THE JEWSIH ANTI-FASCIST COMMITTEE BETWEEN UNIVERSAL BEING AND PARTICULAR SUFFERING

By

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Through an exploration of the history of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), this dissertation examines the larger story of Jews in modernity and the tension between the universal and the particular Jews came to embody. Modernity, as the epoch born out of European Enlightenment, is an epoch of paradoxes and unresolvable tensions between the universal man – the abstract individual – and the particular other it assumed and sustained in order to maintain its own boundaries. The Soviet nationalities policy, based on the same universal ideas, was marked by these very tensions. Its attempts to negotiate universal ideas of class struggle with fighting against Great Russian Chauvinism and the oppression of nationalities, kept reproducing these modern paradoxes. As this dissertation shows, Soviet Jews - an anomaly among the many Soviet nationalities - became the ultimate culmination and expression of this tension between the particular and the universal. The JAC, established in 1941 as part of the war against fascism, was to negotiate this very tension in a time when Soviet Jewish particularity came to the fore and was even officially embraced. Exploring the story of its members, their actions, and the different meanings assigned to them, I show how the tension Soviet Jews embodied in their otherness
ultimately became irreconcilable. This was an outcome of the recognition of Jewish particular suffering during the war that unavoidably also pointed to Soviet paradoxes and aggression. The particular suffering, thus, had to be repressed along with the particular aggression, only to return as the Anti-cosmopolitan campaign – the very campaign that marked the JAC’s demise. This dissertation, thus, explains the shift in attitude toward Soviet Jews in the postwar years, not through such causalities as the beginning of the cold war or the establishment of the state of Israel, but through an exploration of Soviet fantasies of friendship, unity and universality.
DEDICATION

To my mom,
my first intellectual role-model
Acknowledgments

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Bibliography
Introduction

This is the story of a Committee, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. This committee was one of five Soviet Anti-Fascist Committees to be established during the Great Patriotic War, the others representing Youth, Women, Slavic people, and Scientists. And yet, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was a one-of-a-kind Committee. This book is an exploration of this uniqueness, of everything, in other words, that made the JAC particular. This is a story of particularity. But it is also a story of the universal, of those universal ideas without which such particularity could never come into being. The story of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee is the story of the paradoxes imbedded in modernity, in the universal ideas of the Enlightenment, and how they found their ultimate expression in the encounter of Jewishness and Sovietness.

The JAC was founded after the invasion of Nazi Germany into Soviet land. During the war, the JAC and its members enjoyed a favorable attitude from the regime but things started shifting quickly after the war. The beginning of the cold war in 1946 ushered in a new era of Soviet patriotism – officially referred to as an Anti-Cosmopolitan campaign. This was a series of decrees, along with a campaign in the press, directed at the intelligentsia, with the goal of breaking away from the bourgeois decadence of the West. The intelligentsia, thus, had to be cleansed of all harmful Western influences and a new purge was now in motion. In November 1948, the committee was disbanded and 15 of its presidium members were arrested the following year.

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1 As the Soviet government referred to its war against Nazi Germany and its Axis allies.
2 On the history of these committees, see N. K. Petrova, Antifashistskie komitety v SSSR. 1941-1945 gg. (Moscow, 1999).
Hundreds of other Soviet intellectuals were arrested as well, most of them of Jewish origin. In 1952, the JAC presidium members stood trial and were eventually found guilty and sentenced to death.

The drastic shift in attitude to which the JAC was subjected during its short lifespan is usually attributed to two main factors – the beginning of the cold war and the establishment of the State of Israel. Scholars often identify the combination of these two factors as the cause that led to the singling out of Soviet Jews as the main targets of Anti-Cosmopolitanism. While these two occurrences are indeed an important part of the story, this dissertation will stay away from the causality described above. Instead, it asks why Soviet Jews persisted as a particular problem, a particular question, in Soviet society right from its very first days. As the dissertation will show, the Great Patriotic War enabled a particular moment in which a fantasy of a Soviet unified society, a society united in suffering, allowed for a recognition of the particular suffering of Soviet Jews. This particular suffering, however, exposed a much deeper and older particularity that well preceded the Nazi invasion and that in the wake of the war could no longer be integrated into Soviet universal ideals.

Several recent works have acknowledged the persistence of prewar tension between the particular and the universal and the way that it informed the postwar experience of Soviet Jews.

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What this dissertation sets out to do, however, is to account for both the continuity and the breaks in the history of Soviet Jewry as a particularized other. The main question that this work explores is what happened during the war that turned Soviet Jews from a question mark into an exclamation point of incompatibility. What was it about the Nazi invasion, in other words, that made Soviet Jews completely irreconcilable with the Soviet universal, and how was this related to their state of prewar particularity? An exploration of the history of the JAC, as the institution charged with balancing a tension that would prove irreconcilable, offers some interesting insights. With the tragic trajectory of its rise and fall, the JAC is a microcosm of the particularized otherness that enables the universal and its boundaries.

The JAC was a manifestation of Jews as a particularized other emerging from the modern conception of nations and nationalism. As the persistence of the Jewish Question suggests, nationalism did not provide much of an answer to whatever it was that Jewishness put into question. In some sense, the story of the JAC is the story of this very question mark that Jews kept carrying around with them in the world of Enlightenment and nationalism. It is also the story of a modern project that is in itself considered particular and othered within the Westernized perception of Enlightenment, and yet is one of the most ambitious universal projects that the Enlightenment produced – the Soviet project of communism. As the initiators of this revolutionary project, the Bolsheviks, who were opposed to nationalism and considered it a capitalist ideology, had multiple paradoxes to handle as they set out to elaborate a distinctly Soviet nationalities policy.

The Soviet Union inherited a multi-national country from tsarist Russia, and with this it also inherited years of national oppression and forced assimilation. It was, thus, faced with a complex question right away - how to right the wrongs of its predecessors without allowing or encouraging nationalism. This was the main task of early Soviet policy makers and it was not an
easy one to navigate. The Soviet nationalities policy indeed changed many times throughout Soviet rule, but it was always guided by Stalin’s famous “National in Form, Socialist in Content” paradigm. This meant that in order to avoid further oppression, the national form of the different Soviet nationalities would be allowed and encouraged. In 1923, two twin policies of promoting national languages and national elites in the different national territories were established. These two policies were soon referred to as *korenizatsiia*. They became the center of the Soviet nationalities policy. *Korenizatsiia* is most commonly translated as “indigenization” and it is derived from the adjectival form of the word *koren* (root) as is used in the phrase *korennoi narod* (“indigenous people”).

The Jews, as one of the nationalities residing in the former tsarist empire, were a particular form of nationality that, by lacking a national territory, did not fit the Soviet policy of *korenizatsiia*. This lack of “rooting” is at the center of this work. Through this particular form of a nationality that, precisely for its lack, was more universal than nationally particular, the Jews emerged as the site in which the tension between the universal ideas of the Soviet revolutionary project, and the particular demands of the Soviet nationalities policy, received its most visible expression. This, in turn, was an expression of the larger tension between the universal and the particular that was embedded in Enlightenment ideas of universal (male) rights and suffrage, considering that these universal ideas were themselves grounded in the particular concept of the nation. The story of the JAC, as an organization that more than any other Soviet organization before it became responsible for regulating and negotiating this tension, also tells the larger story of the modern tension between the particular and the universal.

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This work aims to shed light on the tension imbedded in Soviet Jewish identity not by offering a social history of its many variations - from the assimilated urban Jew through the religiously observant, shtetl, Zionist, intellectual or craftsmen. Instead, my effort is to reflect on the concept of Jewishness in a double inflection – of Sovietness and enlightened modernity. By analyzing the case of the JAC, I set out to explore what in the Soviet project, as well as in modernity at large as the era that gave birth to this revolutionary project, kept reproducing the Jews as particular despite their rapid assimilation. This, then, is a study of core conceptual questions with which the members of the JAC kept grappling. Their position as both Jews and Soviet writers, and the authority that they were given over these complex questions, at least for a short period of time, in addition to the influence they wielded as interlocutors with thousands of Soviet Jews, makes the JAC a perfect case study for what it meant to identify, and be identified as a Soviet Jew.

* 

The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, along with four other anti-fascist committees, was founded as a Soviet wartime propaganda tool, in order to mobilize support from foreign countries. The JAC, however, was the only nationality-based committee. Its main purpose, as a Jewish committee, was to establish connections with world Jewry in the fight against fascism and to spread information about German atrocities in the USSR. The first official Soviet announcement on the committees was made in April 1942 by Solomon Lozovsky, Deputy Chairman and Commissar of the Sovinformburo. Lozovsky was an assimilated Jew, a long time Bolshevik, who knew Lenin and Stalin back from 1905. Lozovsky had a long political career behind him when, in 1939, he was chosen by Vyacheslav Molotov, the commissar of foreign affairs, to be one of three deputy commissars. As the deputy commissar of foreign affairs, he was responsible for all five
The JAC, however, was already active in incipient form since August 1941, when a group of Soviet Jewish personalities gathered together for an anti-fascist radio broadcast and rally. Among these Soviet Jewish personalities were the famous writer Ilya Ehrenburg, the actor and director Solomon Mikhoels, who gave the opening speech, the Yiddish poet Perets Markish, and the Yiddish writer David Bergelson.\(^8\)

The JAC collaborated with many foreign pro-Soviet organizations. One of its main collaborators was the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists that was established in direct response to the JAC’s appeal to world Jewry in August 1941. The Writers’ Committee, as it was often called, started as a small group of Yiddishist intellectuals but it was soon able to get the help and support of some very big names, such as Albert Einstein and Dr. Rosen of the JDC (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee). One of its main purposes was to distribute Soviet material, sent mostly by the JAC, to American Jews. It also collaborated with the JAC on two large initiatives – the Mikhoels-Fefer tour in America, and the Black Book project on Nazi atrocities against Jews.\(^9\)

From the very beginning, the JAC’s main objective was to sway public opinion in the West, and especially in America, in favor of the Soviet Union. This was also the objective behind the trip of Mikhoels and the Yiddish poet, Itsik Fefer, to America. The official invitation for the tour came from the Jewish Council of Russian War Relief and the Writer’s Committee. During this trip that took place over the second half of 1943, Fefer and Mikhoels visited major centers of Jewish life in north America, in an attempt to mobilize Jewish public opinion. They gave multiple public

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\(^8\) Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir Pavlovich Naumov, *Stalin’s Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee* (Yale University Press, 2005), Kindle Locations 3360-3379.


\(^10\) Ibid., 104–6.
presentations in which they stressed the JAC’s importance to Soviet Jewry and gave harrowing accounts about the Nazi campaign to annihilate the Jews. It was on this trip that the Writers’ Committee suggested to their Soviet visitors the idea of a joint publication of a Black Book of Nazi atrocities against Jews.\textsuperscript{11}

From the moment of its inception, the JAC collected detailed information on Nazi atrocities in the occupied Soviet territories; this documentation began to multiply as the Red Army advanced west following its victory over the Germans at Stalingrad. Correspondents for the committee’s newspaper \textit{Eynikayt} (Unity),\textsuperscript{12} Red Army soldiers, and Soviet Jewish survivors sent reports and testimonies to the JAC offices, attesting to the extent of the atrocities. Much of this material was sent by the committee to various Jewish organizations and publications abroad. The JAC, thus, had the necessary materials and means to create such a project as the Black Book and when the idea emerged in summer 1943, \textit{Eynikayt} announced to its readers that the Writers’ Committee in New York had approached the JAC through Fefer and Mikhoels with the offer of publishing a joint Black Book.\textsuperscript{13} The original idea was to collaborate with the World Jewish Congress and National Council (\textit{Vaad Leumi}) in Palestine, so that each organization would collect and submit materials relating to the Holocaust. These materials would then be published jointly in several languages. A JAC sub-committee was soon established for this project. Its members included Mikhoels, Fefer, Markish, and the writer and poet Lev Kvitko. Ilya Ehrenburg, who was himself getting numerous materials and testimonies from survivors, became highly involved with the project as well. Between January and April of 1944, a Black Book literary Committee headed by Ehrenburg was established. Not long after, the Soviet writer Vasily Grossman was also added to the literary

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 115–18.
\textsuperscript{12} The JAC’s official newspaper, written in Yiddish.
\textsuperscript{13} Redlich, \textit{Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia}, 66.
committee of the book project. Ehrenburg was very personally invested in the project but eventually left the literary Committee after disagreeing with the decision made by the JAC to publish the American version before the Russian one. Grossman then took Ehrenburg’s place as principal editor.¹⁴

Even though the Black Book was ready for publication in 1946, it would not see the light of day. The narrative of Jewish particular suffering that the project promoted was no longer compatible with the Soviet postwar perception. As one of the JAC’s main projects it, along with the Mikhoels-Fefer tour, featured prominently in the trial that took place against the presidium members of the JAC in 1952, where they were accused of nationalism and espionage. Both the Black Book and the Mikhoels-Fefer tour, thus, will feature prominently in this work as well. They will be analyzed as two sites, internal and external, in which the tension between Jewish particular suffering and Soviet Universal being was most prominently negotiated.

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The story of the JAC, as presented in this work, will be told through an exploration of the actions and, especially, the words of some of its most prominent members. Solomon Mikhoels was the chairmen of the JAC. He was a Russian Jewish intellectual, deeply rooted in both of these cultural worlds. As a youth, he received a traditional Jewish education, including Yiddish and Hebrew. Mikhoels started his acting career at the age of 28 and within a few years rose to the position of director of the GOSET (Moscow Jewish State Theater), the most prestigious Jewish theater in the USSR. He was a well-respected Soviet artist who received both the Lenin and Stalin prize. During the war, as part of his activities as the chairmen of the JAC, Mikohels became the

¹⁴ Ibid., 65–69.
unofficial representative and spokesman for Soviet Jews and the prime addressee of Jewish requests. He died in what was officially declared a car accident in January 1948, and his death revealed how much of an object of identification he was for Soviet Jews when tens of thousands of people passed by his body.\footnote{Ibid., 77–83.}

Itsik Fefer was a Yiddish writer and poet, a member of the JAC presidium and the Eynikayt editorial board, and a devoted communist. He was the most politically-minded among the Yiddish writers associated with the committee. He joined the Bolshevik party in 1919, after being a member of the Bund for some years. Fefer was one of the founders of the “Union of Revolutionary Jewish Writers in the Ukraine” and he headed the Jewish section of “All-Ukrainian Union of Proletarian Writers.” He was a Soviet Jewish writer in every fiber of his being, and his biography reflects his identity, separately and combined, as a Soviet man, a Jew, and a writer. He was considered the founder of proletarian Yiddish literature in the Soviet Union. Fefer was also a Red Army officer and during his 1943 trip to America with Mikhoels, he appeared in his Red Army Colonel uniform. As a highly involved member of the JAC, Fefer became very invested in the Jewish Question and its resolution in the USSR, especially when it came to Jewish culture and national territory.\footnote{Ibid., 85–87.}

Perets Markish was one of the most well-known Yiddish poets in the USSR. He was a member of the JAC presidium and the Eynikayt editorial board. As a child, he received a Jewish Orthodox education. His first poems, which he wrote in Russian still under the tsar at the age of 15, were distinctly Zionist in nature. He seemed to be the one to feel most strongly the tension between his Soviet and Jewish identities. Like a number of other Soviet Jewish poets, Markish spent a few years abroad in the early 1920s. He lived in London, Paris, Warsaw, and Berlin and
even visited Palestine in 1923. Although he was able to eventually become a member of the Soviet intellectual elite, he was often criticized by other Soviet Jewish writers, including Fefer, for his nationalistic sentiments. Markish joined the Party during the war but was never politically active.\textsuperscript{17}

Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman were the “outsiders” of the committee. Ehrenburg was probably the biggest name associated with the JAC. He was an assimilated Jew, a well-known and established Russian writer, who did not speak Yiddish and had almost no cultural ties to his Jewish heritage. In many senses, he was the incarnation of the exemplary Soviet writer. Ehrenburg spent a lot of time in Europe and was granted highly unusual traveling privileges by the regime, allowing him to live outside of the USSR for extended periods of time. The war marked a change in Ehrenburg’s identifications when he became engaged with, and invested in collecting testimonies of Jewish suffering and heroism. Like Mikhoels, he became a well-known addressee for Soviet Jewish survivors and those in need of assistance or advice. Ehrenburg was not an official member of the JAC but he participated in most of its public events and he and Grossman collaborated with the committee on the Black Book project. This was also Ehrenburg’s and the JAC’s biggest bone of contention, when the material that he collected for the book was sent by the committee for publication abroad without Ehrenburg’s consent. This event led Ehrenburg to leave the Black Book literary committee and the responsibility over its publication and preparation was given to the JAC. Like Ehrenburg, Grossman was not an official member of the JAC, but he too collaborated with the committee on the preparation of the Black Book and even wrote the preface to what was meant to be its Soviet version. He too was an assimilated Jew, Russian writer and journalist, and like Ehrenburg he was a correspondent for the \textit{Red Star} and among the first to

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 87–89.
discover Nazi atrocities against the Jews in Soviet occupied territories. His close family was exterminated by the Nazis in his hometown of Berdichev.\textsuperscript{18}

Other prominent members of the JAC were the famous Yiddish writer David Bergelson, the Yiddish poet and children’s writer Lev Kvitko, and the Yiddish poet David Hofshtein. Indeed, the JAC was a committee of writers and its story, as this work will show, was greatly shaped and influenced by what it meant to be a Soviet writer in the Stalinist world. During the 1930s, culture, and especially literature, were raised to the level of a secular religion in the Soviet world.\textsuperscript{19} It is important to note, however, that in the center of this investment stood not so much the actual literary products, but their producers – the writers. Maksim Gorky, the one figure that could be considered the true prophet of this Soviet secular religion, said about the Soviet writer: “Never before has the writer been so interesting, so close to the mass of readers, as he is in our times, among us, in the Union of Soviets, never has he been esteemed so highly by the literate masses, and this esteem is natural, because the masses see how they themselves are creating writers and how they are reflected in their books.”\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, the Soviet writer came from within the masses, and his job, in turn, was to shape and mold these masses with his very writing. Being a Soviet writer was not so much a matter of talent as it was a matter of skill, of craftsmanship. In his 1934 speech at the first congress of Soviet Writers, Gorky declared: “The proletarian state must educate thousands of outstanding ‘craftsmen of culture,’ ‘engineers of soul.’”\textsuperscript{21} For Gorky, any kind of work required a craftsman, and the craftsmanship of writing in particular required mastering a certain technique. This technique included observation, selection, comparison and imagination,

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 90–96.
\textsuperscript{19} Katerina Clark, \textit{Moscow, the Fourth Rome} (Harvard University Press, 2011), 10.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 358.
which Gorky considered as the four most important operations in creative work.\textsuperscript{22} To carry the weight and responsibility of this profession, thus, a writer had to be well trained and master the very craft that would enable him to “engineer souls.”

It was none other than Stalin who claimed to be the first to entitle writers as “engineers of the human soul”.\textsuperscript{23} By this, Stalin meant that writers were entrusted with shaping the masses’ souls, but also that, just like engineering, writing was indeed a craft that had to be learned and mastered. Becoming a writer, someone who could engineer souls, required one to be the product of social engineering themselves. In the Western tradition especially, it is common to think about Socialist Realism in terms of state censorship, but in order to fully understand the history of Socialist Realism one must consider that censorship was principally internal, rather than external, to the process of writing. To become a Soviet writer, a writer had to be able to become his or her own censor, to reflect the spirit of the party and utilize it to shape souls.\textsuperscript{24} A Soviet writer had to be able to extract meaning from facts in order to get to the Truth. In Gorky’s words, “the chicken must not be roasted with its feathers.”\textsuperscript{25} Censorship, thus, was a constituent part of the creative act and not an external “problem” forced upon the writer. The spirit of Socialist Realism was embedded in the writer, who was expected to possess a “creative personality” that functioned in this very specific way. As this dissertation will show, the incredible stakes of what it meant to be a Soviet writer often shaped and manifested in the JAC members’ actions and discourse as well as in the way they were approached and perceived by both the Soviet Jewish masses and Soviet authorities.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 352–54.
\textsuperscript{23} On the provenance of this term, see Omri Ronen, “Inzhenery chelovecheskikh dush: K istorii vyskazyvaniia,” in: idem, Poetika Osipa Mandel’shtama (Saint-Petersburg, 2002), 164-74.
\textsuperscript{24} The Making of the State Writer, xvii–xviii. On the personal and internal dimensions to the elaboration of a Soviet subjectivity, see Jochen Hellbeck, Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin (Cambridge, Mass., 2006).
\textsuperscript{25} Boris Groys, The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond (Verso Books, 2011), 54.
The story of the JAC began with the Nazi invasion of Soviet territories and the persecution and extermination of Soviet Jews that followed. It is therefore a story of trauma and of testimony, of the remembrance, the forgetting, and the recognition of suffering. The term ‘trauma,’ was not a signifier of the historical subjects’ own discourse; it figures here instead as an analytic tool. The way that the concept of trauma, as well as of that of memory, testimony and recognition, are utilized in this work is based on a psychoanalytic understanding of them. This begs the question of relevance - is psychoanalysis, as an external discourse, relevant to discussing the Soviet Jewish experience and if so, what constitutes its relevance? An answer to these questions requires consideration of the conceptual work that writing the history of the JAC enabled. Through the particular history of the committee, I attempted to say something significant not just about Soviet Jewry but on the Jewish condition in the age of the Enlightenment more broadly. This condition, as this dissertation shows, is the condition of the particular that enables the universal by the power of its very difference. This, in many ways, is also true for psychoanalysis. Freud’s biggest discovery, which led to the invention of psychoanalytic theory and practice, was that of the unconscious. And it is exactly the unconscious as the incarnation of the particular, a radical alterity, the discourse of the Other, that enabled psychoanalytic theory as a universal theory.

Psychoanalysis is the field of the particular, of the exile from the universal. It is the field of alienation from ourselves in meeting with our own otherness – the unconscious. The basic premise of psychoanalysis is exactly this particularity of the unconscious that lies at the core of the universal idea of human subjectivity. In this sense, it is not different than the Enlightenment’s ‘abstract individual’. The ‘abstract individual’ is in itself a paradoxical idea that is split between the particular and the universal. It also, however, posits an ideal of individuality to which every
individual has to live up – an individuality that is characterized by sensitivity, reason and moral capacity. This is the basis of human sameness, of universality. In this sense, Freud’s unconscious is the very opposite of the abstract individual. Unlike the abstract individual, it is not an ideal that in its particularity enables universality. It is in effect not an ideal at all. The unconscious is always singular, particular, and it can never be mastered or assimilated. Like the Jewish condition that this work formulates, the subject in psychoanalysis is destined to always be in a state of split subjectivity - the conscious vs. the unconscious, the universal vs. the particular. This is a state of unescapable alienation.

This similarity between Jewishness and the subject posited by psychoanalysis is not coincidental. Freud’s own Jewishness found its ultimate expression in psychoanalysis as “the practice of the non-identical, of de-identification and of the desire for difference.” Freud, as a fin-de-siècle assimilated European Jew, was no stranger to the mark of otherness that accompanied the Jewish condition. In that sense, Freud had a lot in common with many of the cultural figures of which the JAC consisted. A famous statement made by Ehrenburg in 1941, the very statement that is considered to have inaugurated the JAC, sounds shockingly similar to a statement made by Freud in 1926. Ehrenburg said: “I grew up in a Russian city. My native language is Russian. I am a Russian writer. […] But the Nazis have reminded me of something else: my mother’s name was Hannah. I am a Jew.” In a 1926 interview, Freud declared: “My language is German. My culture, my attainments are German. I considered myself German intellectually, until I noticed the growth of anti-Semitic prejudice in Germany and German Austria. Since that time, I prefer to call myself

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While these two statements were made in different settings and under different conditions, their uncanny similarity helps draw our attention to the prominence of the experience of otherness and particularity that both Ehrenburg and Freud shared as Jews in the age of the Enlightenment.

What the two statements reveal is exactly the split between a conscious identification and a sort of otherness that is forced on the subject. It reveals the mark of particularity Jews have been carrying with them and how this mark, especially in modernity, was often a product of the way Jews were seen by others and how this very “seeing” othered them. It was this particular Jewish experience of otherness that enabled Freud’s formulation of psychoanalysis as the “science of the particular.”

The subject that psychoanalysis posits in its theory of the human psyche is, thus, based not on the “abstract individual” of the Enlightenment, but exactly on what prevented Jews to ever become one – on what persistently kept interrupting their identifications. It is for this reason that I find such psychoanalytic concepts as “repression,” “transference,” and “trauma” relevant to the analysis of the Soviet Jewish experience. The Jewish experience of otherness and particularity that is at the center of this work is also the experience that allowed the discovery of these very concepts. Their supposed universality does not stand in the way of the particular for what they offer is merely a lens through which it can be perceived. Psychoanalysis is about listening for the singularity of the subject’s speech. It is not about the universality of language as a code that can be utilized to transmit unambiguous statements, but about the particular history that emerges in the speech of a particular subject. Psychoanalysis has thus enabled me to explore the history of the very particular subject that is the Soviet Jew.

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31 Ibid., 20.
The two main archives I used for this work were the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee records from the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), and the Ilya Ehrenburg archive at Yad Va’Shem. These archives contain numerous letters and testimonies sent by Soviet Jews to either the committee or Ehrenburg, as well as drafts of materials, essays, and transcripts of recorded testimonies that were meant for the Black Book. This enabled me not only to utilize unpublished documents, but also to compare published documents – such as Black Book testimonies – to their unedited original versions. I was, thus, able to incorporate into my analysis not only unpublished material but also the absences in the published ones – the omissions and deletions. It is important to acknowledge that I too, very much like the editors of the Black Book, had created a certain narrative by the mere process of selection of documents. My process of selection was shaped by my own historical taste and understanding of the materials but also, inevitably, by the fact that I – just like Ehrenburg - cannot read Yiddish. That meant that my main focus was given to those documents composed in Russian. The fact that Ehrenburg himself did not speak Yiddish and was still made the addressee, the big Other, of Soviet Jews and their suffering, made it possible for a Russian reading historian like myself, who does not read Yiddish either, to be able to write this particular history. Since Ehrenburg could not read Yiddish, the vast majority of the testimonies addressed to him were written in Russian. I was therefore able to take Ehrenburg’s position as a substitute addressee fairly easily. What was inevitably excluded by this linguistic barrier were mostly literary works of the committee members themselves. The content of these works is indeed beyond the scope of this study.

The fact that Ehrenburg did not speak Yiddish and therefore communicated with the Jewish masses only in Russian points to more than a mere technicality. It speaks to a sort of hierarchy of
languages in which Russian is the language of the universal while Yiddish remains a particular question, caught between the necessity of a national form and the dangers of national content. Ehrenburg, as the incarnation of the exemplary Soviet writer, offered Soviet Jews an official recognition of their particular suffering but only if that suffering was told and narrated through the language of universality that Russian seemed to be. This was a demand to universalize the particular while still recognizing it as such - a tension that we will keep encountering throughout this work.

The Soviet Jews that sought Ehrenburg’s universal recognition of their particular suffering were in themselves positioned lower in the hierarchy of Sovietness than Ehrenburg himself. This bags the question of uniformity when it comes to such identity category as “Soviet Jews.” Since this work is an attempt to write, through the history of the JAC, about the state of Soviet Jewishness more broadly, it is important to first account for the fact that the committee members who are at the center of this work were not the “average” Soviet Jew, if such a thing indeed existed, but a very particular group of Soviet-Jewish intelligentsia. My attempt in this work is not to try and impose some sort of uniformity on the Soviet Jewish experience through the story of such a unique group. It is, rather, to explore the larger experience of Soviet Jews vis-à-vis this particular group. By looking at the work of the JAC, very much shaped by the numerous letters and appeals they received from the Soviet Jewish masses, I am able to tell the larger story of the Soviet Jewish experience. This is possible not in spite of the hierarchical position that the committee members occupied, but exactly because this position allowed me to examine the Soviet Jewish understanding and fantasies of what it meant to be Soviet and what it meant to be universal. After all, it was not the JAC that declared itself the official representative of all Soviet Jews. It was, rather, Soviet Jews themselves who assigned them this role.
This work is an attempt to write modern Jewish history on a few different levels – the history of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and their particular story; the history of Soviet Jews and Soviet Jewish identity; and the history of European Jews in the age of the Enlightenment. This is not the first attempt of writing Jewish history through an exploration of the European project of modernity. Yuri Slezkine embarks on such a project in *The Jewish Century*, and even does so through an extensive engagement and exploration of Soviet Jews in particular. Slezkine uses the metaphor of the Mercurians and the Apollonians to explain the relationship between Jews and other local communities. According to Slezkine, the Mercurians were those groups who were non-primary producers, specializing in the delivery of goods and services to the surrounding agricultural populations. They were the decedents (or predecessors) of Mercury – the god of those who did not herd animals, worked the land, or lived by their sword. The Jews, says Slezkine, were service nomads, separated from other local communities (who descended from Apollo – the god of livestock and agriculture) by strict rules that prevented them from sharing food (hospitality) or blood (marriage) with outside communities. The reason for the difference, however, was less important than the fact of difference – as it was only strangers that could do certain dangerous or distasteful works. And so, being a stranger was a precondition for the Jewish professional occupations just as much as Jewish professional occupations were a function of being a stranger. The main difference between the Mercurians and the Apollonians is, as per Slezkine, the difference between those who grow food and those who create concepts and artifacts. Modernity, therefore, was the age of the Mercurians, but it was also the age of nationalism and communism - both of which were fundamentally Apollonian. Modernity, hence, was also the age of anti-Mercurianism.\(^{32}\)

Slezkine talks about the Jews as the template of universalism and modernity. He also talks about their role as “professional strangers” in the societies in which they lived. He does not, however, explore the dialectic relationship between these two components – the Jew as the exemplary universal and the Jew as the perpetual other. In my work, I show how this position of the stranger was in itself an imminent and inseparable part of the idea of universality. By examining the case of Soviet Jews, I am able to show the reciprocal relationship between universalism and particularism as it is manifested in the relation of Jews to their Soviet surroundings, but also as emblematic of Soviet Jewish identity in itself. Through an exploration of this particular (and universal) identity, I show how the universal was not sustainable without the particular and vice versa, and how the Jewish position, and particularly the Soviet Jewish one, both sustained and disrupted this tension. In that sense, Jews were indeed an inseparable part of the modern project by being a constant other, a constant particular, against which universality was defined. They were also, however, a constant reminder of the limits of the universal ideal.

This tension, which Slezkine defines through binaries and I perceive as dialectical, can be found in many other modern projects. Its origins are in the revolutionary project of French enlightenment which posited an other - in the form of women - to define the universal man. As will be explored in Chapter One, the position women were assigned in France bore many similarities to the position Jews occupied in Soviet society. It is worth mentioning, however, that Jews themselves were also othered in France. In her book, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, Wendy Brown identifies these different forms of otherness by comparing the “Jewish Question” to the “Women Question” in post-revolutionary France. For Brown, it was actually Jews that were seen as others by being constructed as subjects of tolerance, which assumes difference, while the women question was discussed via the terminology of
equality, which is based on sameness. This does not fully align with the assumption that women were biologically different and therefore could not change, while Jews were expected to assimilate and progress to the level of the universal man. As Brown herself shows, French Jews indeed went through a successful process of assimilation but, even after all Jewish communal practices were abolished, still remained “Jews” in the eyes of French society. This was, according to Brown, a product of the emerging 19th century race discourse that reshaped the definition of “Judaism” to include, in addition to common religion, traditions and nationhood, also physiological race. Since this discourse constructed race as something that was embedded in every part of the body and soul, assimilation would not be able to eliminate it or the differences it entailed. So even though Jewishness as a communal trait was eliminated by a process of assimilation, the individual Jew still maintained a physical difference that could not be altered. This racial difference limited their full participation in an emerging universalistic formulation of man.33

There is, however, another difference between the case of French Jews and that of Soviet Jews, which places Jews in the Soviet Union in a more similar position to that of French women. This difference is rooted in the fact that while the French state was trying to eliminate differences through assimilation, the Soviet Union was committed to keeping them. In Chapter One I show how in both cases the universal always had to be reached through the particular. In France this meant that the model of the universal man laid upon the idea of the individual – possessing a particular set of traits. Whoever was not thought to possess these traits – in this case women, was instead perceived as some sort of a nonindividual. Ironically, this meant that while each man possessed singular and unique qualities that differentiated him from all others, women were all

considered essentially the same. In a very similar manner, not every Soviet nationality was considered a nation. In order to be considered a full-blown nation, nationalities also had to meet a certain set of criteria. By not meeting these particular national criteria, Jews lacked the particularity they needed to be universal. In my analysis of the two cases I therefore show how this “sameness” that Brown identifies when she speaks about subjects of tolerance was in fact necessary to sustain the unchangeable position of difference that French women and Soviet Jews both occupied in their respective societies.

This work, thus, makes a clear intervention in several fields. By weaving the Soviet Jewish case into the larger story of European modernity, I intervene in both Jewish Studies and Soviet history. I also make a clear intervention in the field of Holocaust studies and, particularly, in the conceptualization of trauma and testimony through psychoanalytic theory. The discussion in scholarship around the trauma of the Holocaust has focused mostly on the silences of the post-Holocaust years. The Holocaust as a traumatic event, indeed the single most traumatic event of modernity, is described through the inability of its survivors to speak of it – to give it representation - as well as the inability of society at large to listen and register the horrors of these unspoken testimonies. This scholarship is based on a Western European experience and understanding of the trauma of the Holocaust. It does not, however, take into account the Holocaust as it was experienced and documented in the East, and especially in Soviet territories. In psychoanalysis, trauma is indeed represented by a nonrepresentation - a failure to give representation through language and through speech. Scholarship has shown how, after the Holocaust, this resulted in many years of silence and inability to speak about what happened. What this fails to recognize,

34 Scott, Only Paradoxes to Offer, 10.
35 See for example Dominick LaCapra, Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma (Cornell University Press, 1996); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (Taylor & Francis, 1992).
however, is the very different case of Soviet Jews who were offered an avenue of documentation immediately following the horrors, not through speech but through written testimonies. Analyzing the case of Soviet Jews and how it differs from the prevalent Holocaust narratives of silence and delayed testimonies, enabled me to not just give an account of the less known history of the Holocaust in Soviet territories, but also to account for and historicize the Soviet Jewish trauma. By challenging the universal understanding of trauma as a failure to speak, I am able to show the primacy of writing in Soviet society and the horizon of recognition Soviet Jews were offered by having a famous writer, Ehrenburg, as the addressee of their testimonies. I also show how this recognition was implicated in the trauma itself in a way that helps widen our understanding of Freudian trauma, and makes room for historical and cultural specificities.

This work chronicles the trajectory of Soviet Jews, from their initial misfit with the sort of rootedness that that the Soviet conception of indigenization (korenizatsiia) required, to the tragic events propelled by the campaign against “Rootles Cosmopolitanism.” The first chapter explores the history of the Soviet nationalities policy from the October Revolution to the Great Patriotic War. By highlighting the analogies that exist between the basic premises of the Soviet nationalities policy and the French Revolution with its Declaration of the Rights of Man, I show how the same paradoxes, created by the Enlightenment, informed the construction of both. These paradoxes are based on an idea of universality that requires a particularized other to sustain its own boundaries. The chapter also explores the Soviet desire to differentiate itself from tsarist Russia, an effort that resulted in the Soviet persistent attempt to encourage national self-determination despite their clear opposition to nationalism. This desire ultimately resulted in what I perceive as the Soviet fundamental fantasy – the fantasy of the Friendship of the Peoples. The Friendship fantasy required
all Soviet nationalities, except for the Russians, to foster and maintain a national form. The particular situation of Soviet Jews, however, kept disrupting this fantasy. Chapter Two explores the effects of the Nazi invasion on Soviet Jews through the testimonies collected for the Black Book. Through an analysis of the testimonies and their addressee, I show how Ilya Ehrenburg, as an exemplary Soviet writer and a Jew, functioned as what Lacan calls “the subject supposed to know” – a position that enables the subject’s speech through a desire for recognition. This very desire that the JAC was able to preserve for Soviet Jews by offering them recognition, I argue, enabled a symbolization of their trauma in a way that was unavailable to Holocaust survivors elsewhere. Chapter Three explores the shift in attitude toward Soviet Jews during the first postwar years. It shows how the Nazi invasion actualized a mark of otherness that well preceded the war and how the recognition of Jewish particular suffering unavoidably resulted in recognizing the ways Jews were marked by their fellow Soviets to begin with. This disruption of the Soviet fantasy of the Friendship of the Peoples, I suggest, had to be repressed but returned in a disguised form as the Anti-Cosmopolitan campaign. The last chapter offers an analysis of the JAC trial transcripts and shows how the many themes and paradoxes that were explored in the previous chapters found their expression in the trial. Scholars often see the trial transcripts and testimonies as documents attesting to either the coercion and torture the defendants endured, or to their conscious efforts to “speak Bolshevik.”36 In this chapter, however, I take seriously the narratives that emerge from the testimonies and show the identity crisis the defendants suffered when their life-long identifications now stood trial. Over the course of the trial, the defendants struggled to fit themselves back into the Friendship of the Peoples fantasy, stretching the very boundaries of the Soviet discourse that constructed them as subjects. I also show how the defendants, many of them writers, used their

literary works to prove their innocence and what that reveals about the figure of the Soviet writer.

