

Conclusion

A fact both irrevocable and prodigious: about 48,000 Jews in Bulgaria, almost the entire Bulgarian Jewish community, were not deported during World War II. Beginning with Hannah Arendt, the first generation of those writing on the destruction of the European Jews consistently pointed out this historical exception.¹ A few years later, Raul Hilberg offered a more nuanced reading of the events. Territorial ambitions, strategic prudence, delay tactics—in his account, these were all to be situated within a state policy that considered the Jews a “pawn in the hands of an opportunistic power.” He continued, “They were like a surplus commodity, to be traded for political advantage. The Reich could not completely destroy the Bulgarian Jews because it could not offer sufficient gain to the cautious Bulgarian rulers.”² Yet the American historian added, “It was as though the degree of involvement had already been predetermined. The operation was brought to a halt as if stopped by an invisible sign which said, ‘So far and no farther.’”³

In the Bulgarian State Archives, as if in a daze, one enters to discover a wealth of archival records showing the array of individual and collective protests that arose in autumn 1940 against the passing of the first anti-Jewish law.⁴ To be sure, unlike in Vichy France, in Bulgaria the legislation on the “Jewish question” had been discussed in parliament and debated in the press, a setup propitious for public controversy. The diversity of the actors involved in these protests, in terms of social networks and resources, nonetheless seemed to defy the sociological rules of social movements. They included members of the intellectual and political elite, professional unions, the Orthodox Church, as well as ordinary citizens; certain of the latter who wrote were visibly not familiar with the art of lodging grievances. Let us recall that at the time Bulgaria was a personal monarchy with a predominantly rural population that had only recently achieved literacy. Then came the second wave of protests, in March 1943, in opposition to the deportation of Jews from the “old” kingdom. Despite a tightening of the political

1 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 188.

2 Hilberg, *Destruction of the Jews*, 794.

3 Ibid.

4 Part of this documentation has been digitized by the Bulgarian Central State Archives.

channels—the executive had received full powers over the “Jewish question” in June 1942, and the authorities sought to keep the preparations for the deportations secret—this cluster of initiatives was no less striking. Even more so was their success: the deportation orders were called off, and the Bulgarian Jews who had been arrested were freed. The later attempts at deportation prepared by the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs failed to secure the approval of the government and the king.

Any investigation into the social production of knowledge about Bulgaria’s Jewish policies during World War II is bound to start with this constellation of events and their reverberations across the world. A scholar must work with them, rather than against or without them. Yet, the fascination that such archival records exert cannot overdetermine the direction, much less the outcome, of the inquiry. Who has forgotten Georges Perec’s luminous lines on puzzles: on how, in doing a puzzle, one reproduces the earlier moves of the puzzle’s maker? Reflecting on this double process of assembly, he noted, “In isolation, a puzzle piece means nothing—just an impossible question, an opaque challenge. But as soon as you have succeeded . . . in fitting it into one of its neighbors, the piece disappears, ceases to exist as a piece. The intense difficulty preceding this link-up—which the English word *puzzle* indicates so well—not only loses its *raison d’être*, it seems never to have had any reason, so obvious does the solution appear. The two pieces so miraculously conjoined are henceforth one, which in its turn will be a source of error, hesitation, dismay, and expectation.”⁵ In writing the present volume, I have striven to accept Perec’s invitation by bringing together contrasting, often contradictory, pieces, without attempting to resolve the tension between them or dissolve them into a single whole. The challenge was to adjust each piece to the problem at hand and allow meanings to emerge that—unlike Perec’s jigsaw puzzle—have not been composed in advance.

Historiographical Disputes

Three historiographical disputes have wound their way through this investigation: the nature of the authority that Bulgaria exercised over its occupied territories; its autonomy with respect to the Third Reich; and the politics of citizenship. These interrogations converge on one critical issue: how to assess Bulgaria’s and Germany’s respective shares of responsibility for the deportation and extermination of the Jews from the “new” kingdom.

