

Diana Dumitru

Listening to Silence

What Soviet Postwar Trial Materials Resist Revealing about the Holocaust

Abstract

This article draws on Soviet postwar investigations of crimes and trial materials in order to illuminate how the representation of wartime anti-Jewish violence shapes contemporary historians' knowledge of the Holocaust. The study intertwines two different but tightly connected strands of analysis: the first delineates gaps in Soviet postwar trial documentation while placing them in the sources' specific legal and social contexts. The second thread of inquiry highlights the challenges resulting for the study of the Holocaust.

After the demise of the Soviet state, an important group of sources became (partially) available to scholars: postwar investigations of crimes and trial materials of Soviet citizens accused of "collaboration" with the enemy during the Second World War. As some historians were quick to realise, these documents proved to be of great importance for the study of the Holocaust. In 2003, the historian Alexander Prusin made a compelling case for integrating them "into the mainstream of Holocaust studies".¹ Tanja Pentter offered three major reasons why the study of this body of documentation is important: it provides exceptional insight into the conditions of life in camps and ghettos; it illuminates the profiles and motives of perpetrators; and, it helps us to understand how the Soviet regime viewed collaboration.² Since then, a number of studies have successfully deployed this set of documentation in their various analyses.³

- 1 Alexander Prusin, "Fascist Criminals to the Gallows!": The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials, December 1945 – February 1946, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17 (2003) 1, 21.
- 2 Tanja Pentter, *Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material on Soviet Postwar Trials against Collaborators*, in: *Slavic Review* 64 (2005) 4, 783-784.
- 3 Seth Bernstein/Irina Makhalova, *Aggregate Treason: A Quantitative Analysis of Collaborator Trials in Soviet Ukraine and Crimea*, in: *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 46 (2019), 30-54; Alana Holland, *Soviet Holocaust Retribution in Lithuania, 1944–64*, in: *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 46 (2019), 3-29; Wolfgang Schneider, *From the Ghetto to the Gulag, from the Ghetto to Israel: Soviet Collaboration Trial against Shargorod Ghetto's Jewish Council*, in: *Journal of Modern European History* 17 (2019) 1, 83-97; Vladimir Solonari, *On the Persistence of Moral Judgement: Local Perpetrators in Transnistria as Seen by Survivors and their Christian Neighbors*, in: Claire Zalc/Tal Bruttmann (ed.), *Microhistories of the Holocaust*, New York 2017, 190-208; Jared McBride, *Peasants into Perpetrators: The OUN-UPA and the Ethnic Cleansing of Volhynia, 1943–1944*, *Slavic Review* 75 (2016) 3, 630-654; Franziska Exeler, *The Ambivalent State: Determining Guilt in the Post-World War II Soviet Union*, in: *Slavic Review* 75 (2016) 3, 606-629; Vladimir Solonari, *Hating Soviets – Killing Jews: How Antisemitic Were Local Perpetrators in Southern Ukraine, 1941–42?*, in: *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15 (2014) 3, 505-533; Juliette Cadiot/Tanja Pentter, *Law and Justice in Wartime and Postwar Stalinism*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 61 (2013) 2, 161-171; Oleksandr Melnyk, *Stalinist Justice as a Site of Memory: Anti-Jewish Violence in Kyiv's Podil District in September 1941 through the Prism of Soviet Investigative Documents*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 61 (2013) 2, 223-248; Vadim Altskan, *On the Other Side of the River: Dr. Adolph Herschmann and the Zhmerinka Ghetto, 1941–1944*, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26 (2012) 1, 2-28; Leonid Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns: Collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II*, New York 2011; Lev Simkin, *Death Sentence despite the Law: A Secret 1962 Crimes-against-Humanity Trial in Kiev*, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27 (2013) 2, 299-312; Martin Dean, *Crime and Comprehension, Punishment and Legal Attitudes: German and Local Perpetrators*

From the beginning, the issue of credibility disquieted both pundits and the larger public when confronted with this group of sources. Deep suspicions towards the reliability of documents produced by the infamous Stalinist repressive apparatus have consistently been expressed. Several studies tackled the matter of the credibility of Soviet postwar trial materials directly, and gradually a scholarly opinion has taken shape which supports the validity of the information on the Holocaust provided by this documentation.⁴

The current study aims to expand the methodological discussion about Soviet postwar trial materials by taking it in a new direction. It aims to probe into the biases inbuilt in this documentation and ponder the subtle, almost invisible ways they influence the production of historical knowledge.⁵ In the following sections, I will bring into relief four ‘blind spots’ and illustrate them with relevant examples culled from the dossiers that came to my attention. Hopefully, this will provide additional food for thought on the challenges that historians encounter when working with these and other relevant sources and will remind us that real life experience is exponentially wider than that described by the sources which fall into our hands.

