideological imperatives and pragmatic concerns, but they also resulted from tensions within ideology. On one hand, the state maintained that the civilian population in occupied territory, with the exception of a few people who were deemed traitors, had fully supported the Soviet partisans. In the official Soviet narrative of the war as an “all people’s war” (*vsenarodnaia voina*), Belarus occupied a special place as the center of the “all people’s partisan war” (*vsenarodnaia partizanskaia voina*) against the Germans.³⁹ On the other hand, Ponomarenko and other high-ranking Bolsheviks believed that the war had helped to uncover mass enemies in hiding, eternal enemies who had gone into hiding in the interwar years yet had resurfaced and joined the Germans in 1941. Ultimately, the authorities—from party leaders to low-level officials, state security officers to members of the judiciary—were unable to establish a consensus on just what exactly “working for the Germans” (*rabotali u nemtsev*), as internal state documents put it, had entailed. While the case of policemen and village heads seemed easy to judge, more confusion continued to exist with regard to teachers, agricultural specialists, or office clerks who had worked in the German-overseen administration. Given the dire lack of cadres, the Soviet state continued to employ many of them. Still, the authorities’ suspicion, palpable in the denial of higher education or professional advancement, did not diminish over the years. Indeed, anyone who had lived under Nazi rule could be suspect—as best expressed in one line on the bibliographical questionnaires that Soviet citizens had to fill out before beginning a new job or entering university: “Did you live in occupied territory?” The Soviet state that emerged from the Second World War, then, was able to quickly reassert its authority in the formerly German-occupied territories—yet at the same time ambivalent about its politics of retribution.

Searching for Truth, Guilt, and Justice

For private individuals, the moment of return was first and foremost about the much hoped-for reunion with family members. Returning home, however, also led to encounters with former neighbors and friends, fellow villagers, and colleagues. These encounters not only threw into sharp relief that some, in particular Jews, had lost more than others during the war. They also, and inevitably, raised questions about people’s wartime behavior.

One would probably assume that in a secret police state like Stalin's Soviet Union, where fear of informers was widespread and people were highly cautious about what they said in public, individuals would shy away altogether from talking about the war in ways that might deviate from the official line. That, however, was not the case. When Vasil' Bykaŭ returned to his village Bychki in northeastern Belarus after the war, fellow villagers came over at night and recounted how much they had had to suffer during the war: "From the Germans, from the partisans, from the *narodniki* [people associated with the administration] . . . Among others also from some people who came from the same villages, in particular from those who up to the war had been Soviet activists and during the war tried hard to serve the Germans."⁴⁰ As neighbors and acquaintances met in social settings, they did talk frankly about the war, including sensitive topics such as violence committed by Soviet partisans. Yet if people spoke about taking furniture from Jewish apartments, stealing food from villagers, or serving in the German-organized police forces, they usually always referred to *other* locals as having done such things, not themselves—and it needed a lot of personal determination and insistence to overcome people's reluctance to respond to uncomfortable questions, in particular ones that might have brought to light their own entanglement in wrongdoing or crimes.

When individuals found out or surmised that members of their prewar social communities had become complicit or entangled in Nazi crimes, or that their neighbors had taken advantage of other people's plight, they responded in different ways. Some sought comfort in the social relations that had survived, the friendships and solidarities that had not been destroyed by what people had done or not done during the war. Often, people cut all ties with those whom they suspected of wrongdoing, as Ol'ga Bembel'-Dedok did with her nephew Igor', a former Red Army soldier who had fallen into captivity and subsequently worked as a translator for the Germans.⁴¹ Yet others like Litman Mor, a Holocaust survivor and former Soviet partisan, decided to altogether sever the bond to their local community, whether this entailed leaving one's hometown, region, or Belarus—or, if possible, even the Soviet Union itself. On his return home to David-Gorodok in 1944, Mor discovered that some of the town's inhabitants had participated in the murder and expropriation of his family. All social ties that he had once held to non-Jewish acquaintances shattered. As he explained: "My hatred of the Germans was common, not aimed at a specific German. But my hatred of the locals, who murdered my family, was personal."⁴² Hoping against hope that some members of his extended family might have survived, Mor returned once more to David-Gorodok in early 1945: "This time, I walked around like in a cemetery.

I was completely indifferent. . . . I only knew—I will never return here.”⁴³ Under the conditions of the Polish-Soviet population exchange, he was able to leave the Soviet Union and subsequently settled in Palestine.