5 Perec, *La Vie mode d’emploi*, 17–18.

What was the legal status of the occupied territories and who ruled over them? Were these lands fully under Bulgarian jurisdiction? Were they regions under temporary military and civil administration, where Bulgarian law and bureaucracy nonetheless prevailed? Or were they spaces where the key decisions would ultimately depend on Nazi Germany?⁶ While the Bulgarian government and public considered it a final and complete annexation, toward the end of the war Hitler toyed with the idea of creating a separate Macedonian state under the auspices of Vanče Mihajlov.⁷ To this day, the most enlightening analysis of these jurisdictional dilemmas has been written by an associate law professor at the University of Sofia, Zdravka Krăsteva. At the intersection of Bulgarian law and the law of war, she offers a contrarian analysis of the arguments deployed during the Nuremberg trial to assert the nonsovereignty of the Croatian *ustasha* state and comes up with several decisive conclusions: Bulgaria was a sovereign state during the war; the signing of a bilateral agreement with the Third Reich for the deportation of Jews from the occupied territories proves that the Germans understood these populations as being under Bulgarian jurisdiction; finally, from the perspective of international law, the pressure that Nazi Germany exerted over its Bulgarian ally was not enough to constitute a case of force majeure (here the author distinguishes between the notions of “pressure” [*natisk*] and “constraint” [*prinuda*]).⁸ One related question, however, remains. In terms of an internationally recognized annexation, was such de facto administration likely to reduce the perception held by the Bulgarian ruling elites of their own decision-making autonomy in these territories, vis-à-vis the Reich?

How should we characterize the alliance between the Third Reich and Bulgaria since this member of the Tripartite Pact did not send an expeditionary force to the eastern front and did not declare war on the Soviet Union? Even today, in Bulgarian public discourse, the relationship with the Reich is still sometimes presented as “de facto German occupation.”⁹ To what

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- 6 We might recall the resolution adopted on March 8, 2013, by the Bulgarian parliament affirming that, unlike South Dobruža, ceded by Romania in September 1940, the Yugoslav and Greek territories were not under Bulgarian jurisdiction in September 1940.
 - 7 The author wishes to thank Maria Todorova for this reminder. On this episode, see Troebst, “Führerbefehl!,” 491–501. This article was translated into Macedonian: “Naredбата na Adolf Hitler za proglašuvanje na nezavisna Makedonija (septemvri 1944),” *Glasnik na Institutot za nacionalna istorija* 46, no. 2 (2002 [2003]): 25–39.
 - 8 Krăsteva, “Pravni aspekti na dăržavnata antievrejska politika,” esp. 159–69.
 - 9 On March 8, 2013, Maksim Benvenisti, then president of Šalom, spoke of a “de facto occupation (*praktičeska okupacija*) of Bulgaria by Nazi Germany.” See Dima Kirilova, “V Kjustendil početoha tăržestveno spaszavaneto na

extent was the Bulgarian state subordinated to its protector and powerful ally? Bulgaria was certainly economically dependent on Germany, conducting over 60 percent of its foreign trade with the country by the end of the 1930s.¹⁰ It was also indebted to the Reich for the fulfillment of its dreams of a “greater Bulgaria,” dreams that had consumed national elites since the creation of a Bulgarian principality in 1878, and even more so in the wake of the Balkan Wars (1912–13) and World War I (1919 Treaty of Neuilly). The transport of Jews from the occupied territories was readily presented as the foil to such territorial gains, or as a measure of compensation for the refusal to deploy a Bulgarian contingent on the eastern front. This was alternatively interpreted as the *sine qua non* condition of the “rescue of the Bulgarian Jews,” and as a concession intended to preserve as many lives as the unequal power relations between Bulgaria and the Reich would allow. It would be a hazardous exercise in counterfactual history to venture into this unfulfilled future—that is, the political and military consequences that the Bulgarian authorities’ refusal to undertake the roundups might have had in 1943.

With these dilemmas addressed, the distribution of responsibilities in carrying out the acts remains to be discussed. Those who defend the Germans’ power of initiative often juxtapose the Bulgarian deportations with the Nazi calendar of the Final Solution in central and southeastern Europe from the summer of 1942 to the spring of 1943. They point to the double chain of agents involved in negotiating the roundups with the Bulgarian authorities: the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA), on the one hand, and the German Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*, AA), on the other. In November 1941, at the time of the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact, discussions began in Berlin between German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and his Bulgarian counterpart, Ivan Popov, at the latter’s initiative. They continued throughout 1942, with Minister Plenipotentiary of the Reich Adolf-Heinz Beckerle serving as the liaison between the Bulgarian authorities and Martin Luther, the point person for Jewish Affairs within the AA, who was tasked with pressuring Nazi allies into handing over their Jewish population. Beyond possible reluctance among the Bulgarians, the irregular rhythm of these talks reflects the existence of inter- and intrainstitutional rivalries in Germany’s management of the Final Solution.

bălgarskite evrei,” *Dariknews.bg*, March 8, 2013, <https://dariknews.bg/novini/obshtestvo/v-kyustendil-pochetoha-tyrzhestveno-spasvaneto-na-bylgarskite-evrei-1052126>.