A Violent but Emotionless Society

All Soviet postwar trial dossiers share several common features. First of all, the documents are written in a standardised, concise, and dry language. Unmistakably Soviet idioms are recognisable especially in investigative reports, prosecutors’ correspondences, and court decisions – all part of the dossiers. At the same time, the bulk of any dossier is usually comprised of numerous structured interrogations of the defendant and of the witnesses of the case; this cross-examination is shaped exclusively by the interrogator’s queries. Moreover, the interrogations follow a predetermined template: The questions are narrowly focussed and aim at obtaining direct descriptions of specific (presumably criminal) acts. As a rule, the interrogator avoids dwelling on other non-related aspects touched upon by interlocutors during cross-examinations. As a result, the stories from the dossiers are cut short of possible complex ramifications. One of the outcomes of this particular mode of filtering materials

of the Holocaust in Domachevo, Belarus, in the Records of Soviet, Polish, German, and British War Crimes Investigations, in: David Bankier/Dan Michman (ed.), *Holocaust and Justice: Representation and Historiography of the Holocaust in Post-War Trials*, New York 2011, 265-280; Yitzhak Arad, *Popular Collaboration in the Baltic States: Between Evasion and Facing a Burdensome Past*, in: Roni Stauber (ed.), *Collaboration with the Nazis: Public Discourse after the Holocaust*, London 2011, 53-68; Tanja Penner, *Local Collaborators on Trial: Soviet War Crimes Trials under Stalin (1943–1953)*, in: *Cahiers du Monde russe* 49 (2008) 2, 341-364; Vladimir Solonari, *Patterns of Violence: The Local Population and the Mass Murder of Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, July–August 1941*, in: *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8 (2007) 4, 749-787; Jeffrey Jones, “Every Family Has its Freak”: Perceptions of Collaboration in Occupied Soviet Russia, 1943–1948, in: *Slavic Review* 64 (2005) 4, 747-770.

4 Alexander Prusin, “The ‘Second Wave’ of Soviet Justice: The 1960s War Crimes Trials”, in: Norman J. W. Goda (ed.), *Rethinking Holocaust Justice: Essays across Disciplines*, New York 2018, 129-157; Diana Dumitru, *Challenging Stalinist Justice: A Review of Holocaust Crimes after 1953*, in: Simon Geissbühler (ed.), *Romania and the Holocaust: Events. Context. Aftermath*, Stuttgart 2016, 171-190; Diana Dumitru, *An Analysis of Soviet Postwar Investigation and Trial Documents and Their Relevance for Holocaust Studies*, in: Michael David-Fox/Peter Holquist/Alexander Martin (ed.), *The Holocaust in the East: Local Perpetrators and Soviet Responses*, Pittsburgh 2014, 142-157.

5 I studied the dossiers relating to crimes that took place in the territory of the Moldavian SSR and the Ukrainian SSR – in the latter case, specifically those committed in the territory of Transnistria during the Second World War. These files have been preserved in the former KGB archives of the Moldavian SSR and the Ukrainian SSR and copies were made available at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

is that human emotions are almost entirely absent in the history they reproduce. A violent but emotionless society inhabits the pages of this documentation.

To a certain extent, this void is an intended outcome, designed by the relevant institutions and prosecutors who aspired to establish the credibility of the evidence by outlining its 'rational' and 'objective' character. Soviet investigators appear to have shied away from registering any tempestuous comments made by interrogated individuals in the minutes they recorded, not wanting to 'taint' the depositions and further 'discredit' such evidence in the eyes of Soviet courts. Simultaneously, as in other countries, the official setting of interrogations made interlocutors less keen on elaborating on their own or other persons' feelings. These two factors joined together to ensure that barely any description of individuals' feelings are mentioned in dossiers. Even when victims revealed personal tragedies, they tended to do so in a neutral voice, stated as a matter of fact. The tone of such voices comes with a chilling effect, depicting a ruthlessly violent and cold-blooded society.

