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MEMORIA

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"PRUSSIAN BLUE".

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SURVIVAL".
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We invite all of you to work closely with us. We would be grateful to receive information about events, projects, publications, exhibitions, conferences or research that we should share with our readers. We also accept proposals for articles.

Paweł Sawicki, Editor-in-Chief

Our e-mail: memoria@auschwitz.org

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"PORTRAITS OF SURVIVAL". EXHIBITION IN MELBOURNE

Melbourne Holocaust Museum presents a new temporary exhibition on view
until 18 January 2026.

This series of intimate portraits by Anita Lester honours 16 Holocaust survivors from Melbourne, whose lives were rebuilt through family, community and culture. Through these paintings, their faces and stories embody resilience, vitality, and the ongoing responsibility to remember. This exhibition invites visitors to encounter these survivors not just as subjects of history, but as living witnesses.

Anita Lester is a multidisciplinary artist based in Melbourne, Australia, working across music, film, painting, poetry, and illustration. Her practice is grounded in storytelling first and foremost, resisting easy categorisation – marked by both a technical precision and a deep emotional intelligence that connects across forms.

Whether through image, word, sound, or line, Anita's work continues to ask essential questions – about memory, faith, and how we carry culture through rupture and reinvention.

special exhibition by Anita Lester

Portraits

OF SURVIVAL

ions Gallery

MELBOURNE
HOLOCAUST
MUSEUM

Judy & Leon Goldman
Learning Centre

"PRUSSIAN BLUE". YISHAI JUSIDMAN'S CYCLE OF PAINTINGS AT A NEW TEMPORARY EXHIBITION AT THE AUSCHWITZ

Starting from October 9, the Auschwitz Museum hosts an exhibition of the Prussian Blue painting series by the artist Yishai Jusidman. This is the first large-scale contemporary art exhibition at the Museum. Nearly 50 works, which have not yet been displayed in Europe, are displayed in the rooms of Block 21 at the former Auschwitz I camp.

The nearly fifty artworks in Prussian Blue are rendered almost exclusively in that color, one of the earliest artificially developed pigments used by European artists. The chemical compound that produces this blue pigment is chemically related to the prussic acid found in Zyklon B, the lethal agent used in some German Nazi concentration and extermination camps. By an unforeseen turn, conspicuous traces of the blue pigment have remained in some of the extant gas chambers.

"It's an incredible privilege and honor to stand here at the Auschwitz Memorial. This being the first time a contemporary artist does such a large-scale exhibition within the structures that this site memorializes. The series was produced between 2010 and 2017 with the idea of being shown in contemporary art museums. For me, I always wanted to bring this exhibition to Europe from the outset. And it proved to be an incredible, difficult challenge because of the subject, I think. It turns out now that the series of paintings comes to Europe for the first time to the Auschwitz Memorial. For me, the event is really one of the most significant, important moments of my life," said Yishai Jusidman.

"It was not easy to come to Europe with your art coming from Central America. However, the starting point of this art was exactly here. It was this history that went first to Central America, and now the feedback is coming back here. That's why I think it's extremely important. I will not speak about this art, as the art must speak for itself and, as one will see, I think it does speak," said dr Piotr M. A. Cywiński, the director of the Museum.

"And this is art that not only speaks about Auschwitz, but also about several different sites. It's going through the entire European experience of that time and even it transgresses the borders of the Shoah because it's talking about some other concentration camps and not only other extermination centers like Treblinka, Sobibór or Bełżec," added Piotr Cywiński.

"Zyklon B leaves traces on many of the infrastructure elements where it has been applied: in gas chambers, but also in other spaces. Very recently, the Auschwitz Memorial preservation team has finished preserving the bathhouse at the former Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp, where Zyklon B was also used as a disinfectant. You can still see the traces today. The title of the exhibition and this chemical effect are very strongly connected. I am very glad that we managed to connect the end of this project with the preservation of the bathhouse. I am confident it is a very important first step in working with art by the Memorial and through the Memorial. Thank you, Yishai, for



YISHAI J PRUSSIA BŁĘKIT

your family, for being here and for your support,” said Wojciech Soczewica, the Director General of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation.