10 John Lampe, aggregating Bulgarian trade with both Germany and Austria, calculates the total as 41 percent of exports and 30 percent of imports from 1929 to 1931; and 63 percent of exports and 59 percent of imports by 1938–39. Lampe, *Bulgarian Economy*, 90.

On the RSHA side, within a chain of command beginning with *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler and continuing to *SS-Obergruppenführer* Ernst Kaltenbrunner (who after Reinhard Heydrich's assassination in the spring of 1942 led the office from January 1943) and Adolf Eichmann, *Referat IV B 4*, one can find that *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Theodor Dannecker, Eichmann's special representative, was dispatched to Sofia on January 21, 1943, to expedite the preparations for the deportations. Working with him was the SS and police attaché Adolf Hoffmann, assigned to the German legation in Bulgaria in March 1943 on the basis of an agreement between Himmler and Ribbentrop. These three names—Beckerle, Dannecker, and Hoffmann—bear witness to the direct involvement of Reich agents and their painstaking monitoring of the preparations for the arrests, the creation of temporary detention centers, and the transportation from Bulgaria, Vardar Macedonia, and Northern Greece to the extermination camps in Nazi-occupied Poland.

Those who, in contrast, favor an interpretation of the historical facts that accentuates Bulgaria's decision-making autonomy note how early Bulgaria and Germany began to discuss and seek a European "solution" to the problem of how to treat Jews with different citizenship statuses: for example, the meeting between Ribbentrop and the Bulgarian foreign minister mentioned above. They highlight the June 1942 vote by the Bulgarian National Assembly that granted the executive full powers over Jewish Affairs, as well as the range of decision-makers and bureaucrats involved in the anti-Jewish persecutions (the Council of Ministers; the Ministries of the Interior and Public Health, Foreign Affairs, War, Agriculture, and Public Property; the national railway company; the Bulgarian National Bank, and others). Moreover, they underline that government decisions were subject in the last instance to the king's approval. Beyond the existing state bureaucracy, specialized institutions were also created, including the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs (KEV). Reporting to the minister of the interior and endowed with broad prerogatives, KEV designed, coordinated, and implemented anti-Jewish policies. Article 7 of the August 26, 1942, decree stated that "Jewish municipalities" (*evrejskite obštini*)—those communal institutions now placed under the authority of the Commissariat—had the "task of preparing the deportation (*izselvaneto*) of the Jewish population." Article 29 envisaged the expulsion of Jews from Sofia "to the provinces or outside the Kingdom."¹¹ These documents are thus taken as evidence that at least part of the Bulgarian state apparatus—at a minimum, the Commissariat and the Ministry of the Interior—had in mind, beginning in 1942, the deportation

11 DV, no. 192, August 29, 1942.

of the Jews from the “old” and “new” kingdoms as the ultimate horizon for anti-Jewish policies.

This historical interpretation, in addition, showcases the role of the police, the army, and the Bulgarian administration in carrying out round-ups in the occupied territories—and, briefly, in the “old” kingdom—as well as in the management of the transit camps; conveyance by train through Northern Greece, Bulgaria, and Vardar Macedonia; dispatching (together with the German police) the Greek Jewish deportees by boat from Lom; and the subsequent organization of the confiscation of Jewish property. Such accounts further specify that the arrests, deportations, and appropriation of Jewish property were authorized by decrees passed by the Council of Ministers at the beginning of March 1943. Finally, those who underline Bulgarian decision-making autonomy point out that, when the government and King Boris refused to apply the new deportation plan submitted by Commissioner for Jewish Affairs Aleksandăr Belev, in May 1943, and “contented themselves” with authorizing the expulsion of Jews living in Sofia and other Bulgarian cities to the provinces, the German response was rather mild. The pressing demands of the Reich were not considered sufficient to impose the deportation of Jews of Bulgarian citizenship.