One example serves to illustrate this point. Khaia Khuvin, a resident of the village of Alexeevka, in the region of Odessa, suffered her three children being executed by Romanian gendarmes in Transnistria in 1942.⁶ She herself miraculously survived the killing. In 1948, Khuvin testified against the former Jewish head of the ghetto, accused of sending the Khuvins into the hands of the Romanian gendarmes. The woman's deposition summarises the murder in stern language:

"In July 1942, when I arrived together with my family – my two daughters Sara Davidovna, born in 1925, and Elizaveta, born in 1927, and my son Izia, born in 1934 – at the 'Ghetto' camp in the city of Rybnitsa in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, with the intention of remaining in this camp, I was refused the registration inside the camp. At the same time, the Romanian gendarmes during the night took our entire family to the Dniester bridge and there shot my two daughters and son and threw them into the River Dniester. While my two children were being executed, I rushed to run across the bridge. The gendarmes started shooting and inflicted two bullet injuries in my leg and hip. After I was injured, I fell into a hole in the bridge and hung on logs. In the morning at dawn, an unknown man took me off the logs and brought me to his apartment in the city of Rybnitsa. He also provided me with medical care and hid me in his apartment for three days."⁷

Khuvin's account got a little more personal, but not much, when she was repeatedly interrogated ten years later. In 1957, she testified:

"at night I was taken away for the execution together with my children and other citizens arrested by [Romanian] gendarmes. When they took us to the River Prut [sic], the Romanians took away my children, but I was put on the bridge and [the gendarmes] shot. I fell and got hooked on the wire, while being injured. When I was hanging on the wire, I saw how a Romanian threw my son alive into the river; he was still swimming and I tried to free myself and to jump to him into the water, but since the wire pierced my neck, I was unable to free myself and later lost conscience. My two daughters were

6 The territory known as Transnistria during the Second World War came under the authority of Romania as a result of an agreement signed on 30 August 1941 with Germany. Transnistria was located between the rivers Dniester and Bug. Its northern border was settled on a line connecting Moghilev-Podolsky and Vinnitsa; its southern border was bounded by the Black Sea. The region remained under Romanian occupation until the spring of 1944. See more on the Holocaust in Transnistria and Romania in: Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, translated by Yaffah Murciano and edited by Leon Volovici, Lincoln 2011.

7 USHMM, RG-54.003 (War Crimes Investigation and Trial Records from the Republic of Moldova, 1944–1955), file of Samuil Boşerñitan. Tom II, 46–47.

shot by Romanians. Passing across the bridge, a local resident accidentally found me, took me off the wire, and saved me. He brought me to his home where I spent some time.”⁸

Khuvin’s emotions bubbled up only once, when during the second round of scrutiny of the defendant’s case, an investigator asked, once again, whether her statement was true, mentioning that the defendant denied all her accusations in his official complaint.⁹ This time, Khuvin’s indignation mixed with fury came out in the recorded minutes of the interrogation:

“[The accused] is very cunning. His statement does not correspond to reality. When I came to him with my children and started to ask him to register my family, he demanded gold from me. I fell to his feet and begun to kiss his feet, my children also begged him, cried, fell in front of him, but [the defendant] Boşerniţan ordered [...] me and my children to be taken to the [Romanian] gendarmerie. How can he now deny this circumstance? He completely lost his sense of shame. I will never forgive him for that. He took the children away from me, left me miserable, for the sake of his personal goal – gain.”¹⁰

Alas, such depositions are rare and in most cases, when weaving a historical account based on Soviet postwar investigations and trial sources, there is a risk that the protagonists from these stories appear as detached and cold-hearted people. As a result, the society might be portrayed as dangerously black and white, like on an old television set. Avoiding falling into the trap of monochromacy is one of the issues to be aware of when dealing with this group of sources.

Seeing Like a Man

The second challenge is connected to the fact that the analysed material is almost exclusively the product of male authors, given the fact that all the interrogators were men. In a small number of cases there were female judges in Soviet courts, but this circumstance did not substantially influence the content of the postwar investigations and trials. This specific structural framework guaranteed the filtering of information through a male’s perspective. Implicitly, it meant a certain blindness towards gender issues, such as the lack of (or at least a reduced) interest in topics relating to women’s bodily harm, child abuse, and so forth. To the historian’s chagrin, various hints lurking in the background of collected statements were never probed further by the investigators.