Ultimately, it was not only the JAC presidium members that were put on trial but Soviet Jewish identity at large. The trial verdict sealed its fate.
Chapter One: Universal in Form

One of the grave mistakes you make is that you lump together all existing nations and fail to see any fundamental difference between them. There are different kinds of nations.

Joseph Stalin
The National Question and Leninism, 1929

On 15 November, 1917, a short week after coming to power, the Bolshevik government published "The Declaration of the Rights of Russia's Nations." This was an attempt to rectify what the young Bolshevik government considered one of the greatest evils of the Russian tsarist regime, namely, its treatment of its minority nationalities. “The October Revolution, led by workers and peasants,” the declaration read,

was started under the banner of emancipation. Peasants are emancipated from the power of landowners since the land is no longer the property of the latter. [...] Workers are emancipated from the folly and tyranny of capitalists since from now on they will be controlling the factories and plants. All that is alive and full of vital energy is emancipated from its shackles. The only thing left are the nationalities of Russia who have struggled with tyranny and arbitrary treatment. Their emancipation must start immediately and be carried out definitively and decisively. 37

As the wording of the declaration makes clear, Russia’s various nationalities appeared as another entity in need of liberation, much like the workers and peasants who were previously oppressed under capitalism. The fact that the declaration puts nations on a par with class, and sees them as an object of oppression, is quite paradoxical. This paradox is rooted in the fact that Marxists believed nations to be an invention of capitalism. 38 As we will see, this paradox was the building block of the Soviet nationalities policy.

38 Writing in 1929 about the National Question and Leninism, Stalin, after declaring that “the Russian Marxists have long had their theory of the nation,” proceeded to characterize a “nation” as “not merely a historical category, but a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism”. Joseph Stalin, “The National
"The Declaration of the Rights of Russia's Nations," brings to mind another well-known foundational declaration – the Declaration of the Rights of Man. This 1789 declaration was based on the idea that all men are born with natural rights of freedom and equality. Enlightenment ideas, therefore, were based on the universal assumption of the abstract individual who stood at the center of these natural rights. Interestingly, the idea of the ‘abstract individual’ was, to begin with, a paradoxical idea. On the one hand, this individual was the abstract and universal prototype for all humans. On the other hand, however, it was a unique and particular being, different from all others. It is because of, and not despite of, this particularity that the individual was given its claim to common rights. It is exactly because the individual, like all other individuals, was a unique and singular being that it had the right to freedom, equality, and sovereignty. These rights were considered natural because they were derived from the nature of man – his human nature as the very foundation of his individuality – and they were considered common because they were natural to all individuals.\footnote{Scott, \textit{Only Paradoxes to Offer}, 5–6.} To be universal, thus, one had to first be particular and vice versa.

This paradox, then, was the precondition of the universal project of the Enlightenment. At one and the same time, it conditioned universality and predetermined the perpetual failure of its realization. In order to abstract individuals, their particular social status (wealth, occupation, property, religion, etc.) had to be cast aside. They also had to be disembodied to avoid any physical differences. Abstracting the individual to such a level made it possible to posit a fundamental human sameness that was the basis for human equality – a singular individual. This sameness was based on such criteria as sensitivity, reason and moral capacity. But precisely because it set certain criteria for the sameness of human nature, it also established an idea of difference – of an other
who does not meet these criteria. So, while the idea of the abstract individual was established on sameness, it was at the same time itself particularized to the point it could not tolerate any differences. This had the potential of excluding anyone who did not fit this particular model of universality. In post-revolutionary France, this model and set of criteria were used to determine who had political rights by their universal nature and who (- women -) were excluded on account of an incompatible particularity - a mark of otherness preventing their ability to be elevated to the individual prototype.  

The Bolshevik concern for national rights, as much as the Bolshevik project as a whole, was based on these universal Enlightenment ideas. The first three articles of the French Declaration exemplify the similarities between these two modern projects, as well as their differences:

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.
2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.

Marxism was based on the same assumption that men (and women) are born free and equal in rights, but it differed in interpreting the meaning of these rights. The right to property was, of course, considered a liberal and capitalist idea, and so was the grounding of these rights in the idea of the nation. The Soviet ‘abstract individual’ was based not on national, or sexual, terms but on class terms, free of any nationality. This was based on the belief that national division is another capitalist tool that was meant to divide the proletariat. Under communism, this division was expected to dissolve. For Stalin and the Bolsheviks, nations were "not racial or tribal, but a

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40 Ibid., 6–7.
historically constituted community of people.” Early Soviet leaders believed that the ethnic and national progressions in the Soviet Union were fundamentally different than those of capitalist countries, and the formation of new historical, social, and international supra-ethnical unity – the Soviet people – would result from a dialectical process of simultaneous flowering and convergence of different ethnicities.

But while the ultimate goal of the early Soviet regime was to strive for national integration and ethnic assimilation that would eventually lead towards the formation of one homogenous Soviet nation, their immediate agenda was to make up for tsarist Russia’s past injustices. “Under the tsar,” the Declaration of the Rights of Russia's Nations read,

the nationalities of Russia were systematically pitted against each other. The results of such policy are well-known: on the one hand - slaughter and pogroms, on the other - enslavement of some by the others. There must be no return to such policy of instigation. From now on it must be substituted by the policy of voluntary and honest union of Nationalities of Russia.

Here we can see what, in establishing the early Soviet nationalities policy, took real precedence – not the Marxist idea of converging nationalities but the urgency to never repeat past grievances and oppression. This then led to the paradoxical principle through which the only way to reach the desired goal of a Soviet homogenous nation was not by abolishing national differences but, on the contrary, by promoting them. Lenin, speaking at the 1919 VIII Party Congress, further explained this logic:

The Bashkirs do not trust the Great Russians because the Great Russians are more cultured and used to take advantage of their culture to rob the Bashkirs. So in those remote places the name "Great Russian" stands for "oppressor" and "cheat." We should take this into

43 “Декларация Прав Народов России.”
account. We should fight against this. But it is a long-term thing. It cannot be abolished by decree. We should be very careful here. And a nation like the Great Russians should be particularly careful because they have provoked such bitter hatred in all the other nations. Indeed, the fight against what the Bolsheviks referred to as “Great Russian chauvinism” was one of the key principles of the early Soviet nationalities policy. In this quote, Lenin draws a distinction between “oppressor” nations and the nations they oppressed. This was based on the assumption that, as per Lenin, some nations were more “cultured” than others, and therefore also possessed the means to oppress their less cultured counterparts.

Indeed, the fight against what the Bolsheviks referred to as “Great Russian chauvinism” was one of the key principles of the early Soviet nationalities policy. In this quote, Lenin draws a distinction between “oppressor” nations and the nations they oppressed. This was based on the assumption that, as per Lenin, some nations were more “cultured” than others, and therefore also possessed the means to oppress their less cultured counterparts.

The terminology of culturally evolved (oppressor) nations and culturally backward (oppressed) nations was an application of Marxist class terminology on the subject of nation rights. The apparent contradiction between Marxist universalism and what appears to be national particularism is explained by Lenin based on these terms. Backward nations were mostly backward in a cultural and economic sense, and they were also still unable to differentiate the bourgeois and proletarian elements within them. Nations were, thus, considered historical formations on a Marxist timeline. If history is indeed determined by a gradual progression from feudalism to capitalism to communism, then nationalism, as a product of capitalism, is another necessary step. Stalin elaborates:

There are nations which developed in the epoch of rising capitalism, when the bourgeoisie, destroying feudalism and feudal disunity, gathered the parts of nations together and cemented them. These are the so-called "modern" nations. […] Of course, the elements of nationhood—language, territory, common culture, etc.—did not fall from the skies, but were being formed gradually, even in the precapitalist period. But these elements were in a rudimentary state and, at best, were only a potentiality, that is, they constituted the possibility of the formation of a nation in the future, given certain favorable conditions. The potentiality became a reality only in the period of rising capitalism, with its national market and its economic and cultural centers.46

45 Ibid., 421.
46 “The National Question and Leninism.”
Stalin and the Bolsheviks believed there was only one path to progress and different nationalities were on different stages of this path.\textsuperscript{47} Just as Capitalism was a necessary historical phase on the way to Communism, so was nationalism – national consciousness was an unavoidable historical phase that had to be reached in order to arrive to internationalism.\textsuperscript{48} Lenin had spoken to it as early as 1916: "mankind can proceed towards the inevitable fusion of nations only through the transitional period of the complete freedom of all oppressed nations."\textsuperscript{49} One of the main purposes of the Soviet nationalities policy was, thus, to help backward nations to historically evolve, or, in other words, to help them become “real” nations in terms of historical progression.\textsuperscript{50} To be sure, both Stalin and Lenin considered nationalism a capitalist and dangerous ideology, but they both also recognized that it presented a legitimate social grievance in a national form. With this, we encounter another key paradox embedded within the Soviet nationalities policy – progress as at the same time both oppressive and desired.

The young Bolshevik government had a lot of paradoxes through which to navigate in its attempts to carry out the modern project of socialism – the paradox between nationalism and internationalism; between creating one homogenous Soviet nation and promoting its different nationalities’ rights to self-determinate; and between abolishing capitalism, and therefore also nationalism, and encouraging an idea of progress of which it was very much apart. These different paradoxes were all a product of the unavoidable tension of universalism, relying on the particular to sustain its own boundaries. The abstract individual, as the universal model and prototype of all

\textsuperscript{47} Martin, \textit{The Affirmative Action Empire}, 126.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 5.
individuals, could only ever exist as such in the eyes of an other. The universal individual, thus, was at once universal and particular. His difference from an other (in the French case, a woman) is what his universality was defined against and what determined its boundaries. The particularized other both enabled and sustained the universal.\textsuperscript{51} The tension between the universal and the particular that characterized the French project of Republicanism, found its manifestation in the Bolshevik case through the question of nationalities. The Bolsheviks were never concerned with individuals and were even hostile toward the idea of individual rights. They instead focused on group rights.\textsuperscript{52} Under this logic, the displacement of the paradox between the universal and the particular from the realm of the individual and onto that of nationalities made sense.

The Declaration of the Rights of Russia’s nations can indeed be seen as the Bolshevik version of the French Declaration, translated into the language of collectives rather than individuals. The Declaration called for:

1. equality and sovereignty of Russia's nations.
2. the right for self-determination to the point of separation and establishment of an independent country.
3. elimination of all privileges associated with belonging to a certain nationality or religion.
4. Free development of the nations and ethnic groups who reside in Russian territory

In both declarations, the first and most important article is dedicated to the right for equality and freedom/sovereignty. In the Bolshevik Declaration, however, “Man” is replaced with “Nation” and under this discourse of national rights the idea of the nation appears to be just as paradoxical as that of the abstract individual. Soviet nationalities were expected to embark on the same paradoxical journey toward universalism where, on their way to internationalism, they first had to meet a particular set of criteria. If the abstract individual was defined as a sensitive being, capable

\textsuperscript{51} Scott, \textit{Only Paradoxes to Offer}, 10.
\textsuperscript{52} Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” 415.
of reasoning and having moral ideas, then whoever was not thought to possess these qualities was also not considered an individual and was instead perceived as some sort of a nonindividual. What did it mean to be a “nonindividual”? Ironically it meant that while each man possessed singular and unique qualities that differentiated him from all others, women were all considered essentially the same.\textsuperscript{53} The journey toward universalism could not be completed without first passing through the particular.

In a very similar manner, not every Soviet nationality was considered a nation. In order to be considered a full-blown nation, nationalities also had to meet a certain set of criteria – as defined by Stalin:

\begin{quote}
The Russian Marxists have long had their theory of the nation. According to this theory, a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of the common possession of four principal characteristics, namely: a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make-up manifested in common specific features of national culture. This theory, as we know, has received general recognition in our Party.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

“Nations,” thus, were meant to possess certain communal traits that would turn them from a mere historical “potentiality” into real, live, historically-progressed nations. Of course, not all nationalities met these four criteria. The Soviet nationalities policy was meant to help all Soviet nationalities progress from the category of “nationality” (\textit{natsional'nost}) to that of a nation (\textit{narod}) and to be elevated, by acquiring these particular traits, to the level of the universal. The period between 1919-1923, thus, was dedicated to figuring out how to encourage national self-determination within the confines of a unitary Soviet state. This led to a strategy aimed at disarming nationalism by granting and promoting “national forms.”\textsuperscript{55} This strategy was based on

\textsuperscript{53} Scott, \textit{Only Paradoxes to Offer}, 10.
\textsuperscript{54} “The National Question and Leninism.”
\textsuperscript{55} Martin, \textit{The Affirmative Action Empire}, 3.
three fundamental premises that shaped the early nationalities policy - The Marxist premise, according to which class division masked by nationalist ideology could only disintegrate through the granting of a national form; the modernization premise, based on the assumption that national consciousness was an unavoidable historical phase that must be passed on the way to internationalism; and the colonial premise, based upon the assumption that great-power (Russian) chauvinism was a greater danger than local nationalism.\footnote{Ibid., 4–8.}

What these premises, and especially the modernization one, had ironically created, however, was a hierarchy of nationalities – from more “primitive” and “backward” forms of nationhood at the bottom to completely evolved modern nations at the top. Similarly to the original French idea of the Rights of Man and Citizen, Russia’s nations were all supposed to be granted equal rights. Just like the model of the abstract individual, however, the model Stalin set for nations worked to exclude those nationalities who could not meet these criteria. Here, just like in the French model, being elevated to the level of the universal required the possession of some very particular traits. What happened to those who could not or would not work toward possessing these traits? Like in the French case, they unavoidably turned into the particularized other that enabled the idea and boundaries of national progress, while at the same time perpetuating the unavoidable failure of universalism. One such case was that of Soviet Jews.

\textit{The Jewish Question}

In its attempt to answer the broader question of nationalities, the young Soviet government could not ignore a question that had been posed many times before in different modern settings, and even by Marx himself. This was the Jewish Question. “To formulate a question,” Marx tells
us in *On the Jewish Question* “is to resolve it,” and the Bolsheviks formulated the Jewish Question through the discourse of nationalities.\(^{57}\) Did this “resolve” the question? Perhaps on one plain, but it also displaced it onto a new one. The Jewish Question was no longer inherently incompatible with the modern universal project, since it was no longer a religious question. Instead, it was reformulated through the same universal discourse that helped sustain the Soviet project as a whole. The Soviet Union was the first country to officially recognize Jewishness as a nationality, right from its early days.\(^{58}\) This recognition was realized as early as January 1918 with the formation of the Commissariat for Jewish National Affairs. The problem was, however, that by so doing the Bolsheviks attempted to answer the Jewish Question using the same discourse that posed it as a modern question to begin with. To understand the paradox that this created, a second look at the French arsenal of Enlightenment paradoxes might prove insightful.

Joan Scott examines feminist history through what she calls “reading for paradox.” Using this method, one reads for the internal tensions and incompatibilities of a single group or position rather than for the clash of opposing ones.\(^ {59}\) Examining the history of feminism, Scott asks why it has been so difficult for women to realize the French Revolution’s promise of universal liberty and equality. She suggests searching for an answer by identifying and examining the repetitions of this failure as a symptom of contradictions in the political discourse that both produced feminism and was contested by it – the discourse of individualism and individual rights. The exclusion of women was, from the very beginning, based on the idea of “sexual difference,” maintaining that women were inherently different from the (masculine) model of the abstract individual. Feminism’s goal was to eliminate “sexual difference” in politics but it had attempted to do so by fighting the fight

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\(^{58}\) The only other country to offer Jews such recognition would be the state of Israel.

\(^{59}\) Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, 16.
of “women” – in itself a discursive construct of the discourse of sexual difference. So, to the extent that it fought for “women’s rights, feminism was bound to produce the “sexual difference” it called to eliminate.  

With the same method of “reading for paradox” in mind, we should reconsider the Jewish Question in the context of the Soviet nationalities policy. The Jewish Question existed in its modern form exactly because Jews did not fit the model of modern nations. Modernity, as well as the idea of modern nations, were characterized by a moving away from the divine and toward “the people,” and the people were now constituted as nations. Nations were imagined as limited and sovereign communities - limited because no matter how big a nation was it would never imagine itself conterminous with mankind; and sovereign because it was born at an age in which Enlightenment ideas destroyed the dynastic, divinely-based, legitimacy of rule and were thought to be universal and free from such particularities as religion. A group of people was considered a nation, thus, based on a shared commonality that was no longer rooted in the divine. Since religion was not the uniting common trait anymore, the modern form of the Jewish Question was now based on the intersection of Jews and nationalism – were the Jews a nation and if so, what made them into one? In the Soviet Union, Jewish religion and Jewish nationality were two different designations and they did not even share the same name. Evrei is the most common Russian word for 'Jews', and it is also the default dictionary suggestion for the English word 'Jew'. Its meaning is Jewish in the ethnic-national sense. Yudei is the word that designates 'Jew' in its religious meaning. Soviet Jewishness was based on the ethnic-national sense and was not a religious category. Nevertheless, the criteria Stalin set for progressed and evolved nations – namely, a

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60 Ibid., 3–4.
common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make-up – was not met by Jews, Soviet or otherwise, who lacked all criteria but a common language. This lack of common national traits was what constituted the Jews as a modern question to begin with. The attempt to answer the Jewish Question with the same discourse that initially produced it as such was bound to repeatedly fail.

Stalin’s four criteria of modern nations determined the hierarchy of Soviet nationalities – from the most backward nationalities to the most evolved nations. Those nationalities, like the Jews, who did not meet all four criteria were encouraged to cultivate their national form and progress on the Marxist timeline toward the age of nationalism. To resolve the paradox created by promoting national rights as part of an anti-nationalist ideology, the Bolsheviks deployed a method of distinguishing between the form and the content – only the national form was allowed and preserved, while the content was to be socialist. This meant that Socialist content would be wrapped in a national form of customs, traditions, and most importantly, language: "Only the mother tongue," wrote Stalin as early as in 1913, can enable "a full development of the intellectual faculties of the Tatar or of the Jewish worker." 62 There was only one way to progress, and it passed through the particularities of a national form. Soviet Jews, like all other Soviet nationalities, were expected to work toward meeting all necessary criteria to become a modern nation. Not many nationalities, however, lacked almost all criteria. Soviet Jews did not have, of course, their own national territory, but they also lacked common economic life and, one could say that as a result, they were divided in their psychological make-up as well. Lacking three out of four criteria for being a modern nation, Soviet Jews were placed very low in the hierarchy of nationalities, as one of the most backward. As part of its nationalities policy, it was the Soviet state’s mission to help

Soviet Jews, as a group, acquire the necessary criteria that would enable their progression as a nation.

Like many of the conceptual problems the Bolsheviks faced, the economic division of the early Soviet Jewry was an inheritance left by tsarist Russia. Between 1772 and 1795 Russia annexed large portions of Poland, and within it a large portion of Jewish communities. In Poland those Jewish communities were able to engage in a variety of practices that made the Jews a distinct social order, among them their ritual observance, rabbinic courts of law and system of taxation that were all protected by the state. In 1786, Catherine the Great ordered that the Jews be registered as urban residents and part of the urban estates - the artisans and petty traders and the mercantry, but in 1791 she revoked this order and restricted Jews’ residence to the western and southern borderlands, away from the Russian interior. This paved the way to the infamous pale of settlement, officially established in 1835. The Jews were now restricted to reside only within the borders of the pale. In 1858, however, Jewish merchants of the first guild were allowed to reside outside of the pale, and during the following several years, other groups of Jews (graduates of institutions of higher education, retired soldiers and artisans) were permitted residency outside the pale. Beginning in the 1860s, tens of thousands of Jews resided in the Russian interior, where they adopted Russian culture and language. By the end of the century more than 300,000 Jews were living outside the Pale of Settlement, with the largest Jewish community outside the pale residing in St. Petersburg. This was a result of the Russian hierarchy of culturally and juridically distinct estates that the Jewish population was encouraged to enter.

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63 Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (University of California Press, 2002), kindle Locations 689-718.
64 Ibid., Kindle Locations 1421-2113.
65 Ibid., Kindle Location 1743.
By the time the Bolsheviks took over, two very distinct communities of Jews were already well established – the shtetl “backward” Jew and the urban, “progressed” Jew – and within both groups was a very low percentage of proletariats. The urban Jews were very prominent among the higher ranks of the Communist party, and an overwhelming majority of them held white-collar professions such as engineering, entertaining and writing.\(^{66}\) By the end of the 1920’s most urban Jews spoke Russian as a first language, and had very little interest in the Jewish language or culture.\(^{67}\) The shtetl Jews, on the other hand, were perceived as the exact opposite. They resided in small cities and towns and made their living from petty commerce, retail sales, and small-scale handicraft production. In the early 1920s, unemployment among shtetl Jews became a concerning problem.\(^{68}\) The shtetl Jews were, according to Mikhail Kalinin, head of state of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, poor and backward by their nationality:

After all, what are the characteristics of the Jewish shtetl population? This - the poverty that puts Jews lower in the living standards of the general population around them. It is generated by the feature of the whole history of this nation.\(^{69}\)

The Jewish nationality, thus, was composed of two very different economic and cultural groups, and these two groups were on two opposite ends of the Marxist timeline of progress.

Failing to fulfil Stalin’s criteria for developed nations, the entire Jewish nationality was considered backward - not despite of, but exactly because of the “over progression” of many Soviet Jews. As a nationality, Soviet Jews were completely divided in their economic life and psychological make-up. The playing field had to be leveled to allow Jews to progress as a unified nationality. Potential solutions centered around trying to resolve this state of national

\(^{66}\) Ibid., 191.
backwardness. Backwardness, of course, was not a permanent state. Like other backward nations and nationalities, the Jewish nationality could be helped and prompted into progression by cultivating its national form, and this was indeed widely attempted by Stalin. Between 1928-32 he carried out a widespread and extravagant attempt of transformation that was organized around his 1924 thesis "Socialism in one country". While this thesis is usually perceived as diverging from Marxism-Leninism, there are also claims to the contrary. In Marxism, the implementation of socialism in one country (in contrast to a revolution on a world scale) was a project that was bound to fail. Lenin saw it, at the very least, as an incomplete project. When Stalin started to implement this thesis in 1927, his approach to the nationalities policy changed accordingly. Stalin based this approach on Lenin's perception of the merging of nations. According to Lenin, such merging would only occur after a socialist revolution on a world scale. With his focus on the implementation of socialism in one country, Stalin arguably stayed true to Leninism by forgoing the goal of the dissolving of nationalities, and putting weight on the advancement of oppressed nations. Stalin invoked Lenin in support of his approach:

> Just as mankind can arrive at the abolition of classes only by passing through a transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can arrive at the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through a transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, i.e., of their freedom of secession.

Therefore, the idea of the fusion of all nations in the Soviet Union was now considered by Stalin to be counterrevolutionary:

> The theory of the fusion of all nations of ... the USSR into one common Great Russian nation with one common Great Russian language is a nationalist-chauvinist and anti-Leninist theory that contradicts the main thesis of Leninism, according to which national

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72 Ibid
differences cannot disappear in the near future but will remain in existence for a long time, even after the victory of the proletarian revolution on a world scale.\textsuperscript{73}

This approach ended up leading to an extravagant state-financed celebration of ethnic and national diversity.\textsuperscript{74} Since assimilation and fusion of all nations were, in the new context of “socialism in one state,” considered anti-Leninist, the agenda now was to concentrate on elevating all the oppressed and backward nationalities to the same stage on the revolutionary timeline.

This policy was promoted aggressively when it came to Soviet Jews. In 1924 the Communist party initiated a "indigenization" (korenizatsiia) campaign among national minorities that aimed to establish cultural and political institutions in native languages. In 1928 this project was intensified. Yiddish courts, schools, party cells, clubs, and theaters were established in all regions where large populations of Yiddish-speaking Jews resided. Known Yiddish folk songs were given new lyrics that delivered socialist content in a national form. Other, new songs were constructed in “Jewish” form, with a socialist text. These songs were published in books and newspapers, and were broadcasted on national radio stations.\textsuperscript{75} One of the most popular Yiddish songs of the late 20s, \textit{Dzhankoye}, is an illuminating example of this “National in Form, Socialist in Content” project:

\begin{center}
Jews, answer my question,  
Where is my brother, where is Abrasha?  
His tractor moves like a train.  
Auntie Leye is at the mower,  
Beyle is at the thresher,  
In Dzhankoye. Dzhan, Dzhan, Dzhan!  
\end{center}

\begin{center}
Who says that Jews can only trade,  
Eat fresh soup with almonds,  
And not be workers!  
Only enemies can say that.  
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{73} Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” 437.  
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 414  
Jews spit in their faces,
Look at Dzhan, Dzhan, Dzhan!76

The structure of this song mirrors the traditional question and answer format used by rabbis and yeshives teachers. The song features many elements that were popularized in Soviet Jewish songs during the 20s and 30s, the most important one is the image of the ideal Soviet Jew - the proletarian Jew.77 While this song presents a clear traditional Jewish form, its content addresses the problem and popular stereotype of the non-worker Jew. It also promotes the Soviet solution to the Jewish problem of both territory and lack of Jewish workers: the formation of a Jewish agricultural territory.

During the 1920s, the party supported an attempt to turn at least 400,000 Jews into farmers. The project took its inception in parts of Crimea and Ukraine, but met with strong resistance by local officials. On March 28 1928, the government approved the creation of a Jewish agricultural settlement in Birobidzhan in the Russian Far East.78 A year before the Birobidzhan project was approved, Kalinin expressed his high hopes for it:

I think that Birobidzhan will be the place where it will be possible to organize a Jewish republic, to which we now virtually desire. […]It is not a counter-revolution but an incredible revolutionary fact for the Jewry of the entire world and for the working Jews in the USSR. In this way, they will better organize their affairs and culture. It is necessary to be dialectic here.79

A socialist republic was the Soviet equivalent of a nation-state, it was where fully evolved nations could exercise their right for self-determination. This was what the Soviet leadership desired for its Jews – a space, a form, where they could better “organize” their particular shared affairs. Shortly after this announcement, the Soviet government began encouraging Jews to move to their new

76 Ibid., 120.
77 Ibid., 120–121.
79 Kalinin, evrei v sssr, The National Library of Israel, Stacks S 32 B 2387, 4-5
designated national territory. It offered government subsidized migrants' travel costs and food, and extended tax exemptions, credit, and other material benefits to Jewish settlers.\textsuperscript{80} In 1930, Birobidzhan was declared a Jewish national region, and in 1934 a Jewish autonomous region.\textsuperscript{81} But in spite of the government’s efforts, the project was largely unsuccessful – by 1933 only 8200 Jews lived in Birobidzhan.\textsuperscript{82}

The project of Birobidzhan was an attempt to resolve both the problem of lack of territory, and the problem of lack of workers and shared economic life. Even though it was mostly discussed in relation to the poor shtetl Jew, there was also a serious attempt to turn a large amount of urban Jews into farmers.\textsuperscript{83} Furthermore, it was hoped that the mere existence of a Jewish autonomous territory with advanced Jewish cultural and lingual national traits would allow Soviet Jewry "to better organize their affairs and culture", or in other words to unite under one umbrella of national form and resolve the problem of the lack of proletariats among the Jewish population. The project of Birobidzhan failed for numerous reasons. One is that the Jewish settlers were not trained as farmers and were attracted to the larger cities in the Far East where they could work in their previous professions in the retail and service sectors. Those who did stay in the region settled in the capital city of Birobidzhan, where they gravitated towards the same professions or worked at government offices.\textsuperscript{84} But this failure, of both the Birobidzhan project and the greater plan of progressing Jewish nationality further up the revolutionary timeline, was an outcome of a far more complex conceptual problem than the causality described above - nationalizing Soviet Jews was a Bolshevik endeavor that was not desired by many Soviet Jewish individuals.

\textsuperscript{80} Weinberg, \textit{Stalin’s Forgotten Zion}, 23–24.
\textsuperscript{81} Slezkine, \textit{The Jewish Century}, 2004, 249.
\textsuperscript{82} Shternshis, \textit{Soviet and Kosher}, xv.
\textsuperscript{83} Slezkine, \textit{The Jewish Century}, 2004, 248.
\textsuperscript{84} Weinberg, \textit{Stalin’s Forgotten Zion}, 31.
As a national group, Soviet Jews were indeed still completely backward. As individuals, however, many of them were quite the opposite. In fact, many Jews who resided in the big cities had become by the late 1920s “exemplary Soviets”. No other group was so keen to abandon their language, traditions, and their traditional areas of settlements. Urban Jews were supposed to be a part of the nationalities policy, but were just not interested. Instead, they were often defined in class terms as almost a nationality without form. The Jewish Question, thus, was no longer just about the categorical backwardness of Jews as a nationality. It was also, perhaps more so, about the fact that, as a group, Soviet Jews were completely divided. Unlike other nationalities of the union, the Jews could not be uniformly categorized as either backward or progressed. The individuals of this nationality were too far apart from one another in the stages of Marxist progression, and yet the same policy was directed at both. This resulted in yet another paradox - not only was the most progressed group in Marxist terms part of the most backward of nationalities, but it was also preserving, by its very progression, the backwardness of its nationality.

No shortcuts, it seemed, were offered on the way to the universal. Going through the particular was a necessary stage that could not be bypassed. Soviet Jews were expected to travel this road as a group. As per Kalinin:

The Jewish people faces the great task of preserving its own nationality, and to this end a large part of the Jewish population must be transformed into an economically stable, agriculturally compact group which should number at least hundreds of thousands. Only under such conditions can the Jewish masses hope for the future existence of their nationality.

It was not only shared territory and shared economic life, however, that Soviet Jews were expected to establish and maintain. They were also supposed to form a shared “psychological make-up.” Before we can question whether Soviet Jews indeed shared a common psychology, we must

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85 Slezkine, *the Jewish century*, 251
86 Weinberg, *Stalin’s Forgotten Zion*, 22.
wonder what it means, as a group, to share such a psychology. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud writes that what holds a group together are libidinal ties that go in two directions – toward the group leader and toward other members of the group.\(^87\) An actual leader, however, is not necessary for a formation of a group. This position could also be occupied by a common idea, a shared wish.\(^88\) Kalinin urged Soviet Jews to rise to the task of preserving their own nationality. Only by travelling a particular path, he proclaimed, could they hope for its future existence. Kalinin based this plea on the presupposition that Soviet Jews indeed shared such a hope. What Kalinin and other members of the Soviet government failed to recognize was the possibility that such a shared wish did not exist among Soviet Jews. The goal of promoting national traits was to prompt the progression of backward nationalities, but urban Jews, decades apart from the shtetl Jews on the Marxist timeline, were so highly educated, so urbanized and so eager to become cosmopolitans that Jewish nationalism - either in form or content - seemed to them counterproductive or just irrelevant.\(^89\)

What Kalinin and the party expected from Jews as a group was to conform to an ideal with which many of them did not identify. Freud speaks of *identification* as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person. He elaborates its evolution from this early stage:

> First, identification is the original form of emotional tie with an object; secondly, in a regressive way it becomes a substitute for a libidinal object tie, as it were by means of the introjection of the object into the ego; and thirdly, it may arise with every new perception of a common quality shared with some other person who is not an object of the sexual instinct. The more important this common quality is, the more successful may this partial identification become, and it may thus represent the beginning of a new tie.

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\(^{87}\) Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 24 (Kindle Edition)

\(^{88}\) Ibid., 27.

The mutual tie that exists between members of a group, Freud notes, is of that nature of a shared quality, and this quality lies in the nature of the tie with the leader.  

“Identification,” tells us Freud, “endeavors to mold a person's own ego after the fashion of the one that has been taken as a 'model'.” This becomes what Freud calls “the ego ideal.” Through an exploration of such phenomena as falling in love and hypnosis, Freud arrives at the following formula for the libidinal constitution of groups: “A primary group of this kind is a number of individuals who have substituted one and the same object for their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego.”

To become a group, thus, members must form ties of identification between one another on account of a shared ideal. Soviet Jews, divided in form and in content, did not identify with Kalinin’s ideal of “an economically stable, agriculturally compact group,” nor did shtetl Jews identify as urban Jews, or vice-versa. Most urban Jews, in fact, identified more with the Russian culture, which during the 1930s had become almost synonymous with the idea of Soviet culture and therefore was perceived as universal rather than particular.

The unmarked position that the Russians occupied was a result of the Soviet attempt to rectify their oppressing and overbearing practices during the tsarist rule. As mentioned, the most important part of the Soviet nationalities policy was fighting against Great Russian Chauvinism. In order to make up for this injustice, the Soviets initially decided not to grant Russians any national rights. Indeed, in the early years of the Soviet Union "Russian" did not constitute a nationality, and therefore remained a politically empty category, unless it referred to Great Russian Chauvinism. Ironically, this actually resulted in preserving the structure of the old regime - the

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90 Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, 34.
91 Ibid., 33.
92 Ibid., 41–42.
94 Ibid.,
Soviets literally left the Russians in an unmarked position, and by doing so they also unintentionally turned them into the Soviet Union State-bearing people.\textsuperscript{95} The Russians, thus, were placed in a very similar spot to that of France’s abstract individual. Urban Jews were mostly identified with this universal and abstract position. As exemplary Soviets, all they wanted was to shed their particularities and become truly universal. This level of abstraction, however, was exactly what made them particular. Jews, as a nationality, were meant to be emancipated, progressed and elevated to the universal by a process of particularization.\textsuperscript{96} By trying to bypass the particular, Soviet Jews, as a group, were denied the universal - becoming a progressed nation. Only the Russians, as the Soviet model of a progressed nation, were allowed such level of abstraction.

The universal position occupied by urban Jews, thus, unavoidably resulted in marking Soviet Jews, as a group, as particular. While as individuals they were mostly able to get away with this nonidentification, like in the case of Ilya Ehrenburg, as a group (or a nongroup) they became the target of unfavorable feelings harbored by their fellow Soviets. This particular position of visibility that the Soviet Jews came to occupy resulted in reinforcing popular antisemitism. Between 1927-1932 the Party launched a massive campaign against antisemitism that included Party sponsored formal appeals, celebrity speeches, rallies, books, numerous newspaper articles and more. The main idea promoted in this campaign was a combination of two contradictions - that Jews did not in fact occupy a peculiar position in Soviet society, and that their peculiar position had a perfectly good reason. It was getting harder and harder to ignore, however, the fact that the Jewish overrepresentation in Soviet leadership and other public organizations (about 19% in 1929)

\textsuperscript{96} for a discussion about (Anika walke shows how the efforts of Korenizatsiia resulted in universalizing Jewish form rather than enforcing it, see Walke, \textit{Pioneers and Partisans}, 37–65.
was met with growing resentment. Alongside the campaign against antisemitism, thus, the Party also attempted to "normalize" urban Jews by trying to promote Jewish national traits of language and culture among them, and increase the number of workers within them. These attempts, however, were unsuccessful.\footnote{Slezkine, \textit{The Jewish Century}, 2004, 248–52.} It was exactly because they refused the “normalization” of becoming a more cohesive group that Soviet Jews suffered such an antisemitic response. If group identification was not forming from within, it was to be forced on them from without. In other words, if Soviet Jews did not see themselves as a national group, they were forced to become one by an external gaze, by being seen – and resented – as such.