The third point of contention, the interpretation of citizenship policies, forms a subset within the discussions of the chain of events leading to the deportations. All accounts agree that the failure to grant Bulgarian citizenship to the Jews living in the occupied territories deprived them of state protection. But how to explain this situation? Article 4 of the decree published in the *State Gazette* on June 10, 1942, regarding citizenship in “the lands liberated in 1941,” stated that “all Yugoslav and Greek citizens of non-Bulgarian origin who, on the day that this decree enters into force, resided in the lands liberated in 1941, become Bulgarian citizens. . . . This decree does not concern people of Jewish origin.”¹² Should this be seen as the legal consequence of two prior texts: the Citizenship Law passed in December 1940¹³ and the Law for the Defense of the Nation, in force from January 23, 1941?¹⁴ The former denied Bulgarian citizenship to individuals who were “unworthy and dangerous to state security and the public order”¹⁵ and stipulated that citi-

12 DV, no. 24, June 10, 1942.

13 DV, no. 288, December 20, 1940.

14 DV, no. 16, January 23, 1941.

15 More specifically, article 21, part III of the December 1940 Law stated that ‘Bulgarian citizens living abroad, who through their acts expose the Bulgarian state or place its security at risk. . . . Bulgarian citizens of non-Bulgarian origin, as well as those who were naturalized . . . , if they, with their children, have proved unworthy and dangerous for the security of the state and the public order’ could be deprived of their Bulgarian citizenship.

zens who chose to emigrate would automatically lose their citizenship upon leaving the territory; the latter prohibited the granting of Bulgarian citizenship to people of Jewish descent. Or was it a political choice made between May and June 1942, under pressure from German authorities?

Two additional points should be taken into consideration as well: the first related to questions of periodization, the second to the level of protection granted to the Bulgarian Jews. Some documents suggest a different timeline of cooperation between Bulgarian and German authorities in Jewish arrests, one beginning significantly earlier than usually admitted. In November 1941, when the Jews had already begun to be exterminated on a large scale in Serbia under Nazi occupation, Serbian Jews who had sought refuge in Macedonia were arrested by the Bulgarian authorities, handed over to the Germans, and subsequently murdered in Serbia.¹⁶ In addition, in the summer of 1942, Germans and Bulgarians agreed in an exchange of verbal diplomatic notes that Bulgarian Jewish citizens residing in Germany or in territories under German control—mainly in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia—would have their Bulgarian citizenship revoked, with an eye to their subsequent deportation.¹⁷ In July 1942, a report from Karl Klingenfuss, then employed with *Referat D III* of the Reich's Foreign Office, confirmed that the Bulgarian authorities had accepted all the Reich's anti-Jewish measures to be applied to those Jews holding Bulgarian citizenship who lived in regions under German control, including the "eastward transfers," and that the Bulgarian state had undertaken not to request their return.¹⁸ At least 140 Bulgarian Jews living in France would thus be deprived of their

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- 16 In October 1941, having been informed by the Gestapo of the presence of Serbian Jews in Skopje, the Bulgarian authorities demanded they be registered with the police. The 213 Serbian Jews who obeyed this order were arrested on November 25, 1941; 47 men over age eighteen were transported to the Beograd-Banjica camp in Serbia, where they were executed on December 3, 1941. CDA, F 2123K, op. 1, ae. 22 286, l. 56–57; Micković, *Logor Banjica, Logoraši*, 1:163–66. The author wishes to thank Milan Koljanin for making this source available.
- 17 On July 4, 1942, Dimităr Šišmanov, secretary-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, confirmed that he had received approval from Prime Minister Bogdan Filov, indicating to the German authorities that "the Bulgarian government has nothing against deporting Jews who are Bulgarian citizens finding themselves in German territory." The Bulgarian government merely requested a list of the names of the deportees, their place of birth, and the address from which they were being displaced since their deportation may have legal consequences for the Bulgarian state. CDA, F 176K, op. 8, ae. 1110, l. 3.
- 18 Naučen Arhiv na Bălgarska Akademija na naukite, F 111, op. 1, ae. 14, l. 9 (translated into Bulgarian from German; reproduction of documentation kept at Yad Vashem under the call number 207505–207506).

citizenship, rounded up and held in the camp at Drancy before most were deported to the east.¹⁹ This position was reiterated on June 11, 1943, in a letter from the Commissariat to the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in response to a request sent by the German legation in Sofia: “The KEV is not interested in the situation of people of Bulgarian origin, citizens of Bulgaria, living in Germany and in the countries under German occupation.”²⁰

Each milestone in this debate leads to the ultimate question: who was responsible for the events of March 1943? If Bulgaria’s shared responsibility in anti-Jewish persecutions is to be acknowledged, including in the roundups and deportations from the territories entrusted to the Bulgarian administration, should this responsibility be located in a specific government, in a political regime, or in the Bulgarian state?