As varied as people’s responses to the ghosts of war were, one sentiment was widely shared by inhabitants of Belarus: the urge to seek justice and retribution—that is, punishment that people believed to be morally right. In its most extreme form, retribution meant revenge violence, such as beating up a fellow villager accused of having worked for the Germans. Yet individuals also pursued many other, less physical means of retribution. Some did so privately—for example, by confronting neighbors directly, demanding the restitution of property that these had acquired during the war. Many more, though, found themselves brought into contact with the Soviet state. In their efforts to determine what Soviet citizens had done under Nazi rule, the authorities relied heavily on local information, on an assortment of names, clues, and stories. Some of these were supplied unwillingly, as when torture during interrogations made people provide or fabricate incriminating material about friends or neighbors, or when people were blackmailed into becoming informers. Others agreed to become informers for the state security organs because they saw this as a chance to punish locals they believed guilty of crimes committed in the name of German power. While some consented to pass on information to the state after they were approached by its representatives, many more acted on their own initiative and wrote letters to the central authorities. Testifying to the state—whether to the members of the Extraordinary State Commission (Chrezvychainaia gosudarstvennaia komissiiia, ChGK) or, if possible, as a witness at a public trial—was another means through which individuals could seek retribution. In doing so, some people found that their individual notions of what constituted morally right punishment overlapped or were congruent with those of the regime. When the authorities acted on their tip and arrested a neighbor they believed to have committed crimes in the name of German power, even someone who otherwise was not sympathetic to Soviet rule could see the state as a guarantor of justice. The same could apply to individuals who served as witnesses in court. The widespread desire for punishment made it possible for some inhabitants of postwar Belarus to find moral justice (*spraviadlivosts’* in Belarusian, *spravedlivost’* in Russian) within a state whose legal system was, and remained, profoundly illiberal.

At the same time, interaction with the authorities carried its own risk. People who engaged with the state could, of course, do so only on the terms set by the authorities.⁴⁴ There were boundaries to what could be said and done, and investigations could backfire on those who initially set them in motion.

Nowhere did this become more visible than in the ubiquitous property conflicts. What belonged to whom was an immensely contentious question in the immediate postwar years, a deeply personal and at the same time highly political question. The death and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people—in particular, the region's Jews—and the destruction of houses as a result of military operations or German punitive actions meant that a lot of property—be it apartments, furniture, or clothes—had passed through many different hands during the war. Just how did you manage to move into a new apartment during the war—because the Germans had burned down your house as punishment for ties to the partisans, or because the partisans had burned down your house as punishment for ties to the Germans? Or because a bomb had destroyed your house and you simply needed a new place to stay?

These questions inevitably arose when trying to solve the ubiquitous property conflicts, which is why we can read them as one of the ways in which people in Belarus grappled with the ghosts of war. Sorting them out was an inherently difficult task, both practically as well as morally. Red Army soldiers, Holocaust survivors, or former partisans often turned to the state, asking the authorities to settle the question of ownership or occupancy rights in their favor. In doing so, they had no choice but to work with Soviet normative categories, with the authorities' notions of right and wrong wartime behavior. In consequence, it was, of course, impossible to seek justice for wartime wrongdoing believed to have been committed in the name of the Soviet state. A peasant could not complain to Minsk, for instance, that Soviet partisans had stolen his cow during the war. The partisans were unambiguous heroes, people's avengers, and defenders of the socialist motherland. According to the official narrative of Belarus as the republic where the "all people's partisan war" had taken place, the local population in both the republic's eastern and western part had, with the exception of a few traitors, stood firmly behind Soviet power. In this respect, narrating the years of war and occupation was also about the creation of a new linear story of Soviet Belarusian statehood—one that firmly united eastern and western Belarus under the banner of the "Partisan Republic," as the postwar republic came to be known. After Stalin's death in 1953, the general Soviet war narrative and its specific Belarusian version became more inclusive, and within limits, some of its aspects could be contested. Still, because of the centrality of the "all people's partisan war" to postwar Soviet Belarusian statehood, there was no space to acknowledge that the relationship between Soviet partisans and civilians in German-occupied territory had been fragile, unequal, fraught with conflict, and at times antagonistic.⁴⁵ This book thus joins studies that have investigated the intricate processes of social and

individual remembering, forgetting, and silencing, and that have demonstrated the complex and dynamic interplay within and between official and private memories—yet that have also shown the limits of individual agency in the face of state power.⁴⁶ The exclusively positive depiction of the partisan-civilian relationship was, and remains to this day, nonnegotiable in Belarus (and for that matter, in Russia, too). Violence committed by Soviet partisans against civilians continues to be a political taboo; challenging it comes with high professional and social costs.⁴⁷ Privately, individuals in postwar Belarus tried to make sense of the discrepancy between official and private memory by distinguishing between “real partisans” (who could be honored) and “bandits,” thereby attempting to rationalize the abuse they had encountered from the latter—yet this reframing of their wartime experiences could publicly only be articulated at the cost of exclusion from the larger political community.