Soviet Jews lacked identification with the ideal of becoming a nation and, as a result of not being libidinally invested in the same ideal, they also lacked identification with one another. Identification was nonetheless forced on them, not only by the marking of antisemitism but also by Soviet bureaucracy. On December 27 1932, the Soviet government implemented an official identification document all citizens were required to carry. This internal passport, as it was called, included a registration of each individual’s nationality under article 5. The internal passport transformed the category of “nationalities” in the Soviet Union from historically constituted formations into a formal and documented bureaucracy that persisted throughout the Soviet Union’s existence. For most people in the Soviet Union, this category usually coincided with their place of origin. This was, of course, not the case for the Jews. They were now formally othered in most of their places of residency and origin. Jews, to begin with, were constituted as a question due to their incompatibility with the concept of modern nations and this incompatibility now received an official and permanent state-sponsored stamp. Unlike Jews outside the Soviet Union, who were
affected by racial theories, Soviet Jews did not carry their otherness on their racialized bodies. Nevertheless, with this new form of bureaucratic identification, they now carried it in their pockets.

_The Friendship of the Peoples Fantasy_

The year 1932, as the gateway to “High Stalinism,” is considered a turning point in the Soviet nationalities Policy. This process is often referred to as “the Great Retreat” – the gradual abandoning of revolutionary practices in favor of more traditional values. An important part of this process was the rehabilitation, and even celebration, of the Russian nation. The Russians were previously denied any national rights to avoid provoking the resentment of other, previously oppressed, nations and nationalities. During the Great Retreat, however, the Russian culture and language started occupying a unifying role within the entire Soviet Union. Policy changes included the Russification of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to create and strengthen a “Russian core,” and a propaganda campaign celebrating the unifying role of the Russian nation and culture and praising the Russian language, literature and art. It was through the Russian language that this process of rehabilitation was justified. Unlike the Russian history, the Russian language was much easier to rehabilitate especially when focusing on its literary past. Russian literature had indeed become one of the building blocks of this unifying policy, and Pushkin, Tolstoi, Gorky and Turgenev, along with the Russian language as a whole, were celebrated as a source of pride for all Soviet people. In 1937, the Russian language became a mandatory subject in all schools and the Russian culture started serving as the core of Soviet culture.

98 Nicholas Sergeyevitch Timasheff, _The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia_ (E. P. Dutton, Incorporated, 1946); See also Martin, _The Affirmative Action Empire_; Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism.”


100 Martin, _The Affirmative Action Empire_, 430.
This celebration of Russianness seems to be a complete reversal of the previous policy which encouraged the diverse national forms of different nationalities. These attempts, however, still continued to remain in effect, but in a new context. In 1934 Stalin announced some major changes in the internal structure and state of progression of the Soviet Union:

This [economic and cultural] progression is remarkable in that it introduced fundamental changes to the structure of the USSR and radically changed the face of the country. During this period, the USSR was radically transformed, ridding itself of everything backward and medieval. From an agrarian country, it became an industrial country. From a country of small individual agriculture, it became a country of collective large-scale mechanized agriculture. From a dark, illiterate and uncultured country, it has become - or rather, is becoming - a literate and cultured country covered by a huge network of higher, secondary and primary schools operating in the languages of the different nations of the USSR.\(^\text{101}\)

With this declaration, the Soviet Union as a whole was perceived as having progressed to a new stage on the Marxist revolutionary timeline – a stage in which backwardness had been overcome and was now a thing of the past. This meant that all Soviet nations and nationalities could no longer occupy a backward position because backwardness itself had been eradicated. Institutions that were created to deal with backwardness were therefore shotting down, The Jewish Section among them. The science of pedology was banned for claiming that some groups, such as women and minorities, might still need assistance along the path to modernity, and so was the science of ethnology for assuming that some contemporary cultures might still be primitive or traditional. And yet, the division to nations and nationalities was kept. Indeed, the national form was now meant to take up less space but it nonetheless prevailed. The Leninist idea of “unity through diversity” was still guiding the way but the spotlight had now shifted from diversity to unity.\(^\text{102}\)

This disarray of contradictions resulted in the emergence of a new organizing metaphor - The Friendship of the Peoples (though one can also wonder if it was not the metaphor that first

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\(^{102}\) Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” 442.
produced the paradoxes.) In December 1935 Stalin introduced this new metaphor to represent the idea of Soviet unity. This was a new development of the previous idea of the Brotherhood of the Peoples - brotherhood being the classic socialist metaphor of proletarian unity - that was prevalent during the 1920s but did not play a major role in promoting Soviet unity. Through the new “friendship” metaphor, Stalin attempted to put a greater emphasis on proletarian unity without dismissing the idea of national diversity. This was a way of cultivating a unifying Soviet culture, mostly Russian in its origin, while maintaining - through the idea of “friendship”- a clear contrast with the tsarist period and its Great Russian Chauvinism. In a 1935 meeting, in honor of some exceptionally productive Tajik and Turkmen kolkhozniki, Stalin announced:

Today’s meeting is a striking proof of the fact that the former distrust between the peoples of the USSR has already come to an end. That distrust has been replaced with a complete mutual trust. The friendship between the peoples of the USSR is growing and strengthening. That, comrades, is the most valuable of all that the Bolshevik nationalities policy has produced.

And the friendship between the peoples of the USSR is a great and serious victory. For while this friendship exists, the people of our country will be free and unconquerable. While this friendship lives and blossoms, we are afraid of no one, neither internal nor external enemies. You can have no doubt about this, comrades.

With this speech, the importance of this metaphor for the Soviet project becomes clearer. Stalin calls this friendship “a great victory,” but over what? Over the previously oppressive rule of tsarist Russia, of course. If we go back to the Declaration of Rights of Russia’s Nations, in the early days of the October revolution, we should find that same guiding principle: “the nationalities of Russia were systematically pitted against each other.” It read. “There must be no return to such policy of instigation. From now on it must be substituted by the policy of voluntary and honest union of Nationalities of Russia.” In this, we can find the very trajectory that took us from this early

104 Ibid., 439.
Declaration of Rights to Stalin’s 1935 speech. The same guiding principle is indeed present in both – maintaining a clear and uncompromising distance from the days of tsarist rule.

The Friendship of the Peoples, thus, is a metaphor that is meant to sustain and reinforce a difference. It is meant to sustain the universality of the Soviet project through a clear differentiation from the particularizing tsarist regime. We have seen how the universal always requires a particularized other, a difference, against which to define its own boundaries. Tsarist Russia was that other for the Bolsheviks. This is why the national organization of Soviet society was able to survive Stalin’s declaration of the triumph of socialism, when so many other things previously acceptable were now declared obsolete and even counterrevolutionary. If backwardness had been eliminated, if everyone were able to progress on the Marxist revolutionary timeline to the point of socialism, then the idea of nations – an idea belonging to the epoch of capitalism – should have been eliminated as well. And yet it prevailed. This was because the fantasy of Friendship, of a Soviet society that is voluntarily united, homogenous by choice, was the fundamental fantasy sustaining the Soviet project as a universal project.

Interestingly enough, the metaphor of “friendship” was an important part of the French universal project as well. We have seen how, in French republicanism, it was sexual difference that sustained the structure of French society. Emile Durkheim, a prominent republican sociologist, evoked the idea of friendship to explain this universal-particular paradox. He used the concept of the conjugal family to criticize the patriarchal family as obsolete and relied on the idea of friendship and solidarity as the foundation of “conjugal society.” According to Durkheim, the idea of difference was crucial to sustain social relations, since it was the basis for “organic solidarity” – the idea that different elements are necessary for a successful and complete union.

For Durkheim, this difference was the sexual difference between men and women, and his model for a functioning society, therefore, was based on heterosexuality.\textsuperscript{106} We have seen earlier how, in the Soviet case, the paradox between the universal and the particular was displaced from the realm of the individual (man and woman) to that of nationalities. It makes sense, thus, that the fantasy of “friendship” was also displaced from the realm of the private household to that of solidarity between nations – the Friendship of the Peoples. In Stalin’s words: “while this friendship exists, the people of our country will be free and unconquerable. While this friendship lives and blossoms, we are afraid of no one, neither internal nor external enemies.” It is only through this unity of differences that the Soviet universal project can sustain itself and define its own boundaries, its own difference, from its predecessors.

In 1936 a new Soviet constitution was introduced, declaring that the foundations of a classless society have been laid and a second phase of development has begun. This second phase applied to Soviet nations as well. \textit{Pravda} announced proudly that the new constitution created five new Soviet republics and five new autonomous republics. This was an outcome, it argued, of the Soviet policy’s efforts to facilitate the achievement of stateness as well as the consolidation of nationhood. This success in consolidating people into nations, the article read, represents one of the great victories of socialism in the USSR.\textsuperscript{107} The propaganda campaign surrounding the 1936 constitution started promoting the terms “socialist nations” and “socialist national states,” that became an important addition to the Friendship fantasy. These terms were first introduced by Stalin in 1929 alongside the idea of “bourgeois nations:”

Examples [of bourgeois nations] are the French, British, Italian, North-American and other similar nations. The Russian, Ukrainian, Tatar, Armenian, Georgian and other nations in Russia were likewise bourgeois nations before the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Soviet system in our country. Naturally, the fate of such nations is linked

\textsuperscript{106} Scott, \textit{Only Paradoxes to Offer}, 9–10.

\textsuperscript{107} Martin, \textit{The Affirmative Action Empire}, 447.
with the fate of capitalism; with the fall of capitalism, such nations must depart from the scene. […] But there are other nations. These are the new, Soviet nations, which developed and took shape on the basis of the old, bourgeois nations after the overthrow of capitalism in Russia, after the elimination of the bourgeoisie and its nationalist parties, after the establishment of the Soviet system. […] Such nations must be qualified as socialist nations.  

With the introduction of the new constitution, essentially declaring the end of capitalism in the Soviet Union, “bourgeois nations” were no longer supposed to exist. The nations that survived the overthrowing of capitalism, therefore, had to be socialist nations and as such, they had to meet the criteria of progressed nations. This applied to Soviet Jews as well. Semyon Dimanshtein, a leading theorist of national issues in the USSR and an expert on Soviet Jews, said in 1937:

The Jews became a true nation after the creation of the Jewish Autonomous district in Birobidzhan. By acquiring their own territory, their own statehood, the toiling Jews of the USSR received a crucial element that they had lacked before and that had made it impossible for them to be considered a nation in the scientific sense of the term. And so it happened that, like many other Soviet nationalities completing the process of national consolidation, the Jewish national minority became a nation as a result of receiving its own national administrative entity in the Soviet Union.  

Having been allotted their own national territory, Soviet Jews supposedly had everything that they needed to become a real nation. As a nationality, they managed to survive the liquidation and ethnic cleansing to which other nations and nationalities – now designated “enemy nations” - were subjected during the 1930s, Like all other “Socialist nations,” Soviet Jews were expected to complete the process of national consolidation, and like other Soviet nations they were supposed to get there by following the leading example of the Russian people.

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108 “The National Question and Leninism.”
110 Between 1935 and 1938 a limited number of stigmatized diaspora nationalities, who shared cross-border ethnic ties with nations-states outside of the Soviet Union, were subjected to deportation and ethnic cleansing. Terry Martin shows how this was done not against the principles of Soviet nation-building but as part of these very efforts. See Martin, The Affirmative Action Empire, 311–43.
With the end of capitalism, Stalin declared that the previous mistrust of non-Russians toward the Russian nation had been overcome. As mentioned earlier, the Russians were not only rehabilitated but were also given a special and privileged position of a kind of a “model nation” - they became “first among equals:”

All the peoples [of the USSR], participants in the great socialist construction, can take pride in the results of their work. All of them from the smallest to the largest are equal Soviet patriots. But the first among equals are the Russian people, the Russian workers, the Russian toilers, whose role in the entire Great Proletarian Revolution, from the first victory to today’s brilliant period of its development, has been exclusively great.

In this excerpt, taken from a 1936 Pravda editorial, the expression “first among equals” was first coined and quickly became a common epithet for the Russian people.\textsuperscript{111} It should not be too surprising to us, at this point, that the Soviet nationalities policy – as a policy rooted in Enlightenment universal ideas – produced yet another paradox. As first among equals, however, the Russian people were cast in a crucial role in the Soviet Friendship fantasy. They, as the most progressive people of all, were meant to be the unifying element, tying all other Soviet nationalities together: “The cultures of the peoples of the USSR,” read a 1938 article of the party’s major theoretical journal, “are historically linked with the culture of the Russian people. They have felt, and continue to feel […] the beneficent influence of the progressive Russian culture.”\textsuperscript{112} The Russian people thus, now occupied a completely different role than they did in the 1920s – they had transformed from oppressors into beneficiaries. This was a way of creating a different history, separated from the dreaded tsarist past. In the latter, Russians mostly stood for progress as oppression in the form of Great Russian Chauvinism, but after this was overcome what was left was progress as liberation - a guiding and unifying element.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 452.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 456.
The paradoxes that the Soviet nationalities policy kept producing, thus, were maintained under the organization of the Friendship fantasy. As we have seen, this fantasy consisted of different groups of equals, united in friendship by those leading the way. Where did Soviet Jews fit in all of this? As one of the socialist nations to survive the end of capitalism, they were supposed to be able to occupy their proper place in the First among Equals paradigm. In other words, they were supposed to be equals but they were not, in any way, supposed to be first. They were meant to blend in rather than stand out. Their question mark, however, continued to follow them despite the Soviet efforts to turn it into an exclamation point. Yuri Slezkine defines Soviet Jews as “an ethnic group that was so good at becoming invisible that it had become visible as an elite.”113 This is the paradox of the exemplary, the particularly universal. Soviet Jews, as a nationality, now possessed their own territory but many refused to live in it. Jews in the Soviet Union did not constitute an economically stable entity and did not share a “psychological make-up.” They were, in effect, completely divided. The urban half of this nationality, consisting mostly of the intelligentsia, continued to reject its national language. This resulted in a distorted situation, under the logic of the Soviet nationalities policy, in which the Russian Soviet intelligentsia was not in fact nationally Russian.114 Soviet Jews had gotten better at being Russians than Russians themselves, they were indeed exemplary Soviets.

By refusing to play their own part in the social structure organized by the Friendship fantasy, Soviet Jews persisted as a disrupting element. They kept challenging the teleology of progress that was at the heart of the Soviet nationalities policy; and they did not fit, in any way, into the idea of Friendship that was based on different equal groups that are different from one another and therefore also complimentary, and are united under the guidance of the exemplary

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114 Ibid., 297–98.
Soviet Russians. Soviet Jews were themselves at the Forefront, not as a group but as individuals who had managed to shed their national form. This was, as per Stalin, a contradiction of the main thesis of Leninism, “according to which national differences cannot disappear in the near future but will remain in existence for a long time, even after the victory of the proletarian revolution on a world scale.” By disrupting the fundamental Friendship fantasy, Soviet Jews disrupted the very thing that worked to veil what the Soviet Union did not want to know about itself – that its constant attempt to avoid oppression ultimately led to a new form of oppression. This fantasy, thus, veiled the lack of tolerance of otherness that was embedded in these universal ideas all along. For Jacque Lacan, a fundamental fantasy works to sustain an illusion of wholeness and completeness that is necessary for maintaining a sense of being. It is the story subjects tell themselves about their positioning vis-à-vis others. The Soviet Union, as the product of a revolution - indeed the most extreme act of breaking and differing from a past – positioned itself as the opposite of the tsarist regime that preceded it. So much so, that it was willing to embrace the overtly capitalist idea of national self-determination to be able to sustain this difference.

For this very reason, Soviet Jews remained a question that could not be answered by the Soviet nationalities policy, despite all efforts. They did not fit the discourse of oppressed-backward nations vs. oppressor-progressed ones, because they were indeed both backward and progressed at the same time. As a nation they were never able to meet the criteria for becoming a progressed nation, but as individuals they became the most progressed of all, occupying a position that was not designated for them. This incompatibility denied the integration of Soviet Jews into the Friendship fantasy and kept reproducing their otherness despite their exceptionally successful assimilation. Marx might have been at least partially right arguing that the way a question is

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formulated already determines its resolution. Posing the Jewish Question did not necessarily offer it any resolution but it did nonetheless determine the (im)possibility of one. Trying to answer the Jewish Question using the same discourse that, to begin with, formulated it as a question based on its difference from other modern nations was bound to keep reproducing this very difference. Soviet Jews, therefore, were stuck in a peculiar and paradoxical position between the universal and the particular. As the next chapter will show, negotiating the tension that this position produced was the greatest challenge facing the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in their attempt to document Jewish particular suffering during the years of the Great Patriotic War.
Chapter Two: The Writer Supposed to Know

As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere there is transference.

Jacque Lacan
The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964

On August 21, 1941, a group of Soviet Jewish writers, journalists, and actors issued a radio broadcast from Moscow that sought to mobilize Jewish communities worldwide for the fight against fascism. It was on this occasion that Ilya Ehrenburg delivered his famous speech, describing how the German invasion of the Soviet Union had led him to rediscover his Jewish identity: “I grew up in a Russian city. My native language is Russian. I am a Russian writer. Now, like all Russians, I am defending my homeland. But the Nazis have reminded me of something else: my mother’s name was Hannah. I am a Jew. I say this with pride. Hitler hates us more than anyone else. And that does us credit.” That radio broadcast was the first step toward the creation of a Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist committee (JAC) in February 1942.

The Nazi onslaught on the Soviet Union was deadly for millions of people, especially Soviet Jews. The full scope of mass annihilation did not become visible until spring 1943 when the Red Army started its counter-offensive, liberating temporarily occupied Soviet soil. Red Army soldiers and survivors showered the JAC with testimonies of what they had seen or lived through, transforming the committee into a center for the documentation of Nazi atrocities against Jews. It was in this context, in 1943, that the project of a “Black Book” documenting the Nazi crimes against Soviet Jews was born.

The Black Book is not only an important source for providing a more complete picture of the Jewish Holocaust in Europe; it also showcases the singular experience of Soviet Jews who

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were persecuted as both Jews and Soviets, and who experienced the atrocities, and attested to them, through this dual position. Indeed, the Jews who were persecuted in the Soviet territories were not just Jews, they were Soviet Jews, and as such they were also the core representatives of what the Nazis perceived as their arch enemy – Judeo-Bolshevism. When reading the Black Book, it quickly becomes apparent that this is not only a Jewish story. Even though the project was concerned with documenting the barbaric crimes committed against Jews, its objective, as stated in the original preface by the original editors – Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, was first and foremost to document the attack on Soviet citizens, as “the anti-Semitic campaign was undertaken to conceal a larger assault of the rights and freedom of the working classes.”\(^\text{117}\) For the editors of *The Black Book*, the connection between reactionism and antisemitism was never so “graphic and concrete” as it was in the moment of the Nazi invasion. While the fascists “loudly proclaimed the cruelest forms of terror against the Jews”, they were quietly forwarding an attack against freedom at large:

Beneath the thunder of Judeo-phobic drums, beneath the din of malevolent slander, and in the poisonous haze of anti-Semitic lies, they quickly and methodically dealt with hundreds of thousands of Polish intellectuals and activists for democracy. They screamed about reprisals against the Jews; at the same time they placed the people of Poland and Czechoslovakia in shackles. In books and Newspapers, they printed descriptions and photographs of the Warsaw ghetto, and inconspicuously, on the sly, they murdered Poles and Czechs.\(^\text{118}\)

Antisemitism, thus, was meant to conceal the real target of fascism – the free world led by the proletariat for itself. Grossman’s narrative depicts the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 as the final stage in the fascist fight for world domination. The fascists knew, according to Grossman, that if they defeated the Soviet Union the American and British resistance would become useless, and so, on June 1941, the order was given to begin the massacre of the Soviets:


\(^\text{118}\) Ibid., xxvii–xxviii.
“On a scale never before seen by humanity, there began a massacre of millions of Soviet citizens, chief among whom were communist, military commissars, and Jews.” This massacre, in turn, says Grossman, was meant to “paralyze the will to resist among the freedom-loving Soviet people.”

Throughout The Black Book preface, we cannot ignore the attempt to negotiate a project that is not only Jewish and not only Soviet, but both at the same time. The translator of the English language edition of the book, published in the United States in 2002, cautions the readers of what he calls “a clear Soviet bias” that is reflected in the materials prepared by the book’s “Soviet contributors.” It is interesting how often Western observers identify Soviet perceptions as “biases” while treating their own liberal values as transparent neutralities. My intention is to treat this Soviet tonality not as a “bias” but as a discourse that formed the bedrock of a Soviet Jewish identity.

Most scholars regard The Black Book as a Jewish document and read through the soviet passages. It was not only the editors and the initiators of The Black Book project, leaders of the JAC, who exemplified such a clear Soviet tonality, however. A compelling case is the testimony of a Soviet-Jewish survivor from Ukraine, who described the last moments of the Jews of Uman, using these words: “Some wept, saying goodbye to their families and friends; others walked along heads held high, singing the International one last time.”

Western readers familiar with Holocaust testimonies might expect the last sentence to end with Shma Israel rather than the

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119 Ibid., xxix.
122 Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir Pavlovich Naumov, Stalin’s Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (Yale University Press, 2005), 190.
123 literally “hear Israel” – the most important Jewish prayer that also became traditional to recite as last words
International. It is this tension between the universality of Soviet ideas and the particularity of Jewish suffering, as it is brought forth in the testimonies, that is at the center of this chapter.

This chapter reflects on three kinds of sources in combination: Grossmann’s and Ehrenburg’s contributions to The Black Book project; survivor and witness testimonies gathered by the project editors; and letters from Soviet citizens that were sent directly to the Jewish Antifascist Committee. This triple engagement makes it possible to map the discursive realm that shaped Soviet Jewish existence, suffering, and commemoration during the Nazi onslaught on the Soviet Union. The chapter explores the tension between the universality of being Soviet and the particularity of suffering as a Jew that pervaded the project of the Black Book. It also shows how the very existence of the project differentiated the case of Soviet Jewish survivors from that of their counterparts in Central and Western Europe - the Black Book created a horizon of recognition for Jewish suffering that ultimately, and ironically, helped reinforce Jewish particularized otherness in postwar Soviet society.

*Editing between Being and Suffering*

The German occupation not only turned Soviet Jews into targets of persecution, but also exceptionalized and distinguished them from the rest of Soviet society. Ehrenburg’s quote, with which this chapter opens, is an emblem of this exceptionalizing experience. As Ehrenburg himself states, up until the war his Jewishness was completely forgotten. In fact, he defines himself as a “Russian writer.” By that he does not only refer to the language in which he writes, but also, and more so, to the literary and cultural tradition that informs his identity – the Russian culture of Pushkin and Gorky. This Russian culture, however, was unmarked by any one nationality. As discussed in the previous chapter, one important outcome of the early Soviet nationalities policy was that “Russian” was not considered a nationality. In an attempt to fight against Great Russian
Chauvinism, Russians were not granted any national rights. Yuri Slezkine shows how this ultimately resulted in turning “Russian” into a politically empty category and Russians into the Soviet state-bearing people, essentially equating “Russianness” with “Sovietness”. When Ehrenburg identified as a Russian writer, thus, he was in fact identifying himself with what was considered culturally Soviet. It was the war, and specifically the Germans’ intents to kill all Soviet Jews, that reminded Ehrenburg of his Jewishness and sent him on a quest to document Jewish suffering. This quest directed this exemplary Soviet away from a universal experience and into the realm of the particular.

The tension between particular and universal suffering pervades The Black Book project and informs Grossman’s and Ehrenburg’s careful editing in their constant attempt to balance the Soviet with the Jewish. These negotiations, I argue, were not a product of state coercion, but an honest attempt on the part of the committee members to reintegrate Jews back into Soviet society after finding themselves exceptionalized by Nazi persecution. In an unpublished foreword written for The Black Book, Ehrenburg opens by introducing the project as a primarily Jewish one, showcasing “the extermination of the defenseless Jewish population by the German invaders.” He describes the form of the documents gathered by stating that these are not products of fiction but rather real stories, letters and diaries. He then proceeds to describe their content: “It is not just grief and horror in the face of the low-life fascists that appear before the reader. It is also pride for a great man. Let it be known to everyone, the feat of these people – Russians, Poles, Byelorussians

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or Ukrainians, who risked their lives to rescue fellow citizens.”  

While the foreword begins with a focus on Jewish suffering, it quickly shifts to a description of Soviet solidarity, where Jews are now referred to as “fellow citizens.” In a memorandum sent to the central committee about a month later, in September 1944, Ehrenburg again stated that “it is extremely important to show the solidarity of the Soviet population, the rescue of individual Jews by Russians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians and poles.” Emphasizing displays of solidarity on the part of non-Jews was one of Ehrenburg’s objectives.

Ehrenburg was not alone. Grossman, too, was very concerned with maintaining an idea of a unified Soviet society by stressing Jewish and non-Jewish solidarity and deemphasizing the particularity of the Jewish experience. “When I read the material you put together,” said Grossman in a meeting of The Black Book literary committee in October 1944,

I was struck by the all too frequent use of the word “Jew”. If they write “a Jew was led away” in a short note — that’s all right. But, if the book as a whole is about Jews, then we should avoid the use of the word “Jew”. Otherwise this word will be repeated 6,000 times and will irritate the reader. We can write “they assembled people”, or “people went to the square”, or “five people fell”, without writing the word “Jew.”

With this observation in mind, Grossman composes his preface to The Black Book painting a picture of a unified peaceful Soviet society that is being invaded by outsiders, rather than emphasizing the particularity of the victims. “Only the stubborn, bloody struggle of the freedom-loving people of the world, above all the Soviet People,” writes Grossman, “demolished the edifice constructed by the German fascists and destroyed the executioner’s block that Hitler erected in the

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126 Chernaya Kniga - Predislovie by Ilya Ehrenburg, August 1944, record group p.21, subdivision p.21.1, File number 1, the Ilya Ehrenburg collection, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem
127 Rubenstein and Altman, The Unknown Black Book, xxv.
128 Redlich, War, the Holocaust and Stalinism (Routledge, 2013), 352–53.
heart of Europe.” 129 Grossman further explains how the “pseudo-science” of racism was used to distract the masses from their true objective interests and pit brother against brother in blind racial hatred. As he describes the hardships and suffering of Soviet citizens at large, Grossman talks about the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Russians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians. This was in accordance with Hitler’s plan to eventually annihilate the Slavic people along with the Jews. This persistent attempt to not isolate Jews as the ultimate targets of Nazi aggression was part of the effort to depict Soviet society as one unified whole and to avoid distinguishing the Jews from the rest, and vice versa.

Grossman then proceeds to describe the mechanisms of the Nazi extermination mission. He describes how, in the occupied Soviet territories, the ghetto confinements of the Jews were short lived and were soon followed by the murder of all its inhabitants. The ghettos in this context served primarily as means to gather together those who were condemned to death. The mass executions always started after the arrival of German civil authorities, Gestapo, SD Einsatzkommandos, gendarmes, and police units and battalions, which were responsible for the coordination and implementation of the executions. While describing the details of these death operations, Grossman does not provide any hint, however, to a phenomenon mentioned repeatedly in many of the testimonies gathered for the book – that of local collaborations with German authorities, on both the establishment of the ghettos and the mass murders.

Grossman depicts this operation in the following manner: first, the gestapo would arrive (but only after the city had been occupied by the German army for about 10 days). A little time was needed to coordinate the work of the Gestapo, the police, and the commandment’s office.

They would then establish punitive and investigative networks and start resettling the Jews into the ghettos. While resettling them, however, the Germans were secretly occupied with coordinating the mass murders and selecting and preparing the extermination site. Local prisoners, Red Army POW’s, and Jews themselves were forced to dig mass graves without realizing this was the trenches’ purpose. After these preparations, says Grossman, only one thing could stand in the Germans’ way of implementing their plan – the inability of the SS, police units and SD Einsatzkommandos to keep up with the huge numbers of the millions doomed to death. As many of the testimonies reveal, however, the Nazi authorities did not always have to handle these huge numbers by themselves. The tight, neat German operation, described by Grossman, excludes the numerous stories of victims and witnesses that specifically mention local police forces as occupying a formal or informal role in these operations, as well as stories of civil local support. One testimony, for instance, describes a mass murder that took place in the depth of Darevsky forest, just outside of Shpola, Ukraine. The mass murder, the testimony reveals, was carried out by Ukrainian police under German command. In another testimony, about life in the Minsk ghetto, we learn how the Gestapo raided Rakovaya street, while the local police surrounded the street and drove everyone out of their apartments. These are but two examples of the active part local authorities took in the Nazi operation in Soviet occupied territories. Many other testimonies are filled with such examples.

This absence in Grossman’s narrative is just as revealing as the presence of his carefully chosen words. Both Grossman and Ehrenburg tried hard to produce a book about the Jewish tragedy, while also trying to prevent exceptionalizing Soviet Jews any further. They sought to meet

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130 Ibid., xxx.
131 Rubenstein and Altman, The Unknown Black Book, 185.
132 Ibid., 239.
this challenge by emphasizing the contrast between the German perpetrators and Soviet society as a whole. Yet this proved to be difficult to implement, considering the growing numbers of testimonies that described collaborations with the Germans by local police auxiliaries as well as ordinary citizens. Solomon Bregman, a Soviet official (RSFSR Deputy Commissar of State Control) who in 1944 joined the JAC as a presidium member, expressed his own concerns over the number of accounts in The Black Book materials that mentioned “the vile activity of traitors among the Ukrainians, Lithuanians, et al. This,” wrote Bregman in a report evaluating The Black Book, “diminishes the force of the main accusation against the Germans, which should be the primary and decisive purpose of the book.”

Many of the editing decisions that were made by Grossman and Ehrenburg were based on such concerns, which they themselves shared. Ehrenburg attempted to resolve the tension between these two opposing narratives of Soviet solidarity and local collaborations by calling the collaborators politsai instead of referring to their nationality. “By ‘politsai’ we understand not a German, but a traitor,” said Ehrenburg in a meeting of The Black Book literary committee. Bregman’s concerns, however, resulted in the exclusion of many of the testimonies that were, in the eyes of the editors, too focused on local collaborations. These testimonies were eventually published after the fall of the Soviet Union as a separate volume, entitled, *The Unknown Black Book*.

*The Testimonies*

It is tempting to assume that these exclusions of testimonies, as well as the other attempts to advance a universal idea of Soviet solidarity in place of the particularity of Jewish suffering,

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133 Redlich, *War, the Holocaust and Stalinism*, 2013, 355–56.
134 Ibid., 352.
135 Rubenstein and Altman, *The Unknown Black Book*. 
was one of two things: either a service paid to Soviet authorities in order to get some version of
the book published, or a product of assimilated intelligentsia, completely disconnected from the
majority of Soviet Jews. This would not explain, however, the fact these attempts were present in
the testimonies themselves, and not only in the approved ones but also in those that were excluded.
Despite the numerous and harsh descriptions of local persecutions in these testimonies, the
distinction between the Germans and the locals, so carefully emphasized by Grossman in the
book’s preface, is nonetheless maintained. This is made possible by a particular and consistent use
of language that differentiates Germans from locals, ultimately creating the same opposition
between German invaders and Soviet citizens advanced by the editors of the book.

The story of Ida, a Jewish woman from Kiev, is filled with references to lurking neighbors,
waiting to turn her and her family in to the Germans, along with any other Jew they could spot. As
her testimony unfolds, we learn how her family was indeed handed over to the Germans by their
own neighbors on Tverskaya; how her Ukrainian friend and coworker refused to take in her sister’s
children, knowing that her neighbors would turn her in immediately; and how she herself, while
hiding in her Russian husband’s family house in Podol, was often mentioned by nosey neighbors
who were trying to establish her whereabouts. These neighbors also held discussions about what
the fate of her son should be, considering he was half Jewish:

The building superintendent raised the question of Igor's life - his mother was a Jew, after
all (I did not exist) - saying he needed to be handed over to the Germans. The men in our
family somehow came up with proof, genuine or otherwise, that Igor had been baptized,
and so saved him. They coached the child at home to say that he had no mother, that she
had left. Everyone in the building tried to catch him off guard, suddenly asking: "Where's
your mama?" Outside the apartment, he was forbidden to say the word "mama:' and at
home, only quietly, so that no one would hear.

136 Ibid., 55–57.
137 Ibid., 57.
In another testimony, written in the form of a letter addressed to Ehrenburg, Blyuma, a Jewish woman from Khmelnik, writes about what she experienced during the German occupation. Her story reveals a tight collaboration between the local authorities and the Germans:

I shall begin with January 9, 1942. Early that morning, we, the Jews, were surrounded by Ukrainian police and an SS detachment. A panic began, no one could grasp what awaited us. Around eight in the morning, the local police and the Germans went on a rampage: they smashed windows, fired their guns, and finally began driving people from their homes. They formed them into groups and drove them out into the pine forest. I did not know what to do or where to go with the children. I hid my older son, Misha. My three-year-old, Isaiah, and I were beaten and driven out onto the street, where I saw an awful sight. Corpses were strewn everywhere, the snow was red with blood, the barbarians were running around and shouting like wild animals: "Beat the kikes! Jude kaput’ Then they fired into the crowd.138

Throughout her testimony, the Germans and the local police are depicted as almost inseparable and it is clear that the woman in this testimony makes no distinction between them. She refers to both of them in the same manner, as “barbarians [who] were running around and shouting like wild animals”. This should not come as a surprise given the extent and nature of collaborations many of the testimonies display. And yet, by treating the Nazis and the local collaborators as one evil whole, this testimony actually differs significantly from many of the others.

Ida’s testimony mentioned above, for instance, is a long indictment against the locals surrounding her in both Kiev and Podol. And yet, she never once uses any shameful adjectives when referring to them. The Germans, however, are referred to as “the German barbarians”.139 This could very well have been a random choice of language but reading through the testimonies indicates that this was in fact a consistent line. Even Blyuma’s testimony, which clearly differs from this line, still presents some form of a distinction. She ends her letter to Ehrenburg with the promise of writing him again: “I am waiting for an answer from you. In my next letter, I will try, dear comrade Ilya Ehrenburg, to explain the behavior and attitude of the workers toward the

138 Ibid., 151.
139 Ibid., 54.
Jews.” Unfortunately, that letter was never found in the Ehrenburg archive, but it is safe to assume that Blyuma recognized how poorly her non-Jewish neighbors were depicted in her letter. Her need to offer an explanation for their actions suggests that while she indeed saw the Germans and the local police as one barbaric and fascist whole, she still distinguished them from her collaborating neighbors.

The excluded testimonies leave no doubt about the extent and nature of local collaborations, and yet the use of the word “barbarians”, as well as other derogatory names, is almost exclusively limited to the Germans. The following testimony provides compelling evidence for how carefully this distinction is maintained:

On October 8, 1941, at four in the morning, another pogrom began. So that they would not have to yell their heads off, the gendarmerie took the Ukrainian police and others who wished to take part. It was still dark outside when three men burst into our home with shots, pounding, and yelling. We decided that they had come to loot us. Before we had time to turn on the light and get out of bed, the three came in. Two of them were like rabid tigers with awful eyes that filled you with fear as soon as you looked at them. They were the usual SS barbarians, while the third, a civilian, was hitting the door and windows with a club and shouting: "Let's go. Let's go!" It was obvious that he was a Ukrainian and not even a policeman.

Here, we are told about three individuals who were working together as a group – all three of them came in together, but only two of them, “the usual SS barbarians”, were like “rabid tigers with awful eyes that filled you with fear as soon as you looked at them.” The third individual, who clearly took an active part in the assault, is described as nothing but a Ukrainian civilian. This testimony also reveals another common theme. While the use of the word “barbarians” to refer to the Nazis was overwhelmingly widespread across the testimonies, referring to them as if they were animals was almost just as common. One of the testimonies reads as follows: “I do not remember the Gestapo agent's name just now, but I will never forget his icy, translucent eyes, his abrupt way

140 Ibid., 154.
141 Ibid., 188.
of speaking that sounded like a dog barking, or his enormous height and long, ape-like arms.”

Like the use of the word “barbarians”, this terminology was rarely employed to refer to local collaborators.

Reducing The Black Book’s editorial choices to simple Soviet propaganda and coercion conceals a real problem that was part of the Soviet Jewish experience of the Holocaust in Soviet occupied territories: the fear of separating Jews from the whole of Soviet society of which they were very much a part. Such cynical interpretation also renders the overwhelmingly consistent choice of language in the testimonies themselves meaningless or insignificant. Only if we take the project seriously do we recognize the real dilemma the editors of the book faced in trying to commemorate Jewish suffering as part of a larger Soviet experience.