As this investigation comes to a close, we have reconstituted a constellation of actors who contributed to the mobile, even metonymic, connections between the Holocaust in Europe and the “rescue of Bulgarian Jews” in Bulgaria. This, however, was an extraordinary act of translation. Until recently, World War II was typically described in Bulgarian public discourse through two stages: first, the persecution of the European Jews, in a narrative that centered on the Third Reich, Poland, and Soviet Union, while pushing the other European states, including those in the Balkans, to the margins. Then came an account of events in Bulgaria. Between the two frames—wide shot and close-up, to continue the cinematic metaphor—the meaning of the archival records was reshuffled. This rearrangement did not only concern the final outcome, the deportations in most of Europe versus nondeportation

19 Quoted in Klarsfeld, *Le calendrier de la persécution des Juifs*, 1126–27, 1227. Referring to the data collected by Georges Etlin, an internee in Drancy charged by the camp authorities with keeping statistical accounts, Klarsfeld notes, “This table is not entirely accurate, because it takes into account not only convoys going to the East, but also transfers of detainees from Drancy to other internment camps” (1126). Some victims were also classified with “unknown,” “to be determined,” or “stateless” nationality, thus limiting the possibility of providing exhaustive data on the deportees’ origin (1127). Finally, it should be noted that the roundups of September 14, 1942, in the Paris region, which affected 208 people, including 27 children, specifically targeted Bulgarian, Yugoslav, Baltic, and Dutch Jews (1227). The last deportation of Bulgarian Jews from France occurred in July 1944: there were seven Bulgarian Jews in Convoy 77, the last French transport to Auschwitz. See Hoppe, “Juden als Feinde Bulgariens?,” 233. The author wishes to thank Georges Mayer, president of the Convoi 77 Association, for sharing the number and names of the seven July 1944 Bulgarian deportees. Email correspondence, November 22, 2022.

20 Quoted in Grinberg, *Hitlerskijat natisk za uništovaneto na evreite ot Bălgarija*, 32.

from Bulgaria's "old" kingdom; it also extended to deciphering the policies that had been implemented before the roundups began. The historiographical consequences of this way of narrating the past cannot be underestimated: apart from the planning and carrying out of deportations, the enforcement of most anti-Jewish policies in the "old" kingdom—identification of the Jews; professional exclusions and Aryanization of property; political, economic, and social marginalization; detention in camps and internal exile; forced labor, and more—has remained almost untouched territory.²¹

What We Talk about When We Talk about the Holocaust

If there is one unambiguous lesson to be drawn from this research, it is that the Holocaust in Bulgaria has, since the end of World War II, been unendingly associated with the discussion of other more or less loosely related issues. In 1945, denouncing the acts committed against the Jews served to demonstrate the scale of "fascist crimes" in the country, to rally a politically divided Jewish community to the project of the Fatherland Front (OF), and to propel revolutionary momentum. In the diplomatic realm, heralding the convictions of war criminals charged with anti-Jewish crimes helped lend credibility to the notion of Bulgarian opposition to the pro-Nazi regime, and thus solicit leniency from the victorious powers.

At the end of the 1950s, invoking the Holocaust within the context of Bulgarian–East German discussions on a joint film production became a way for elites from the two countries to draw on distinct symbolic reservoirs for legitimizing the past, in order to arm themselves for contemporary struggles. Through representing Jewish fates, they set the terms for establishing a socialist *and* national identity, as well as a belonging to the Eastern bloc. Meanwhile, their choices betrayed their position within a global moment in which certain modes of signifying the Holocaust were able to traverse the borders of East and West. By the middle of the 1960s, when the Federal Republic of Germany returned to the question of German responsibility for Nazism, Eastern Europe's denunciation of fascism, past *and* present, played out in a collaboration between legal professionals, Jewish organizations, and Holocaust survivors from West Germany, Israel, Bulgaria, the United States, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union. At the same time, the trial courtroom offered a space where interpretive conflicts about the past were made explicit and publicized. Some of these battles placed Jews and non-Jews who had

21 Only the dispossession of Jewish property has led to some pioneering research; see Avramov, "*Spasenie*" *i padenie*.

remained in Bulgaria after 1949 in opposition to anti-communist exiles and Bulgarian *olim* in Israel.