Those who felt that Soviet power had done them an injustice—either during the war at the hands of the partisans or after the war at the hands of Soviet officials—therefore resorted to particular strategies in order to be able to mobilize the state on their behalf: they wrote letters to party leaders in which they accused others of being German accomplices. While their efforts often turned out to be unsuccessful, the authorities usually benefited from them: on a more abstract level, complaint letters to the regime acknowledged that the Soviet state alone had the means to settle the conflicts brought forward by the authors. The importance that this affirmation of Soviet state authority had should not be underestimated, in particular considering how rapidly institutions in the western Soviet regions had collapsed in the summer of 1941. In that sense, and regardless of the author’s intentions, each letter to the state contributed to the rebuilding of Soviet power in the aftermath of Nazi occupation. Unintentionally, “confronting the past” had a regime-stabilizing effect, not leading to the creation of more liberal, open public spheres but instead strengthening the mechanisms of power in an authoritarian regime like the Soviet Union.

The search for truth, guilt, and justice in the aftermath of Nazi occupation, then, was a multidimensional process located at myriad levels of state and society, one that was about defining political loyalty but also about establishing crimes; about finding moral justice in its different forms and meanings but also about revenge; one of tremendous personal grief, trauma, and enduring silences but also about the rebuilding of lives, belonging, and defining one’s place in the postwar community of resisters. Yet precisely because confronting the ghosts of war was such a highly individualized and multidimensional process—contingent on a multitude of interacting factors,

circumstances, and personal experiences—it is difficult to identify a clear contrast between western and eastern Belarus, between the new, formerly Polish and the old Soviet part of the republic. As several scholars have shown, the Sovietization of the regions that were annexed in 1939 and 1940 could be thoroughly carried out only after 1944. In consequence, differences between old and new Soviet regions manifested themselves in state policies and practices.⁴⁸ One might assume that these were also reflected in the personal ways in which inhabitants of Belarus responded to the aftermath of Nazi occupation: for example, that people from eastern Belarus were more likely to turn to the state than inhabitants of western Belarus or more likely to agree with the authorities' categories of right and wrong wartime behavior—and thus more likely to find moral justice through the Soviet state. Given the lack of comprehensive empirical data, this is, of course, impossible to rule out entirely. Still, I could not detect any obvious east/west differences in the available source material. What is noteworthy here is not the existence but rather the absence of a pattern that one would have expected to see.

If there was a line dividing the population not just in Belarus but in the Soviet Union at large, however, then it ran between those who had lived under German rule and those who had not. After the war, many civilians who returned from the Soviet rear or front shared with the authorities their distrust toward those who had lived in occupied territory. Like elsewhere in Europe, women faced a gendered stigma and were accused of “horizontal collaboration.” The mistrust extended to those who had been taken to Germany as forced laborers and to Red Army soldiers who had survived German captivity. Even former Soviet partisans were not always exempt, depending on when and under what circumstances they had joined the movement.⁴⁹ Although people's prejudices toward those who had lived under Nazi rule did not always have to be articulated fully, biases nevertheless lingered on for decades after the war, with the potential to appear at any moment, often during small, everyday social conflicts. Social interactions and encounters, both in public and in private, therefore also showed that for many people, actual, alleged, or surmised wartime behavior and postwar belonging were intertwined issues—whether that meant belonging to a family, a local community, or the Soviet nation.

Private and Public Lives

Ghosts of War is based on a broad range of archival sources from sixteen archives in Belarus, Russia, Germany, Israel, Poland, Ukraine, and the United States. A large part consists of Soviet state documents that were for internal

use only (such as Communist Party reports, reports from the people's commissariats/ministries, cadre statistics, or procuracy reports) and Soviet state documents like newspapers and speeches that were produced for the public. Unlike in neighboring Ukraine or Lithuania, the archives of the Soviet state security organs in Belarus are closed to researchers (as are the central archives of the Soviet state security organs in Moscow). However, reports from the state security organs, including on the work of the NKVD/MVD military tribunals, are available through the archives of the Communist Party of Belarus (although much material remains classified, too). Other archival sources include reports from the Nazi occupation regime and court files from postwar Germany. Together, these documents attest to regime policies and practices and the ways in which they changed over time.

As an exploration of both private and public lives, with its equal emphasis on state and nonstate actors, the book also draws on published and unpublished personal and autobiographical material written or recorded in Russian, German, Polish, English, and Belarusian. This includes memoirs and shorter recollections, interview transcripts, and Jewish memorial books, as well as diaries, complaint letters to the Soviet authorities, and oral history interviews that I conducted in Belarus, Israel, and Germany. With the exception of complaint letters that people sent to the Soviet authorities and the interviews conducted by the Commission on the History of the Great Patriotic War, an oral history project run by Isaak Mints of the USSR Academy of Sciences, most personal and autobiographical material was created decades after the war.⁵⁰ The delay may be attributed to personal considerations, such as the need for temporal distance or an urge only later in life to pass on memories to a younger generation. Audience reception probably also mattered. In the United States, it took at least twenty years for a larger public to become interested in personal Holocaust histories; in Europe, it took even longer.⁵¹ Until the onset of perestroika in the Soviet Union, state censorship prevented the publication of memoirs, including on the Holocaust, that offered an alternative to highly state-regulated ways of narrating the war. Finally, the civilian side of war and the experiences of "ordinary people" only began to attract public and scholarly interest relatively recently, whether in the East or the West. This, in turn, is both reflected in and has shaped the ways in which the memoir literature on the Second World War has developed over time.