**Soviet Form of Being**

But what did it mean to have a “Soviet experience”? What did it mean, in other words, to be included in the body of the Soviet people? The testimony of a teacher named Emelia Borisovna Kotlova offers some insight. Her testimony is rich with descriptions of neighbors and acquaintances looking to turn her in to the hands of the Germans. The way she chooses to single out these collaborators is quite telling. Kotlova tells Ehrenburg how she started working at a school while trying to disguise that she was Jewish, when the Germans implemented a new decree: “anyone turning in a Jew, a communist, a partisan, or a deputy to the Supreme Soviet would receive a reward of one thousand rubles and ration cards for food at a low price.”

With this decree, tells us Kotlova, the principal of the school for which she worked suddenly started to suspect she was Jewish and even suggested that she should give him a thousand rubles for him to keep quiet. Kotlova explains the logic behind his behavior:

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142 Ibid., 385.
143 Ibid., 82.
His wife would always tell me that her husband, that is, the principal, had never been a Soviet teacher, and that he had worked in a school in the Soviet Union for more than twenty years in disguise. But when Hitler came to power, he showed his real face. How painful it was to see how happily people lived and live.\textsuperscript{144}

The principal, then, was living in disguise for many years – he was never a true Soviet. Later on in her testimony, Kotlova talks about a coworker with whom she used to be good friends. When she sought out the help of this woman, she was surprised at how changed she appeared – not long ago she was preparing to become a party member and now she was suddenly on her knees praying to god. “Alexandra Gnatieva, I don't recognize you!” was, according to Kotlova, her reaction to this sudden change. “She replied with a smirk: "Emilia Borisovna! You've got to trim your sails to the wind.” I regretted seeking her help in Kiev. I was even afraid to stay overnight with her.”\textsuperscript{145} Kotlova turned to her former coworker because she thought she would lend her a helping hand. Her rapid change of character, however, could only mean one thing: “I thought that she would help me out at this difficult hour, that she was truly a Soviet person, but things turned out differently.”\textsuperscript{146}

While Kotlova does not discuss directly what being a “Soviet person” or a “Soviet teacher” is, we can easily infer what it means by looking at what exposes a person for not being one. For Kotlova, thus, being Soviet meant being genuine, truthful, as well as helping a fellow Soviet. The people who she feared would turn her in, including the ones who threatened to do so and those who actually did, those people were not true Soviets.

While Kotlova only talks about what it meant not to be a true Soviet, a letter sent to Ehrenburg by a young Jewish woman named Glushetz provides a more direct definition. The letter, dated August 18\textsuperscript{th} 1942, tells Glushetz’s life story. She opens her story with the words “I am a

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
Jew” (Ya – Evreika). She then proceeds to describe the course of her life. She lost her parents when she was ten years old and spent two years on the streets. She was then housed in a hostel by the Komsomol and was able to complete her studies, acquire higher education in a prestigious institution, and become an engineer. Glushetz wonders in what other country this would have been possible for someone in her situation - certainly not in a capitalist country: “and so, I, a Jewish woman, once a homeless, with no means or connections which are necessary in the capitalist world, had graduated from the best educational institution and now work as an engineer, equal amongst my male peers.” Glushetz’s gratitude goes even further. As her narrative continues, we learn that while she was born a Jew by nationality, as the opening statement of her paragraph reflects, she was also born a Soviet: “Soviet power”, she writes, “gave me my very life, put me on my feet, guided me to personhood.” And she was not the only one. Like her, writes Glushetz, there were many others. “This is the source of our patriotism,” she explains, “for our power, for our motherland, we are willing to give our lives away, for this motherland gave birth to us, without it we would have perished.”

For Glushetz, then, being Soviet meant being a person, a human being – being truly alive. Her letter opens with the particular experience of being an orphan Jewish girl. While this part indeed focuses on her suffering, the part focused on her as a product of Soviet power lists her successes – acquiring education, working in a respectable profession, leading a meaningful life, and finally, becoming a human being – the ultimate universal experience.

Glushetz’ and Kotlova’s testimonies make it apparent that the need to preserve the universal idea of “Sovietness” amongst all Jewish suffering was important not only to Grossman and Ehrenburg. Both the Black Book and the Unknown Black Book are filled with Soviet

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147 Correspondence from P.I Glushetz to Ilya Ehrenburg, 18 August 1942, record group p.21, subdivision p.21.1, File number 5, the Ilya Ehrenburg collection, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem
identifications. A testimony by one, Stepan Yakimovich Sehnfeld, a 16-year-old boy who was sent to a labor camp, reads:

[looking towards the horizon:] Where was this long row of cars [produced in the camp] heading? Somewhere to the east, to the east where the brave fighters of the country of freedom, the country of flowering life, the country of happiness and joy, were fighting for our Motherland, for our wise, dear father, leader and friend, for Stalin. And suddenly my chest rose in a melancholy sigh. I felt sad that I was a poor prisoner in a severe-regime concentration camp with the whips of SS troopers whistling over it, and where machine guns thundered, and that I could not go along that road to the east! To the east, to the fighters for socialism, in order to join the ranks for the common cause. But I knew that my dream would come true in the near future.\textsuperscript{148}

This excerpt, taken from the Unknown Black Book, hardly needs any explication – the testifier, a Jewish prisoner in a Nazi labor camp, directly speaks about his dream to fight for socialism and join the ranks of the common cause. An interesting route to take when reading the testimonies, however, would be to not just look for those things that were explicitly “Soviet”, but on the contrary – to look for those repetitions that seem trivial at first glance but may in fact be quite telling of the Soviet experience. One such repetition revolves around the concept of ‘writing’ and ‘being a writer.’

“I read your book War,”\textsuperscript{149} states Sorina, a Jewish woman from the shtetl of Khislavich, at the very beginning of her testimony. This is in fact her opening statement. She proceeds:

I have no comment to make about it, but will only say that it made me relive the awful things that I had already endured. I wrote about the book to my husband at the Front. He answered that not only had he read your book, but that he had met you personally in Vilno, and that you were interested in the story of how I was rescued.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{148} Rubenstein and Altman, \textit{The Unknown Black Book}, 92.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 386.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
At first glance, this opening statement about Ehrenburg’s book, and the elaboration that follows, might seem quite insignificant - a way of introduction or an attempt to establish a point of connection with Ehrenburg. Sorina continues:

I want to tell you the story, and if it can contribute even a useful little grain to the overall struggle against fascism, I will be happy. If, however, my material turns out to be of no use to you for whatever reason, then I apologize. Perhaps it will not be my fault then, but my intentions are only the best. I am not a writer, and it is hard for me to set things out the way they should be, but that can be fixed. There are people who specialize in this and I will turn to them.\textsuperscript{151}

This passage, too, is seemingly insignificant. Sorina is insecure about her abilities to transmit her testimony in writing, stating that she is “not a writer.” A more careful look, however, will reveal to us the peculiar fact that the entirety of the opening paragraph of Sorina’s testimony is concerned with the idea of “writing” and “being a writer.” Indeed, this preoccupation is repeated in many of the other testimonies. One must wonder, then, about the prominence of this concept for the testifiers. Perhaps we should reconsider the seemingly straightforward nature of the statement, “I am not a writer,” and ask what being a writer meant for the Soviet subject of the 1930s and 1940s and how that meaning transpired.

According to Katherina Clark, in Stalinist Russia literature was the expression of a new belief system and as such it was elevated to the level of a secular religion. Tearing down a monastery to build a Pushkin square in its stead illustrates just that. Literature, says Clark, enjoyed such a special and elevated position because it was the most eloquent form of the written word, and the written word enjoyed primacy over speech because it possessed a materiality that the spoken word lacked.\textsuperscript{152} Written words were Materia and as such they could be worked on and

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Katerina Clark, \textit{Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941} (Harvard University Press, 2011), 82.
shaped and in turn shape the world. They left a material mark. Indeed, in Socialist Realism as well as in the Avant-garde tradition that preceded it, writers did a lot more than simply report or generate narratives. To the avant-gardists, reality itself was material for artistic construction - it shaped reality rather than depicted it.153 For this reason, there was no distinction between aesthetics and politics. This was also true for Social Realism, but it was distinguished from the aesthetics of the avant-garde by its emphasis on the role of art as means of knowing reality, its mimetic quality. Mimesis is a reflection of reality rather than its representation. Socialist Realist mimesis focuses not on phenomena but on the hidden essence of things.154 This meant that the job of a Soviet writer was to extract the not-always-immediately-visible essence of things, the inner, rather than external, Truth.155 As per Gorky:

A fact is still not the whole truth; it is merely the raw material from which the real truth of art must be smelted and extracted—the chicken must not be roasted with its feathers. This, however, is precisely what reverence for the fact results in—the accidental and inessential is mixed with the essential and typical. We must learn to pluck the fact of its inessential plumage; we must be able to extract meaning from the fact.156

The Soviet writer was indeed entrusted with this extraction of meaning. Following Gorky’s advice, we should extract the meaning embedded not just in the content of the passage above, but in the fact that it came from a writer who was also one of the most important figures in the Soviet political hierarchy. Upon his death in 1936, Molotov mourned him with these words: “after Lenin, the loss of Gorky is the greatest loss for our country, and for mankind.” He was, thus, placed right under Lenin and Stalin – both writers themselves.157

154 Ibid., 50–51.
155 Ibid., 68.
156 Ibid., 54.
157 Clark, Moscow, the Fourth Rome, 2011, 82–83.
Considering the above, Sorin’a apologetic statement of “I am not a writer” loses its apparent triviality. Indeed, Sorina’s testimony is not the only one in which we find such an apology. In an essay featured in the Black Book, and written by the journalist Vera Inber, the author tells us how hard it was to escape the sentiment, present in many of the testimonies, of lacking the strength to convey the horrors the testifiers had witnessed and lived through. Inber quotes two testimonies as an example. In both, alongside this sentiment, there is also a confession of sorts – ‘we are not writers.’ Elizaveta Pikarmer, a woman from Odessa, uses a metaphor to convey what she is lacking in giving her testimony: “I would have to have the expertise of an artist’s brush to portray the scenes of horror that took place in Domanevka.”

Similarly, a survivor by the name of V. Ya Rabinovixh, states:

A great deal could be written, but I am not a writer, and I do not have the physical strength. For as I write I see it all again before my eyes. There is not enough ink and paper to write down everything in detail. There is not nor will there ever be a man who can paint a picture of the inhumane suffering that we, the Soviet people, have endured.

Here, Rabinovixh proclaims that there could not exist a man who could ever portray the extent of the suffering that the Soviet people, as he himself puts it, had endured. Seemingly, this is a task that could not be accomplished by anyone, regardless of them being, or not being, a writer. And yet, Rabinovixh directly states “I am not a writer.” We should ask ourselves, thus, what this statement is meant to achieve. Its very presence alludes to the prominence of the writer and its place in Soviet society. It indicates a preoccupation with one’s ability to provide a truthful and worthy account when one is not in fact a writer.

This meaning is further reinforced by the testimonies of those who do consider themselves “writers.” One such testifier is Lev Rozhetsky, a 13-year-old boy from Odessa. He opens his letter

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159 Ibid.
to Ehrenburg, stating “I wrote a great deal while I was a prisoner of the fascists.” He then goes on to tell Ehrenburg about a long poem he wrote called “In Exile.” Portions of this poem are woven throughout his testimony. In a second letter, Rozhetsky tells Ehrenburg how he has been interested in literature since childhood, how he “write[s] poetry and work[s] to improve” himself, and how when he was barely eleven, he won a prize for his poem about Stalin at the all-republic Olympiad in Kiev. Writing features very prominently in Rozhetsky’s identity. It is also clearly connected to his overall Soviet identification. In a passage subtitled “Struggle and Freedom,” Rozhetsky tells us how he used writing to serve his country and fight against fascism and how he was willing to risk his life doing that:

I chose as my weapon of war the only means available to me – the word. Under these circumstances, I wrote. You ask: "How? How did you manage it?" I told of this in my poem "In Exile: We were working as field laborers. This helped me. With great effort, having gotten hold of a pencil, on a small board or a piece of plywood, on a bit of brown wrapping paper or on any scrap I could find, I wrote, often after concealing myself in the grass. Most of the time I had to write, then memorize my verses. Of course, this put me under the threat of death. I wrote many pieces, sketches, poems, and songs. Two anti-fascist songs of mine, "The Sky Stretched High Above" and "Nina" (in memory of a woman who lost her mind), reached a wide audience. Once again, I became convinced of the enormous role that the free, living word can play in any circumstance. I was inspired only by the word "freedom." It is quite apparent that Rozhetsky did not perceive “writing” as a passive form of art. “The word,” as he put it, made a real and direct impact on the outside world; it was an impact great enough for which to risk one’s life. It was through writing that Rozhetsky was able to produce a “free, living word.” Through this vivid description shines the Soviet concept of ‘writing’ as a practice that shapes the world and offers a direct path to Truth. Rozhetsky’s words were not simply a

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161 Ibid., 123.
162 Ibid., 131.
representation of the world. Neither were they inanimate artifacts, as could perhaps be found in a museum. Rozhetsky’s words were free, and, indeed, they were alive.

Looking back at the seemingly trivial statement of “I am not a writer,” we can now better appreciate the weight it carried for the testifiers and the meaning that laid behind it. The testifiers were asked to fight fascism with a weapon that, unlike Rozhetsky, they did not necessarily possess – the free, living word; the meaning that must be extracted from the mere facts. “Although I do not have a gift for words, I hope that you will understand me,” stated Emelia Borisovna Kotlova in her letter to Ehrenburg (as will soon be discussed at length). Like her non-writer counterparts, she doubted her ability to fulfil the patriotic task with which she was endowed and give a true, “live” account of what happened. She did convey her hope that the true writer, Ehrenburg, would be able to understand her. Taking this into account, we should now reconsider the meaning Ehrenburg held for the testifiers who had a real writer, indeed, a foremost Soviet writer, as the addressee of their testimonies.

_A Gift for Words_

In a book entitled, _Testimony_, psychoanalyst Dori Laub explains the structural position of the addressee of a testimony. The process of bearing witness to a trauma, says Laub, is a process that includes the listener. Only in the presence of an _other_, of one who listens, can the testimonial process take place. The listener, says Laub, is in effect the enabler of the testimony – he/she has to be “unobtrusive, nondirective, and yet imminently present, active, in the lead.” The testimonies gathered for the Black Book were obtained in different ways and through different methods. Some were collected on the ground by _Eynikayt_ correspondents, Jewish Red Army soldiers, and writers

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163 Ibid., 67.
164 Felman and Laub, _Testimony_, 71.
from the Committee; and some were recorded at the JAC offices, frequently visited by survivors and witnesses coming to deliver information. These testimonies that were taken face to face do not reveal anything about the position of the listener, who is completely absent from the transcribed account. Ironically, it is the testimonies that were sent to Ehrenburg as letters, and henceforth testimonies that were given with an absence of a physical witness, which actually tell us something important about the position of the Committee, and specifically of Ehrenburg, as the addressee (literally) of the testimonies. For Laub, the listener to a testimony has to be imminently present. As we will soon find out, however, this does not necessarily have to entail physical presence.

Many of the letters sent to Ehrenburg were excluded from The Black Book and have found their way into The Unknown Black Book. Kotlova’s testimony, discussed earlier, was one such letter. It opened with these words:

Our own dear Ilya Ehrenburg!
I received your letter on January 12, for which I am very grateful. I waited a whole year for it. Yesterday was the second happiest day of my life, when I read the letter from you. The happiest day of my life was December 25, 1943 when I saw our glorious Red Army on the streets of our village. The third happiest day of my life would come when I could speak with you personally.  

The hierarchy of happiness this letter describes leaves little doubt about the importance of Ehrenburg as the addressee of Kotlova’s testimony - the happiest day of her life was the day of liberation; the second happiest was the day Ehrenburg responded to her first letter, making himself the hearer, the addressee, of her testimony. The letter continues:

I could give you some very valuable material for The Black Book, and you would not manage to write it all down. Although I do not have a gift for words, I hope that you will understand me.  

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165 Redlich, Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia, 65–66.
166 Rubenstein and Altman, The Unknown Black Book, 67.
167 Ibid.
This short quote holds within it so much condensed meaning that it seems almost impossible to unpack. Indeed, this excess is part and parcel of what is communicated in this fragment. First, the mentioning of The Black Book here suggests how meaningful the existence of this project must have been for Soviet Jews who witnessed and survived Nazi persecution. It created an official addressee for the testimonies and thus turned the Committee and Ehrenburg into an official institution for bearing witness. For Laub, the listener had to be “unobtrusive, nondirective, and yet imminently present, active, in the lead.” In initiating the Black Book project, and doing so as soon as the German retreat from Soviet occupied territories began, the committee took the lead as an active witness to the testimonies, even when there was no witness physically present. This act of leadership gave Soviet Jews something that was lacking for so many other Jewish Holocaust survivors – the ability, or rather, the possibility, to bear witness to the atrocities they endured.

Trauma, says Laub, hinders the human mind’s ability to register and record the traumatic event. Testifying is, thus, not the telling of the event but the creation of it as an event, narrating something in place of an absence: “the trauma – as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock – has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of. The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to – and heard – is, therefore the process and the place wherein […] “knowing” of the event is given birth to.”¹⁶⁸ The actual witnessing of the event, thus, does not take place before the testimony is told. Laub tells us how this narration of the testimony is imperative for the survivors, how it is in effect a crucial part of surviving. For the survivor to break free from a fate that “cannot be known” and “cannot be told”, a process of narrating must occur. In this process the survivor transmits her or his story to another outside oneself before re-externalizing it.¹⁶⁹ This desire to tell, to narrativize, and to transmit this narrative

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 69.
to another, to an Other, is indeed the driving force behind Kotlova’s letter. It describes this opportunity to transmit her story to Ehrenburg as a sort of second liberation – the happiest day of her life was the day she was liberated by the Red Army while her second happiest day was her liberation, by Ehrenburg, from the burden of silence.

Most of the Holocaust survivors Laub discusses in his book, however, did not have the opportunity to reach such liberation for many years. The Holocaust, says Laub, was a historical event that produced no witnesses. The lack of responsiveness of bystanders and the world at large to the catastrophe of the genocide abolished the possibility of outside witnessing and ultimately led to the world’s failure to occupy a witness position. According to Laub, the insiders were also incapable of bearing witness. By brutally imposing their ideology on their victims, the Nazis abolished the very possibility of witnessing, of stepping outside of the “dehumanizing frame of reference in which the event was taking place, and provide an independent frame of reference through which the event could be observed.”170 What the Nazis managed to do, that was truly annihilating, says Laub, was to create a world in which there was no Other that could provide the possibility of recognition.171 In Lacanian psychoanalysis, subjectivity is enabled by desire, and what initiates desire is ultimately a lack – a lack of recognition from the Other. This is, partially, what stands behind the famous Lacanian quote “Man’s desire is the desire of the Other”: our desire is always aimed at the desire of the Other, it is a desire for recognition. What we ultimately desire is to attain recognition by an Other.172 Without an Other who can offer recognition, it is the very possibility of subjectivity that is annihilated.

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170 Ibid., 81.
171 Ibid., 81–82.
The testimonies Laub discusses in his book were mostly taken from Holocaust survivors who survived death camps such as Auschwitz. These survivors, as Laub describes, could not find a true hearer for their testimony - someone who could offer them the horizon of recognition - for many years. The Holocaust, as an event without a witness, was inevitably reduced to silence. The attempts at bearing witness that were carried out during the event were doomed to fail, according to Laub, because the terms for bearing witness could not be met. It required such a degree of awareness and comprehension of the catastrophe, that it was “beyond the limits of human ability to grasp, to transmit, or to imagine.”

While it might be true that the event would take many more years to assimilate, the inability to transmit, I argue, was not part of the Soviet Jewish experience. As Laub describes it, this condition of an absence of an Other who could offer the possibility of recognition was the experience of many Western and Central European Jewish survivors. Things were different for Soviet Jews. By initiating a project such as The Black Book, and actively collecting testimonies, the JAC created an actual and official addressee for the survivors’ testimonies, thus recognizing and legitimizing them. It was not only their right to speak, thus, but also their duty as Soviets in the fight against fascism. Unlike the situation described by Laub in the rest of Europe, while the Nazis fought the fiercest war of annihilation in the East, they were unable to eliminate the position of the Other for Soviet Jews - at least not immediately. The committee, and Ehrenburg in particular, took the active position of the Other for Soviet Jewish survivors, by creating a horizon in which recognition was attainable.

Trauma is an event that resists signification. It is an unexpected shock that disrupts the continuity of life and remains as a meaningless hole in the chain of signifiers that make up one’s

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173 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 84.
history. As we have seen, articulation in language—within the realm of the symbolic—requires an outside witness. Only through this second event of witness bearing does the trauma acquire meaning. It is, however, not just the telling of the event that gives meaning to the trauma, but the ability to verbalize what has been sustained as a hole in the signifying chain, replacing it with words. As Laub describes, the survivors are left with a compulsion to tell and be heard, but no amount of telling seems to ease this compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words to articulate what is essentially unspeakable. This sentiment of an event that cannot be captured in words is apparent in many of the letters sent to Ehrenburg, as well as in The Black Book testimonies. A second reading of Kotlova’s words reveals the prominence of this sentiment, the inarticulable excess that is characteristic of traumatic experiences: “I could give you some very valuable material for The Black Book, and you would not manage to write it all down.” In the Russian original, Kotlova uses a more general sense of ‘you,’ it could also be translated as “one would not manage to put it all on paper” (na bumage vse ne napisheš’). Kotlova, thus, did not direct this statement specifically to Ehrenburg but she knew that in the most general sense there was just no amount of words that could capture the extant of this trauma. The rest of the paragraph, however, does reveal a hope, a fantasy, of signification: “Although I do not have a gift for words,” says Kotlova, “I hope that you will understand me.” Kotlova knows, feels, that she is lacking the words to testify to the trauma she endured. But she hopes that the one who does have a gift for words, the writer Ehrenburg, will be able to understand her and give her, in return, the gift of symbolization. Indeed, her following letter is addressed to “Dear writer Ilya Ehrenburg.”

174 G. Bistoen, Trauma, Ethics and the Political Beyond PTSD: The Dislocations of the Real (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 54–55.
175 Felman and Laub, Testimony, 78.
176 Ицхак Арад, Т. Павлова, and И. Альтман, Неизвестная Черная книга (Иерусалим, 1993), 27.
177 Rubenstein and Altman, The Unknown Black Book, 72.
way, Ehrenburg-as-writer is an ideal addressee and witness; he functions as a fantasy that offers not only the possibility of recognition but also that of symbolization – of giving meaning to a trauma that resists all attempts at signification.

When one reads The Black Book, it is easy to miss the prominence of the addressee, the listener, who bore witness to the testimonies. The testimonies, either the ones that were given in person or written as a letter, were edited in a way that left out all traces of the addressee. A letter from a Red Army soldier, for instance, opens with these words: “Let me introduce myself: I am Zalman Ioselevich Kiselev, a soldier in the Red Army and a resident of the village of Liozno in the Vitebsk district.”

To whom is it that Kiselev is introducing himself – that remains unclear. The way this letter appears in the book makes it seem like the addressee is not of importance, like they were redundant. The unedited letter, however, reveals a different picture. The opening sentence of the letter, highlighted and then crossed-over, is still decipherable. It reads: “Good day, comrade Ehrenburg!” While this address is not as strongly worded and emotional as Kotlova’s opening words, it still makes clear that the letter had a very specific addressee. The way it ends, however, echoes Kotlova’s desire for Ehrenburg’s words. In his letter, Kiselev tells the story of his wife’s demise. He then ends with a plea to Ehrenburg: “I ask you to write the story of her fate with your own words.” Like Kotlova, who feels like she does not possess “the gift for words,” Kiselev needs Ehrenburg’s words to tell the story of his loss – to bear witness to it.

Psychoanalysis can prove insightful here, too, by accounting for the nature of this position in which we find Ehrenburg. In psychoanalytic terms, this is a transferential relationship. Freud saw ‘transference’ as feelings of love, originally directed toward some other figure in the patient’s

179 Correspondence from Z.I Kiselev to Ilya Ehrenburg, 20 April 1944, record group p.21, subdivision p.21.1, File number 105, the Ilya Ehrenburg collection, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem
life, that are then transferred onto the person of the analyst. The love the patient expressed was in
effect not for the analyst but for the position he agreed to occupy, the role he played as the healing,
listening Other who has some inside knowledge about what troubles the patient.\textsuperscript{181} Transference
is, thus, among other things, the attribution of knowledge to the Other or the supposition that the
Other is someone who knows something about the subject (the patient or, in this case, the testifier)
beyond the subject’s knowledge of him or herself. By assuming that the analyst, by virtue of their
analytical position, holds some special knowledge on the patient’s inner world, the patient casts
the analyst in the role of \textit{the subject supposed to know}, virtually initiating transference.\textsuperscript{182} It is no
wonder that this role of a subject who is supposed to know something of importance about the
testifier’s inner world was attributed, in our case, to a writer.

As described earlier, being a writer had a very particular significance in Soviet society, and
the person of the writer was endowed with special abilities to discern the human soul and access
truth. While this was expected of professional writers, some of that burden was extended beyond
them to the practice of writing in general. Diaries, for instance, appear to have been a popular
genre - especially under Stalin. It was a practice taken up by not only artists and writers but also
engineers, scientists, workers, students, peasants, housewives and administrators. Unlike the
liberal subject, who considers this practice an island of privacy and individuation, the Soviet
subject practiced diary writing as an attempt to work through vices and harmful thoughts and
tendencies. It was an effort to better the self and, ultimately, to write oneself as a historical subject
- into the social and political order of revolutionary time. It was about finding out the truth of who

one was in essence.\textsuperscript{183} Under the Soviet revolutionary demand to write oneself as a historical subject, autobiographies and narratives of the self were endowed with a special significance, and the practice of writing as self-reflection was perceived as means to reveal one’s subjective essence. It was a path to Truth.\textsuperscript{184}

Trauma, however, as the site in which language fails most clearly and spectacularly, confronted the testifiers with the inability to write these events into their history. This does not necessarily mean that the survivors were not able to talk about their experiences. As we have seen, their testimonies often provided detailed accounts of such experiences. And yet, their accounts also made clear that in talking about them something always remained inexplicable – there was always an excess for which they were unable to find words. Indeed, this inarticulable excess is an indication of trauma. While \textit{trauma} is not a term derived from the testifiers’ own discourse, its conceptualization through the clinical practice of psychoanalysis helps account for this prominent sentiment that arises from the testimonies of the failure of language to capture the survivors’ experiences. We should not, however, disregard the historical specificities of that failure within a Soviet cultural context. This was a failure that was not just personal but also political, collective. It was a failure to write oneself back into Soviet society after being so brutally marked as an other–as a Jew. As Soviet subjects, the testifiers’ inability to articulate their traumatic experiences was oftentimes attributed to their failure to reach a certain ideal of Soviet subjectivity – the ability to engage in meaningful writing. Indeed, as we have previously encountered, the testifiers were not just haunted by their failure to account for their experiences but also, and more specifically, by their inability to write. This, essentially, is what hides behind the repeated apologetic statement

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 7. For a discussion of the importance of autobiographies in Stalinist society see also Igal Halfin, \textit{Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial} (Harvard University Press, 2003).
"I'm not a writer." It is in this context that we must understand the fantasy of the writer, Ehrenburg, as the ideal addressee – the belief that Ehrenburg, as a true writer, would be able to find the right words to articulate what the testifiers could not.

Blyuma Bronfin’s letter to Ehrenburg, discussed earlier, opens with a similar reference to the inarticulable:

Dear Comrade Ilya Ehrenburg:
I received your letter in which you ask me to write down what I experienced during the German occupation. Comrade Ehrenburg, it would be difficult for me to describe what I went through, since all the horrors that I saw with my own eyes cannot be told.185

As she herself expresses, Bronfin feels that those things she experienced under the Nazi occupation are impossible to tell but she nonetheless responds to Ehrenburg’s demand to tell them. Her testimony is long and full of details and closes with a request: “I am waiting for an answer from you.”186 This request is echoed in many of the other testimonies. Sorina, for instance, writes in her letter:

I urgently ask you to grant me one last request. Whether my story is useful or not to you, please respond to me. Let it be the bitter reality, but that is still better than waiting and uncertainty. I know that you are overburdened with work, but I am waiting for a reply.187

These pleas reaffirm the importance of the listener and his/her position in the process of giving a testimony. The anticipation for Ehrenburg’s reply gives away the witnesses’ desire for recognition while also sustaining the fantasy of it.

Fantasies belong to the imaginary order and their purpose is to provide an illusion of wholeness to the lacking subject (lacking exactly because one can never fully capture the Other’s desire).188 Laub tells us about a survivor he interviewed who was only five years old when his

185 Rubenstein and Altman, *The Unknown Black Book*, 151.
186 Ibid., 155.
187 Ibid., 386.
parents smuggled him outside of the Plashow labor camp and he was left to survive on his own until the end of the war. All the while he was holding onto an old photograph of his mother, to which he even started praying. Laub interprets this act of praying to his mother’s photograph as the creation, through fantasy, of the first witness to the child’s sufferings – of a listener to his testimony. This fantasy, of a mother that will come and take him back at the end of the war and end his suffering, was, according to Laub, what kept him going alone on the streets of Krakow. Ehrenburg plays a similar part in many of the survivors’ fantasies of an addressee to their testimonies who, by accepting their words and replacing them with his own, indeed with his recognition, could finally ease their suffering and rid them of their burden. Ehrenburg, thus, is quite literally the “subject supposed to know” – he is the one who is presumed to be able to understand and articulate what the trauma victim himself or herself cannot express.

The anticipation for Ehrenburg’s response is what makes this fantasy, of what Laub calls “an inner witness,”190 sustainable. In the opening of her letter, Kotlova talks about the three happiest days of her life in a descending order: the day of liberation, the day of receiving Ehrenburg’s letter and the third happiest day which has yet to occur and therefore appears as a fantasy – the day she would get to meet Ehrenburg in person. Kotlova’s following letter makes it clear that this fantasy in fact persisted. It reads: “I am sending material for The Black Book. Some facts I will not write. If possible, I will tell them to you in person.”191 This consistent fantasy reaffirms Ehrenburg’s position as that big Other whose desire, whose recognition and understanding, Kotlova desires. This fantasy offered by the JAC to the Soviet Jewish survivors – a way to restore the illusion of wholeness and closure that was previously shattered by trauma – is

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190 Ibid., 87–88.
what differentiates the Soviet case from that of the rest of Europe. Soviet Jews had an immediate and official addressee for their testimonies as well as a duty to transmit them. Their suffering, thus – at least for a little while - was officially recognized.

Ironically, it was this recognition of suffering that ultimately led to the failure of the JAC’s universalizing mission. It would be reasonable to assume that the editors’ efforts to edit out of the testimonies all traces of a specific addressee were an attempt to universalize them - as if they were addressed to the whole of Soviet society. A collection of letters from an orphanage in Romania, included in the Black Book, was one of the many targets of such editing. In the book, this collection of letters is presented as having no addressee. The original, however, opens with the words: “Dear Comrade Ehrenburg.” But this is not the only difference found between the original and the edited version in the book. While the Black Book presents only three letters out of this collection, it in fact consists of twenty different letters. Which letters were excluded, and on what grounds? The first letter in the collection did not make the cut, which suggests this was not merely a quantitative decision, but a qualitative one. It tells the story of a 16-year-old girl, Lina, who lost both of her parents under German occupation and was able to escape to Romania. What stands out in this short letter is Lina’s request to Ehrenburg: “I ask of you to bring me back to Russia. I want to study and become a human being (stat’ chelovekom). I am waitressing at a restaurant. I am wasting my youth, but in Soviet Russia I could work.”

This fantasy, too, reveals much about the position Ehrenburg assumed in the minds of so many Soviet Jewish survivors. It also reveals an honest yearning for the Soviet motherland and its universal ideas of what being “a human being” meant. This unique request for universal being, directed at a particular addressee, is one instance of a broader desire shared by many Soviet Jewish survivors – a desire for a particular Other and a universal self. This

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192 Letter from orphans to Ilya Ehrenburg, record group p.21, subdivision p.21.1, File number 46, the Ilya Ehrenburg collection, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem
desire, in turn, reveals another layer of Ehrenburg’s position as the ideal addressee of the survivors’ testimonies.

Just like the project of the Black Book, Ehrenburg himself could not escape occupying the dual position of the universal and the particular. For the testifiers he was at once an emblem of the universal and an addressee for the particular. As a Soviet writer he symbolized universality at its best – an exemplary Soviet who, by being a writer, has reached the highest stage of Soviet being. As a Jew, however, Ehrenburg was the initiator of a Jewish project of commemoration and an official addressee for accounts of Jewish suffering. Being both a Soviet writer and a newly active Jew, Ehrenburg embodied the object of the testifiers’ most inner and complex desire – the desire for a particular (Jewish) Other and a universal (Soviet) self, as he himself was both of these things. This helps explain the important position Ehrenburg held in the minds of Soviet Jewish survivors. It was not just his active seeking of the testimonies but the fact that this seeking was done by an emblem of Soviet exemplarity – a towering Soviet writer. In his speech with which this chapter opened, Ehrenburg declared and acknowledged this dual position by stating “I am a Russian writer,” while adding, “I am a Jew.” Taking this into account, we can now better appreciate the position of Ehrenburg as this phantasmatic character who was able to give meaning to not just the testimonies but to the very lives and experiences of the testifiers. The burden of the testifiers was double. They were not only unable to articulate their suffering, but also unable to write. By declaring “I am not a writer,” the testifiers admitted to their failure of rising to a state of exemplarity. Ehrenburg was perceived as the one who could gratify both these demands – accounting for their particular suffering while also raising them to the universality of writing, a state which they failed to reach on their own.
Suffering Away from the Universal

The tension between the particular and the universal within Soviet Jewish identity, illustrated by the fantasy of Ehrenburg, preceded the Nazi occupation of Soviet territories and was embedded in the Soviet nationalities policy from the outset. It was, however, the Nazi onslaught that introduced a new constellation of this tension, deeming it irreconcilable. The implications of the Nazi occupation for Soviet Jewish identity affected not just Jews themselves, but the whole of Soviet society. As we have seen earlier, a desire for the universal Soviet self was manifested in the testimonies through the victim’s choice of language - differentiating local collaborators from Germans. What these testimonies also reveal, however, is the success of the Nazi endeavor in singling out Jews and marking them as particularized others. In her testimony, Kotlova tells Ehrenburg of how the Germans hung posters throughout Kiev, proclaiming to kill Jews at the request of their neighbors: “There were posters on every pole saying that Hitler had killed sixty-two thousand Jews at the request of various other nationalities, but that was a lie. It was all his own initiative.”193 This description is quite indicative of German attempts to mark Soviet Jews as others for their Soviet neighbors. The very existence of the Unknown Book as a collection of exclude testimonies is evidence of their success. Kotlova describes how Ukrainian police officers treated her daughter, calling her “dirty kike” (zhidivskaya morda). She then describes an encounter with a neighbor who wanted to turn her in and the response of her other neighbors:

That hooligan Artemenko, she turned up at our place, and at the front door of the building harangued the neighbors: why were they hiding me at such a dangerous time? I was a Jew, after all. One neighbor was the wife of a professor and her grandson had been my student. She replied: "Emilia Borisovna isn't a Jew, that's not so." Another neighbor answered: "Khiba vona zhidivka? Vona ludina, yak tfeba."[How can she be a Jew? She's a person just like you.] (It turns out that Jews are not human.) But my neighbors were not satisfied with this. Baran met me again in the morning, he was going on his merry way to work for Hitler, and I was coming from the market. This time he could not stand it any longer. He found out what apartment I had entered, and thirty minutes later he brought the Gestapo to my

193 Rubenstein and Altman, The Unknown Black Book, 68.
building. He told them that I was a Jew—*Jude*—and that I was hiding here. He was shouting at me, stamping his feet and swearing away: "Kike [Zhidovak], show your passport!"\(^{194}\)

The rest of Kotlova’s testimony makes it clear that this perception of Jews as not being “a person like us” was not an isolated incident. Wandering outside of Kiev, in an attempt to find a new place to live where she could hide her identity, she encountered similar reactions: “One old woman gave this definition: ‘are Jews really people? One like that, how can she be a Jew? That one there is one of *our* women:’”\(^{195}\)

The derogatory word “*zhid*” (kike) and its use in the Soviet Union preceded, of course, the Nazi occupation. Under Nazi rule, however, it acquired a new meaning, a new severity. The testimony of a woman named Manya Feingold, exemplifies how this was done. It describes the first days in occupied Uman, when there were still about 15,000 Jews left in the city:

Most of all, the Jews were frightened by the fact that there were signs reading "No entry to kikes!" hanging everywhere. The Jewish children, unable to understand this, asked more than once: "What are kikes? How can you see them?" Their parents, however, had to own up and tell them that we are the kikes, and that we are the ones being referred to.\(^{196}\)

Another testimony, this time from Minsk, reveals the length of the Nazis’ attempts to separate the Jews from the rest. Russians and Byelorussians were threatened with death for going into the ghetto, or even talking to a Jew through the fence. The same was of course true for Jews if they went outside the ghetto or were caught talking to a Russian. “It was no accident,” the testimony reads, “that the Jews of Minsk, as soon as they were imprisoned in the ghetto, understood the word ‘ghetto’ in this way: ‘a divorce from the local population’.\(^{197}\) Nazi rule marked Jews in any possible way – linguistically, by giving them a certain name; physically, by making them wear the yellow star; spatially, by not allowing them to be in places that were not specifically designated;

\(^{194}\) Ibid., 75.
\(^{195}\) Ibid., 85.
\(^{196}\) Ibid., 187.
\(^{197}\) Ibid., 259.
and ontologically, by not allowing them to be at all. This, in turn, particularized not only the way Jews experienced the Nazi occupation, but also the way they were experienced by their neighbors. What the Nazis ultimately did was to create a certain unconscious reality of the Jews as others. This, in turn, forced the Soviet leadership, as well as the JAC, to recognize Jewish suffering as particular, and it was this particularity that became part and parcel of what it meant to be a Soviet Jew. Lev Rozhetsky, the boy-poet whose testimony was discussed earlier, writes in his poem, “In Exile:”

Deprived of the rights of a man, stripped of all
A man becomes a toy,
And the word "kike" sounds like "leper,"
And life is worth nothing then, a pathetic cheque.
Only in this savage hour of cruel persecution,
Did I recognize my origins. 198

The poem echoes Ehrenburg’s declaration that the Nazis had reminded him of something - that his mother’s name was Hannah, and indeed that he was a Jew. “Only in this savage hour of cruel persecution, Did I recognize my origins,” writes Rozhetsky. With this new introduction of zhid as a word that marks the particularity of suffering as a Jew, Soviet Jews were now able to see themselves, and be seen by their neighbors, not as Soviet Jews, but solely as Jews.