As we approach the 1980s, references to the Holocaust become increasingly interwoven with praise for the Bulgarian Communist Party, for its leader Todor Zhivkov, and for a state whose external image suffered from suspicion of involvement in the May 1981 assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II, followed by a dull reception of Gorbachev's perestroika. From the 1990s to the early 2000s, Jewish destinies became one arena in which partisan identities and national roots were both fostered and contested. In Macedonia (today North Macedonia), Jewish suffering became a metaphor for a fate of national nonrecognition; rediscovered in Bulgaria, the Jewish predicament was marshaled to denounce the right-wing pretense that the precommunist era had been faultless, allegedly embodying at once civilization and modernity. In dialogue with an expanded range of actors who felt empowered to speak their truth of the past (memory entrepreneurs, politicians, and scholars), the events of World War II turned into battlegrounds. As this book has endeavored to show, the centrality of anti-Jewish persecutions in these public debates resulted precisely from their incessant reformulations.

Jewish Voices in the Writing of the Past

If talk of the Holocaust always involved speaking of other issues by proxy, this by no means implies that the anti-Jewish persecutions were thereby not discussed, or that no Jewish voices took part in formulating narratives of the past that did not give Jewish agency its due. Jewish survivors were key players in the production of knowledge and representations of Jewish fates in the “old” and “new” kingdoms, under socialism, as well as following the end of the Cold War. Here lies undoubtedly one of the major insights of this study.

Each chapter has illustrated one facet of Jewish agency. The first restored the role of a network of Bulgarian Communist Jews, mostly lawyers by training, involved in the prosecution of perpetrators of anti-Jewish crimes. The second introduced the pivotal figure of Angel Wagenstein, coauthor of visual and print narratives of the Holocaust from the 1950s onward, alongside East German filmmaker Konrad Wolf. In the third chapter, we turned to other forms of Jewish advocacy, including the work of Nehemiah Robinson, the director of the Institute for Jewish Affairs of the World Jewish Congress, while also examining the way intra-Jewish fractures affected the work of the West German investigators in charge of the Beckerle case. In the fourth chapter, by examining internal debates at the Organization of the Jews of Bulgaria Šalom regarding the legacy of the “rescue of the Bulgarian Jews,” competing definitions of Jewishness, and the reconnection to major Jewish

organizations across the globe, we opened a window onto the social and generational divides within the Jewish community, as well as the structural opportunities created by the introduction of multiparty politics beginning in the 1990s.

Finally, the question of how to broach the tangle of human ties, the intimate yet divided family histories, came into focus in the memorial initiatives of chapters 4 and 5. As we have shown, the contrast in the diverse Jewish commitments cannot be attributed to competing demands of rival political and national entities alone. Rather, the various forms of engagement also bear witness to the existence of distinct prewar Jewish trajectories, diverging Jews' experiences of World War II, as well as to the multiple ways of building a new Jewish life after 1945. The choices made by Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian Jews additionally reflected the positions these protagonists occupied within the national party systems and communal organizations, as well as their intimate beliefs about the logics of wartime events. In 1990, Michael Pollak introduced the expression "memory entrepreneur," echoing sociologist Howard Becker's "moral entrepreneurs," to designate actors who wish to obtain public sanction for their own readings of the past. Pollak's wording was intended to emphasize the work of "framing memory" that accompanied the transformation of individual memories into collective recollections.²² In the scholarly literature produced since then, however, the focus on advocacy has sometimes involved an essentially instrumental reading of the social uses of the past, omitting the "intransigent ethics" and the interrogation of the "truth" carried out by the memory entrepreneurs, as Pollak described them. The preceding pages have attempted to remain alert to the original thrust of Pollak's contribution.