Knowing, as cognitive psychology and neuroscience studies have shown, that every act of remembering entails the reconfiguration of what is being remembered, some historians might caution against using such temporally removed sources as memoirs and strongly favor more immediate ones.⁵² However, I do not entirely share these reservations. At the time of its creation,

interpretations of events are always (and unavoidably so) already being written into a source. While authors of personal or autobiographical sources necessarily position themselves in relation to the larger political and social force field surrounding them, so, too, do the authors of state documents: for example, reports written by local officials or state security officers to Minsk or Moscow. This book draws on a wide range of different sources, of which each comes with its own specific set of methodological problems. At their core, however, the analytical challenge remains the same for all sources: to reconstruct how humans experienced and interpreted an event, to understand who speaks, from what position, and in relation to whom and what, and to identify the limits of what could have been said—and what was left unsaid. In what follows, I therefore juxtapose different sources relating to one particular process or phenomenon. At times, however, this is not possible, and all I can work with is one source, even just a fragment pertaining to a single event. The reason for that lies in an imbalance in the source base, and more specifically, within the available personal and autobiographical material. While members of all social strata wrote complaint letters to the state, urban residents overall left more detailed written traces than rural residents, and men more than women. Memoirs by Holocaust survivors—in particular, those from western Belarus who left the Soviet Union immediately after the war and later settled in the United States or Israel—are also more numerous than memoirs by other population groups. To compensate for this, I drew as much as possible on complaint letters and conducted oral history interviews myself. Although the imbalance is impossible to even out entirely, the available primary source material can nevertheless provide evidence of similarities and differences in human perception and behavior, reveal discrepancies and concurrences between institutional and personal responses to the aftermath of Nazi occupation, and, if interpreted cautiously, provide a sense of scale.

Ghosts of War

The first chapter introduces the tumultuous early twentieth-century history of the region that came to form post-1945 Soviet Belarus. It does so through the lives of some of its inhabitants from different religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds who, alongside others, will appear repeatedly throughout the book. Since individual choices under Nazi rule can only be fully understood if the prewar Soviet years are adequately explored, the chapter traces how larger political shifts and ruptures—in particular, the different ways in which Soviet power came to eastern and western Belarus—transformed personal lives and interethnic relations before 1941.

The second chapter examines the heart of darkness, the years of war and occupation. It focuses on three developments: the transition from Soviet to German rule in the summer of 1941, the murder of Belarus's Jewish community, and the growth of the partisan movement. Taken together, these three developments reveal particularly well individual preferences and motivations, local dynamics of violence, and the multicausal situational factors that increasingly accounted for the choices that individuals made and the choices that they were forced to make under Nazi rule.

The third chapter looks at the moment of return in 1944 and the worlds destroyed, worlds in flux, and worlds apart that it revealed. It examines the first encounters between those who had lived in occupied territory and those who had experienced the war elsewhere, and assesses how the returning Soviet authorities destroyed any resistance, real and imagined. It also explores the state's investigatory process and details the different strategies and sources that the Soviet state security organs drew on, including the help of partisan units, informer networks, captured German documents, witness statements collected by the Extraordinary State Commission (ChGK), and prewar surveillance and policing tools.

The fourth chapter traces the evolution of Soviet punishment of those deemed wartime traitors from the first reconquest phase to the early 1960s, when a second wave of trials took place. Analyzing secret and public prosecutions, the chapter shows that punitive practices were not static but rather varied over time, alternating between more lenient and stricter, less active and more expansive phases in response to shifting domestic and international constellations. At the same time, the state's politics of retribution remained both ideologically inflected and profoundly conflicted, attesting to the powerful yet ambivalent nature of the postwar Soviet state.

The fifth chapter shifts the focus from the state to the perspective of individual lives and local communities. It reveals the destructive impact that people's wartime choices had on personal ties and solidarities in a region that had already experienced much destruction of its social fabric under Soviet rule. The chapter analyzes how individuals sought accountability or revenge with the help of the postwar Soviet state, through nonstate channels, or by a combination of the two, and assesses the different meanings that justice, truth, and guilt held for people.