And so, despite Ehrenburg’s and Grossman’s persistent attempts to not divorce Soviet Jews from the whole of Soviet society, the specific position of witness bearing to Jewish suffering that was introduced by The Black Book project, created an Other, a possibility of recognition, that constituted Soviet Jews as particular subjects and reinforced a singularity of Jewish suffering. This, as we have seen, was an outcome of the Nazi persecution that while unsuccessful in annihilating the structural position of an Other for Soviet Jews, was nevertheless able to distinguish the Jews

198 Ibid., 131.
from the rest and particularize them in a way that was now considered incompatible with the universal idea of Soviet society. The implications were soon to come.
Chapter Three: Terrible Wounds

I am a son of this Soviet land where I was born.
And too
‘I am a Jew!’

Itsik Fefer
I am a Jew, 1941

The attitude towards Soviet Jews, and their place in Soviet society, changed drastically after the war. This change is most commonly attributed to two factors – the beginning of the cold war and the establishment of the state of Israel. These were, of course, important factors in the equation but we should not be too quick to impose a causal relation without taking into account how these two events came to play within the Soviet polity. As the previous chapter explored, the change in perception pertaining to Soviet Jews already started during the war. Attesting to this change are the multiple testimonies of local collaborations in the murder of Soviet Jews, that were excluded from The Black Book. These numerous testimonies serve as evidence to the successful process of othering to which Soviet Jews were subjected during the Nazi occupation of Soviet territories. This chapter examines more closely the effects of this notion of the Jews as others, a notion that would eventually result in what is known as the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign.

In her Black Book testimony, the teacher, Emelia Borisovna Kotlova, attested to this othering process and predicted its postwar ramifications. She wrote:

I was among the Germans in Kiev for a month, then I was handed over by neighbors who had lived in the same house with me for many years. We were the best of friends the day before Hitler came, then ten days later they turned me in and brought the Gestapo to the house. These are the sorts of roots that Hitler has put down. These roots will stay for years to come.\(^{199}\)

\(^{199}\) Ibid., 68.
The “roots” Kotlova identified indeed continued to grow and prosper after the war. In September 1944, for instance, almost a year after the Red Army’s liberation of the city, a pogrom took place in Kiev following a fight between a Jewish NKGB officer and two servicemen who were eventually killed by the officer.\textsuperscript{200} The different responses to such occurrences are revealing of the new breakdown of identities and narratives that the war had helped shape. A strong Jewish response, for instance, was demonstrated when a group of Communist Jewish war veterans sent a letter to Stalin and Beria, indicating how strong of an impact German occupation left – even with local party members:

> The word “kike” or “beat the kikes,” the favorite slogan of the German Fascists, Ukrainian nationalists, and tsarist Black Hundreds, is heard with gusto in the streets of the capital of Ukraine. […] in a somewhat different, more veiled form it is heard in the party apparat, right up to the central committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party.\textsuperscript{201}

This narrative was not just a cry against antisemitism. Even more so, it referenced Jews as the main victims of Nazism. It was one of at least three narratives to emerge during the immediate aftermath of the war and promoted a full acknowledgment of the current nonhomogeneous state of Soviet society, especially in relation to Jews.

A letter sent to Ehrenburg by a Red Army first lieutenant named Klebanov, exemplifies the intricacies of this particular postwar narrative. Klebanov turned to Ehrenburg to share with him his grievances over the way local collaborators were treated after German retreat, and he opened his letter using these words: “Knowing your holy hatred for those who killed and kill millions of innocent people – children and elderly, our wives and sisters, […] I am sending this letter to you

\textsuperscript{200} While this pogrom occurred before the end of the war, it did nonetheless take place after German retreat when Kiev was back under Soviet control.

via comrade Yerusalim.”

Ehrenburg was indeed known for his extreme anti-German stance, and reading Klebanov’s opening words does not give any indication that who he was referencing was indeed anyone but the Germans. As Klebanov’s letter went on, however, it was made clear that his hate for the Germans extended beyond them:

My brain cannot seem to make sense of the fact that people, who have killed children and elders alike, are now awarded with guns and the right to protect the homeland. Is this really the punishment? Getting out of battle alive, they could be transferred from penal battalions to non-penal ones and even, what the hell, be awarded a medal!

These “people,” then, who have killed innocent men and women, and were then allowed to protect the homeland and join non-penal battalions – in other words, were admitted back into Soviet society, were obviously not Germans but Soviet citizens. Another personal letter by Klebanov, addressed to a loved one, illustrates in more detail his frustration and anger with the postwar situation. He writes:

When I was in a partisan squad, I lived one dream and hope, that when the time comes to return to Rakitno I will take revenge on all of our enemies and the enemies of the Soviet Union, all of those who helped the awful Swabians (directly or indirectly), who took an active part in our troubles. These thoughts gave me the courage to endure anything. But dear God! When I came back to Rakitno it turned out that those same people who had greeted the Germans with flowers, cake, and fruits; those who had organized their events, soirees, and parties; those who had started to humiliate, terrorize, rob, abuse, rape, and kill us, Jews, since the first day of the Red Army’s retreat (starting at least six weeks before the Germans came); those who had served the Nazis like loyal dogs - those same people play the first fiddle once the Red Army is back, and antisemitism only grows stronger. […] Antisemitism is everywhere you look.

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202 Correspondence from First Lieutenant Klebanov to Ilya Ehrenburg, 23 February 1945, record group p.21, subdivision p.21.1, File number 106, the Ilya Ehrenburg collection, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem
203 Ehrenburg was criticized for this extreme stance in a Pravda article in 1945. See Redlich, Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia, 94.
204 Correspondence from First Lieutenant Klebanov to Ilya Ehrenburg, 23 February 1945, record group p.21, subdivision p.21.1, File number 106, the Ilya Ehrenburg collection, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem.
205 Germanic people, natives of Swabia – a historic region in Germany.
206 Correspondence from First Lieutenant Klebanov, 23 February 1945, record group p.21, subdivision p.21.1, File number 106, the Ilya Ehrenburg collection, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem.
Klebanov, then, might have not considered the local collaborators fellow Soviets. But more than the actions of the collaborators themselves, what rattled Klebanov was the fact that they were not ostracized or punished by those whom he did consider fellow Soviets. The Red Army – a body that was meant to protect him and of which he was a part – accepted his persecutors back into its ranks. Klebanov’s narrative, thus, is centered not just around the idea of Jewish particular suffering but also around how this suffering changed the very fabric of Soviet society.

A second, contrasting narrative unfolded when official Soviet institutions began to take stock of the losses incurred over the course of the war. The reports of the Extraordinary State Committee for the study of German-fascist atrocities are one such example. While many of the victims listed in the reports compiled by the committee were Jews, the reports did not acknowledge any specific targeting of Jews as a group, not even in cases of mass shootings of entire Jewish communities. This omission erased the particularized nature of the massacres and created a narrative that masked the reality of Jewish particular suffering. This approach, of course, directly contradicted the earlier wartime approach that had led to the establishment of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC) and the creation of The Black Book project. How, then, could this new approach be reconciled with the existence of The Black Book as a commemoration of Jewish particular suffering? As it appears, it could not. In February 1947, Georgi Aleksandrov, head of the Central Committee’s Agitprop Department, sent a letter to Central Committee Secretary Andrei Zhdanov, offering his evaluation of The Black Book:

> in reading the book, especially the first section concerning the Ukraine, one gets a false picture of the true nature of fascism and its organizations. Running through the whole book is the idea that the Germans plundered and murdered Jews only. The reader unwittingly gets the impression that the Germans fought against the USSR for the sole purpose of destroying the Jews.²⁰⁸

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²⁰⁸ Redlich, *War, the Holocaust and Stalinism* (Routledge, 2013), 366.
Aleksandrov gave this report after Grossman and Ehrenburg informed Zhdanov about the continuous delays in publication of the book and asked him to assist. In his response, Aleksandrov objected not only to the content of the testimonies but more importantly, and in a way that marked the true shift in approach toward the project, he pointed to the very attempts of the editors to reconcile the particular with the universal as a major error in their understanding of the war:

… In the preface, written by V. Grossman, it is pointed out that the destruction of the Jews followed a peculiar provocative policy, that the Germans established a certain order of priorities in the destruction of the peoples of the Soviet Union. However, the contents of the book do not confirm this. And actually, the idea itself of some kind of non-existent order of priorities is incorrect.209

Grossman’s preface is also referenced in Amir Weiner’s *Making Sense of War*. Weiner describes this very text as Grossmann’s attempt to crack “the wall of uniformity in the presentation of suffering.” He elaborates: “Beyond the troubling references to collaboration and participation of the local population in the extermination of Jews, Grossman repeatedly hammered to his readers that the Jews as a group were distinctly singled out by the Nazis.”210 Weiner, thus, seems to be in agreement with Aleksandrov about the narrative Grossman and the Committee were promoting. What this fails to acknowledge, however, is that this split between the recognition of Jewish suffering and the official party narrative occurred only after the war. At the time Grossman wrote his preface, his words were fully compatible with the larger Soviet narrative. In December 1942, for instance, the Soviet Union, in collaboration with Britain, the United States, and the European governments-in-exile, issued a statement regarding the “many hundreds of thousands” of innocent Jewish men, women, and children whom the Nazis had deported to Eastern Europe.” The next day, the Soviet Union published its own report in the Soviet press, concerning the Nazi extermination of the Jews in Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and other regions of the Soviet

209 Ibid.
In July 1943, a war crimes trial took place in Krasnodar. The victims of these war crimes were described during the trial and in the press coverage as “peaceful Soviet citizens.” At the same time, there was no attempt to suppress or ignore the overwhelming evidence that the vast majority of these Soviet citizens were Jews. After the trial, an article published in Krasnaya Zvezda described the Nazi efforts to eliminate the Jewish communities of North Caucasus.

It was only after the war that the narrative presented by the JAC began to depart from that of Soviet officials. The challenge now was to negotiate and combine these two and newly contrasting narratives – represented by Klebanov on the one hand and Soviet officials on the other. The JAC were now faced with the challenge of promoting a narrative which recognizes Jewish particular suffering while, at the same time, denies any Soviet involvement in inflicting it. This unique narrative, mitigating the other two, is often overlooked by scholarship. Too often is the JAC perceived as either fully Jewish or entirely Soviet. Reading Grossman’s preface with the aforementioned challenge in mind, does not bear out Weiner’s notion of Grossman “hammering” to his readers the particularity of Jewish suffering. Grossman was in fact trying to Sovietize a project that was, to begin with, officially concerned with Jewish suffering. What Grossman repeatedly hammered to his readers was that even though the book was focused on Jewish suffering it must not be forgotten that this was but a fraction – possibly a substantial fraction - of a larger, more universal suffering. In the preface Grossman even emphasized that ultimately, fascist antisemitism was nothing but a cover-up:

Perhaps never before in history has the connection between reactionism and anti-Semitism been so graphic and concrete; perhaps never before has it been so obvious that the anti-Semitic campaign was undertaken to conceal a general assault on the rights and freedom of the working class.

212 Ibid., 29–30.
Like Grossman, Ehrenburg was adamant about promoting the “shared fate” narrative of Soviet society. We can only imagine what Ehrenburg’s response to Klebanov was, since there is no record of it, but our guess should not be completely uneducated. Ehrenburg placed prime importance on emphasizing expressions of solidarity displayed by Soviet people towards Soviet Jews. These were his words about *The Black Book* project in September 1944:

> The “Black Book” must graphically present the bestial annihilation of millions of people by the fascists. It will include the stories of escaped Jews, witnesses to the atrocities, German orders, diaries and statements of the butchers, notes and diaries of those in hiding. Not declarations, not transcripts, but real-life stories must show the depth of the tragedy. It is extremely important to show the solidarity of the Soviet population, the rescue of individual Jews by Russians, Belorussians, Ukrainians, and Poles. Such stories will help heal terrible wounds and raise the ideal of friendship among peoples even higher.\(^\text{214}\)

With this, Ehrenburg exemplifies the narrative promoted by the committee: a recognition of the particular suffering of the Jews by the Nazis alongside a denial of the position of otherness they now occupied in Soviet society. Ehrenburg’s words, however, unintentionally indicate the presence of this very otherness right beneath the surface. “Such stories,” wrote Ehrenburg, without elaborating, “will help heal terrible wounds.” What wounds he referenced here one can only guess but the fact that an emphasis on Soviet solidarity should help heal them implied that these were not wounds inflicted solely by the Germans. It would not be farfetched to assume, then, that these wounds Ehrenburg mentioned indirectly referenced what Klebanov, along with many other Soviet Jews, had experienced and reported: wounds inflicted on them not by Germans but by fellow Soviets. Ehrenburg’s obscure phrasing points to something in his narrative that, albeit present, is not being said or acknowledged. His words also alert to what is really at stake here – sustaining the Friendship of the Peoples fantasy as the fundamental fantasy of Soviet society. Ehrenburg’s

\(^{214}\) Redlich, *War, the Holocaust and Stalinism*, 2013, 350.
words unintentionally signal the existence of these terrible wounds as an open pit dividing Soviet Jews from the rest of Soviet society.

What Grossman’s and Ehrenburg’s words above exemplify is how closely related the JAC narrative was to that of Soviet authorities. It was not until the war was over that their narrative began to depart from the official Soviet one. While JAC members still worked hard to negotiate the universal and the particular, they failed to understand that what had worked during the war was no longer politically sustainable in its aftermath. What was it that made the recognition of Jewish particular suffering so at odds with the political atmosphere of the postwar years? To answer that, we would have to consider what such recognition entailed, either consciously or unconsciously. This also requires venturing out of the Soviet realm of narratives, to consider the place of the Soviet story within the larger world of international memory building.

On the International Stage

The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee started its path with the intention and goal of fostering a relationship with the allied countries, as well as the international Jewish community, and join forces in the fight against fascism. Once this fight was won, a new battle began – over who got to tell the story of this fight, and how. Since the Committee focused its wartime efforts on the creation of The Black Book, its members were not foreign to memory work. Telling a certain story was, in effect, one of their main jobs. It was not just a Soviet domestic endeavor, however, but one that crossed national and political boundaries. After all, The Black Book started as a joint project with American Jewry.

It is interesting to look at the attempts to negotiate the particular with the universal when we shift the lens from the Soviet stage to the international one. With the Jewish international community in view, one might expect the JAC to place a greater emphasis on Jewish particular
suffering and a sense of a shared fate with the international Jewish community. While that is indeed the case, the delicate dance of balancing the particular with the universal, which characterized the JAC narrative for Soviet audiences, extended to the international stage as well. In April 1943, Mikhoels delivered a speech to the Canadian Jewish community of Ottawa. The speech opens with what Mikhoels calls “a very Soviet “Shalom Aleichem’” [Hebrew for ‘peace be with you.’] He proceeds by acknowledging that this greeting – at once a very Soviet (as per Mikhoels) and a very Jewish one - is delivered in the most troubled of times, “a very difficult, most tragic moment in history for our people.” Mikhoels goes on:

True, it is not only our people who are suffering in this sorrowful time. Hitler raised his bloody hand and in larger, ever larger, circles wielded his axe over the heads of many nations. He tortured, drove out, and enslaved large numbers of Russians, Ukrainians, and White Russians. He sucked the life blood out of the Poles, the Czechs, the Yugoslavs, the Greeks and the Norwegians. And more! Many more! But he singled out the Jews as his chosen victims.

Here Mikhoels repeats a narrative that we have seen so many times before – suffering is at the same time both shared and particular, both a universal experience and an exclusively Jewish one. What was it, then, that kept Jewish suffering particular even in such troubled times shared by so many? Mikhoels’ words imply that this particularity has to do with an act of marking, a singling out. “It is not only our people who are suffering in this sorrowful time -” he says while addressing the question of suffering directly - all these other nations are suffering as well. It is, however, only the Jews, as people, who are singled out as chosen victims and suffer as such.

Despite this persistent particularity of Jewish suffering, the attempts to weave it together with the Soviet one, an attempt we keep encountering either within Soviet borders or outside of them, were largely successful during the war. What made this joint story possible was the new space of shared suffering that fighting fascism enabled. This space permitted a recognition of the

215 Speech by Michoels, April, 1943, Call number RG 1247, Box 23, Folder 278, YIVO Archives, New York, NY.
particularity of the Jews in a way that was no longer incompatible with Soviet universalism. As we have seen, during the war Soviet Jewish suffering was both particular and shared – shared with the rest of Soviet Society, who was in itself ruthlessly targeted by the Nazis in a way no other Western society was; and shared with other ally countries and, especially, their Jewish communities. Indeed, fascism created a shared space of suffering for both Soviets and Jews – either Soviet or not – in a way that incorporated Jewish particularism within a larger Soviet narrative.

The Germans fought an entirely different war in the East than they did in the rest of Europe. While in Western Europe they followed international war conventions in terms of civilians, POWs, property, and cultural treasures, these rules did not apply when it came to fighting “Judeo-Bolshevism.” This meant that many millions of Soviet civilians were purposefully killed by SS units, and many Soviet towns were completely eradicated by the Wehrmacht, who followed a “scorched earth” policy that was adopted in no other country but the USSR. As the Soviet prosecution put it in the indictment document it composed for the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, the Nazi invasion of the USSR was characterized by “the annihilation of adults, women, old people, and children, especially Russians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians, and the extermination of the Jews.”

This phrasing greatly resembles Grossman’s and Ehrenburg’s attempts at negotiating Jewish particular suffering with a larger Soviet experience, when one is left wondering what exactly is the difference between “annihilation” and “extermination.” Here, too, Jews are at once particularized and share the same fate as their fellow Soviets.

This shared fate, forced by fascism upon Jews and Soviets alike, temporarily relieved the tension that was previously produced by the Jewish question within the realm of the Soviet nationalities policy. During the war, being particularized and targeted was part of a larger Soviet

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217 See Chapter One.
experience. It was a unifying narrative. Furthermore, Soviet Jews, who were suffering both as Jews and as Soviets, were able to link Soviet society to world Jewry in a way that allowed for a joint narrative shared between Soviets and other ally countries. This joint story, woven carefully throughout the war in an attempt to establish a shared fate of victimhood and heroism, was the story arc that allowed and sustained The Black Book as both a Soviet internal project and an international one. The weights began to shift once the Soviet Union was unable to sustain its narrative of victimhood on the postwar international stage. Indeed, the excerpt quoted above, taken from a Soviet-authored paragraph of the Nuremberg trial indictment, was approved by the other ally countries’ prosecutors almost in full - except for one notable difference. It now only mentioned the annihilation of Belorussians and Ukrainians while the word “Russians” was edited out. This small edit of the Soviet narrative in the Nuremberg indictment document by the other ally countries is a powerful metaphor for the changing relationships and narratives in the years immediately succeeding the war. The trials at Nuremberg emerged as a new battlefield – this time in the realm of memory wars – and along the trial another battle began over who were to be remembered and in what ways. The Soviets saw Nuremberg as an opportunity for international recognition of the enormity of Soviet losses. It was important to them, thus, that the indictment would reflect that. Procurator General Konstantin Gorshenin, who was also part of the Soviet Indictment Commission, criticized early drafts for not reflecting the true role of the Soviet Union in the war as well as the true magnitude of its losses. His concern was that this would affect both the issue of reparations and the historical record – how the USSSR was to be remembered in the context of the war.\footnote{Hirsch, \textit{Soviet Judgment at Nuremberg}, 101.}
The Nuremberg trials, thus, did not just serve as means to get justice for the victims and to punish the perpetrators. They were also a space in which different narratives - concerning the identity of victims and perpetrators - were presented, evaluated and judged either admissible or inadmissible; either true or false. It was where the official international narrative was negotiated and eventually formed. The Soviets wanted to tell a very particular story at Nuremberg, just as much as any other party involved, and for a while it seemed like they were indeed succeeding in admitting the Soviet narrative into this international realm of remembering. Their edits and revisions to the indictment were adopted almost entirely, and the full extent of the losses and destruction the Soviet Union sustained during the war was not only recognized but even presented by the American persecution, before the Soviets had a chance to present it themselves. This was, in a sense, a “hijacking” of the Soviet line of defense by the American persecution who was selected to present first. While this was perceived by the Soviets as a form of American aggression, it also attested to the extent to which the Soviet narrative of the war was accepted by the other ally countries. When it was time for the Soviet persecution to present their case, they did an astounding job in presenting new and convincing evidence to support their narrative and subsequently earned recognition and praise in the international press for their performance both in court and on the battlefield. At the same time, however, a noticeable rift between the Soviet Union and the other ally countries, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, was growing wider each day. Now that the German threat was eradicated, American and British leaders were showing an ever-greater concern over a future Soviet threat. Disagreements were also starting to form around the question of Germany’s future. These tensions were slowly starting to find their way into the courtroom.

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219 Ibid., 214.
220 Ibid., 242.
On March 6, 1946, Britain’s former prime minister, Winston Churchill, gave his famous “Iron Curtain” speech, deeming the recently widening rift between the countries irreparable. This was only days after the Soviet persecution had successfully presented its case, leaving it to the German defendants and their lawyers to make theirs. This, too, would not work in favor of the Soviets. As impactful as the Soviet case was, the defense was ultimately successful in implicating the Soviets themselves in crimes against peace, bringing to light new details about the Soviet-German collaboration and non-aggression pact. This spilled out of the courtroom through the press and into the realm of international public view. It was then followed by growing doubts over the question of who was truly behind the Katyn massacre, when the defense presented three witnesses implicating the Soviets and putting into question their timeline of the events.\textsuperscript{221} Soviet hopes for Nuremberg, of establishing a narrative of Soviet heroism and suffering vis-à-vis German guilt and barbarity, were slowly but surely diminishing. By the time the trials ended, the Soviets were perceived not as victorious heroes, but as aggressors, and indeed as accomplices with the Nazi regime.\textsuperscript{222} The Nuremberg trials were but one postwar arena in which the Soviets lost their international recognition as one of the main victims of Nazism. It was European Jews that were now recognized, and commemorated, as the main and sole victims, while the Soviets were themselves perceived as aggressors. Deprived of international recognition of Soviet victimhood and heroism, the Soviet recognition of Jewish victimhood was given a new context \textit{après-coup}.\textsuperscript{223} Since the Soviets were no longer recognized as victims, Jewish particular suffering became part of a Western story and the shared-fate narrative was replaced with an international one of Jewish suffering and Soviet Aggression. This international narrative found resonance with the internal

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 319–30.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{223} \textit{Après-coup} is the French term that is used in psychoanalysis to translate Freud’s German \textit{nachträglichkeit}. In English, it is sometimes translated as “afterwardness” or “deferred-action.”
Jewish narrative represented by first lieutenant Klebanov, in his protest against local collaborators and their readmission into Soviet Society. During the war, the heavy and thick blanket of fascism covered over everything else. Once it was lifted, however, it was no longer possible to ignore the fact that Jewish suffering always remained particular. No matter how shared suffering appeared to be, the tension between its particular Jewish form and the universalizing Soviet narrative persisted. It was even harder to ignore the fact that some of this particular suffering was indeed inflicted on Jews by their fellow Soviets.

Recognition as a Double-Edged Sword

Reading through these different war time narratives, one must wonder about the source of this persistent tension between the particular and the universal. What was it in Soviet Jewish suffering, that kept resisting the universal? In his 1943 speech, Mikhoels suggests that it has something to do with the way Jews were singled out as chosen victims. He elaborates:

[Hitler] single-mindedly eradicated [the Jews] wherever they were, wherever his henchman could reach, wherever the long arm of his wild, thieving horde could stretch. According to our information, the Germans destroyed nearly four million Jews in Europe. If you consider that the entire Jewish population was no more than 15 million, then the outcome is the extermination of one quarter of the Jewish people in a period of just a few years. Exterminated for all the world to see: slain, shut down, drowned, strangled, and buried alive.224

Mikhoels describes the different forms of extermination that Hitler saved particularly for the Jews: “slain, shut down, drowned, strangled, and buried alive.” These methods of killing, however, were not the only thing that made the extermination of the Jews particular. The Jews, says Mikhoels, were “exterminated for all the world to see.” It was not just about exterminating, then, but also about marking, singling out. This was, in itself, part of the Nazi plan rather than simply its side effect. Mikhoels continues:

224 Ibid.
It is not just the mass exterminations, not only the complete physical destruction of our people in all the countries that these evil, uncivilized murderers of Nazi Germany invaded; it is not only these atrocities that make this period in our history so gloomy and bleak; It is not just these facts that constitute the horror of horrors, these alone do not reflect the tragedy of our people. Hitler decided to attach a stigma to our people. He tormented and tortured the souls of the people, offended their honor and violated their self-esteem. Little children were forced, in fear of death, to beat their parents with their own bare hands. They were forced to crawl, their hand behind their backs, on their bellies, like worms to their graves! [...] It is not possible to recount the sadistic methods the German savages used to demean and dishonor the Jewish race. All these to justify the evil decision that the entire Jewish people is destined to be put to death solely because it is a lowly, unworthy immoral race. It is in this that the worst danger for our people lies.\(^\text{225}\)

Recognizing this very particular suffering of the Jews, thus, necessarily entailed also seeing the ways Jews were marked by it, by its inflictors. This is a form of suffering that has to do with being seen in a particular way – a way that was not chosen but forced on Jews by their Nazi perpetrators. Suffering, in this constellation, necessitated an outside witness to its own infliction. It is a construction that involves and depends on an other, an Other, who sees and recognizes. As discussed in the previous chapter, subjectivity is enabled by desire – a desire for the desire of the Other, for being recognized. “The subject’s most primordial relationship” writes Lacan, “is that involving demand addressed to the Other qua locus of speech.”\(^\text{226}\) But what happens if the very act of demand that initiates the mechanism of desire for recognition (“See me!”) originates not in the speaking subject but elsewhere? “There is no subject except to another subject,” Lacan continues,

> It is insofar as the Other himself is a subject that our subject is instated, and that he can establish himself as a subject in a new relationship to the Other – one in which he must get himself recognized as a subject by this other, no longer as demand, nor as love, but as subject.\(^\text{227}\)

We should ask ourselves, then, what is being recognized exactly when the initial demand for recognition is not the subject’s own demand. If the Nazis marked the Jews by exterminating them

\(^{225}\) Speech by Mikhoels, YIVO Archives, New York, NY.


\(^{227}\) Ibid., 371.
“for all the world to see” then what does this act of “seeing” really mean for the victims? In other words, what is it that is being recognized here and what are its implications for the subject?

The idea that particular Jewish suffering during the war was contingent on, and produced through recognition, echoes in peculiar ways Laub’s formulation of registering trauma as a construction that involves the Other. For Laub, what the Nazis did that he truly considered annihilating was their elimination of the position of the Other who could bear witness to Jewish suffering and offer them the recognition only a subject can offer another subject. What Mikhoels describes in his speech, however, is actually how much of a part this mechanism of recognition played in the particular suffering of Soviet Jews. We have seen how articulation in language—within the realm of the symbolic—requires an outside witness, an Other. It was through this process of symbolization Ehrenburg offered Soviet Jews, that their suffering was articulated in language. “Everything that the realm of speech brings into existence for the subject,” says Lacan, “continues to depend on utter and complete faith in the Other.”

This process of symbolization, thus, cannot occur in the absence of an Other.

On the one hand, there can be no subject who is not a subject to another subject; on the other hand, it is only as a speaking subject, as a subject of speech, that the first subject can be established as such. And since the Other is herself marked by the necessities of language, she is no longer a real Other; rather, she is established as the locus of the articulation of speech [or locus within which speech is articulated]. The first possible position of subject as such—a subject who can grasp himself as a subject, who can grasp itself as a subject in the Other, insofar as this Other thinks of him as a subject—is created in that locus.

Recognition, Lacan tells us here, can only occur within language, in the locus of speech. The subject is constituted as such only when he is being recognized by another subject, who in itself is marked by the necessities of language. This is so because it is only through language that the initial demand for recognition is interpreted and becomes laden with meaning. As subjects, we are all

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228 Ibid., 395.
229 Ibid., 375.
marked by the necessities of language. The marking of Jews here, however, and much like their very suffering, presents itself as particular – a particular problem to the universal psychoanalytic formulation of trauma. It forces us to ask how this act of recognition, which is meant to offer a “cure” to the unregistered trauma, also takes part in its very creation. The trauma of Soviet Jews, it seems, in itself resists universalization.

How, then, was recognition implicated in the Soviet Jewish trauma that it also helped symbolize? Lacan’s formulation of recognition is based on a Kojèvean reading of Hegelian ideas. For Kojève, human existence is a constant battle for recognition, for capturing the other’s desire. This battle of gazes, for Lacan, manifests in language through the Other’s recognition of the demand as such. Kojève speaks about the master-slave dialectic in a way that necessitates the survival of the slave. If the master kills the slave, there will be no one to recognize the master. This means that subjectivity is always constituted in the locus of the Other. It is a meaning that is forced on the subject from the outside and marks him. In this case, it was not only the interpretation of the demand that came from the Other, but a part of the demand itself. The Jewish demand to be seen and recognized as suffering was propelled by a demand that originated elsewhere – the Nazi demand for recognition and domination. Even if the Jews ended up winning this battle of gazes, the mark that it left on them was the very excess that could not be escaped or symbolized in the attempts to take cognizant of the trauma and put it into words. It is in this inescapable and inexplicable excess – the marking of Jews as “a lowly, unworthy immoral race,” as Mikhoels puts it – “that the worst danger for our people lies.”

The stigma that Hitler attached to the Jewish people, to use Mikhoels words, was both a part and an outcome of the particular ways in which the Nazis inflicted pain and suffering on them.

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– tormenting and torturing their souls, offending their honor and violating their self-esteem. Seeing Jewish suffering, therefore, could not be done without also seeing their violated honor and souls, the stigma that was attached to them by this very violation. Soviet Jewish suffering was recognized, and therefore also symbolized, by the various projects initiated by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. The marking of Jews as particular by this very suffering, thus, also materialized in language and received articulation. It became part of the symbolic with the penetration of the signifier of the Jew – zhyd – as a member of this “lowly, unworthy immoral race.” And yet, there was something about this marking that could not be assimilated or symbolized. This inarticulable excess was disruptive enough, resistant enough to symbolization, to prevent any further attempts of writing Jewish particularity back into the narrative of Soviet universalism after the war. Of course, the derogatory word zhyd existed in the Soviet discourse prior to Nazi invasion. With it, however, it attained new particular meanings. This prewar signifier – charged with new meanings, associations, and connections during the war – reminds us once more that Soviet Jews were already marked to begin with. The Enlightenment itself, as a universalizing project, marked Jews as particular long before the war. In the Soviet case, this marking was apparent through the difficulties Soviet Jewishness posed to the Soviet nationalities policy in its existence as a question – the perpetual Jewish Question. Jews, then, were already marked by a question - a question marking their national designation, their Soviet identity, their Jewish bodies. The Jewish mark was ultimately a question mark. At the same time, zhyd, as this recharged signifier, is a reminder that the Nazi invasion added something new to this marking - not just in quantity but in quality. How can we make sense, then, of this first mark – the Jewish question mark - and its convergence with a second, later, mark forced upon Soviet Jews by the Nazis?
The enigmatic amalgamation of these two different moments of marking echoes in some ways Freud’s conceptualization of the idea of repression. According to Freud, repression is a mechanism that requires not one moment, but two separate moments in time which operate reciprocally in both directions. He distinguishes between the first stage of repression, *primal repression* – an idea that is denied entrance to the conscious – and a second stage which he calls “repression proper.” This second stage of repression, says Freud, affects mental derivatives of the repressed representative, or such trains of thought as, originating elsewhere, have come into associative connection with it. On account of this association, these ideas experience the same fate as what was primally repressed. Repression proper, therefore, is actually an after-pressure [*Nachdrängen*]. Moreover, it is a mistake to emphasize only the repulsion which operates from the direction of the conscious upon what is to be repressed; quite as important is the attraction exercised by what was primally repressed upon everything with which it can establish a connection. Probably the trend towards repression would fail in its purpose if these two forces did not cooperate, if there were not something previously repressed ready to receive what is repelled by the conscious.231

Repression, thus, is the convergence of a repressed primal idea with other later ideas through an establishment of associative connections. Once converged, the second idea reactivates the first, while the original idea works to attract whatever it is with which it can establish connections. In his speech, Mikhoels touches upon a temporal element as another characteristic of what made Jewish suffering particular. He says:

[…] exterminated, annihilated with no weapons to defend themselves were peaceful citizens, not having committed the smallest of offense. Eighty years old and six months old infants alike were brutally murdered. Mothers and daughters, working men, poor folk, bankers and businessmen… all guilty of one thing: having Jewish mothers and fathers – being brought into this world by Jewish parents.

The particular suffering, thus, has to do not only with this present moment in time, in which suffering is shared among many, but with a more continuous form of suffering that is connected

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to the sufferers’ past. Only the Jews were singled out as chosen victims for their familial histories – their parents and their parents before them. The particular suffering Mikhoels hints toward is one that precedes the war. A suffering that is a state of being rather than a particular experience or moment in time. It has to do with the Jewish people as a singular group of people who were so often nomads, persecuted, displaced. In this way, the particular current suffering of Soviet Jews is another form, another manifestation, of the particularity we have encountered before in discussing the Jewish Question. This is recognized by Mikhoels, who points out that the particularity of Jewish wartime suffering has to do with how its infliction is justified – not with something that is located in the here and now but a history, a prolonged state of being.

A similar sentiment is present in a telegram sent by the JAC to the Jews of America and the world on 10 May 1945, following the victory over Nazi Germany. The telegram was signed by some of the most prominent members of the committee including Mikhoels, Grossman, Ehrenburg, Bergelson, Kvitko, Markish, and Fefer, and it “heartily congratulate[d]” the Jews of the world upon the defeat of fascism. In this telegram, too, there is a reference to Jewish particular suffering as a lengthier form of suffering that is not contingent on the war but expands far beyond it: “In the course of its age-old history the suffering Jewish people have never experienced such gory nightmares as in the period of misrule of Hitlerite obscurantists.” Here, ‘suffering’ is used not as a noun but as an adjective, a descriptive quality of the experience of being a Jew. Yet, there is no doubt that this particular moment in time, in which Jews were persecuted by the Nazis, has changed this experience of suffering into “a gory nightmare” that has never been experienced before. The convergence of these two forms of Jewish suffering – the old and the new – into one

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232 See Chapter One.
233 Copy of a Telegram Received via Western Union, Call number RG 1247, Box 19, Folder 223, YIVO Archives, New York, NY.
gory nightmare, bears obvious similarity to Freud’s idea of repression of something previously repressed that is ready to receive what is repelled by the conscious. Mere similarity, however, is not sufficient to deploy the concept of repression in discussing these converging moments. We should ask, rather, what repression can offer us in thinking about this dynamic, that might help explain the apparent paradox of the Jewish mark originating in two different moments in time, and the effect that this had on the constant tension between their universal being and particular suffering.