For example, a Jewish survivor of a ghetto in Transnistria interrogated as a witness in the case of an individual accused of collaboration mentioned during her interrogation that she was forced to leave the ghetto for two weeks to wash clothes for Romanian soldiers. Apparently, the investigator was uninterested in this episode.¹¹ However, the story’s elements ring alarm bells. The girl was only nineteen and she begged not to be taken away, insisting that “she did not know how to do laundry”. Why was she chosen from a population of over one thousand of the ghetto’s detainees? Was she exposed to sexual abuse during those two weeks when forced to “do laundry for

⁸ Ibid., 288.

⁹ The defendant’s dossier was returned to Chişinău for additional investigation, for the second time, by the Supreme Court in Moscow.

¹⁰ USHMM, RG-54.003, file of Samuil Boşerniţan, Tom. II, 289-289 verso.

¹¹ Ibid., testimony of Maria Tatal, 90.

Romanian soldiers”? Unfortunately, we will never know the answers to these questions.

Another puzzling example comes from the file of a former *Selbstschutz* member, Fedor Buch, one of the perpetrators of the Bogdanovka massacre.¹² A Ukrainian woman named Nadezhda Kulik, when interrogated as a witness in the case, mentioned an odd incident:

“In the spring of 1942, Fedor Buch came drunk to my home and began telling me that I should immediately go with him to [the village of] Stepkovka. He did not tell me why I should go to Stepkovka. When I refused, he threatened me, stating that if I would not go, then I would suffer a Jewish death. I had to go to Stepkovka. When I arrived at Stepkovka, Buch Fedor was drinking with somebody during the entire night, and in the morning he took me back.”¹³

The episode clearly withheld something and no attempt to clarify it was undertaken by the interrogator. The Soviet official simply skipped over this ambiguous incident. However, I could not stop wondering why the woman, unsolicited, mentioned this incident. The woman’s profile – 29 years old in 1942 (when the alleged episode took place), a Komsomol member before 1941, and a member of the Communist Party and a junior brigadier (*zven’evaia*) during the time of interrogation – suggests two possible explanations: either the woman was trying to allude towards some form of non-consensual sex with the defendant or Kulik was trying to anticipate a possible blow to her postwar good standing as a Soviet citizen, a threat posed by a wartime love affair with the defendant. The latter scenario presumed that the woman was setting the ground for her claims of a coerced relation, in case her liaison was revealed in the course of investigation. One can only speculate.

Unexpectedly, another woman’s unsolicited comment shed light on the above-mentioned episode. In the same dossier, during an interrogation, the wife of Fedor Buch mentioned:

“After his cure [Buch contracted typhus during the mass killings in Bogdanovka], my husband began to cohabit with Kulik, maiden name Zhigalova, Nadezhda. Once I caught him with her in the storage room of the canteen [...]. When I caught them, I started a fight with Kulik. At home, my husband beat me because of this.”¹⁴

This was one of the felicitous but rare cases that an answer could be found in the pages of the dossier itself. As revealed by this additional snippet of information, Kulik was indeed trying to reframe her wartime love affair in order to hide her dangerous association with the defendant.

The male’s perspective also ensured that women were less frequently summoned as witnesses. While one could argue that there were objective reasons for this circumstance and that in a traditional society women could have been absent from the murder sites, and therefore less valuable as witnesses, it would not be unreasonable to assume a gender bias. It is startling to discover that women who were key witnesses, or even direct victims in an investigated crime, were excluded from the investigation. Take the example of Khaia Khuvin: Despite her family being identified by

12 For more information on the Bogdanovka massacre, see: Diana Dumitru, *Genocide for Sanitary Purposes? The Bogdanovka Murder in Light of Postwar Trial Documents*, in: *Journal of Genocide Research* 10 (2018), 1-21.

13 USHMM, RG-31.018M (Post War Crimes Trials Related to the Holocaust, Ukraine), reel 78 (Fond 5, file no.10890), testimony of Nadezhda Kulik, frames 317-318.