In the Prussian Blue series, Yishai Jusidman tackles a difficult question: can contemporary art contribute to the collective memory of past atrocities, and if so, how?

„In the early 1950’s, the esteemed cultural critic Theodor Adorno argued that ‘to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.’ His admonition endured. By extension, painters, too, were implicitly discouraged from dabbling with the Holocaust. The gap between the event and the possibility of its representation, we were told, was unbridgeable. Yet with the passing of time and generations, the imperative to suitably address the Holocaust through art has only grown more urgent,” wrote Yishai Jusidman in the introduction text to the exhibition.

The most important part of the series consists of unique naturalistic reproductions of photographs of gas chambers in several German Nazi camps, such as Auschwitz, Majdanek, Stutthof, and Mauthausen, as well as the spaces of extermination centers, including Treblinka and Sobibór.

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SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

"UNKNOWN LEGACIES OF THE NUREMBERG TRIAL"

The Pilecki Institute in Berlin is pleased to extend an invitation to participate in an international scientific conference titled "Unknown Legacies of the Nuremberg Trial: Regional Approaches and Perspectives in East Central Europe," scheduled for 3 and 4 December 2025.

The year 2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the start of the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg, a pivotal moment in the development of international criminal law and a significant milestone in the quest to hold accountable those responsible for atrocities committed during World War II. On 11 December 1946, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that established the international law principles outlined in the IMT Charter (also known as the Nuremberg Charter). These principles have since served as a vital reference point in the work of the International Law Commission. Throughout the IMT proceedings and the subsequent Nuremberg trials, these foundational principles played a crucial role in shaping the strategies used to prosecute and penalise the crimes of the Axis powers in the national courts of Allied states, as well as the work of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East.

The Nuremberg Charter was established as part of an agreement made on 8 August 1945, regarding the prosecution and punishment of leading European Axis criminals. This agreement involved the governments of Great Britain, the United States, the Union of Soviet Socialist



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The Nuremberg Charter was established as part of an agreement made on 8 August 1945, regarding the prosecution and punishment of leading European Axis criminals. This agreement involved the governments of Great Britain, the United States, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the Provisional Government of the French Republic. Notably, the authors of the London Agreement, along with the judges and prosecutors of the Nuremberg Tribunal, did not include representatives from the occupied European countries that endured the highest war casualties and where mass crimes were perpetrated, such as Poland. Nevertheless, the contributions of representatives from these nations were significant in shaping the Allied efforts to prosecute and hold accountable those responsible for international crimes, particularly through their involvement in the United Nations War Crimes Commission established in 1943. Their efforts also played a crucial role in advancing international law and the framework for international criminal law after 1945.

Despite being vital to the development of international law, this achievement is often underappreciated and overlooked, primarily because these countries fell under the influence of the USSR. We are only beginning to uncover their impact on the legacy of the Nuremberg trials and the prosecution of international crimes in the 20th century. These influences morphed into the concepts that paved the way for the establishment of the International Criminal Court in 2002. Another factor that has influenced the legal proceedings concerning crimes committed during the Second World War, and one that has not yet been thoroughly researched, is the context of the Cold War and the pronounced polarisation between the Eastern and Western blocs.

The conference aims to present recent research findings and facilitate discussions among international scholars regarding the legacy of the Nuremberg trials. Additionally, the conference will address the unique aspects of prosecuting crimes committed during the Second World War in Central and Eastern European nations, as well as the current state of research on prosecuting individuals accused of international crimes.

Today, there is a pressing need for a thorough analysis of the initiatives taken during and after the war, particularly considering regional narratives and how states have influenced the development of international criminal law. The conference aims not only to foster critical interdisciplinary reflection on the legacy of the Nuremberg trials but also to provide a platform for discussing contemporary investigations and prosecutions of international crimes, along with the challenges involved. This event will bring together scholars from diverse fields, including political science, law, history, and more, to ensure a well-rounded discourse.