Soviet Jews were marked during the war by their particular suffering, and they suffered in a particular manner on account of that marking. This is why we keep encountering the particularity of their suffering even in that one moment in time, created by the war, where suffering was shared by all. This chapter opened with a question about the postwar change in attitude toward Soviet Jews and the recognition of their suffering. In our attempts to locate the source of this shift, we kept encountering the persistent tension between the universal and the particular that in itself presented us with a question: Was the source of this change in attitude an outcome of Nazi marking, as Kotlova predicted in her testimony about roots that were laid down by Hitler and would stay for years to come? And if so, how can we settle this with the fact that Soviet Jews, as the Soviet struggle with answering the Jewish Question suggests, were already marked by particularity long before the war? What happened in the moment of this second marking that suddenly rendered Soviet recognition of Jewish particular suffering so impossible? This is where Freud’s formulation of repression can offer some insight. Repression is about an idea that is repelled from the conscious because it conflicts with another existing idea. This means that where we find repression, we will find the coexistence of incompatible ideas. The Soviet nationalities policy, an outcome of the paradoxical ideas of the Enlightenment that necessitated a particularized other to sustain the
universal, were always an amalgamation of such conflicting and incompatible ideas. “National in Form, Socialist in Content” was an attempt to resolve this conflict and incorporate these incompatible ideas within the same policy. The Jewish Question, however, kept challenging this formula as Soviet Jews lacked a national form and kept resisting adopting one.

Repression, tells us Freud, is a process triggered by psychic trauma that is itself a result of the existence of incompatible ideas. The trauma that leads to repression requires at least two moments in time whose relationship is one of après-coup. This is the same formulation of trauma that we have encountered before in discussing the survivors’ testimonies. Reading through these different testimonies, we have seen how in trauma there is always something that resists being symbolized, being put into words. This is also undeniably present in the constant attempts to negotiate Soviet Jewish suffering with the idea of Soviet universal being. No matter how hard, or how persistent these attempts were, there always seemed to be an excess that refused being assimilated. This inexplicable excess is even present in my own attempts, as the historian behind this account, to capture the essence of this tension between the particular and the universal – to no avail. Using more and more words in a desperate effort to capture it, something keeps escaping and evading and remains unsaid. This tension is exactly that excess which resists symbolization, and as such, it is an indication of trauma. We can, thus, locate the origins of the trauma of Soviet Jewish particularity not in the moment of Nazi invasion, but in the prior marking of Jews by the Jewish Question through the Soviet nationalities policy. What the Nazis did by singling out the Jews as an exclusive target of Nazi aggression, was to reactivate, après-coup, the first moment of their marking. At the same time, this first moment laid dormant and awaited an

235 See the discussion about Laub in Chapter Two.
appearance of a second moment with which it could form a connection. The recognition of particular suffering that was offered to Soviet Jews during the war, therefore, did not only result in registering the trauma and symbolizing it, but also in reactivating it.

For Soviet Jews, this recognition – a reactivation and convergence of their two markings – resulted in fixating them in a position of particularized others. What, however, did it mean for the ones doing the recognizing – the rest of Soviet Society? We have seen how during the war this persistent tension that indicates trauma almost seemed resolvable – recognizable in a way that was now compatible with universal Soviet ideas. Suddenly Jewish projects, such as The Black Book project, could again be Jewish in form and Soviet in content, especially when the content was that of a shared suffering as a Soviet wartime experience. Mikhoels’ strange amalgamation of “a very Soviet Shalom Aleichem” is exactly such a construction. After all, what could possibly be Soviet about this Jewish greeting? It is the fact that the message of this greeting, its content, is Soviet, even if the form is Jewish. Indeed, after detailing the particularities of Jewish suffering, Mikhoels goes back to Soviet hardship and victory:

The Red Army faced Hitler’s vultures, blocked the Nazi scavenger army and, within the space of a little more than two years eradicated many Nazis while simultaneously withstanding the hardships and evils of the German offensive. […] The courageous Red Army, under the leadership of Marshall Stalin, is now fighting with every ounce of its strength to defeat the Nazis who have occupied our land.236

At this point in time in which Mikhoels gave his speech, still during the war, this delicate balance between Soviet universal suffering and Jewish particular suffering was still successfully maintained – possibly better than ever before. Yet, recognition worked as a double-edged sword for both the recognized and the recognizers. Recognizing the mark of otherness that is Jewish particular suffering, could not be done without also recognizing its primal moment – the Jewish

236 Ibid.
Question - and how in that first moment it was not an external marking, forced from the outside, but an internal Soviet one. It meant recognizing what would present as an incompatible idea with the Soviet universalizing project – expressions of internal aggression within Soviet society and the intolerance of otherness that was imbedded in the universalizing attempts of “National in Form, Socialist in Content,” despite its opposite intentions. The postwar disintegration of the Soviet narrative of war heroism and victimhood on the international stage, especially, made it almost impossible to recognize Jewish particular suffering without also recognizing the place of fellow Soviets in its infliction. To sustain this recognition, thus, one would also have to recognize how easily the Nazi invasion reactivated and recharged the first moment of Jewish otherness, and how quickly they were indeed treated as others by their neighbors. Recognizing Jewish particular suffering ultimately meant acknowledging the aggression displayed by Soviet citizens toward fellow Soviet Jews. “On account of this association,” tells us Freud, “these ideas experience the same fate as what was primally repressed.” All of this could not possibly escape repression exactly because it pointed to something that was always already there and that was, to begin with, incompatible with the Soviet Friendship of the Peoples fantasy of a universal society. This is what, ultimately, turned Soviet recognition of Jewish particular suffering after the war impossible – the idea of Jewish otherness had to be repressed on account of what recognizing it entailed and how incompatible these ideas were with the Soviet fundamental fantasy.

Terrible Wounds

This new sense of Jewish otherness that could not escape repression, unavoidably also destroyed the delicate balance that was previously kept between the particular and universal aspects of Soviet Jewishness. After the war, Ehrenberg and the committee attempted to keep promoting the same narrative that this delicate balance allowed. “It is extremely important to show
the solidarity of the Soviet population, the rescue of individual Jews by Russians, Belorussians, Ukrainians, and Poles. Such stories will help heal terrible wounds and raise the ideal of friendship among peoples even higher” wrote Ehrenburg. As his words unintentionally exemplify, recognizing these terrible wounds could not be done without also recognizing how they were inflicted and by whom. The attempt to do one without the other – recognizing particular suffering without recognizing its effects on the Friendship fantasy of a unified Soviet society - was no longer possible.

By pointing to these terrible wounds and their potential forms of healing, Ehrenburg is in effect saying the opposite of what he intends – “a terrible wound has been inflicted on Soviet Jews by their fellow Soviets and this wound could only heal if we turn our attention to opposite stories of rescue and solidarity.” Ehrenburg’s words fail to suture and cover up a tension that has always been there, despite a temporary relief during the war. Through this failure, Ehrenburg emerges as what Lacan calls “the subject of the enunciation.” Lacan distinguishes between the subject of the statement or the utterance and the subject present in enunciation. The subject of the statement is easy to identify as the shifter “I” which designates the person who is uttering the statement (for example in the statement “I am here.”) A shifter is a signifier that always draws its meaning from the context of what is stated. The subject of the enunciation, on the other hand, is the speaking subject who utters the statement. It is the subject, “not so far as it produces discourse but insofar as it is produced, cornered even, by discourse.”237 This may seem contradictory, as we tend to think of the speaking subject as the one who produces discourse through speech and not the other

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way around. What Ehrenburg’s words illustrate, however, is exactly how the subject is cornered by discourse – how in speaking one always says more than what one intends.

The signifier “I,” as the shifter, is precisely that which is universal – a sort of one size fits all signifier, constantly shifting to designate whoever is currently speaking, in the here and now. The subject of enunciation, on the other hand, is the particular subject, determined by its history, that emerges through speech and is produced by it. “Even if there is no I [in the utterance]” says Lacan, “there is a subject of the enunciation, and there is a subject even when it can no longer be grasped in the sentence.” Indeed, there is no I in Ehrenburg’s words cited above, but we can still identify him as the subject of enunciation through the excess in meaning we find in his discourse. As the subject of enunciation, we can see how Ehrenburg fails to be the ideal universal Soviet Jew that he was in the survivors’ fantasies. In an attempt to reinforce and reinstate the universal by emphasizing Soviet solidarity, Ehrenburg lets that which is particular slip out unintentionally. The Jewish mark of otherness emerges as a terrible wound, an injury, in the Soviet fantasy Ehrenburg himself is meant to embody – the exemplary Soviet writer as the incarnation of the universal Soviet man.

The fragility of this fantasy is already present in Ehrenburg’s opening speech that launched the JAC in 1941. Rereading it now, might make this more apparent. Ehrenburg states:

I grew up in a Russian city. My native language is Russian. I am a Russian writer. Now, like all Russians, I am defending my homeland. But the Nazis have reminded me of something else: my mother’s name was Hannah. I am a Jew.

In his speech (and there is an important ambiguity here that cannot be ignored,) Ehrenburg makes a few different I utterances. We can see how, in the case of his first utterance, “I am a Russian

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238 Ibid.
239 See discussion about the fantasy of Ehrenburg in Chapter Two.
240 See Chapter Two.
writer,” we do not find much more than the subject of the statement. The I here designates the person, Ehrenburg, who is uttering the statement, but there is nothing of (what we call in psychoanalysis) the subject of the unconscious that emerges behind this designation, nothing that disrupts the fantasy of language as a universal code, through which a fixed and unambiguous meaning is passed from one speaker to another. Indeed, in his preceding utterance, Ehrenburg specifically cites language as the source of this statement. “I am a Russian writer,” he says, because Russian, as the language that I speak natively, enables me to write and to do so in Russian; to utilize a ready-to-use source of expression, and to be elevated, by this very use, to the level of the universal. Something different happens when Ehrenburg says: “the Nazis have reminded me of something else: my mother’s name was Hannah. I am a Jew.” Here Ehrenburg emerges as the subject who enunciates, who says more than he intends – the Nazis reminded him of something, a particularity, that was already there before. This means that something was forgotten, repelled from the conscious. What was that something that Ehrenburg repressed? It was precisely a name - a mark - who singles him out, through his familial history, as particular.

The subject of the enunciation, who emerges and disrupts the universal meaning of language as code, bears much resemblance to the particular who, unintentionally, emerges from Ehrenburg and disrupts his universal being as an exemplary Soviet writer. In the previous chapter, we looked at the fantasy of Ehrenburg-the-writer, held by many of the testifiers in The Black Book. We have seen how the testifiers craved Ehrenburg’s words to cover for their own inability to triumph as the subjects of their statements – to transmit their experiences through words and language and to produce a discourse they can fully master. By turning to Ehrenburg, the writer, they were hoping to escape this flawed particularity and be elevated to the universality language can only really offer in fantasy. The terrible wounds that followed the arrival of the Germans, and
were then met with repression, conditioned Ehrenburg’s capacity to act in that ideal fashion of a particularized universal. The postwar inability to keep the balance between Jewish particular suffering and Soviet universal ideas of being found its expression in the most exemplary of all Soviet Jews, when even the exemplary writer’s words could not escape particularity.

The Committee’s activities in the postwar years were centered around the attempt to try and tend to these wounds. Stories of solidarity and coexistence were promoted as much as before, in a desperate attempt to offer a cure. These stories, however, could no longer appease either Jewish complaints of local antisemitism or Soviet official complaints about the imbalance and partiality of The Black Book. Following Aleksandrov’s evaluation of the book in February 1947 – deeming it inaccurate and incorrect for its portrayals of a “non-existent order of priorities” in the German destruction of the people of the Soviet Union – Mikhoels made an attempt to appeal to the Central Committee secretary, Andrei Zhdanov, in defense. Mikhoels wrote:

“The Black Book” gives a true picture of events, and its appearance at the present time would undoubtedly fulfill the role of a counter-propaganda document in the struggle against reactionary forces. The reader will find rich material in the book about the friendship among Soviet peoples without regard to nationality during the most difficult days of the German occupation, about the selfless love of our people for their homeland, about their struggle against the occupiers, and about the Soviet Army which saved millions of people from destruction.241

Using the same language of Soviet solidarity that Grossman and Ehrenburg consistently used while working on the book, Mikhoels was trying to recreate the lost balance between Jewish particular suffering and Soviet being. By referring to “reactionary forces,” he was trying to weave this narrative into the current political discourse of the cold war.242 Alas, the terrible wounds left by

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241 Redlich, War, the Holocaust and Stalinism, 2013, 367–68.
242 See Redlich’s discussion of Soviet wartime perception of the world as vertically divided into “good” and “evil” vs. a horizontal postwar approach. Shimon Redlich, Šimʿôn Redlîḵ, and Si ’m’on Redlichi, Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948 (East European Quarterly, 1982), 149.
the brutal reality of local collaborators - so obviously incompatible with the “friendship among Soviet peoples without regard to nationality” fantasy - were now beyond recovery. On October 7 1947, an official letter was sent regarding the publication of The Black Book. It was signed by M. Morozov, Director of the Publications Division, Propaganda Department of the CC AUCP(B), and addressed to Zhdanov. It read:

The Propaganda Department has meticulously studied “The Black Book”. It contains grave political errors. The Propaganda Department does not approve publication of the book in 1947. Consequently, “The Black Book” may not be published.243

The Black Book, a vast monument of ideas that could no longer be reconciled, had to be repelled from the Soviet conscious.

The Return of the Jewish Question

On November 29 1947, the UN voted on the question of the establishment of the Jewish State of Israel in Palestine. The Soviet Union, as a member of the United Nations, was once again faced with the question of recognition. Specifically, it had to decide whether to officially recognize Israel as the national home of the Jewish people. The Jewish Question, therefore, was back at the forefront. In his famous speech to the UN general assembly on May 14 1947, Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, drew a direct connection between Jewish particular suffering and the necessity of finding a solution to the Jewish Question. Gromyko emphasized how the countries of Western Europe failed in providing assistance and defending the Jewish people from the horrors of Nazism and concluded that in light of this,

The time has come to help these people, not by word, but by deeds. It is essential to show concern for the urgent needs of a people which has undergone such great suffering as a result of the war brought about by Hitlerite Germany. This is a duty of the United Nations.

243 Redlich, War, the Holocaust and Stalinism, 2013, 368.
At this point, however, the Soviet Union was in favor of a shared Arab-Jewish State, rather than a partition plan dividing Palestine into two national States. Gromyko explained why:

An equitable solution can be reached only if sufficient consideration is given to the legitimate interests of both these peoples [Arabs and Jews]. All this leads the Soviet delegation to the conclusion that the legitimate interests of both the Jewish and Arab populations of Palestine can be duly safeguarded only through the establishment of an independent, dual, democratic, unified Arab-Jewish State. Such a State must be based on equality of rights for the Jewish and the Arab populations, which might lay foundations of co-operation between these two peoples to their mutual interest and advantage. […] Contemporary history provides examples not only of the racial and religious discrimination which, unfortunately, still exists in certain countries. It also gives us examples of the peaceful collaboration of different nationalities within the framework of a single State, in the course of which collaboration each nationality has unlimited possibilities for contributing its labor and showing its talents within the framework of a single State and in the common interests of all the people.244

It is easy to guess which “State” is referenced in Gromyko’s speech when he speaks about a peaceful collaboration between different nationalities within the framework of a single State. Gromyko is alluding, of course, to the Soviet Union and its nationalities policy. It is interesting to note that, while the Soviet Union was indeed willing to recognize the particular need of the Jewish people, it initially attempted to do so according to the same model it implemented within its own borders. This was an attempt, in other words, to resolve the conflict between two incompatible ideas – recognizing Jewish national aspirations and opposing nationalism – by evoking the same model of “National in Form” that ultimately resulted in the Friendship of the Peoples fantasy. As a model, it helped sustain the fantasy of a Soviet unified society in spite of various national particularities.

Gromyko’s portrayal of the idea of a “democratic, unified Arab-Jewish State” is a projection of this Soviet Friendship fantasy onto the new realm of particularity created by the

Jewish Question in its current form. It is yet another attempt at reconciling incompatible ideas by universalizing the particular. This Fantasy is precisely what Ehrenburg and the JAC worked so hard to salvage in their attempts to heal terrible wounds with stories of solidarity and friendship among the people. In it, as portrayed in Gromyko’s speech, history gives us examples of true unity between nationalities residing side-by-side, as well as examples of racism and discrimination. These examples, however, are contrasted and belong to different states - different countries and different modes of being. The possibility of both existing within the same boundaries is denied. We, thus, get a clearer idea of what acknowledging Soviet Jewish otherness would mean and why it is therefore repressed – racial discrimination cannot exist in the same realm as the peaceful and united society that occupies Soviet fantasies.

On November 29 1947, the Soviet Union, along with 33 other countries, voted in favor of the partition plan and the establishment of the State of Israel. It, therefore, offered a full recognition of the new Jewish State. These news were a source of great enthusiasm, both for the JAC and for Soviet Jews in general. Many committee members expressed their joy over this recognition in written statements. The well-known writer and journalist, David Zaslavsky, for instance, sent a letter to Eynikayt in which he shared his feelings about the news:

It is with a feeling of great pride that I have learned about the official recognition of the State of Israel by the Soviet government. Yet again the whole world can contemplate the great moral force of the politics of the Soviet socialist democracy. The recognition of the right of the Jewish people of Palestine to state sovereignty and national independence is another example of the honesty, integrity, freedom-loving and peaceful disposition of the Soviet foreign policy, firmly committed to exercising the great principles of Leninist-Stalinist national policy.  

This letter is a celebration of the Soviet recognition of the State of Israel, but it is also an attempt to reconcile this recognition with the premises of the Soviet nationalities policy. It exemplifies a

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245 GARF, Fond P-8114, Opis 1, Delo 32, 1. 98.
similar effort to the one present in Gromyko’s speech of denying the incompatibility of ideas that this recognition brings forth. With this, we see how the same attempt to balance the particular with the universal is carried over from its previous arena, the Soviet recognition of Jewish suffering, to its current one - the Soviet recognition of the State of Israel.

Recognition, as the double-edged sword that it had already proven to be for Soviet Jews, was now shifting again, from the marking of particular suffering introduced during the war, back to that of the Jewish Question mark. As we have seen, however, the Jewish Question itself was already recharged with new irreconcilable meanings. In another letter of support, written by the World Chess Champion, Mikhail Botvinnik, suffering and the Jewish Question are bridged again, in a way that exemplifies how this question was recharged by the new meanings suffering introduced:

The noble decision of the Soviet government to recognize the Jewish State in Palestine will be joyfully and gratefully welcomed by the long-suffering Jewish people. The Jews of the entire world can clearly see the difference between the consistent and principled policy of the Soviet government, protecting peace and safety of small nations, and the policy of imperialist states whose plotting and scheming may threaten Jews and other nations with a grave new suffering.246

This letter, formally concerned with the Soviet recognition of the State of Israel, both opens and closes with the idea of suffering. Suffering, thus, is interwind with the Jewish Question and its possible solutions. It would be justified to wonder if this component of suffering was not, to begin with, a part of the Jewish Question - was this question mark not always a mark of suffering? Nevertheless, we have seen how the Nazi onslaught altered this suffering into something new and different, something irreconcilable. Botvinnik touches upon this difference when he opens his letter with the idea of the long-suffering Jewish people, indeed an old suffering informing their particular Question mark, and ends it with the threat of a new suffering that awaits the Jews if they

246 GARF, Fond P-8114, Opis 1, Delo 18, l. 285.
are denied their own national State. With this, Botvinnik reveals the new and irreconcilable
dimension of suffering that the Nazis forced upon the Jews. According to the logic of his letter,
the long-suffering Jewish people can only protect themselves from this grave new suffering if the
Jewish Question is finally answered with the creation of a Jewish State. In other words, the way
with which this question was dealt before is no longer sustainable. Now that this particular
suffering had been recognized, a recognition of the State of Israel had to follow. Particularity could
no longer be concealed.

Another letter of support, celebrating the recognition, was written by Ehrenburg himself.
The letter is concerned with the war that erupted in Palestine following the United Nation’s vote.
Ehrenburg writes:

The Soviet people have shown what brotherhood is. They have shown it on the banks of
the Volga and the Vistula during the years of hardship. If some Jews remained alive in
Europe after the horrifying years of fascism it is because Soviet people, drenching in their
own blood, have put an end to the triumph of racism. The Soviet government instantly
recognized the new Jewish State. This recognition will empower the heroes who are now
defending Israel against the mercenaries.247

Ehrenburg draws another connecting line between Soviet recognition of particular Jewish suffering
and the recognition of the Jewish State of Israel. It was Soviet recognition of Jewish wartime
suffering, according to Ehrenburg, that ultimately saved the Jews of Europe, and it was the same
recognition that will now help the Jews in defending their new State. “This recognition,” says
Ehrenburg, “will empower the heroes who are now defending Israel against the mercenaries.” He,
thus, predicts what the results of this recognition would be for those to whom he refers as heroes.
Who were meant to take part in this heroism, however, and where did Soviet Jews stand in relation
to it? These questions remained unanswered. It was this unclarity that resulted in the numerous
letters that were sent to the JAC by Soviet Jews from all over the country, asking to help the new

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247 GARF, Fond P-8114, Opis 1, Delo 88, 1. 2.
State by donating money, joining the Israeli army, and even immigrating to Israel to help build the land.\(^{248}\) The committee was once again put in the impossible position of balancing the unresolvable tension thatimmerged from the Soviet decision to support Zionist aspirations while still opposing Zionism. The Soviet resolution to recognize the state of Israel, thus, resulted in a displacement of the previously encountered tension between the universal and the particular - from the realm of suffering and onto the field of nationalities policy. In that sense, the recognition of Israel followed the same path created by the recognition of suffering.

The members of the JAC continued with their consistent struggle to keep the balance between the particular and the universal following this most recent recognition. In a presidium meeting dated June 7 1948, the committee members discussed the erroneous sentiments presented by Soviet Jews as well as possible responses to them. Fefer informed the other members about the numerous letters addressed to the committee regarding the events in Palestine. He read some of them outload.

“What do these letters show?” asked Fefer. He proceeded to answer:

They bear witness to the fact that the authors do not comprehend the position, situation, or functions of our organization. They are not aware of what it means to be a Soviet person and what the role of a Soviet person is; what Soviet patriotism is at all stages and under all conditions. Only people who do not understand the situation could talk today about the dispatch of volunteers to Palestine. [...] Zionism, which had been hidden, is now coming to the surface. This can be seen from the letters. People now think that Zionism, which we had condemned, has become legitimate. I feel that our newspaper “Eynikayt” must play a leading role; it must publish a series of articles instilling patriotism in order to rebuff harmful attitudes [...]\(^{249}\)

These errors in understanding, according to Fefer, can only mean a failure to understand what it means to be a Soviet person and what a Soviet person’s role is. This is a failure in being universal, even if suffering is in effect particular. The composers of the letters fail to recognize the limit

\(^{248}\) See for example: GARF, Fond P-8114, Opis 1, Delo 8, 1. 45, 1. 58, Delo 20, 1.32, 1.24, 1.62

\(^{249}\) Redlich, *War, the Holocaust and Stalinism*, 2013, 400–401.
between suffering as Jews and remaining first and foremost Soviets - at all stages and under all conditions. They fail to comprehend the difference between recognizing Zionist particularism and opposing the national (and hence, particular,) character of Zionism. This failure in understanding is another manifestation of the impossibility of balancing the particular and the universal in the postwar years. Once the second marking of the Jews as others, left by the Nazis, converged with the first marking of the Jewish Question, the incompatibility of the two ideas – the particular and the universal – could only be resolved by the repression of one of them. The committee’s struggle to maintain this balance, thus, was bound to fail. This explains the emergence of the three postwar narratives with which this chapter opened: A full denial of the particular suffering as represented by Soviet authorities; a full acknowledgment of it along with its particular implications, as represented by so many Soviet Jews, and the desperate and failing attempt to reconcile the two represented by the JAC. It was, then, not the authors of the letters that failed to understand the situation, as Fefer proclaimed, but indeed Fefer himself. He failed to recognize that what was possible in the prewar years, before the Jewish Question was recharged and reactivated by the Nazi onslaught, could no longer be maintained. He failed to realize, in other words, that what was possible during what Freud would call “latency,” the period in which the initial trauma still laid dormant, was not sustainable after repression proper set in. Soviet Jewish otherness could no longer be tolerated in any conscious way.

The return of the Jewish Question in its new form, thus, could not be resolved through the premises of the Soviet nationalities policy that were, in themselves, based on the assumption that particularity could be balanced with the universal. Ehrenburg, as the exemplary Soviet writer that he was, exemplified the current impossibility of this question in an essay published in Pravda on September 21 1948. In this essay, entitled “Answer to a Letter,” Ehrenburg replies to a letter he
received from a German Jew who was asking for his opinion on the matter of Palestine and the Jewish Question. What Ehrenburg truly does in this essay, however, is not just an attempt to answer the question but to eliminate it altogether. Ehrenburg explains that the idea of world Jewry as a group of connected individuals is a false idea promoted by what he calls “obscurantists:”

Obscurantists have since long-ago invented fables designed to represent the Jews as some peculiar creatures different from the people around them. [...] Obscurantists have affirmed that the Jews of various countries are a unit, held together by some mysterious ties. [...] However, there is very little in common between a Tunisian Jew and a Jew living in Chicago who speaks American and thinks American. If there is a bond between them, it is anything but mystical; it is a bond created by anti-Semitism.250

For Ehrenburg, what particularizes Jews is indeed a marking forced upon them from the outside. What he fails to acknowledge, however, is that this marking has a bearing on Soviet Jews. For him, the Jewish Question might still exist for someone like the writer of the letter, who resides in a country in which Jews remain particular by the marking of antisemitism. The Soviet Jew, however, “is bound to all Soviet people by the ties of friendship in battle, and dear graves bind him to every inch of Soviet soil.” Through this complete rejection of any sense of otherness, Ehrenburg casts aside the Jewish Question as irrelevant. He sums up his essay with these words of conviction: “Let my correspondent, Alexander R., ponder over the events of the last decade, and he will realize that there is only one way to solve the “Jewish question.” It is to abolish the Jewish question.”251 That is, to abolish Jewish particularity. Ehrenburg, who was only reminded of his own particularity during the war, could himself no longer tolerate it. To keep being an exemplary Soviet writer, his Jewish particularity had to be abolished, cast aside and repressed, along with the question mark attached to it.

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251 Ibid., 42.
In November 1948, the JAC was disbanded, just a short while after the sudden death of Mikhoels, one of its most prominent founders. Mikhoels’ death was formally declared an accident but it is now widely acknowledged as the work of Soviet authorities. Over the next two years, all Yiddish theaters and organizations were closed and many Yiddish writers were arrested. This chapter opened with the question of the change in attitude toward Soviet Jews in the postwar years. What was it in the Soviet context that changed so much, we wondered, to suddenly make Jews intolerable? We were able to see how this was a result of incompatible ideas that laid dormant for many years and were awakened by the Nazi invasion through a process that resulted in repression. Freud tells us that repression consists not of two phases, but of three. The third phase of repression is, in effect, its failure – an eruption that leads to the return of the repressed. According to Freud, once the original repressed impulse is reawakened from its dormant state by a new “precipitating cause,” it also renews its demand of satisfaction. What is the impulse that has been repressed in the Soviet case? Can we even talk about impulses when we are dealing not with an individual but a whole group of people? Freud does not find it farfetched to assume that something might happen in the life of human groups that is similar to what occurs in the life of individuals. He invites his readers to suppose that -

[...] here too events occurred of a sexually aggressive nature, that left behind them permanent consequences but were for the most part fended off and forgotten, and which after a long latency came into effect and created phenomena similar to symptoms in their structure and purpose.

252 Rubenstein and Al'tman, The Unknown Black Book, xxxxiv.
The impulse that has been repressed in the Soviet case is indeed one of an aggressive nature – an aggressiveness directed toward the particularized other that Soviet Jews have embodied in their consistent question-like state, demanding a particular answer. We have seen many indications of this aggressiveness through the frequent emphasizing of its opposite. Whenever the subject of Soviet Jews had been raised, an emphasis on peaceful existence and Friendship among all Soviet People followed. Such consistent emphasizing is often an indication of an opposite unconscious impulse.

Since, in cases of repression, the normal path to satisfaction of the impulse is blocked, another path of a “substitutive satisfaction” opens in the form of a symptom. This is the return of the repressed. The distinguishing feature of symptoms, tells us Freud, is the “extensive distortion the returning elements have undergone, compared with their original form.” The symptom, thus, brings back the repressed in a distorted form, concealing its original material. In January 1949, an infamous editorial in Pravda was published, bearing the title “On an Anti-Patriotic Group of Theater Critics”. These critics were primarily of Jewish origin. In the following months, hundreds of Soviet intellectuals, mostly of Jewish nationality, were dismissed from their posts in all areas of literature, economics and administration. Many were arrested. The discourse that formed around this new “purge” was concerned with anti-patriotic and alien elements in Soviet Society that had to be eliminated. These foreign elements were represented by a renewed and prominent signifier, almost opposite in its form to the idea of the particular. This was the “rootless cosmopolitan”, a signifier that soon became almost synonymous with “Jew.”

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256 Sigmund Freud, Moses and Monotheism (Knopf, 1939), 163–64.
257 Azadovskii and Egorov, “From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism,” 75.
As a signifier, the rootless cosmopolitan was representative, in a disguised form, of everything that was particular about Soviet Jewish identity and its inability to fit into the Soviet universal. In a memoir of an assimilated Soviet Jew named Raisa Orlova, she describes a conversation that she had with a colleague, as early as in 1942:

He told me, in particular, that the best Jews - the intelligentsia, the party activists - have torn away from their people (svoego naroda), from their roots (ot kornei), and the bearers of the national remained the urban, or rather, the shtetl bourgeoisie. Old men. Only the old, pre-revolutionary, hardened, remained national. Other nations with a territory - Georgians, Armenians - had a new Soviet national identity, while Jews did not.²⁵⁹

In their divided state, Soviet Jews lacked the national form they needed in order to be a new Soviet nation.²⁶⁰ Without such form they were unable to fit in with the Friendship of the Peoples fantasy, that was based on the idea of the unity of different Soviet nationalities. Rootless cosmopolitanism, thus, was about breaking loose from one’s national roots that were required to connect a person to his or her Soviet national identity. The rootless cosmopolitan was someone who had become too particular by becoming too universal. It was an expression of everything that was paradoxical about the Soviet Jewish identity in its struggle to balance the particular with the universal. Indeed, “the rootless cosmopolitan” seemed to be a new and distorted form of the previously repressed zhyd, and the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign that was launched against them - a distorted form of antisemitism. This was an eruption of the return of the repressed in the form a symptom, providing substitutive satisfaction to the aggressive impulse toward particularized otherness, always-already imbedded within the paradoxical project of universalism.

²⁵⁹ Raisa Orlova, Vospominaniya o neproshedshem vremeni (CP Slovo, 1993), 191
²⁶⁰ See Chapter One for a full discussion of the state of division of Soviet Jews as a Soviet nationality.
Chapter Four: Writing as an Alibi

Do you know what the situation was at that time? The secretary of the Central Committee would give me instructions to put together a radio broadcast immediately in Yiddish for propaganda in America. We had to arouse millions of people against the Hitlerites because of their brutality. And here you're saying that there was a nationalistic rally, and Lozovsky did it all. It's like some kind of fairy tale - there was no Central Committee, no government, just Lozovsky and a couple of Jews who did everything.261

Solomon Lozovsky, 1952

Member of the Court: We judge a person by his deeds and not by what he thinks and says.
David Hofshteyn: What were my deeds? My deeds are my written works. There is no dissent in my works.

Between the months of September 1948 and July 1949, 15 former JAC members were arrested. The accused were: Solomon Lozovsky, Itsik Fefer, Solomon Bregman, Joseph Yuzefovich, Boris Shimeliovich, Lev Kvitko, Perets Markish, David Bergelson, David Hofshteyn, Benjamin Zuskin, Lina Shtern, Leon Talmy, Ilya Vatenberg, Emilia Teumin, and Hayke Vatenberg-Ostrovskaia. All prominent figures of Soviet Jewish intelligentsia, and many of them writers. They were accused of espionage and nationalistic activity, and specifically of turning the JAC into a center of Jewish nationalism. The trial, that opened in May 1952, would soon become an arena in which the “National in Form, Socialist in Content” principle would emerge in its full paradoxicality through the case of Soviet Jews. As Jewishness, in its Soviet context or otherwise, always contested the modern form of nations, it never actually fitted the National in Form, Socialist in Content paradigm. In the trial, this finally surfaced when the defendants had to defend actions and thoughts that were previously considered national in form and were now suddenly nationalistic in essence. As the trial would show, Jewishness officially lost its ability to simply be a form of an otherwise universal content.

The investigation of the case went on for over three years before the trial finally began. Fefer was the first to confess his (and others) “crimes” and to fully cooperate with the investigators.

In fact, Fefer cooperated with the investigation even before his arrest, as an informer. Prior to his arrest, he did not think of himself as guilty of the crimes investigated and it is assumed that his own arrest came as a complete surprise to him. Nevertheless, he cooperated with his investigators and gave a confession admitting to the crimes of which he was accused. Fefer’s involvement in the investigation is often portrayed as betrayal – betraying his Jewish brothers and sisters and the Jewish people at large. The editors of *Stalin’s Secret Pogrom*, a book gathering the trial transcripts, came to his defense: “It is easy to condemn Fefer for cooperating with the investigation of the JAC case. His testimony led to scores of arrests and helped to construct the case against the committee,” they admit. But they also urge us to consider the fact that Fefer “did not abandon all feelings of loyalty towards his fellow Jews”. They then emphasize his efforts, in the years prior to his arrest, to commemorate wartime Jewish suffering, views that he did not retract even during the trial. They conclude with an anecdote in which Shmuel Halkin, one of the arrested Yiddish writers who was eventually not persecuted, was taken to see Fefer in a witness confrontation. The encounter is depicted as follows: “without raising his eyes from the floor, Fefer urged Halkin to confess to engaging in “Zionism” and “Bourgeois nationalism”. Halkin remained silent but, before being led away, kissed Fefer on the forehead in a sign of forgiveness.” This anecdote, especially Fefer’s inability to look directly at Halkin, portrays Fefer as someone who is ashamed of his actions and is aware of the falseness of his accusations. It also presupposes clear and distinct “sides” and loyalties – either Jewish or Soviet. The tension between the particular and the universal, however - so emblematic of the Soviet Jewish experience - persisted in this current arena of arrests and investigations as well. This was not always a question of either-or. The question of “guilt,”

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262 Rubinstein and Naumov, *Stalin’s secret pogrom*, 50.
263 Ibid., 79.
264 Ibid., 80.
therefore, was not a straight-forward “yes” or “no” question depending on some kind of “objective” reality. What was on trial here was an identity, or rather, a set of identifications that suddenly became incompatible. Loyalty, now, would have to be for either one or the other - either the universal or the particular. The JAC trial was where this tension, that as we have seen in the previous chapter was no longer reconcilable, awaited its final verdict.

Itsik Fefer was a Soviet Jew, an Yiddish writer. He was also a devoted communist who had been a party member for over 30 years. When someone like Fefer, who has such strong identifications with both sides of the Soviet Jewish equation, needs to reflect on his actions and determine where his loyalties really lie, the question of guilt takes on new and complex meanings. Defending oneself by rejecting the accusations would necessitate going against the party, against the revolutionary truth. This creates an absurd situation in which denying accusations of being an Oppositionist would automatically make one exactly that - an Oppositionist. Since the particular (Jewish) aspect of the Soviet Jewish experience was no longer acceptable, Fefer – as a devoted communist - now had no choice but to consider that his previous actions were indeed counterrevolutionary, even if he was not able to acknowledge that at the time. The transcripts of the JAC trial, thus, should be read with an eye for this question of guilt in its current state between the particular and the universal. It should also be kept in mind that, under the Soviet discourse of communism, the truth was always universal and never particular. This was an identity crisis under which almost all the defendants found themselves, as it was exactly their particularity that was now on trial. Since the universal and the particular could no longer coexist, the trial set out to determine which of the two defined the defendants’ real essence – were they Jews or were they Soviets? The verdict, it seems, was already predetermined.