The sixth chapter reconstructs how different actors shaped the official image of Belarus as the "Partisan Republic," outlining its evolution from the war years into the first postwar decades. As acts of public remembrance contributed to public silencing and forgetting, party leaders increasingly ethnicized the war narrative in terms of both heroes and victims (with Jewish

and Polish inhabitants of Belarus subsequently excluded from the narrative). By presenting the Soviet partisan movement in Belarus as a mostly male, ethnic Belarusian or at best an East Slavic undertaking, the authorities also marginalized the contribution of female partisans, who had, after all, constituted 16 percent of the movement's forces in Belarus.⁵³ At the same time, even many ethnic Belarusians found that their actual experiences with the partisans were not reflected in the state's narrative. The chapter identifies the many discrepancies that existed between official image and personal experiences and reveals the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that were underlying the memory-making process—but it also shows how individuals at once accommodated, contested, and reshaped official war memory.

The afterword locates the Soviet Union within the global moment of post-Second World War justice, a moment that saw hundreds of thousands of individuals prosecuted for their wartime activities in almost all former belligerent countries, that led to the emergence of international criminal law, and that witnessed public and official discourses on collaboration transcend national boundaries. Tracing their different postwar trajectories both within and outside Belarus, the book ends with the lives of Ol'ga Bembel'-Dedok, Chasia Bornstein-Bielicka, Zofia Brzozowska, Vasil' Bykaŭ, Vladimir Kharatanovich, Litman Mor, Lev Ovsishcher, and Zinaida Suvorova. For these eight individuals, as for countless others, the war never became history but remained ever present.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Quoted from Ol'ga Bembel'-Dedok, *Vospominaniia* (Minsk: Propilei, 2006), 147.
2. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 165–66; Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin*, vol. 2: *Waiting for Hitler, 1929–1941* (London: Penguin, 2017), 897.
3. Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), 128–33.
4. Quoted from Neomi Izhar, *Chasia Bornstein-Bielicka: One of the Few. A Resistance Fighter and Educator, 1939–1947* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 99.
5. Quoted from Zofia Brzozowska, “Wspomnienia z lat 1939–1945 przeżytych na Kresach Wschodnich.” *Recollections*. Ośrodek Karta, Archiwum Wschodnie (hereafter AW) II/1252/2K, l. 5.
6. Vasil' Bykov, *Dolgaia doroga domoi: Kniga vospominanii* (Moscow: Ast, 2005); Litman Mor, *The War for Life* (Tel Aviv: n.p., 2007).
7. The title of my book is intellectually indebted to Heonik Kwon's seminal study on the memory of the Vietnam War (*Ghosts of War in Vietnam* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008]). In contrast to Kwon, who studies the memory of tragic war death through popular imaginaries of ghosts, I use “ghosts of war” in a more metaphorical sense to mean specifically the choices that people made and that they were forced to make under Nazi occupation, and the ways in which these haunted postwar state and society, communities, and individuals alike. I have also found the following two books, with their brilliant combination of narrative and analysis, extremely inspiring: Mary Fulbrook, *A Small Town near Auschwitz: Ordinary Nazis and the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw's Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
8. The key works on transitional justice are Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable Truth: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*, 2nd ed. (Routledge: New York, 2011); Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon, 1998); Ruti G. Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Ruti G. Teitel, *Globalizing Transitional Justice: Contemporary Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For a critical assessment of what criminal prosecution can achieve, see Laurel E. Fletcher and Harvey M. Weinstein, “Violence and Social Repair: Rethinking the Contribution of Justice to Reconciliation,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 24 (2002): 573–639; and Eric Stover and Harvey M. Weinstein, eds., *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For a

critique of the “liberal-legalist narrative” underlying the field of transitional justice, see Dustin N. Sharp, *Rethinking Transitional Justice for the Twenty-First Century: Beyond the End of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), viii–ix.

9. There were sixteen Soviet republics from August 1940 on and fifteen republics from July 1956 on.

10. On the emergence of Soviet Belarusian statehood and the interwar years, see Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906–1931* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

11. Seventeen of the twenty-three districts of the pre-1941 Białystok region (called Belostok oblast between 1939 and 1941) including the city of Białystok and three districts of Brest oblast were handed back to Poland in 1945. See Anatol’ F. Vialiki, *Belarus’ u savetska-pol’skikh mizhdziarzhaiŭnykh adnosinakh, 1944–1959 hh. XX st.* (Minsk: BDPU, 2010), 11–34.

12. To speak of the republic’s “prewar population” would be incorrect, given that the pre-1941 territory of Belarus was larger than its post-1945 territory. It is important to note that both Belarus and Ukraine are counting their dead within their post-1945 borders, which include most of the parts of eastern Poland that were annexed to the Soviet Union in 1939, whereas Poland counts its dead within the pre-1939 Polish borders—as a result of which a double count of about two million people occurs. Nevertheless, Belarus would still be among the European countries with the highest proportionate human wartime losses even if one were only to calculate the number of dead for pre-1939 Belarus—that is, the territory that after 1939 came to be eastern Belarus.

13. These are my own calculations. In the scholarly literature, much disagreement exists on Belarus’s wartime losses. For a detailed discussion of the available sources, their inherent problems, and how I have arrived at this number, see my Note on Wartime Losses.