To mark the 80th anniversary of the start and end of the Nuremberg trials, the organisers have planned two editions of the conference. The first edition, scheduled for 2025, will focus on the preparatory aspects of the trial, exploring the shared and divergent interpretations of the indictment and elucidating the definition of international crimes within the Tribunal's jurisdiction. The second edition will focus on the significance of the Nuremberg verdict.

"AUSCHWITZ. NOT LONG AGO. NOT FAR AWAY" EXHIBITION IN CINCINNATI

On 16 October, the traveling exhibition 'Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away' created by the Museum and the Spanish company Musealia was opened in Cincinnati Museum Center located in the historical building of Union Terminal.

The curators of this unique exhibition are international experts: Dr. Robert Jan van Pelt, Dr. Michael Berenbaum, and Dr. Paul Salmons, who worked closely with historians and curators from the Auschwitz Museum Research Center headed by Dr. Piotr Setkiewicz.

'Today we are living in a very difficult world. It's no longer a post-war era. There are so many new cases of dehumanization, new racism, antisemitism, xenophobia. I think we really need the remembrance, perhaps even more than it was 20 or 30 years ago. Remembrance is perhaps the last key that we have, to understand and imagine our own role today in the world that we are living in,' said director of the Auschwitz Museum, Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński, at the opening of the exhibition.

'This exhibition has travelled for some years to different cities in the world. Now it arrived here, and you will be tempted to show it, especially to some new generations, thinking that they will find some answers here. No, they will not. This history, and the remembrance of the Shoah, does not give us good, soft, easy, or clear answers, only questions. This is the most important thing we could give you. Questions are extremely important, even if those





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The exhibition depicts the successive stages of the development of Nazi ideology and describes the transformation of Oświęcim, an ordinary Polish town where Nazi Germany established the largest concentration camp and extermination center during the occupation, where approximately one million Jews and tens of thousands of people of other nationalities were murdered.

certain ideologies,' said Luis Ferreiro, director of Musealia.

'Auschwitz leaves us no excuse. We know where certain ideologies lead to, and therefore I think the exhibition also becomes a powerful message from the 20th century to us whole citizens of the 21st century. How we listen to that story, what we do with it, is then our responsibility. And I think that is also something important, that we all have this responsibility towards our own present and the future,' he added.

The visitors at Union Terminal will see several hundred items, mainly from the Auschwitz Memorial Collection. These include personal items belonging to the victims, such as suitcases, glasses and shoes. The exhibition will also include concrete posts forming part of the Auschwitz camp fence; fragments of the original barrack for prisoners in Auschwitz III-Monowitz; a desk and other items belonging to Rudolf Höss, the first and longest-serving commandant of Auschwitz; a gas mask used by the SS; and a lithograph depicting a prisoner's face by Pablo Picasso.

Additionally, the exhibition features individual objects on loan from more than 20 institutions, museums, and private collections worldwide, including Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Wiener Library, and the Buchenwald Mauthausen and Sachsenhausen and Westerbork memorial sites.

In addition to the original items that are a permanent part of the exhibition, Cincinnati also features several objects that tell the stories



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THE PROFESSIONAL AS A SYMBOL

30 YEARS OF FILMIC REPRESENTATION OF BUSINESS, INDUSTRY, AND PROFESSIONALISM IN THE HOLOCAUST

Fellowships at Auschwitz for the Study of Professional Ethics (FASPE) promotes ethical leadership for today's professionals through annual fellowships, ethical leadership trainings, and symposia, among other means. Each year, FASPE awards 80 to 90 fellowships to graduate students and early-career professionals in six fields: Business, Clergy & Religious Leaders, Design & Technology, Journalism, Law, and Medicine. Fellowships begin with immersive, site-specific study in Germany and Poland, including at Auschwitz and other historically significant sites associated with Nazi-era professionals. While there, fellows study Nazi-era professionals' surprisingly mundane and familiar motivations and decision-making as a reflection-based framework to apply to ethical pitfalls in their own lives. We find that the power of place translates history into the present, creating urgency in ethical reflection.