265 Igal Halfin, Ha-Tihurim Ha-Stalinistim (Resling Publishing, Tel Aviv), 2006, 204-205.
The judicial proceedings started with a short biography given by each of the defendants. This biographical testimony included, among other things, the defendants’ full name, occupation, date of birth, place of origins, father’s occupation, nationality, higher education, and description of political past. This last part was also the most detailed – the defendants had to include, in a chronological order, all of the political parties that they had ever joined. We learn that most of the defendants were party members, but while some joined as early as 1901 and 1912, some had only been party members since 1939. We also learn that a few of the defendants, including Itsik Fefer, were Bund members at a certain point during the civil war. The prominence of the defendants’ biography to the judicial process, including details about political tendencies from three decades earlier, does not make much sense outside of the Bolshevik system. The genre of autobiographies, however, had a long and significant history in the Soviet context of truth-seeking. It offered a point of entry into a person’s consciousness or soul that was otherwise unavailable. The hermeneutical process of self-narration, thus, was the only way to establish if someone was a true communist.  

A brief history of the different narrative forms that these autobiographies took over the years might clarify the importance of certain details for the trial.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, autobiographical narratives were shaped around the eschatological nature of Marxist-Bolshevik “conversion stories”, describing the road to communism as a journey from darkness to light. They were a necessary part of almost any application process – from party membership to university applications. According to the logic of the conversion narrative, a person was allowed, even expected, to err prior to him or her conversion. After gaining class consciousness, however, any error, any violation of the party line,

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could only be explained as premeditated rejection of the Revolution. People telling their life story using this narrative form, then, had to prove a trajectory of progress.267 Just like nationalities, individuals had to overcome backwardness to be able to transform into New Soviet Men and Women.268 This method of self-narration however, dramatically changed with the 1936 constitution, declaring that the foundations of a classless society had been laid and a second phase of development had begun. This had significant consequences on Soviet society – from a society moving forward toward the end of history to a one that was on the verge of reaching it. In Marxism, history is a struggle for emancipation, for the end of exploitation of man by man. As long as this struggle persists, historical time persists. The end of class struggle, thus, is supposed to bring about the end of history - the end of time. With the new constitution declaring that socialism in the Soviet Union had now been achieved, history entered its last and final stage. the New Man was now a reality, and as one he had no room for errors. Backwardness could no longer exist for either nations or individuals. Whoever got to that stage on the revolutionary timeline without becoming a New Soviet Man was considered imminently evil, an enemy of the Revolution. The party, in fact, believed that this new stage of development revealed who were inherently good, and therefore able to purify their souls, and who were radically evil, counterrevolutionary at heart.269

The genre of the communist autobiography changed in accordance. An individual could no longer evoke his or her backwardness and lack of class-consciousness as an excuse for their erroneous ways. Every mistake was now considered an intentional act of sabotage and autobiographies were used to locate early signs of a person’s true nature. This was based, in great part, on the sequence of events surrounding Gregory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev. Zinoviev and

267 Ibid., 22.
268 See Chapter One for a discussion of the hierarchy of nationalities and their road toward becoming full Soviet Nations.
Kamenev were two prominent members of the politburo who, over the years, were expelled from the party multiple times for opposing Stalin and the official party line but were forgiven and readmitted into the party after repenting and acknowledging their mistakes. They were arrested again after the 1934 assassination of Sergei Kirov, head of the Leningrad party, by a group who was believed to be “Zinovievist.” Kamenev and Zinoviev were accused of being the masterminds behind the assassination and in 1935 were given a prison sentence. In August 1936, however, Zinoviev and Kamenev were tried again, this time for being the leaders of a "Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Center." They were sentenced to death and executed.\(^{270}\)

Following these events, Zinoviev became the model and prototype of the post 1936 enemy - a two-faced Oppositionist who managed to deceive the party for years with fake recantations. Past political errors, thus, were now judged harshly as an indication of timeless and inherent Oppositionsm. The interest in the defendants’ past was based on that same attempt to look for preliminary clues that would point to their counterrevolutionary nature. Fefer’s autobiographical account, while short, offered some important details:

I, Isaac [Itsik] Solomonovich Fefer, was born in 1900. I am originally from the shtetl of Shpola, Kiev region. I am the son of a village schoolteacher, I am Jewish [po natsional’nosti evrei], and did not complete my higher education. I have been in the party since 1919, have not been expelled from the party, and had a party penalty assessed in 1947. I was a member of the Bund from 1917 to 1919. Until I was arrested, I wrote poetry all of my life. I am married. I have an adult daughter. I have the following awards: the Badge of Honor received in 1948 and two medals For Valiant Labor During the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945. I was arrested on December 24, 1948. I received a copy of the indictment on May 3, 1952.\(^{271}\)

The details about Fefer’s political past, especially, were of great interest to the judges. Parties that, during the 1920s, were considered legitimate precursors to Bolshevism, were defined by the mid-1930s as counterrevolutionary. The Bund was one such example of a party that was once


\(^{271}\) Ibid., 245-46.
considered socialist and was now entirely associated with Jewish nationalism.\textsuperscript{272} Political biographies, thus, had the potential to reveal such “clues” about one’s true nature and attest to an inevitable trajectory.

The triumph of socialism, declared in the 1936 constitution, along with the Kamenev-Zinoviev affair, introduced a new type of internal enemy, threatening to sabotage the final stage of history and the transition from socialism to full-blown communism. Article 131 of the constitution referred to these enemies as “enemies of the people” [\textit{vragi naroda}]. This term replaced the 1920s term “enemies of the toilers.” The difference in the conceptualization of the enemy had to do with the different historical epochs associated with each decade. Since the mid-1930s were perceived as verging on the end of history, the threat of the bourgeois class as such was thought to be eliminated. The enemy, thus, was composed of inherently deviant individuals. This echoes another previously discussed metaphor, that of the “Friendship of the Peoples.”\textsuperscript{273} Here too, the 1930s metaphor replaced a 1920s metaphor that had clear class associations – “Brotherhood of the People,” ‘brotherhood’ being the classic socialist metaphor of proletarian unity. This metaphorical change – from class terminology to that of Soviet unity - represented the new structure of Soviet society. Since class division in the USSR was already overcome, the enemy had to be individuated, particularized. At the same time, Soviet society, having overcome class division, was now united as people. While the enemy was particularized, Soviet society was universalized. In the new metaphor of “enemies of the people” the particular, thus, is positioned as the enemy of the universal. Here, we should consider the fact that the Russian word for “people,” \textit{narod}, also means “nation” in a non-ethnical sense. Enemies were no longer class enemies but enemies of the entire Soviet people, the Soviet Nation.

\textsuperscript{272} Halfin, \textit{Terror in My Soul}, 2003, 246–47.
\textsuperscript{273} See Chapter One for full discussion.
This notion of internal enemies, however, was completely suspended with the invasion of external enemies into Soviet territories. The previous chapter has shown how this state of events temporarily eased the tension that found its expression in Soviet Jews even before the war, and enabled a new sense of a unified experience. After the war, Soviet society saw the gradual return of the internal enemy threat, a return that culminated in the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. The external/internal division, however, was never a simple one. The internal enemy was exactly that which was excluded from the Soviet People and as such was helping to sustain the Soviet Nation’s boundaries from the outside. It was internal for its physical presence within Soviet borders, and external for its conceptual presence outside of them. Stalin referenced both types of enemies in his 1935 speech honoring Tajik and Turkmen kolkhoz workers:

[...] the friendship between the peoples of the USSR is a great and serious victory. For while this friendship exists, the people of our country will be free and unconquerable. While this friendship lives and blossoms, we are afraid of no one, neither internal nor external enemies.

Here too, we see how enemies, either external or internal, are positioned against the whole of Soviet society, the unity of the Friendship of the Peoples. The particular is the enemy of the universal and the universal will conquer the particular. After the war, the idea of the “internal enemy” was converged with that of the external one even further. The cold war turned the idea of the “rootless cosmopolitan” into the ideal internal-external enemy. The rootless cosmopolitan was exactly that who, due to identification with external, Western ideas, was not a part of the Soviet Nation and therefore lacked any roots of belonging. Zionism and nationalism were considered such Western ideas.

Soviet Jews emerged from the war as a direct threat to the fantasy of Soviet unity by being a constant and live reminder of Soviet aggression and internal division. Since they could no longer be integrated into the Friendship of the Peoples metaphor, they inevitably became part of the
particular realm of the enemy. In their trial, the defendants indeed had to frequently endure, and
defend against their labeling as “enemies” of Soviet power. Lozovsky, who was the principal
defendant in the trial, addressed these accusations in his testimony right away. To the request of
the judges, all individual testimonies opened with a second biographical account, more detailed
this time. Lozovsky gave a very detailed account of his prerevolutionary and 1917 actions, which
went on for a while. Finally, the presiding officer (equivalent to the principal judge) interrupted
him:

Presiding Officer: Why are you telling about your trade union activity? That is not what
you are accused of.
Lozovsky: You'll see in a moment. It has to do with the false accusation against me.
[...] supposedly I was an enemy starting back in 1919.
Presiding Officer: This has nothing to do with the case.
Lozovsky: It has to do with my head.
Presiding Officer: You have been arraigned under a specific accusation. The indictment
reads as follows: "Engaged in espionage and led the Jewish nationalistic underground in
the USSR, was the moving force and organizer of the transformation of the Jewish Anti-
Fascist Committee into a center of nationalistic activity, in 1943 assigned Mikhoels and
Fefer the task of establishing contact with reactionary circles in the United States." What
does the story you have told us about the revolutionary workers' trade union movement
have to do with this activity?
Lozovsky: But in the indictment it says that I have been an enemy since 1919.274

In his testimony, Lozovsky is trying to prove a history of honest loyalty to the party with the
exception of a few erroneous choices. Strangely enough, the judges question the relevance of this
eyarly history to the accusations. This does not seem to coincide with the fact that they repeatedly
ask the defendants to give biographical accounts including early political history. As we will see,
the court finds these biographical details relevant for the purpose of proving someone’s
preordained guilt, but not as any proof of innocence. The testimony proceeds:

Presiding Officer: If you would like to enumerate what party tasks you have carried out,
then tell us briefly about that.

Lozovsky: So, over the whole period, until I started working at Goslitizdat, I always held party jobs that entailed great trust, for I knew the opinions of the party leadership. And this is why it is absolutely unbearable for me to read lines such as these which say that I was an enemy of the party starting in 1919.

Presiding Officer: This follows from the accusation presented to you.

[Lozovsky then proceeds to give a long and detailed account about his role as deputy people's commissar for foreign affairs.]

Presiding Officer: What does this have to do with the case? Details about operations in the Foreign Ministry are hardly needed here. Tell us, did you receive any reprimands or penalties at this time? Tell us about that.

The judges, then, are only interested in hearing biographical details that foreshadow the current allegations and reveal something about the defendants’ true and timeless corrupted nature.

It is apparent that Lozovsky and the judge are engaged in two very different conversations. Lozovsky was one of four defendants to plead “not-guilty.” In his testimony he was determined to prove his complete innocence to the judges:

If, in my testimony, I do not prove to the court that everything collected in all of these forty-two volumes and in the indictment and all that has been said about me is worlds away from the reality of the situation, then I deserve the death penalty not only once, but six times over.

At the same time, Lozovsky admits that there were times in his past in which he made mistakes, errors in judgment. In 1917 he was expelled from the party for going against the party line on the issue of state control over Trade Unions:

At the time, I feared that the trade unions would be turned into a department or ministry of labor and would lose the opportunity to choose their leaders and build their organization from the bottom up, so I opposed state control of the trade unions. Later I realized that I had been mistaken. I was expelled from the party for my errors.

Later on in his testimony, Lozovsky refers to this again as a “political error.” The notion of an innocent mistake that can be attributed to political immaturity or lack of understanding, however,

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275 The other three were Markish, Shimeliovich, and Bregman. Fefer and Teumin, pleaded “guilty” and the rest pleaded “guilty-in-part.”


277 Ibid., Kindle Locations 3425-3425.
was completely opposed to the idea of the “enemy” that Lozovsky and the others were accused of being. This line of defense could not hold against such essentializing notion of an enemy who was there to be exposed if one only looked close enough. Under this logic, one’s biography can only indicate guilt, not innocence.

Nevertheless, the defendants worked hard to find a way to present their history in a way that proved their innocence, or at least show mitigating circumstances. The way they narrated their life stories indicates how strongly some of them, especially those who have been around since the early days of the Revolution, were still influenced by the Marxist perception of history as a linear line of progression from the darkness of capitalism to the enlightenment of a classless society. Bergelson, for instance, was asked to give a short biography starting 1918, but instead started with his childhood and his first steps as a writer well before 1918. He pleaded guilty in part and when asked to what specifically he pleaded guilty he replied “to running away from the Soviet Union and toward nationalism.”

He then began with his early biography, telling the court that he was raised in the spirit of strict nationalism. He mentioned that he was already eleven or twelve when he first managed to read Russian syllables. Bergelson was a writer at heart and his testimony as well is quite poetic. He describes fasting a Jewish fast every August in memory of the fall of Solomon’s temple. In his testimony, he describes how deeply immersed he was in his grief for the burnt temple that he could literally smell the fumes and fire. “I tell you this to indicate the extent to which this nationalism was engraved in my mind.” Proclaims Bergelson at the end of his biographical account.

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278 Rubinstein and Naumov, *Stalin’s secret pogrom*, 150
279 Ibid, 151
280 Ibid, 151
Throughout Bergelson’s testimony, it becomes very clear that his organizing narrative is that of progression within history, and not that of the end of history that was brought upon by the 1936 constitution. When asked if he feels that the Jewish people alone were struggling against fascism, he replied:

Well, this was a call from the anti-fascist Jews of the Soviet Union, who were appealing to Jews of all countries during the war, when the Soviet Union was under Fascist attack. This was at a time when people with nationalistic feelings were included in the struggle. There are many such expressions in literature, which were permitted at the time and were appropriate then, whereas now they would be considered highly nationalistic.\(^{281}\)

It is quite clear, then, that Bergelson’s narration is located within history, where he can point to changes and progression over time, rather than outside of it where every action is eternal and shapes not only the here and now but also the past retroactively. This becomes even clearer when Bergelson speaks about his own progression as a Soviet man:

I ask you, citizen chairman and citizen judges, to take my whole life under consideration, and although I did not attain the level of a real Soviet man, to take into account that my starting point were somewhere back in the middle ages. […] I was headed toward attaining the level of a real Soviet man, but did not quite reach it, and of that I am guilty. I am guilty that I did not attain the level of vigilance inherent in a Soviet man. I ask the Supreme court to give me, an older Yiddish writer, the opportunity to expand my strength for the good of the people and attain the level of a Soviet man.\(^{282}\)

In this final statement Bergelson reveals the organizing structure of his narrative and makes clear why he chose to open his testimony with the poetic reference of the Jewish temple. Bergelson hoped that his clear historical disadvantage, having grown up in “the middle-ages”, would allow him to have more time to complete his progression. The court, however, did not share this time perception. Bergelson’s testimony was in itself behind in history – a testimony belonging to a different epoch.

\(^{281}\) Ibid, 157
\(^{282}\) Ibid, 478
Lozovsky, as a long-time party member and experienced politician, could easily see the incompatibility of this logic with the current party line. He refers to Begelson’s flawed reasoning in the very beginning of his own testimony:

*Presiding Officer:* Defendant Lozovsky, tell the court, to what are you pleading guilty?
*Lozovsky:* I plead guilty to nothing. Allow me to explain in detail.
*Presiding Officer:* You pled guilty during the preliminary investigation.
*Lozovsky:* I am not going to hide anything.
*Presiding Officer:* Start with biographical information.
*Lozovsky:* I turned seventy-four at the end of March. This is not a mitigating circumstance, but rather an aggravating one. That is item number one. The second aggravating circumstance is that in politics allowances must not be made on account of age, contrary to what Bergelson believes.\(^{283}\)

Lozovsky opens his testimony declaring that he is not going to hide anything. He therefore opens not with an excuse but with the harsh truth. He knows very well that what Bergelson considers as mitigating circumstances is more likely to actually indicate guilt. The essentializing narrative of the enemy’s eternal evilness did not allow for any mitigating circumstances. Instead, Lozovsky takes an approach of radical honesty in his attempt to prove his innocence and distinguish himself from the enemy. In fact, his narrative invokes Zinoviev specifically to show how different they were in motivations and in nature:

*Presiding Officer:* You testified during the investigation (vol. 1, p. 37) as follows: "In December 1917 I was expelled from the Russian Communist Party for the second time because of my opposition to party policy during the October Revolution and on trade union issues. Zinoviev announced the decision to expel me from the party, adding, as he read out the resolution, 'Promise that you will renounce your views as I have done, and you can continue to carry out the same line as you did before, and the party will retain you.'" Is this correct?
*Lozovsky:* Absolutely correct. Zinoviev really did say this to me, but his advice was monstrous (*chudovichno*) to me. I didn't understand how a person could stay in the party and continue working underground against it. I said that I would not do that.\(^{284}\)

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\(^{284}\) Ibid., Kindle Locations 3426-3431.
With this, Lozovsky shows how he was in effect the very opposite of Zinoviev. As the model of the enemy was based mostly on the two-faced snake that Zinoviev had come to represent, Lozovsky attempted to prove to the judges that his political errors were of a completely different nature. Unlike Zinoviev, he never tried to hide his true nature but was always honest about his beliefs and stood behind them. Since his errors were always done openly, and never with any attempt to deceive, Lozovsky was hoping that they could be considered innocent errors after all. He elaborated:

I believe that what it says in the indictment about my expulsion from the party for double-dealing is wrong both politically and legally. What does double-dealing mean? It means to remain a party member and conduct subversive underground activity against the party. But if a person speaks out openly, can you really say that he has been removed for double-dealing? But there is a difference between being removed for double-dealing and being removed for wrong behavior, for openly stating one's opposition to the party line. So this language has nothing to do with me. I have never been a double-dealer.285

What Lozovsky was conveying to the judges here is essentially that - “I am not Zinoviev. I am not an Enemy of the People.”

With this line of argumentation, Lozovsky was trying to intervene in the idea of the Enemy according to which any present divergence from party line alters past errors into intentionally evil actions, and every past mistake is an early indication of timeless Oppositionism. With his radical honesty, Lozovsky was trying to show how mistakes, when done openly and lack any element of deception, can indeed be innocent mistakes. The court, however, stuck to an essentializing perception of timelessness according to which every action is an indication of a person’s essence. During Lozovsky’s testimony, the court asked Fefer about the instructions that Lozovsky gave him and Mikhoels on their trip to America in 1943, and specifically about Lozovsky’s instructions to form connections with wealthy Americans. Fefer explained: “When Lozovsky gave us instructions

285 Ibid., Kindle Locations 3431-3434.
to make connections with wealthy Jews through these committees, he said that this was necessary
in order to get as many dollars as we could for the Soviet defense budget.” The court was not
convinced. “Why,” asked the presiding officer, “are you now denying Lozovsky's nationalistic
motives when he gave these instructions?”

Fefer: I am not denying his nationalistic motives.
Presiding Officer: If you will allow me to cite them, there are ten questions in answer to
which you say that he is a nationalist, and two where you say that he is not a nationalist.
That is not logical. If he is a nationalist, then all of his activity is nationalistic.286

According to the party’s logic, thus, one’s essence determines all of one’s actions and these actions
must, for that reason, point to one’s essence. This is the logic of the End of History - a perception
of temporality that does not allow change through a linear progression from past to present.
Instead, it allows change to occur retroactively. Linear temporality is a time perception that belongs
in history. This is how historical narratives are constructed. The Soviet narrative, however, was no
longer within history since Soviet society had already made a leap forward toward its culmination.
Under this logic, change can only occur retroactively. It is a change of the course of history
according to its ending.

The Result of Further Reflection

The post 1936 End of History narrative, resembles in some ways Freud’s mechanism of
repression, in which one moment in time alters an earlier moment retroactively and gives it
meaning. Thinking about these mechanisms side by side might prove productive because, just like
the conscious mind in the process of repression, the End of History is a state that does not allow
for paradoxes. One could either be purely good or inherently evil. The presence of any
contradictions or incompatible ideas, such as past political errors or a set of now incompatible
identifications, is removed by a retroactive change of the past. And just like in repression, this is

286 Ibid., Kindle Locations 3643-3646.
not a one-sided change - the first moment “awaits” a second later moment in the present in which one is accused of a crime. The connection formed between these different moments alters one’s essence *après-coup* and eliminates any conscious contradictions between past and present. *Après-coup* is the French term that is used in psychoanalysis to translate Freud’s German *nachträglichkeit*. In English, it is sometimes translated as “afterwardness” or “deferred-action.”

Itsik Fefer, most likely unfamiliar with Freud’s work, refers to it simply as “further reflection:”

*Presiding Officer* (to Fefer): In answer to a question about the conclusions drawn by the expert commission, you say: "As I have already testified, the nationalistic line began to go into effect at the committee from the very first days of its existence. This can be explained by the fact that active Jewish nationalists were its leaders: Lozovsky, Mikhoels, Epshteyn, and I, Fefer." Is this testimony of yours correct?
*Fefer:* This is the result of further reflection.
*Presiding Officer:* What do you mean, "the result of further reflection"?
*Fefer:* Let me explain what I mean. I did not know Lozovsky as a nationalist, and prior to the committee's establishment I had not appealed to him for anything. [...] After the committee was formed I didn't look upon Lozovsky as a nationalist, and we did not talk about nationalistic questions. But during the investigation, when I began to draw conclusions about the committee’s activity and thought about all of the most important parts—such as the memorandums to the Central Committee, The Black Book, the two memorandums about mistreatment of Jews and the materials sent abroad focusing on Jewish heroes on the front lines and at the rear—then when I summarized all of this, I understood that all this activity was the basis for accusing the committee of nationalism. And since Lozovsky followed what was going on at the committee, I called Lozovsky a nationalist. This is how I understand the words "the result of further reflection."

During the investigation, then, Fefer reached a sort of enlightenment regarding the committee’s, and therefore also Lozovsky’s, true nature. In his current state of consciousness, he could no longer reconcile the presence of these two now contradictory ideas of being a true Soviet while also engaging in such projects as the Black Book or the collection of materials focusing on Jewish heroes on the front lines. The entire committee and its leaders, thus, are altered retroactively to “nationalists.”

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287 Ibid., Kindle Locations 3592-3601.
Lozovsky, however, was not impressed. Using the same radical honesty that characterized his entire testimony, he bluntly called out Fefer’s narrative for what it was: “Here in the "house of enlightenment,"” said Lozovsky, "Fefer assesses everything as a nationalist.”

This is not the first time Lozovsky referred to the trial setting as “the house of enlightenment.” He explained the logic behind many of the other testimonies using this same language:

Above all, the conclusion that emerges from the testimony which Fefer, Kvitko, Bregman, Markish, and Bergelson gave is that when they came here, to this "house of enlightenment," they saw the light and realized that Lozovsky was the main perpetrator of all evil. I will briefly direct the court's attention to certain circumstances. Seeing the light, they signed testimony that they themselves had not given. Kvitko firmly asserts that he never thought about any evil hand of Lozovsky. So that means that there was no evil hand of Lozovsky, but rather someone's evil pen which wrote that and which Kvitko hurriedly signed.

Lozovsky, it seems, easily recognized the Marxist form of this enlightenment narrative. In Marxism, the End of History is a state that is reached through a process of enlightenment, by gaining class-consciousness. Interestingly enough, repression is in itself a mechanism that is propelled by consciousness – it is a product of the inability of the conscious to tolerate contradictions. The Enlightenment, as a movement, is indeed a movement toward a state of consciousness that is intolerable of the very paradoxes of which it is constructed. Certain ideas, thus, must remain in the dark, exiled to the unconscious. In the context of the trial, as a representative of the current party line, these intolerable ideas were clearly centered around having any form of Jewish identity.

Writing as an Alibi

No other defendant exemplifies the extant of the identity crisis Soviet Jews were now under more than Itsik Fefer. As a Yiddish poet and a devoted communist, Fefer had strong identifications with both Soviet society and Jewish culture. When these two identities became completely

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288 Ibid., Kindle Locations 3871-3873.
289 Ibid., Kindle Locations 3797-3801.
incompatible, such as they were during the trial, Fefer found himself forced to tell two different stories about himself, to narrate two different histories. In one, he was the Jewish nationalist that he confessed to being in the interrogations, while in the other he was a pure-souled Soviet mam.

In his testimony, Fefer is trying to prove who of these two “Fefers” is his true self. He begins his story with how he became a poet:

I was born in the shtetl of Shpola into the family of a schoolteacher. My father could not afford to teach me, so I was self-educated. I lived in this shtetl until 1922, when I moved to Kiev and started pursuing literature. I did not engage in anti-Soviet activities in Kiev. To the contrary, I consider myself one of the first Yiddish poets to begin writing about the Red Army, the Party, and the Komsomol.  

Then the story cuts to his political activities. First, he joined the Bund in 1917 and was a member for a year and a half. When he was 19 years old he joined the party because “At the time, the Communist Party’s attitude towards the national question suited me.” By his own account, his reasons for joining the party were nationalistic in nature. The testimony then proceeds to Fefer’s acquaintance with some of the other defendants, where he compares their work to his:

I started writing in mid-1918. In 1920 I met the Jewish nationalists Bergelson, Hofshteyn and Kvitko. They expressed their nationalistic view in poetry. At the time, I felt that Soviet reality should be written about more, so in 1922 I published my poems about Russia. This comparison becomes significant as Fefer’s self-narration continues. First, he emphasizes again that his cycle of poems entitled Russia was free of any national sentiments. Then, he goes on to explain that his nationalism was expressed in his “frame of mind” and in conversations about his dissatisfaction with assimilation. He points out that he was already a party member then. The rest of his testimony is dedicated to his nationalistic activities, including those carried out by the JAC. He continues, however, to emphasize the absence of these sentiments from his literary works:

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290 Ibid., Kindle Locations 1340-1342.
291 Rubinstein and Naumov, Stalin’s secret pogrom, 80
292 Ibid., This is a testimony that was given during the interrogation and then read aloud during Fefer’s court testimony.
“I have published about thirty books, and although this was never expressed in my books, I held nationalistic attitudes.”293

Fefer, then, talks about his literary work as almost an objective state that, once produced, has its own separate existence. This can be read as an interesting interpretation of Marx’s idea of objectification. "In bourgeois society", writes Marx, "the worker exists purely subjectively, without object."294 This missing object is what would have been the product of the worker’s labor, which is also a material extension of him/herself, his/her objective manifestation. The product of one’s labor is what grounds their existence in the world around them, what connects one to hi Raisa their society. When, however, this product is the outcome of a hostile process, the society that benefits from it becomes alien and hostile as well. In the era of capitalism, thus, man is alienated both from his society and from himself.295 By repeatedly emphasizing the absence of his nationalistic views from his literary work, Fefer tries to establish, through this very work, an objective and concrete manifestation of himself that, through its objective qualities, could be examined and judged by society. In this way, his work functions as sort of an alibi, an objective proof of his innocence. And while there is also a side to him that is alienated and hostile, through his literary works he emerges as a true proletariat.

When the court asks Fefer to speak about his activities, articles and the way he glorified nationalism, Fefer continues in that same direction:

I have to say before the court that while there may have been times when my public activity was contaminated with nationalistic ideas, this affected my creative work least of all. My literary work is not besmirched in this way. There were individual cases of nationalistic

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293 Ibid, 81
295 Ibid.
errors. For example, the poem “I am a Jew”, cited here, and to that could be added another two or three poems that are nationalistic in tone.\textsuperscript{296}

The Presiding Officer, it seems, is not impressed. He asks Fefer: “

Why do you consider these errors? You said earlier that you were raised in the spirit of nationalism, and especially after the 1930s the leitmotif of your work was the struggle against Jewish assimilation. This is not an error, this is a consistent line.”\textsuperscript{297}

Fefer then responds by juxtaposing these two elements in him - the hostile and the poet: “I have given detailed testimony about this, touching on my public activity. As for my literary work, I was one of the first Yiddish poets to write about the Soviet Motherland…” The officer then reacts in a manner that puts into question Fefer’s entire narrative: “Is it possible to be a nationalist and write Soviet works?” and yet, this question allows Fefer to finally make his point. He responds: “No, in poetry that cannot be done. A sage once said that poetry is the mirror of the soul. I wrote as my soul prompted me.”\textsuperscript{298}

With this quote Fefer’s line of argumentation finally becomes clear – although his public-self was hostile and alienated from society, guided as it was by nationalistic tendencies, this was not in his soul. This echoes Stalin’s famous characterization of writers as engineers of the human soul, but in a somewhat dialectic manner – writers write souls and therefore souls are manifested in writing. For Fefer, as for Soviet society at large, literary works were indeed a tool that provided access to the objective state of one’s soul. By making a strong distinction between his contaminated public actions and the pureness of his soul as reflected through his literary works, Fefer was hoping to prove to the court that, unlike Hofshteyn and Bergelson, he is a true communist after all. This distinction allowed him to make the claim of innocent political errors without stepping back into history. Indeed, he attributes his nationalistic views to political immaturity and lack of communist

\textsuperscript{296} Ibid, 92
\textsuperscript{297} Ibid, 92
\textsuperscript{298} Ibid, 93
consciousness: “I consider myself guilty of not properly understanding the situation then, wrapped up as I was in my nationalistic yearnings…” But he does so in a manner that allows him to claim that his soul was always pure.

David Bergelson presents a similar understanding of writing as a craft that is meant to reveal the Truth:

I was a professional writer, and from the very beginning of my literary career I strove to master the craft. That means nothing other than striving to reveal the truth of life, and I am telling the truth when I say that I had no ill feelings toward the Bolsheviks in the first years of the revolution. Bergelson’s emphasis on being a professional writer who strives to reveal the truth of life echoes the Socialist Realist understanding of writing as a practice that is meant to extract and expose the hidden essence of things. It also echoes Stalin’s famous directive to writers to “write the truth.” The ‘truth’ Stalin references is not an external static truth but a truth that reflects the writer’s inner world - the inner truth that’s in his heart and his faith in Stalin and the party. This is exactly what Bergelson is trying to prove when he says that for him, being a professional writer means striving to reveal the truth. The truth, according to Bergelson, is that he “had no ill feelings toward the Bolsheviks in the first years of the revolution.” Through his writing, Bergelson was trying to prove what was truly in his heart.

In Stalinist culture, the artist - and more specifically, the writer – creates according to what his heart dictates. The state then judges the condition of the writer’s heart on the basis of this evidence. When his honesty is being questioned in the courtroom, Lev Kvitko offers his poems as just such evidence:

299 Rubinstein and Naumov, Stalin’s secret pogrom, 84
300 Ibid, 451
301 See Chapter Two.
302 Groys, The Total Art of Stalinism, 68.
303 Ibid., 68–69.
Presiding Officer: All of this [referring to Kvitko’s testimony in the courtroom] diverges from your testimony during the investigation. You consider yourself in love with the party, but then why do you make false assertions? You consider yourself an honest writer, but you were far from having the attitudes that you say you had.

Kvitko: I am saying that the party does not need any lies from me, and I am testifying only to those things that can be confirmed factually. During the investigation all of my testimony was distorted, and everything was made to look as if it meant the opposite of what I said. This holds for my trip abroad as well, supposedly made with harmful intent, and this holds to the same degree with regard to how I wormed my way into the party. Take my poetry from 1921 and 1922. The investigator has these poems in a file. They tell a completely different story. My works printed in 1919, 1920, and 1921 were published in a communist newspaper. When I told that to the investigator, he said, "We don't need that."

Presiding Officer: So, in a word, you are repudiating this testimony.

Kvitko: I repudiate it. I cannot deny that I worked at the committee, but everything else that casts me as an enemy I repudiate. [...] The day of the October Revolution will always remain in my memory as the most joyful, as the happiest holiday in my life. [...] This can be verified by looking at my poems that were published at the time in the communist press in Kiev.304

The judges question Kvitko’s feelings toward the party as well as his entire being as an “honest writer.” Kvitko then references his literary work as almost an objective manifestation of his inner feelings, thoughts and beliefs. Just like Fefer, Kvitko regards his poems – the product of his labor - as objective extensions of himself. Indeed, Soviet writers were expected to be able to do just that – produce art that objectively manifested their inner truth. Artists and especially writers, were often given access to the inner circles of the party for this very reason. As artists, they were expected to have the ability to identify and fuse with the will of the party and the product of their artistic work was expected to shape reality according to this very fusion.305

When literary works failed to manifest the party line, however, this was an indication of the writer’s political disagreement with the party, a dissension of which he himself might have not even been aware.306 Interpreting correctly the truth literary works reflected, thus, could have

304 Rubenstein and Naumov, Stalin’s Secret Pogrom, 2005, Kindle Locations 2588-2598.
305 Groys, The Total Art of Stalinism, 52.
306 Ibid.
significant implications on their creators and their reputation. This is why, during Markish’s testimony, we find Fefer and Markish arguing over the meaning of a line in one of Markish’s poems:

_Fefer_ (to Markish): Do you remember when Fadeyev accused you of having nationalistic material in your book?
_Markish_: That's nonsense. One evening he said to me, "You have a poem about a mirror falling and breaking into pieces and how you tried to put the pieces back together. But you still couldn't see your reflection in it." Fadeyev said that this poem was pessimistic. If Fefer had a shred of conscience, he would not slander Fadeyev this way.
_Fefer_ (to Markish): Don't you remember what Fadeyev said about a shattered people and about lying in fragments?
_Markish_: No. He said to me, "I can tell that you were feeling sorrowful when you wrote that poem."\(^{307}\)

Strangely enough, this now controversial line in Markish’s poem was literally about a failed reflection – not being able to see his own image clearly in a shattered mirror. Little did Markish know, when he wrote this poem, that one day it would itself be judged as a mirror reflecting his inner truth. In this case too, the “mirror” – that is, the poem as a reflection of Markish’s heart – failed to give a clear image.

When asked to give their final statements, almost all the writers among the defendants mentioned their literary works once again as the most solid proof they could offer of their innocence. Markish offered a description of his loyalty as it was reflected through his work:

I want to say to the court that my whole life and my literary work and activity have been a battle against backwardness in literature. I have been called a troublemaker, and in America I was sharply criticized for this. All of my books were brimming with this struggle. I was a rank-and-file soldier among Soviet writers and a correspondent for Pravda and Izvestia.\(^{308}\)

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\(^{308}\) Ibid., Kindle Locations 7299-7301.
Kvitko asserted that if he is accused of wanting “to exchange the honorable title of Soviet writer and poet for the title American spy” then the investigators must present a material proof of that.\(^{309}\)

He himself offered a material counterproof in the form of his old but also new poems:

> I know for sure that if artistic work is not steeped in our modern ideas, then it quickly wilts, because although I am in prison, in my soul I feel myself to be among the family of the great Soviet people. I have not ceased to maintain contact with children in my mind, so while in prison I have created a new collection of poems, called Toward the Sun (\textit{K Solntsu}.). The party is my family and my faith, and no one can ever take that great strength of a communist away from me.\(^{310}\)

With this collection of new poems, Kvitko was trying to shed light on his true character, his true essence, and to be readmitted into the universal ranks of the “family of the great Soviet People.” Through their literary works, the defendants were trying to provide a proof of their true and most inner identifications with Soviet universal ideas. This, however, could not save them from their rootlessness that this universalism, without a national form, implied. To be included in the Soviet Friendship fantasy they needed national roots but their own national roots were already tainted with nationalistic content. This was the inescapable paradox that Soviet Jewish identity now faced.

\textit{Lozovsky, the Editor}

In addition to being a politician and a high-ranking Soviet official, Solomon Lozovsky was also an editor who, in the late 1930s, became the director of the government printing house \textit{Goslitizdat}. His testimony stands out among all the others’ in its reflective and commentary qualities that often echo the job of an editor. Indeed, while many of the other defendants referenced their literary works as an alibi, Lozovsky used his editing eye to put into question the narratives that emerged over the course of the trial as he skillfully took apart others’ testimonies as well as interrogation records. His testimony is a fascinating gateway to the mechanics of Soviet discourse.