14. John Sweets has described this dilemma for the population of Vichy France (*Choices in Vichy France: The French under Nazi Occupation* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1994], 169).

15. “Soviet citizens” included the inhabitants of the regions annexed in 1939–1940, regardless of whether they self-identified as such. The literature on the German occupation of the Soviet Union is extensive. For studies that examine its impact on the local populations, see Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018); Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004); Alexander Brakel, *Unter Rotem Stern und Hakenkreuz: Baranowicze 1939 bis 1944. Das westliche Weißrussland unter sowjetischer und deutscher Besatzung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009); Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weißrussland 1941–1944* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1998); Laurie R. Cohen, *Smolensk under the Nazis: Everyday Life in Occupied Russia* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013); Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000); Johannes Due Enstad, *Soviet Russians under Nazi Occupation: Fragile Loyalties in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Tanja Penter, *Kohle für Stalin und Hitler: Arbeiten und Leben im Donbass, 1929–1953* (Essen: Klartext, 2010); Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht: Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in*

der Sowjetunion 1941–1944 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008); and Leonid Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns: Collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

16. For discussions on what constituted collaboration, cooperation, or accommodation, see, for example, Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1–13; Philippe Burrin, *France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise* (New York: New Press, 1998), 1–4, 459–67; Christoph Dieckmann, Babette Quinkert, and Tatjana Tönsmeier, “Editorial,” in *Kooperation und Verbrechen: Formen der “Kollaboration” im östlichen Europa 1939–1945*, ed. Christoph Dieckmann, Babette Quinkert, and Tatjana Tönsmeier (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 9–21; and Rein, *Kings and the Pawns*, 11–55.

17. Quoted from Jan T. Gross, “Themes for a Social History of War Experience and Collaboration,” in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath*, ed. István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15–35, here 24 (first quotation), 26 (second quotation).

18. Kai Struve, “Anti-Jewish Violence in the Summer of 1941 in Eastern Galicia and Beyond,” in *Romania and the Holocaust: Events—Contexts—Aftermath*, ed. Simon Geissbühler (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2016), 89–113. The book that sparked scholarly and public debates on local anti-Jewish violence was Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). For additional literature, see chapter 2.

19. On double occupation: Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 190. On stereotypical perceptions of Jews as supporters of communism: Gross, *Neighbors*, 46–53, 111–17, 152–56; Joanna Michlic, “The Soviet Occupation of Poland, 1939–1941, and the Stereotype of the Anti-Polish and Pro-Soviet Jew,” *Jewish Social Studies* 13, no. 3 (2007): 135–76.

20. Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, *Intimate Violence: Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 14–16, 129. The book studies local anti-Jewish violence in six of the eight former Polish provinces that constituted eastern Poland before 1939, with a main focus on the Białystok region and eastern Galicia. For lack of local census data crucial to their research design, Kopstein and Wittenberg could not include Wilno and Nowogródek voivodships, which comprised large parts of the regions that constituted western Belarus in 1941.

21. On the radical Polish Right: Sara Bender, “Not Only in Jedwabne: Accounts of the Annihilation of the Jewish Shtetlach in Northeastern Poland in the Summer of 1941,” *Holocaust Studies* 19, no. 1 (2013): 1–38, here 8, 28. On radical nationalist groups: Struve, “Anti-Jewish Violence,” 103–13.

22. Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 5–7.

23. For an older example of this exceptionalism argument in the Anglo-American literature, see Nicholas Vakar, *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 187. A more recent example is Barbara Epstein, *The Minsk Ghetto, 1941–1943: Jewish Resistance and Soviet Internationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 43–46, 57–60. For one of many examples from Belarusian historiography, see Viktor Balakirev et al., eds., *Spasennaia zhizn’: Zhizn’ i*

vyzhivanie v Minskom getto (Minsk: Limarius, 2010), 10–12. Rein makes a similar observation about the exceptionalism argument (*Kings and the Pawns*, 259).

24. Writing on the extensive communal violence that engulfed the Kulen Vakuf region in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the summer of 1941, Max Bergholz has cautioned against static, generalizing interpretations of interethnic violence. Instead, he has drawn attention to the highly varied behavior of micro-level actors in multiethnic regions, which explains why continued escalation of violence on the ground can vary greatly according to time and place (*Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016], 310–12).

25. On the war behind the front: Brakel, *Unter Rotem Stern und Hakenkreuz*, 279–379; Masha Cerovic, *Les enfants de Staline: La guerre des partisans soviétiques (1941–1944)* (Paris: Seuil, 2018), 231–62; Alexander V. Prusin, *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870–1992* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 177–90; Kenneth Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas: Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 79–84.

26. Lawrence L. Langer coined this term with regard to the choices faced by Jewish ghetto and camp inmates, where “critical decisions did not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of ‘abnormal’ response and another, both imposed by a situation that was in no way of the victim’s own choosing” (“The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps,” *Centerpoint* 4, no. 1 [1980]: 224).