14 USHMM, RG-31.018M, reel 78, minutes of the interrogation of Daria Buch, frame 330.

interrogators among the defendant's main victims, only after the Soviet Supreme Court's second order to "return the case for supplementary investigation" (*vernut' na dosledovanie*) did it transpire that Khuvin had not been interrogated. Thus, three years after the arrest of the defendant, it was arranged for Khuvin's testimony to be collected.¹⁵

When offered the chance to speak unhindered (and when their recollections were actually put on paper), some of the women's testimonies are particularly gripping. In such cases, vivid details break through the dry and uniform voice of the investigation materials. While not necessarily of great value for the direct purposes of the prosecution (which prioritised eye-witness descriptions of the crimes), they offer graphic images of specific episodes of the Holocaust. A dramatic description was offered in relation to one of the accusations against Buch, namely the murder of a teenage boy (about 14 years old), presumably an escapee from Bogdanovka. The boy's capture and murder occurred on the premises of a bakery where women formed the main employees. Hence, several of them were interrogated after the war. A witness named Alexandra Minina described her encounter with the Jewish boy:

"I remember it was cold, but there was no snow [...]. I had left the bakery on my own business and saw a badly dressed boy walking. He was wearing a quilted jacket [*fufaika*], torn pants, but what he was wearing on his feet I do not remember. Through the torn pants on his right leg blood was visible. I called out to the boy and took him with me to the bakery [...]. I gave the boy some water and he washed his face and hands and I fed him. Except for myself nobody else was in the bakery."¹⁶

A second woman testified about what happened hours later. While she was baking bread and the boy was warming up by the oven, Fedor Buch entered the building. He took the boy to an apartment in the vicinity. The woman followed the two, trying to see what would happen to the boy. After some time they came out of the building, "the boy was shaking all over and he stank". What had happened inside the building was then revealed by the deposition of a third woman, Anna Shelest. It was in her apartment that Buch brought the boy and asked some Soviet prisoners of war present there to beat the boy. The prisoners refused to comply. As Shelest testified: "Buch begun to beat the boy [so hard] that he relieved himself." Afterwards, Buch took the boy outside and shot him behind the building, before throwing his body into a pit that local residents used as a toilet.¹⁷

Such powerful reconstructions of the last hours of a victim's life are rare and usually tucked away inside the voluminous dossiers, mostly as side notes. Alas, from the point of view of the interrogators, information about an anti-Soviet joke or the defendant's membership in a political party (especially in the case of Bessarabia) during the interwar period seemed to have been more valuable than details about the victims' clothes, shoes, fears, or smells. However, for historians of the Holocaust, they are among the most precious pieces of information to be culled. It should be the historian's goal not to allow them to remain side notes.

15 USHMM, RG-54.003, file of Samuil Boşerņițan, Tom II, 1-2. After the war, Khuvin moved to Moscow where she lived with her nephew.

16 USHMM, RG-31.018M, reel 78, frame 428.

17 USHMM, RG-31.018M, reel 78, frame 433.

The Perpetrator Outside the Social Fabric

The third important void relates to the social networks that (usually) connected the perpetrator to their surrounding social fabric. Understandably, most of the people interrogated as witnesses tried to downplay or even remained silent about their previous social contacts with the accused individuals, fearing a possible association with the culprits. The defendants in turn showed restraint in detailing pre-war and wartime interactions, aiming to avoid further incrimination resulting from an expanded probe into various aspects of their lives and activities. At first glance, such omissions may seem unimportant, yet the opposite is true. Reading postwar trial materials without this caveat in mind results in the distorted perception that the perpetrators were people living on the margins of society, as social outcasts. This perception is only consolidated by the heavily ideologised language of the Soviet dossiers, which were intended to castigate the defendants and signal that these individuals were pariahs in the 'socialist paradise'. Nevertheless, bits of evidence slipped into some files point towards resilient and meaningful social connections between the defendants and broader society.

This evidence suggests that silent but vigorous supportive actions were undertaken by the defendants' family members, friends, and acquaintances during the investigation and trial period. For example, in the above-mentioned case of Boşerņițan, we learn in passing from the depositions of Khuvin that an acquaintance of the defendant tried to reach out to Khuvin when she arrived in Chişinău to take part to the trial, and asked her not to inculcate Boşerņițan, promising "any sum of money" in return.¹⁸ Another of Boşerņițan's acquaintances made repeated attempts in the foyer of the courthouse to convince Khuvin to give positive testimony about the defendant, reasoning that her children "cannot be returned" anyway.¹⁹