Challenges of the Page: Leafing through Time, Speaking the Seen

It is a dilemma shared by all scholars that take history as their object of study: how to narrate the past, that "foreign country" accessible only through mediation?²³ Moreover, how can we build a footbridge—rather than a seawall—toward the mid-twentieth century when the extreme violence of World War II is enjoined to hand over the keys of an illegible, and

22 Michael Pollak, "Mémoire, oubli, silence," in Pollak, *Une identité blessée*, 29–31.

23 Tony Judt, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," *Daedalus* 121, no. 4 (1992): 83–118.

increasingly violent, present?²⁴ How are we to keep in view both the singularity of a moment *and* the profusion of narratives about that moment, all while hoping such multiple retellings will help us find our way in disoriented times? To tell this story of intricate and confusing transactions between time and space, I have opted for a diachronic structure, aimed at overcoming the pitfalls of linearity.

To this end, I employed several devices. First, almost all the chapters follow an obsessive structure of clockwork rhythm. They begin with the mention of dates; they are striated by calendar markings, arranged in numerical divisions. Such thorough dating echoes the scrupulous care with which Bulgarian state officials, aided by their German allies and mentors, embarked on the deportation plans, fixing the appointed times for the military to seal the Jewish quarters and for the police to make the arrests, coordinating transfers between transit camps and train stations, transfers from one train to another, from railway to maritime transport, to the end of the line. This obsession with facts and figures is also reminiscent of the requests for information from the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs to regional delegates, demands that became more urgent as the date set for the roundups drew near. In the gaps between them can be glimpsed the desperate chronology, compressed and crushing, of the petitions that Jews deprived of employment and resources filed with Jewish municipalities in the winter of 1942–43.

As one might presume, the writing choices made in this book also bear the imprint of other works in progress, in this case on the Holocaust in the “new” lands of Vardar Macedonia and Thrace.²⁵ They pinpoint the existence of a gap between the way time was experienced by Bulgarian administrators and by the victims of the anti-Jewish system, even while affinities among forms of inscription—numbers and dates—might hide this gulf. In his reflection on Aby Warburg’s *Pathosformeln*, Carlo Ginzburg cites an observation by Joshua Reynolds: “[The] extremes of contrary passions are with very little variation expressed by the same action.”²⁶ Yet a bygone era cannot be restored, no clarifying effects produced, by delicately smoothing out its pleats. To avoid such a snare, I constructed a mobile set of spatiotemporal frames among which the reader might tarry.

A similar aim underpinned the mise en abyme of the narratives and the historical events to which they presumably correspond. From the start of the investigation, I had committed to advancing the facts together with

24 Hamit Bozarslan, “Quand la violence domine tout mais ne tranche rien: Réflexion sur la violence, la cruauté et la Cité,” *Collège international de Philosophie*, nos. 85–86 (2015): 19–35.

25 Ragaru, “Madding Clocks,” 161–94; Ragaru and Le Noc, “Visual Clues.”

26 Ginzburg, *Fear, Reverence, Terror*, ix.

the ways in which they were narrated, without presuming either their radical separation or the scholar's exclusive access and right to claim *the* truth. From this point of view, the recurring references to specific temporal points were intended as coordinates that might drill an opening into the bundle of research, allowing each—though related to the others—to retain its own unique logic.

In the hope of troubling any linear progression of the narrative, I chose to offer the reader the opportunity to return to the same episode on several occasions, each time equipped with a distinct set of instruments, data, and questions; for instance, the March 12, 2018, ceremony in Skopje commemorating the deportations, with which the book opens, reappears at the start of chapter 4. Between these two restitutions of the event, there occur shifts in the scene's protagonists, as well as in the balance between the Macedonian and Bulgarian speeches. Time swelled as new guests were welcomed to the table, while the temporal frame underwent revisions as well. In the introduction, the day March 12, 2018, serves as a brief prelude to a seventy-five-year-long process of shaping historical retellings. In chapter 4, by contrast, March 12—the commemoration of the deportation of Macedonia's Jews and the nondeportation of Bulgarian Jews—is stretched to encompass ten days, and this extension is used to think about discussions of memory and history in a three-decade-long postcommunist period.