27. Quoted from Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 389.

28. Dumitru, *State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration*, 1–9, 235 (quotation).

29. The Bialystok region, where local violence against Jews was high during the summer of 1941, possibly continued to be the exception (meaning that the non-Jewish population continued to be more antagonistic toward Jews than in other parts of western Belarus, thus resembling the situation in Bessarabia).

30. Joseph Stalin, *On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union: Speeches, Orders of the Day, and Answers to Foreign Press Correspondents* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1944), 12–14.

31. Quoted from Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (hereafter RGASPI) f. 625, op. 1, d. 44, l. 238.

32. Between 1944 and 1947, the Chinese Nationalist government prosecuted 30,185 Chinese nationals (deemed *hanjian*, literally “traitors to the Han Chinese”) for collaboration with the Japanese wartime occupation regime. Of these, 14,932 were convicted. These statistics are incomplete, though, and thus estimates. It is unknown how many Chinese nationals were tried by the Chinese communists. Given the magnitude of the war in East Asia and the intensity of the Chinese Civil War (1946–1949), the actual numbers were perhaps closer to those of the Soviet Union. See Barak Kushner, *Men to Devils, Devils to Men: Japanese War Crimes and Chinese Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 120; and Yun Xia, *Down with Traitors: Justice and Nationalism in Wartime China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 6–8.

33. This is a revised and more conservative estimate than previously given in Franziska Exeler, “The Ambivalent State: Determining Guilt in the Post-World War II Soviet Union,” *Slavic Review* 75, no. 3 (2016): 607. It is based on the statistics

(by year) provided in Oleg Mozokhin, *Pravo na repressii: Vnesudebnye polnomochiia organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti. Statisticheskie svedeniia o deiatel'nosti VChK-OGPU-NKVD-MGB SSSR (1918–1953)* (Moscow: Kuchkovo pole, 2006), 481–626. There are no statistics available from 1954 on. See the discussion on numbers in Mark Edele, *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers Became Hitler's Collaborators, 1941–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 140–41.

34. Norwegian courts, for example, tried 3 percent (more than 168,000 people) of the country's population for collaboration with the Germans, about four times more than Belgium and six times more than France. The picture changes, though, if conviction and acquittal rates as well as type and length of sentence are factored in. In Belgium, 60 percent of all defendants received prison sentences, whereas in Norway, only about 18 percent did. France sentenced ten times more defendants to death than Czech courts but carried out only about one-tenth of the sentences. Czech courts, in contrast, carried out almost all death sentences. See Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 45–50; Martin Conway, "Justice in Postwar Belgium: Popular Responses and Political Realities," in *Politics of Retribution in Europe*, 134; Luc Huyse, "The Criminal Justice System as a Political Actor in Regime Transitions: The Case of Belgium, 1944–50," in *Politics of Retribution in Europe*, 161; and Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2–3, 90–91, 321.

35. Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 136–37. In developing his argument, Weiner provides examples of policemen, village heads, and Ukrainian nationalists, yet he also applies the term to anyone accused of having helped the Germans: "The irreversibility of any form of collaboration was further underlined by the absolute denial of political or social rehabilitation, even in the face of a dire need for experienced personnel" (183).

36. Jeffrey Jones, *Everyday Life and the "Reconstruction" of Soviet Russia during and after the Great Patriotic War, 1943–1948* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Olaf Mertelsmann and Aigi Rahi-Tamm, "Cleansing and Compromise: The Estonian SSR in 1944–1945," *Cahiers du monde russe* 49, no. 2 (2008): 319–40; Tanja Penter, "Local Collaborators on Trial: Soviet War Crimes Trials under Stalin (1943–1953)," *Cahiers du monde russe* 49, no. 2 (2008): 341–64; Vanessa Voisin, *L'URSS contre ses traîtres: L'épuration soviétique, 1941–1955* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015), 427–30.

37. Of the 360 civilians who in May and June 1944 were tried under the treason article 58-1a (or 63-1), for example, 9 percent received the death penalty, while the rest were sentenced to forced labor camp, most of them to ten years and more. Of the 134 people tried under the April 1943 decree, all received forced labor sentences. See the report on the NKVD military tribunals in Belarus for the second quarter of 1944 (National'nyi arkhiv Respubliki Belarus' [hereafter NARB] f. 4p, op. 29, d. 22, l. 35).

38. Between 1943 and 1945, around 5 percent of the defendants received the death sentence (Penter, "Local Collaborators," 356).

39. In the sources, "all people's war" is used synonymously with "all people's struggle" (*vsenarodnaia bor'ba*), and "all people's partisan war" with "all people's partisan struggle" (*vsenarodnaia partizanskaia bor'ba*).