Probably most such incidents, in which various individuals tried to arrange exonerating depositions by threatening or bribing witnesses and victims, will remain unknown to us. However, these glimpses indicate the existence of social ties that held great significance to the defendants before, during, and after the war. Additionally, brief references to drinking parties and shared dirty secrets hint at much wider networks of solidarity than can be directly deduced from the testimonies.²⁰ The story that we should not allow to slip through the cracks of history is that of the perpetrators' social frame of reference. This case makes it especially clear that we need to complement our research with other sources. The use of other sources will widen the perspective on the perpetrators, leading to a different social profile compared to the image that transpires from the investigations and court materials. For example, something that I never discovered in the postwar trial dossiers, but found expressed in oral history, was the compassion shown towards the convicts jailed for their participation in the Holocaust. Thus, in a 2010 oral history interview, a Moldovan, who at the age of 20 witnessed the shooting of 82 local Jews by Moldovan peasants, expressed sympathy for the assassins, who "went to jail, poor them" (*o făcut puşcărie săracii*).²¹

18 USHMM, RG-54.003, file of Samuil Boşerņițan. Tom II, the testimony of Khana Khuvin, 289.

19 Ibid.

20 For example, the investigation materials of the Bogdanovka massacre reveal that barrels with alcohol were delivered in order to maintain the motivation and courage of the executioners. USHMM, RG-31.018M, reel 78, frame 870.

21 USHMM, RG-50.572.0154, audio interview with Ion Cărhană (2010).

How Much We (Do Not) Know About Violence and Its Victims

The last point to highlight is that violence was much more ubiquitous and the ignorance thereof much greater than we as historians might normally assume. Reading through tens of thousands of pages of materials saturated with addresses, biographical notes, minutes of interrogations, court proceedings, and written appeals, innocuously but strongly build confidence about the enormous wealth of information we possess on committed violence. This is prone to produce an exaggerated belief that we are able to look into all the dark corners of violence and that we know almost everything that there is to be known about countless episodes of violence committed during the Holocaust. Alas, multiple events most probably escaped through the net of historical study and too many victims will remain unknown, as evinced in the above-mentioned case of the teenage boy murdered by Fedor Buch in a tiny village in Ukraine. Even if we identify the place where his bones rest today, we will probably never be able to discover the boy's name along with information concerning any other violence that he experienced before the day he was beaten and then shot.

Moreover, even when the killing sites were located in postwar investigations and the remains of the victims were unearthed, the victims often remained anonymous. This is evident in the case of a group of Jews who were shot in the winter of 1942 in the vicinity of a little known village named Yastrubynove in Ukraine.²² The postwar investigators collected evidence against local ethnic German and Ukrainian policemen, who according to the investigation materials shot over three thousand Jews on the occupiers' orders and threw the victims' bodies into six cemented wells. Witnesses of this crime testified that layers of bodies were covered with straw, doused with gasoline, and set on fire. Six wells (each of them 1.5 metres in diameter and 30 metres in depth) were discovered on a site known to locals as "Kamennaia Balka", as detailed in the exhumation reports: Four wells included skeletons in a "semi-lying position", bodies of children and teenagers with traces of bullet wounds, and "remnants of human bones, clothes, and unburned bodies", while two of the six wells were empty.²³ The only information about the victims' identities to be found in the dossier specifies that these were Jews from Odessa, brought to Yastrubynove by Romanian soldiers. For now, this is how thousands of Jewish men, women, and children from Yastrubynove will go down in history, unless someday forensic archaeology coupled with DNA analysis is able to discover the victims' individual names.

In the meantime, we must rely on the professional tools available to historians: cross-checking various groups of sources, gathering oral history and other documents to obtain a more insightful view into individuals' mental worlds and their surrounding social fabric, and staying alert and in a 'questioning mode'. Such practices will hopefully ensure more astute and sensible interpretations of available documents and will result in a more complex and sensible understanding of the Holocaust.

22 USHMM, RG-31.018M, reel 78, minutes of the interrogation of Matvei Frelich, frames 2018-2026.

23 USHMM, RG-31.018M, reel 78, frames 2063-2065.

Diana Dumitru is Associate Professor of History at Ion Creangă State University of Moldova. Her fields of expertise include the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, Jewish history. She has held fellowships, including Fulbright Scholarship at Georgetown University, Gerda Henkel Stiftung fellowship, and the Rosenzweig Family Fellowship at the USHMM. Her second book, *The State, Antisemitism and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2016. In 2019, the Romanian-language translation of this book was published by Polirom.

E-Mail: dumitru@gmail.com

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