\(^{309}\) Ibid., Kindle Locations 7359-7361.
\(^{310}\) Ibid., Kindle Locations 7366-7369.
and its most prevalent narratives. In a sense, Lozovsky offers us a meta-discourse to dwell and reflect critically on these Soviet narratives as they emerged in the testimonies. It also offers us a window into those things that were otherwise repelled from the Soviet collective conscious - the very repression that led to the committee’s trial.

Lozovsky starts by categorizing the entire indictment under the genre of ‘fiction:’ “What was the work that all the committees were doing, in particular the Jewish committee, that it merited forty-two volumes' worth of attention?” he asks the court and proceeds to answer:

If you look at the testimony and the indictment, it appears that the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee arose because of Lozovsky's initiative, with nationalistic and hostile intent, in order to establish contact with bourgeois organizations to pursue subversive work. This is sheer fiction.311

Over the course of his testimony, it becomes clear that Lozovsky, as an experienced editor, does not share the writers’ perception of writing as a direct path to Truth. This was, in many ways, a transcendence of the discourse of Socialist Realism and the narratives it enabled. “Fiction,” in Socialist Realism, is not a mere fabrication. It is conditioned, rather, by the Socialist Realist time and space perception. The Stalinist novel, explains Katerina Clark, is shaped by a world view that tends to annul time and bridge the gap between its own epic past and the present. Fictional, historical, and actual experience are interwind through the lens of this mythic time. This creates a sort of temporal hierarchy of a canonized Great Time (events like the 1917 Revolution, for instance) and the profane present. “No event of the present time,” writes Clark, “could transcend its profaneness unless it could be dignified by some identification with a moment either from the official Heroic Age or from the Great and Glorious future. The meaning of all present-day reality was derived from its relationship with these mythic times.”312 Taking into account the après-coup

311 Ibid., Kindle Locations 3526-3528.
narrativization of the defendants’ entire past, it is safe to say that this was not only true for glorious good but also for glorious evil. To escape its every-day profaneness and be transformed into an essence, the defendants’ actions had to be “dignified” by some identification with a mythical moment - in this case, with the official Heroic Age that necessarily also posited official Villains.\textsuperscript{313} These mythical times, the official Heroic Age and the Great and Glorious future, can both be categorized under \textit{Utopia}. As such, they can have ever-shifting referents – their discourse is written under the influence of the present while the present conforms to the utopian revolutionary development.\textsuperscript{314} They, thus, follow the reciprocal logic of repression. The similarity of these mechanisms and their \textit{après-coup} logic is not surprising since it is exactly repression which enables utopia as a concept.

Lozovsky, however, does not conform to this logic. He uses his editing eye as a tool that allows him to see things from an outside perspective and gives him access to some sort of a meta-language that goes beyond the conventions of the genre. In fact, he even goes as far as explicitly making fun of the \textit{après-coup} logic that turned him, retroactively, into a lifelong villain. When criticizing the fact that he was accused of sharing secret documents that were never actually presented to him, Lozovsky remarks sarcastically:

\begin{quote}
As indicated in the indictment, we pass on classified material and retain copies in the files. Then along come employees from the State Security Ministry and take everything away. How can I be accused of such nonsense? If I wanted to pass top-secret information, then, with my many years of experience as a conspirator in the underground, do you think I really would have left copies for the State Security Ministry to find? That is just out-and-out stupidity.\textsuperscript{315}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
313 As all universal ideas, Heroes needed a particular other against which to be defined.
\end{flushright}
As a life-long “conspirator in the underground” Lozovsky should have indeed known better. By taking the narrative of the indictment apart, Lozovsky aims to prove its fictional and fantastical elements. In regards to the allegations that he transmitted confidential material through Fefer and Mikhoels on their trip to America, Lozovsky asks: “Would I have gotten in touch with a poet and an actor if I had wanted to engage in espionage?” He elaborates:

And so, a Central Committee member and deputy minister of foreign affairs [Lozovsky is referring to himself] is accused of supplying two people with espionage materials during the war. Even had I wanted to engage in such activity, why would I transmit something through these people? After all, there is an American Embassy in Moscow that is simply swarming with intelligence officers.\(^\text{316}\)

Lozovsky, thus, as an experienced politician and editor, ridicules the “poets” and “actors” in a way that questions their ability to function outside of their own fantastical world. In Lozovsky’s own words: “This is fiction. These are writers and poets. They are given to all sorts of flights of fancy.”\(^\text{317}\)

It is not just the fantastical content of the testimonies that Lozovsky is trying to reveal, but also its form, its style. He points out to the judges the peculiar stylistic similarity of all the testimonies:

Looking at all of the case materials and the defendants' testimony, one gets a very strange picture. I would request the court to make note of that. All of the defendants, all of those under arrest (not only those who are here, but those outside this courtroom as well) confirm and develop one and the same formula. Where did it come from? What is the source, and why is there such unity of ideas and phrases?\(^\text{318}\)

What Lozovsky is hinting toward here is that, judging by their similarity in style, all testimonies are in effect based on one initial testimony – that of Itsik Fefer: “I believe that Fefer's testimony, from which this whole case begins,” Lozovsky states explicitly, “is the sheerest fantasy.”\(^\text{319}\) While

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\(^{316}\) Ibid., Kindle Locations 3944-3948.
\(^{317}\) Ibid., Kindle Locations 4011-4012.
\(^{318}\) Ibid., Kindle Locations 4037-4040.
\(^{319}\) Ibid., Kindle Location 4076.
Fefer relies on his writing to prove the pureness of his soul, Lozovsky regards it as a proof of the very opposite – Fefer’s ability to fictionalize. In his testimony, Lozovsky often references Fefer’s confession as a work of fiction. He tells the court: “I will comment later on what Fefer's aim was in writing three volumes of fiction that reveal certain of his features.” Writing, according to Lozovsky, does have the power to reveal someone’s character but, at least in Fefer’s case, it exposes not purity but dishonesty. He then discusses the contradictions between Fefer’s written testimony and his oral testimony in the trial. He says:

I was arrested two weeks after Fefer's testimony about a beachhead. And now it comes out, based on the words of the same Fefer, that there was no conversation with Rosenberg about how the Americans wanted to use the settlement of Jews in the Crimea for their own imperialistic purposes, and that they would support us in seizing the Crimea. From Fefer's testimony that he gave earlier, it follows that they promised to fight for the Crimea. Who? These two musketeers-Fefer and Mikhoels- were going to fight for the Crimea against Soviet power? Again, this is slanderous fiction.

Lozovsky continues to ridicule “the poet and the actor” and the fantasy world of fiction they live in. He sarcastically refers to Fefer’s written testimony as “Fefer's "collected works:" “When I read the third volume of Fefer's "collected works,"” exclaims Lozovsky, “I understood what it was all about.”

Over the course of the trial, Lozovsky listened to many of his fellow defendants struggle to “further reflect” and reconceptualize their understanding of their actions après-coup. With these attempts they were trying to find their way out of the impossible paradox that their identity had by then become. “Further reflections” took place around previously safer, but always ambiguous ideas that stood at the heart of the Soviet nationalities policy and found their most paradoxical expression

320 Ibid., Kindle Locations 3607-3608.
321 Ibid., Kindle Locations 4076-4081.
322 Ibid., Kindle Locations 4321-4322.
in Soviet Jews. ‘Assimilation’ was one such idea. Fefer and Kvitko argued about the possible meanings and implications of this process during Kvitko’s testimony:

*Fefer:* Why did you decide that assimilation was Communist Party policy?

*Kvitko:* In Lenin's works [...] it says that when the revolution comes, when Russia is free, it will be a favorable time for assimilation. He considered assimilation as a very progressive process and in the interests of the masses and the country. And if the committee, in organizing Jews, was not preparing them for assimilation, if we were making nearly assimilated Jews back into Jews again, then that meant that we were acting against Comrade Lenin's directives and against the party line.

*Fefer:* Are you aware that when Jews came to Comrades Lenin and Stalin to discuss the issue of developing their culture in their own language, they were always met with support, and that most of the Jewish organizations were created under Lenin? [...] If this was a policy of assimilation, then it was party policy as well, and so there would have been no Birobidzhan.

*Kvitko:* The very way you posed the question contains within it the whole problem. Here's why Yiddish culture was needed, just as the literature of all the national minorities was needed, in order to prepare the masses in their native languages for assimilation by a certain time.³²³

Fefer and Kvitko’s argument reflect the same struggles the party faced dealing with this concept since the revolution – how to deal with the capitalist division to nationalities in a way that would not be a continuation of tsarist oppression. In an attempt to resolve this paradox Soviet, nationalities policy had indeed changed its stance on the question of assimilation many times throughout the 1920s and 1930s.³²⁴ From a theoretically desirable process of a natural convergence of all Soviet nationalities into one Soviet supra-nation, it was regarded by the mid-1930s as a counterrevolutionary theory. In a 1930 party congress Stalin referred to it as anti-Leninist:

The theory of the fusion of all nations of [...] the USSR into one common Great Russian nation with one common Great Russian language is a nationalist-chauvinist and anti-Leninist theory that contradicts the main thesis of Leninism, according to which national differences cannot disappear in the near future but will remain in existence for a long time, even after the victory of the proletarian revolution on a world scale.³²⁵

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³²³ Ibid., Kindle Locations 2758-2767.
³²⁴ See Chapter One for the full discussion.
Kvitko and Fefer were struggling to make sense of the different paradoxes of belonging that Soviet Jews had always faced – how to be universal in a way that was not itself too particular? In other words, to not assimilate too much so they lose all national form while also making sure not to assimilate too little so they become nationalistic. This was a struggle for Soviet Jews, in particular, because their national form was always questionable (hence the Jewish Question). Since, by the time the trial took place, being Soviet and being a Jew had become incompatible states of being, Soviet Jews could now either be fully Soviet or fully national and both states were highly problematic.

Kvitko’s “further reflections” resulted in his understanding of the JAC’s struggle against assimilation as counterrevolutionary:

What do I accuse myself of? What do I feel guilty of? […] Feeling that Soviet Yiddish literature was ideologically healthy and Soviet, we Yiddish writers, myself included (perhaps I am more guilty of this than the others), did not pose the question of how we could promote the process of assimilation. I am talking about the assimilation of the Jewish masses. By continuing to write in Yiddish, we unwittingly became a brake on the process of assimilation. The work of Soviet writers is ideologically and politically firm, and this content-the Soviet content-served in no insignificant way to promote the assimilation of large masses of the Jewish population. But in recent years the language has ceased to serve the masses, because they-the masses-have left the Yiddish language behind. So it started to stand in the way. As the director of the Yiddish Section of the Soviet Writers' Union, I did not raise the question of closing down the section. Herein lies my guilt. To use a language that the masses have left behind, that has outlived its time, and that sets us apart not only from the larger life of the Soviet Union but from Jews at large, Jews who are already assimilated, to use such a language, in my opinion, is, in its own way, a manifestation of nationalism.\(^{326}\)

Kvitko, therefore, realizes something fundamental about the state of Soviet Jewishness. The fact that in the context of Soviet Jews the idea of assimilation was suddenly desirable again, reveals just how much Soviet Jews, as a nationality, lost their ability to be national in form. Any identification with a Jewish characteristic was now designated nationalistic in content. Jewish form

and content could no longer be distinguished. At the same time, the idea of assimilation Kvitko describes, of the Jewish masses leaving their national language behind – shedding their national form – was exactly what Stalin considered an anti-Leninst idea. Keeping the national form of the different Soviet nationalities was still an important part of the Friendship of the Peoples metaphor that governed the Soviet fantasy of a unified society. “Rootless cosmopolitanism” was precisely about lacking such roots of belonging that the national form, as long as it was the form of a new Soviet nation, offered.327

The Yiddish writer, David Bergelson, showed less conviction than Kvitko when it came to the issue of assimilation. His testimony makes clear that he still understands the fight against Jewish assimilation as a Soviet practice. He explains his specific Soviet motivations in doing so:

The closing of Yiddish schools alarmed us a great deal. This was an open acknowledgment that we would become superfluous. […] we felt that this order had not come from the Central Committee. On the other hand we knew that the number of students in the Yiddish schools was dwindling, but for me personally, it was a question of Yiddish culture in general. […] Kalinin believed that Yiddish culture could develop in Birobidzhan. I read this in a pamphlet of his, and I heard him say it himself. It became clear to me that this literature had to hold out until it reached a developed stage in Birobidzhan.328

The court, however, questioned this line of argumentation by asking Bergelson more directly if the problem of assimilation troubled him. Bergelson responded with a double negation that only implicated him further:

It wasn't that I did not believe in assimilation (Ya v assimilatsiyu ne to chto ne veril),329 but rather I felt that it would be a drawn-out process, which meant prolonged agony. It could be worse than death.

The court did not take well to this response:

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327 See Chapter One for a discussion about the conceptualization of “socialist nations” post 1936.
329 Владимир Павлович Наумов, А. А. Краюшкин, и Н. В. Тепцов, Неправедный суд: последний сталинский расстрел : стенограмма судебного процесса над членами Еврейского антифашистского комитета (Наука, 1994), 82.
Presiding Officer: And do you still consider the assimilation of the Jewish people within the Soviet people to be agony?

Bergelson: I am not speaking of the people, but of the culture.

Presiding Officer: But doesn't the culture mean the people?

Bergelson: I was so completely imbued with Soviet principles that in the end I could comfort myself with the thought that the Jewish people were living among other peoples.\(^{330}\)

What is remarkable about the court’s line of questioning is the sharp and straightforward distinction that they make, almost unwittingly, between the Jewish people and the Soviet people, when in theory there should be no such distinction. Bergelson tries to defend himself by referring not to the people, but to the culture – to maintain some sort of difference between content and form – but he too understands at this point that he is dealing with two incompatible ideas. By admitting to the comfort that comes from the idea of “living among other peoples,” Bergelson also admits to the sacrifice that this unification requires – foregoing any sort of Jewish identifications.

Fefer’s testimony on the issue of assimilation, reveals not just his own difficulties with the concept, but also those of the court. When questioning Fefer about his goals in working for the committee, the presiding officer asks him to admit that some of these goals had to do with “certain peculiarities of the Jewish nationality” (особенности еврейской национальности)\(^{331}\) and with an attempt to solve “the problem of Jews in the USSR.” Fefer replies that he had in mind the problem of preserving and developing Jewish culture. The presiding officer then says: “But the struggle against assimilation is in fact a nonexistent Jewish problem, which the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was trying to resolve. Is that correct?” Fefer confirms. The court, represented by the presiding officer, seems to be a bit confused as well when it comes to the question of Jewish assimilation. While they deny the very difficulties that this topic arises, they, at the same time, speak about “the peculiarities of the Jewish nationality” and the attempt to solve the very problem

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331 Наумов, Краюшкин, and Тепцов, *Неправедный суд*, 155.
that they themselves then proclaim is “nonexistent.” What the court calls “peculiarities” are exactly these particularities that made the Jewish nationality incompatible with the idea of assimilation that the Soviets were able to “assimilate” – the idea of assimilating in content rather than in form.

As Fefer’s questioning continues it becomes clearer that in the case of Soviet Jews, content and form have amalgamated into one - the obscure category of “culture”:

*Presiding Officer:* We have agreed here that you joined the work of the committee as a person who already had nationalistic sentiments.

*Fefer:* At that time there were some things that I did not consider to be nationalistic work. For example, I did not think that working to counter assimilation was nationalistic activity.

*Presiding Officer:* In response to my questions you answered that in 1941, when you started working for Eynikayt, you pushed your intention of struggling against assimilation.

*Fefer:* Yes, because an organic assimilation process was taking place.

*Presiding Officer:* What was the point of your struggling against this if the party hadn't set that task before us? We are stating a fact: that in 1941 you started working at Eynikayt with the goal not only of carrying out the tasks put to you by the party, but of struggling against assimilation and for the cultural autonomy of Jews.

*Fefer:* No, for the growth of Jewish culture.

*Presiding Officer:* All right, but that is also a nationalistic mission.

*Fefer:* At the time I did not consider it a nationalistic mission.

It is unclear, thus, what this “culture” contains that makes it nationalistic in nature but the fact that promoting the growth of Jewish culture is now considered a nationalistic mission proves that it is indeed considered national in content. In his attempts to make sense of his “anti-Soviet” behavior, Fefer once again conforms to the *apres-coup* narrative. When it is Lozovsky’s turn to speak, however, he does not hold back from pointing out the paradoxes all the other defendants ignore in their attempts to refit themselves into the Soviet Friendship fantasy. While Fefer relies on the idea of “further reflections” to explain his engagement in what is now considered nationalistic actions, Lozovsky addresses these contradictions between past and present by asking directly the one question that seems to be the elephant in the courtroom - “Why is this considered nationalism?”
My Mother’s Name is Hannah, Too

During his testimony, Lozovsky was questioned about the committee’s official newspaper, the Yiddish newspaper *Eynikayt*. His response exposes the paradoxes around the issue of assimilation and brings them to the surface:

I am stating here that nothing that was written in Eynikayt had anything to do with me directly or indirectly. When I was told that they needed a Yiddish writer, I would help them, and that was it. To write for a Yiddish newspaper, a writer had to write in Yiddish. But when Bergelson suddenly says that if someone writes in Yiddish, that is nationalism, that means that what is on trial here is the Yiddish language. This is beyond my capacity to grasp. […] The point is not what language someone writes in, but how they write. There are times when national feelings shift to nationalistic feelings, and a communist ought to know that. \(^{332}\)

Lozovsky’s response speaks directly to the convergence of content and form that the Jewish nationality had undergone. He is the only one who explicitly states what was meant to be an obvious fact in regards to the Soviet concept of assimilation – that a national language is nothing but form. Writing in Yiddish, thus, is not supposed to be considered nationalistic or point to any nationalistic feelings. There is a difference between form and content, Lozovsky reminds the court. Every communist ought to know that. He continues with this same line, pointing out what is not meant to be acknowledged, when he is questioned about hiring certain translators:

The party bureau commission finds me guilty of hiring Feinberg and others. And who is Feinberg? Feinberg is the son of a communist, an old workingman who lived many years in England. Feinberg translated Lenin’s works into English. Why shouldn't I hire him? Because he is a Jew?

Here, Lozovsky asks the one question that none of the other defendants dare ask – what is the current meaning of being a Jew in the Soviet context? This is a question about a particular state of being, a state of being that had lost its compatibility with what was supposed to be its universal

content – being Soviet. The state of being a Jew, thus, is not just a particular form but necessarily also entails a particular content.

Feinberg is unmistakably a Jewish name. What Lozovsky is in effect asking here is why, when it comes to Jews, a name is no longer considered purely form - why is a name suddenly indicative of an essence? He tries to point this out to the court when he responds to a story Fefer told in his interrogation. In this story, Fefer recalls how Epshteyn informed Mikhoels and him about the creation of the Anti-Fascist Committee and stated that “much of the credit for this should go to Lozovsky, whom he called, “our father.” This was interpreted as a reference to Lozovsky as the guiding spirit of the JAC. In response to this, Lozovsky says in his testimony:

The witness for the prosecution [Lozovsky is sarcastically referring to Fefer here] keeps alluding to Epshteyn, who is dead. He said that I was the "father," that I was moved to tears. Maybe they did indeed call me "father," but in Kirgizia, people called me "Aksakal[ In Central Asia, the term "Aksakal" refers to a wise, respected elder] and in China, "Chinese elder," because I had done a lot of work involving China, and in Latin America they called me "a second Columbus." One photojournalist sent me a book and her photograph with the inscription "To Solomon the Wise." So there were quite a few people who referred to me in various ways. What does that have to do with my political activity?

Lozovsky specifies the many different “names” that he was called over the course of his career. The point that he is trying to make here is that these different names do not, in any way, indicate the essence of Lozovsky as a person, as a Soviet person. “There were quite a few people who referred to me in various ways” says Lozovsky. “What does that have to do with my political activity?” What do these different forms, in other words, have to do with Lozovsky’s Soviet content? Indeed, when referring to his work, Lozovsky says: “I did not have an easy job, but I dare

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333 Ibid., Kindle Locations 3498-3500.
334 Ibid., Kindle Locations 3591-3592. Shakhno Epshteyn was a Soviet-Yiddish writer and the JAC’s executive secretary. He died in 1945.
335 Ibid., Kindle Locations 3611-3615.
to think that I handled it pretty well. I have never talked about it, never credited myself for it, but I think that I was doing work that was truly Soviet.”

Lozovsky was the only defendant to point directly to the shift in attitude toward Soviet Jews that turned previously acceptable practices, indeed still permissible for other nations, into anti-Soviet acts of sabotage. In another attempt to point out the collapse of form and content, Lozovsky referenced Ehrenburg’s mythological speech about his mother’s name, a speech that was given at a rally Lozovsky helped organize and was now considered a nationalistic event:

I organized a rally according to party directives. Every speaker received instructions from the Central Committee. I read every speech, as did Alexandrov and Shcherbakov. Is it really possible to imagine that the radio committee, which was not subordinate to me, would broadcast appeals and speeches on the air without Central Committee approval? So the rally took place. Tell me, is Academician Kapitsa a subordinate of mine? Is the writer Ehrenburg a subordinate of mine? Do they speak according to my instructions? Recall the list of speakers. Ehrenburg says that his mother’s name is Hannah, throwing that in the fascists’ faces. And suddenly someone says that this means a return to being Jewish. My mother's name was Hannah, too. Am I supposed to be ashamed of that? What kind of strange psychology is this? Why is this considered nationalism?

Just like Ehrenburg, Lozovsky announces that his mother’s name was Hannah. This declaration, however, made in such a different moment in time, now has very different effects. If we look at these two declarations - both involving the same name - we could see the entire trajectory of this Jewish mark. From a source of new-found pride at the beginning of the war, a badge of honor, to a shameful marking. Indeed, in his declaration, at an anti-fascist rally, Ehrenburg says: “My mother’s name is Hannah, I am a Jew. I say this with pride.” Eleven years later, in a Soviet courtroom, Lozovsky says “My mother's name was Hannah, too. Am I supposed to be ashamed of that?” This journey, from a momentary sense of pride in something that was until then dormant, to a now source of shame, tells us the Soviet story of the Jewish mark in a nutshell. Lozovsky

\[^{336}\textit{Ibid.}, Kindle Locations 3486-3488.\]
wants to know what kind of a strange psychology is this that would make him ashamed of his mother’s Jewish name. This “strange psychology” is the psychology of repression. In Ehrenburg’s speech he identifies the Nazi’s as those who reminded him of his mother’s name. This was a reminder that there was something about this name that was already previously particular, other, and that laid dormant until it was reactivated by the moment of Nazi invasion. As the previous chapter showed, this reactivation of the Jewish mark resulted in repression proper – a complete denial of Jewish particularity that then returned (as the repressed always does) in the form of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign.

In his testimony, Lozovsky is the only one to point directly to the repressed, to what was otherwise only apparent in a distorted form. At the end of his testimony Lozovsky asks the court:

By the nature of the work I did, by the nature of my activities, through my duties at the Central Committee, I was involved with bourgeois circles and bourgeois newspapers all over the world: Yiddish ones, American ones, English ones, French ones. Why are you singling out the Yiddish newspapers and dealing with them separately?

The court replies that it is because he is accused of being a Jewish nationalist and maintaining ties with bourgeois Jewish reactionaries and not American or British ones. He is then asked about hiring nonparty staffers at the Sovinformburo and particularly about the percentage of them that were Jews and their ratio to the total number of employees. Lozovsky replies: “I did not do that kind of calculation. I never felt drawn to Jews and never denied that I was a Jew. A person who denies his nationality is a bastard.” To this the court responds with a sweeping denial: “No one is accusing you or any of the others seated here of being a Jew. That is not why you are here. You are here for carrying out anti-Soviet work.”337 The court, of course, denies that this has anything to do with being a Jew. acknowledging that would necessarily lead to an acknowledgment of Soviet aggression and its incompatibility with the Friendship of the Peoples fantasy. Lozovsky, however,

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337 Ibid., Kindle Locations 4390-4395.
keeps disrupting this fantasy by asking the questions that everyone else seem to ignore - why is having a mother named Hannah suddenly a source of shame? Why is being a Jew suddenly anti-Soviet? What Lozovsky is ultimately asking is what really is on trial here.

**Particular Suffering on Trial**

The recharging of the Jewish Question mark that led to repression was propelled by the recognition of Jewish particular suffering, as Chapter Three showed. With the repression of Jewish particularity, this very recognition of suffering was denied, criminalized and was now on trial. Lozovsky, in particular, was accused of particularizing wartime Jewish suffering:

*Presiding Officer* [to Bergelson]: You also testified that before the creation of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, Lozovsky brought together Jewish writers at the Sovinformburo and instructed them to get materials about the sufferings of the Jewish population connected to the Soviet-German war. This directive of Lozovsky’s degenerated into nationalistic activity on the part of the Jewish writers, because materials about the Jewish population were submitted to the Sovinformburo in isolation from the sufferings and disasters that the war brought to all of the Soviet people.\(^{338}\)

It was the isolation, thus, of Soviet Jews as Jews rather than a part of all Soviet People, that could not be tolerated. And it was intolerable exactly because this marking, this isolation, was, to begin with, a result of Soviet policies and practices. It was a reflection of the repressed Soviet perception of Jews as particularized others.\(^{339}\)

Most of the accusations Lozovsky faced on account of promoting Jewish particular suffering had to do with gathering material for the Black Book. When questioning Markish, the court quoted from his interrogation records: “In your testimony (vol. 15, p. 148) you said that Lozovsky taught you to emphasize Jewish national sorrow in your speeches.” The questioning about Lozovsky continued:

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\(^{338}\) Ibid., Kindle Locations 3705-3707.

\(^{339}\) See Chapter Three for a full discussion of the mechanism of repression of Jewish particularity.
Presiding Officer: Did he close his eyes to the sufferings of other peoples? You testified that Lozovskyy told you that you should write only about the Jews, and closed his eyes to the suffering of other peoples.

Markish: He did not say that. The very fact that these materials were being gathered qualifies as nationalism, but there were no instructions from Lozovskyy to "close your eyes to the suffering of other peoples." What I want to say is this: There is no doubt that Lozovskyy made clear to the writers who were in his office at that time that they should gather material exclusively about brutalities against the Jews. But as to any nationalistic motives behind such a directive, that was a conclusion drawn later during the investigation.

Presiding Officer: Is the conclusion yours?

Markish: Well, what it comes down to is that Lozovskyy did not exhort writers to go and commit a crime against the Soviet people. The only thing he said was, "Go gather material about atrocities against the Jews." 340

There is, it seems, a question of recognition that emerges here – did Lozovskyy recognize the suffering of other people? It is interesting to think about this inversion – the withdraw of recognition of the suffering of those who were othered, the closing of eyes to the very suffering that marked them as others and to the very otherness that was their source of suffering, was now projected onto these very people. Lozovskyy, thus, was accused of the very thing that Soviet society could not tolerate in itself – its aggressiveness toward otherness. Markish was trying to defend Lozovskyy by saying that he never asked writers to go and commit a crime against the Soviet people. All he did, said Markish, was ask them to "Go gather material about atrocities against the Jews." This level of particularization, however, was now considered exactly that – a crime against the Soviet people, against the Soviet fundamental fantasy of the Friendship of the Peoples. It was, in a way, an indictment of the Soviets' own repressed crimes against their particularized others.

Chronicle of a Death Foretold

On July 18, 1952, the court reached its verdict after seven days of deliberations. The defendants’ efforts to defend their character using their literary works as their alibi were unsuccessful. The court, in fact, reached the opposite conclusion:

As the immediate supervisor of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, Lozovsky hired Mikhoels to be chairman of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and Epshteyn (both deceased) to be the executive secretary. They were both ardent Jewish nationalists, who with Lozovsky's knowledge and consent, in order to conduct anti-Soviet nationalist activity, in turn hired as members of the presidium of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee prominent Jewish nationalists—the Yiddish poet Fefer, a former Bundist who had in the past repeatedly spoken out in his works as a nationalist; the Yiddish poets Kvitko and Markish and the Yiddish writer Bergelson, who greeted the Great October Socialist Revolution with hostility and in 1920-1921 fled abroad, where in their works they slandered Soviet reality and the national policy of the Communist Party and the Soviet government and after their return to the USSR again spoke out expressing nationalistic views in their works.³⁴¹

The court, thus, did not accept the validity of the defendants’ literary alibi and saw it instead as incriminating evidence of the defendants’ nationalistic and anti-Soviet spirit. It is quite clear from the verdict that the defendants were not just judged for specific actions and crimes, but rather their entire essence stood trial. The court goes back to events that happened thirty years earlier, exemplifying the logic of après-coup – a current moment in time reshaping the meaning of an earlier moment that then reshapes the present. By this very mechanism of repression, the defendants and their particularity (meaning, anything Jewish) were now reshaped as Enemies of the People. The court then announced its verdict:

On the basis of the aforementioned, the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR finds [the defendants] guilty of committing the crimes referred to in articles 58-ia; 58-io, part z; and 58-11 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. […] The Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR Has Sentenced: Lozovsky, Solomon Abramovich, Fefer, Isaac Solomonovich, Bergelson, David Rafailovich, Yuzefovich, Joseph Sigizmundovich, Shimeliovich, Boris Abramovich, Markish, Peretz Davidovich, Zuskin, Benjamin Lvovich, Kvitko, Leyb Moiseyevich, Hofshteyn, David Naumovich, Teumin, Emilia Isaacovna, Vatenberg, Ilya Semyonovich, Talmy, Leon Yakovlevich, and Vatenberg-Ostrovskaya, Khayke Semyonovna, on the basis of article 58-1a of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation to the severest measure of punishment for the crimes committed by them jointly: execution by firing squad, with all of their property to be confiscated.³⁴²

³⁴¹ Ibid., Kindle Locations 7501-7506.
³⁴² Ibid., Kindle Locations 7608-7614.
The defendants were sentenced to be removed for being a painful reminder of the internal aggression that laid beneath the Soviet fantasy of the Friendship of the Peoples.

On August 12, 1952, the sentence was carried out. The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and its presidium members were no more. In his final statement during the trial, Lozovsky made a request:

I have said everything and request no favors. I need either complete rehabilitation or death. [...] But should anything come to light indicating that I was innocent, then I ask that I be posthumously readmitted to the ranks of the party and that the information about my rehabilitation be published in the newspapers.343

After Stalin’s death in March 1953, the case materials were reviewed and new evidence were discovered that proved beyond doubt the defendants’ innocence. In 1955 all of the defendants were indeed rehabilitated, just as Lozovsky hoped and predicted. His request that this would be made public knowledge, however, was never fulfilled. The rehabilitation was granted secretly, in the dark, and an open publication was forbidden.344 The memory of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, along with the Jewish Question mark that followed it, was repelled from the Soviet Union’s collective conscious for the rest of its remaining days.

343 Ibid., Kindle Locations 7343-7346.
344 Ibid., Kindle Locations 51-55.


**Epilogue**

I have often faded but never died:
‘I am a Jew!’

Itsik Fefer
I am a Jew, 1941

This work has dealt extensively with the question of ‘recognition.’ As a Hegelian concept, ‘recognition’ stands at the center of both Marxist and Lacanian thought. For Hegel, it was the master-slave dialectic that propelled history. Marx applied that to the idea of class struggle. Lacan used it toward theorizing human desire as a desire for recognition. Kojeve’s theory of recognition brings these two aspects together when he shows how the desire for recognition is the very battle that sustains human history as the history of human struggle. For Kojeve, thus, mutual recognition is a necessary condition of the end of history. According to Kojeve, History is the outcome of human desire, a unique form of desire that takes as its object the desire of another. Human desire is the desire for recognition and History proceeds as long as the battle for recognition proceeds. The end of history, therefore, will be a state of mutual recognition and the end of any motivation for battling. If we reconsider the Friendship of the Peoples fantasy through a Kojevean lens, we might gain another insight into how Soviet Jews found themselves by the mid-1940s completely incompatible with it. The 1936 declaration of the transition to socialism denoted a leap outside of history – the beginning of the end of the Soviet peoples’ struggle for a communist society. The Friendship of the Peoples fantasy was, thus, a fantasy of mutual recognition – of the end of any battles between Soviet peoples – that this leap outside of history required.

The Great Patriotic War, however, acted in a sense as a step back into history when the Soviets were again faced with a struggle. This struggle was forced on the Soviets from the outside.

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– as if history reached in and tried to pull them back within its boundaries. The war allowed for a temporary suspension of the absoluteness of the Soviet end of history narratives, and this, in turn, enabled a new state of integration of particularity in a way that was never possible before. Once the war was over, however, what was left was a narrative of particularity of Jewish suffering that by its very existence put into question the possibility of mutual recognition among all Soviet people. At the end of history, recognition had to be mutual, no one could be singled out. Difference could only exist within history.

Socialist realism was based on the same end of history narratives that defined the boundaries of Soviet discourse. This was, according to Boris Groys, the difference between socialist realism and other schools of art:

In contrast, socialist realism, which regards historical time as ended and therefore occupies no particular place in it, looks upon history as the arena of struggle between active, demiurgic, creative, progressive art aspiring to build a new world in the interests of the oppressed classes and passive, contemplative art that does not believe in or desire change but accepts things as they are or dreams of the past.\(^{346}\)

The JAC trial testimonies have shown how powerful this perception was that in an attempt to build a new world, altered the past après-coup. We have also seen how the defendants, as true Soviet writers, tried to make sense of their lives through this very perception. According to Stalinist aesthetics, tells us Groys, everything is new in the new post-historical reality, even the classics are reworked beyond recognition.\(^{347}\) It is striking how much this mechanism resembles that of repression in which one moment in time alters earlier ones and gives them new meaning. We have seen that, just like the conscious mind that stands beyond repression, the end of history is a state that cannot tolerate contradictions or paradoxes. Since the Soviet Jewish identity, as a set of these two specific identifications of being Soviet and Jewish, was now irreconcilably paradoxical, its

\(^{346}\) Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, 49.

\(^{347}\) Ibid.
meaning had to be changed retroactively. We have also seen how this was a mechanism that worked reciprocally - that while one moment altered another après-coup, the earlier moment was waiting to attract a new moment with which it could form an association. This earlier moment, was created well before the war by the Soviet nationalities policy that posed Jews as a question and expected them to grow the national roots that they lacked in order to be national in form and socialist in content. When the Nazi invasion marked Jews in a way that reactivated that earlier moment of otherness this very marking had to be repressed, repelled from the conscious.

Indeed, the end of history in Marxism, as a paradox-free state, could only be reached through consciousness – gaining class consciousness. This is a movement from darkness to light, to enlightenment. Only these narratives that were compatible with this state were allowed to stay in the light. The rest had to be pushed back to the darkness of the unconscious. “The chicken must not be roasted with its feathers” said Gorky, charging Soviet writers with the important task of censorship. The truth is not always visible, it has to be extracted. Meaning must be derived from the raw facts and the feathers, as a disturbing element, must be removed in the process. Socialist Realism allows these retroactive changes through its conventions of mythical time with its ever-shifting referents.

If we apply these conventions of mythical time to Markish’s poem that was discussed in the trial, in which a mirror falls and breaks into pieces, we might ourselves be able to extract from it a hidden essence, that of the Soviet Jewish tragedy. As Markish tells the court, the poem describes a mirror shattering. Markish then tries to put the pieces back together but still cannot see his own reflection in it. In many ways, this was a true depiction of the trial in which the defendants had to see their own image, as a reflection of their life-long identifications, being reflected through a shattered mirror – to the point they could not recognize themselves anymore. The trial, as a
deprivation of recognition, destroyed the defendant’s ability to identify themselves as Soviet Jews. They were not worthy of being Soviet exactly because they identified as Jews. This one line in one of Markish’s many poems, was a reflection, a prediction even, of the JAC trial. While fifteen Soviet Jews faced charges in this trial, and bore its tragic consequences, it was Soviet Jewish identity as a whole that was judged.

All of the JAC presidium members were posthumously acquitted and rehabilitated. The many sources and complaints about discrimination and antisemitism in the post-Stalin years, however, indicate that Soviet Jews were never reintegrated back into the Soviet Friendship of the Peoples fantasy. The death verdict given to Soviet Jewish identity was never overturned.

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