The second writing dilemma I faced was how to restore visual materials that, for copyright reasons, could not be systematically included in the manuscript—particularly the visual archives of chapter 3. This was a paradoxical situation in an investigation that so insists on the singularity of each document, and that stresses the powerful effects of analyzing written, visual, and audio sources together. Such a visible absence, nevertheless, offered an opportunity to reflect on how to make images come alive, with the tools of block black-and-white letters and paper alone. Ekphrasis also proved a fruitful device in reenacting the 1945 trial hearings for anti-Jewish crimes out of photographic stills. In assessing the feature film *Zvezdi/Sterne*, I worked from two intermediary versions of a cardinal scene as well as from the version of the sequence retained in the final montage: Jews arriving in Bulgaria after having been deported from Northern Greece. The first two sources—screenplay and storyboard—constitute distinct kinds of textual products: in order to turn the script into a storyboard, the creators of the movie had to do away with parts of the written text. Technical terms replaced some of the poetic wording of the screenplay. An intermediate object, the storyboard enables both proximity to and distance from the scene filmed. In the sequence actually shot, words incarnate into flesh—in bodies, gestures, and landscapes. Colors, light, and camera angles add to (and substitute for) the initial wordy script. In a final attempt at exploring the kind of knowledge the

confrontation between images and words may deliver, I described, with my own words, the scene that was finally shown to the audience. At each level, through various connections and operations of translation, the visual and the written were intermingled, and came to complement one another.

Has such a method borne fruit? Line after line, the imperfect overlap between juxtaposed sequences lent itself to visualizing *and* interpreting images together. The choice was not an easy one: reflecting on images of the final film cut in *Zvezdi/Sterne* amounted to blanketing them with a new layer of language, at the risk of hiding them from view. To understand the reasons behind this choice, we might recall Siegfried Kracauer's reflections on photography,²⁷ alongside Ginzburg's interpretation of Kracauer's work.²⁸ The first refutes the idea that images would only serve a documentary function; the second reflects on the role of the photographer in the selection of a point of view and its ability to create a feeling of estrangement, thereby stimulating doubt, imagination, and thought.

For the visual archives of the 1943 deportations, three archival inventories respectively located in Bulgaria, the United States, and Germany were initially given responsibility for making the images speak. In addition to analyzing differences among their written depictions of this iconographic source, I explored the contrasts and similitudes between the 1943 moving images and the photograms extracted from them in 1967. Finally, multiple beams of testimony were laid down in this analytical framework: those of Bulgarian operators contemporary to the events as well as East German archivists who took notes on a reel they watched several decades later. Bringing together these multiple documentary sources, the manifold practices of transcription and translation, and the uses of the 1943 film footage by protagonists located at distinct points from this visual object delivered some fruitful insight into the origins and nature of the 1943 deportation film. Here, the aim was to identify, rather than resolve, the tensions among the sources and to follow the interpretive avenues these tensions opened.

One more decision lay at the core of this research: to cite at length the original archival material, and thus give this documentation breathing space, rather than suffocate it in a stifling interpretive framework. The (nearly exhaustive) transcription of the July 2000 parliamentary debate on the proposal to remove the Speaker of the National Assembly, Blagovest Sendov, was emblematic of this approach. In sound and in writing, the amazingly graphic exchanges in the Bulgarian assembly illustrated the richness of this archival source, once apprehended in its totality. Much of our understanding of the

27 Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, and *History*.

28 Carlo Ginzburg, "Details, Early Plans, Microanalysis: Thoughts on a Book by Siegfried Kracauer," in Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces*, 180–92.

situation would have been missed had only short excerpts from this document been deployed to support a single argument. Attention, for instance, might have been driven away from the applause and jeers preserved in the session's stenographic report. By reading thoroughly, one comes to hear the procession of sounds and to grasp that their volume was set differently within smaller and larger parliamentary groups. Through their exclamations and interjections, the parties with the larger contingents literally gave voice to their political influence and, thereby, exerted power.

The patient transcription of sources was not only motivated by the object of inquiry: a study of discordant, polyphonic knowledge. More generally, the goal was to find a way of writing that would bring little-known social worlds and situations to life, with the belief that readers would come to see and feel them. The condition of this encounter? That senses and sensibility be brought into the description of past events. Thus, the author would also avoid adopting *une position de surplomb*, a position of superiority, guarding the keys to the interpretive process, and only conferring them on the reader at the end of the journey. Instead, throughout the book, I took the risk of letting readers judge the evidence put before them—giving them a place in this history of stories so often told (and mistold)—in the hope that one day, perhaps, one of them will feel the need to recount it anew.