40. Bykov, *Dolgaia doroga domoi*, 135.
41. Bembel'-Dedok, *Vospominaniia*, 182.
42. Quoted from Mor, *War for Life*, 221.
43. Quoted from Mor, *War for Life*, 220.
44. Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
45. On the partisan-civilian relationship: Slepian, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 157–62; Kenneth Slepian, "Partisans, Civilians, and the Soviet State: An Overview," in *War in a Twilight World: Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1939–45*, ed. Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 35–57.
46. On silence and its historical variations: Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter, eds., *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On trying to reconcile individual memories of violent mass death with existing public and domestic commemorative orders: Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). On the interplay between official and private memory: Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953–1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Lisa Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995: Myth, Memories, and Monuments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
47. On more present-day discourses on the "Partisan Republic" in Belarus: Alexandra Goujon, "Memorial Narratives of WWII Partisans and Genocide in Belarus," *East European Politics and Societies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 6–25; Simon Lewis, *Belarus—Alternative Visions: Nation, Memory and Cosmopolitanism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 53–80; David Marples, "Our Glorious Past": *Lukashenka's Belarus and the Great Patriotic War* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2014), 103–37; Aleksandr Smolenchuk (Ales' Smalianchuk), "Pamiat' na pogranich'e (na primere pamiati o Vtoroi mirovoi voine)," in *Belorusy: Natsiia pogranich'ia*, ed. Aleksandr Kravtsevich, Aleksandr Smolenchuk, and Sergej Tokt' (Vilnius: EGU, 2011), 159–206.
48. On the Sovietization of the regions annexed in 1939 and 1940: Felix Ackermann, *Palimpsest Grodno: Nationalisierung, Nivellierung und Sowjetisierung einer mitteleuropäischen Stadt 1919–1991* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); Tarik Cyril Amar, *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A Borderland City between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Svetlana Frunchak, "Commemorating the Future in Post-War Chernivtsi," *East European Politics and Societies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 435–63; Iryna Kashtalian, *The Repressive Factors of the USSR's Internal Policy and Everyday Life of the Belarusian Society (1944–1953)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016); Małgorzata Ruchniewicz, *Więś zachodniobiałoruska 1944–1953: Wybrane aspekty* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytet Wrocławskiego, 2010); Jan Szumski, *Sowietyzacja Zachodniej Białorusi 1944–1953: Propaganda i edukacja w służbie ideologii* (Cracow: Arcana, 2010); Elena Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml' 1940–1953* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008).
49. The best-known case of gendered retribution and sexual punishment is that of France. See Fabrice Virgili, *Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France* (Oxford: Berg, 2002). In the eyes of Soviet state security officers, women accused of

collaboration with the Germans were “socially harmful elements” (Voisin, *L'URSS contre ses traîtres*, 275–85).

50. The commission conducted interviews during the war and immediately after liberation from Nazi occupation. On the commission and its interviews: Oleg Budnitskii, “A Harvard Project in Reverse: Materials of the Commission of the USSR Academy of Sciences on the History of the Great Patriotic War—Publications and Interpretations,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 19, no. 1 (2018): 175–202.

51. Judt, *Postwar*, 803–31; Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 1–11.

52. The scholarship on memory and history is tremendous. Within that literature, “memory” refers to many different phenomena, from cognitive and neural processes of remembering to autobiographical narratives and acts of public commemoration, to name just a few. For an overview, see Joan Tumblety, “Introduction: Working with Memory as Source and Subject,” in *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject*, ed. Joan Tumblety (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 1–16.

53. According to official data compiled by the Belarusian Staff of the Partisan Movement on January 1, 1946, in total, the partisan movement in Belarus comprised 360,491 individuals from the summer of 1941 to its disbandment in the summer of 1944. This included 79,484 partisans who guarded family camps or fulfilled supporting functions, but for whom no further information exists. For the remaining 281,007 individuals (16 percent of them women), additional information on their gender, ethnicity, social background, prewar profession, and year as well as circumstances under which they joined are available. The numbers appear to refer to the partisan movement within the pre-1941 borders of the republic (including Belostok/Bialystok oblast). See the data compiled by the Belarusian Staff of the Partisan Movement, January 1, 1946, NARB f. 4p, op. 33a, d. 634, ll. 1–10.

1. Contested Space

1. On the notion of borderlands: Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (1999): 816; Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, “Introduction: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands,” in *Shatterzones of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 1–20.

2. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1995).

3. Bembel’-Dedok, *Vospominaniia*, 21.

4. On the region’s geography and economy in the late nineteenth century: Vakar, *Belorussia*, 30–36; Steven L. Guthier, “The Belorussians: National Identification and Assimilation, 1897–1970,” *Soviet Studies* 29, 1 (1977), 37–61, here 43. Until the early nineteenth century, most peasants belonged to the Uniate Church, a mixture of Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. After the government in St. Petersburg abolished it in 1839, the bulk of the peasantry converted to Russian Orthodoxy (Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—a Perpetual Borderland* [Leiden: Brill, 2009], 39–42).