Each month one of our fellows publishes a piece in Memoria. Their work reflects FASPE's unique approach to professional ethics and highlights the need for thoughtful ethical reflection today.

World War II has captured the artistic imagination for more than eighty years. As time has passed, artists' and audiences' relationships to the atrocities of combat and the Holocaust have evolved through countless songs, paintings, poems, and movies. In cinema alone, half of the highest-grossing war movies have taken place during World War II¹. Steven Spielberg, the highest-grossing filmmaker in history, has directed ten different movies set in the period², and eight films about the war or Holocaust have won the Academy Award for Best Picture³.

While these works have run the thematic gamut of war, violence, tragedy, and redemption, a common theme is complicity. To what extent did figures outside traditional political and military actors play roles in harming and heroism alike during World War II and the Holocaust? As the period pulled unprecedented numbers of noncombatants into conflict, the role of everyday people regularly features in these films. Inside and outside Hollywood, our interpretation of civilian involvement and possible complicity has evolved over time. For example, in academic genocide studies, debate has pushed the traditional three-category framework (victims, perpetrators, bystanders) to account for more "outsider" roles (including profiteers and helpers)⁴. Meanwhile, national debates over perpetration and victimhood during World War II and the Holocaust continue to affect politics and society in countries such as Germany and Poland⁵.

This analysis will examine the interpretation of business professionals and their professional complicity in the Holocaust through an examination of three decades of film, represented by three movies released from 1993 to 2023.

Why films from this timeframe? As we discussed during our FASPE trip, much of the post-

¹. Saving Private Ryan, Pearl Harbor, and Dunkirk. The other three are Wonder Woman, American Sniper, and Gone with the Wind. Internet Movie Database (IMDb), 2024.

². "Top Grossing Director at the Worldwide Box Office", The Numbers, Nash Information Services, 2024.

³. All Quiet on the Western Front (1930), The Best Years of Our Lives (1946), The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957), The Sound of Music (1965), Patton (1970), Schindler's List (1993), and Saving Private Ryan (1998).

⁴. "What is left of the Hilberg's Triad 'Perpetrators-Victims-Bystanders'?" Jewish Historical Institute, April 25, 2013.

⁵. Discussed at length in Berlin and Krakow during FASPE, and covered in excellent detail in recent articles such as Tobias Buck, "The fight for Germany's 'memory culture'", Financial Times, March 9 2024.



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6. Jenny Wüstenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany*, Cambridge University Press, August 2017.

7. Michael Rothberg, "Lived multidirectionality: 'Historikerstreit 2.0' and the politics of Holocaust memory", *Memory Studies*, November 30, 2022.

8. Vicki Lawrence, "Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Coming to Terms with the Nazi Past", *AGNI*, 1998.

Judenrat, the city's Jewish administrative body, looking for a Jewish accountant named Itzhak Stern to run finances at a new factory he's acquired. Their meeting is immediately tense; Schindler is looking for a way to get richer, while Stern is faced with the administrative deportation of his community. Schindler sees financial opportunity in the future, while Stern lives in the present. Schindler is a salesman; Stern is not.

But Stern reconsiders after local Jewish people are evicted from their homes and forced into ghettos. He introduces Schindler to two wealthy merchants who could provide the capital he needs upfront. Schindler drives a hard bargain, taking advantage of the Jews' underclass status; when the potential investors splutter, "Money's still money!" to reject a lowball offer, Schindler coolly replies, "No, it's not. That's why we're here." But there's no question he has a heart of gold somewhere deep down. When the investors note that they won't be able to trust him since contracts between Jews and Germans are unenforceable, Schindler firmly yet comfortingly counters: "I said what I'll do. That's our contract."

In the same vein, Schindler maintains a hard exterior while beginning to help Jewish people. He justifies his decision to hire Jewish workers to Stern based on cost alone, dismissively saying, "Poles cost more. Why should I hire Poles?" while nonetheless actively helping forge papers for older Jews, academics, and children, designating them as "essential workers" and saving them from the day-to-day misery of the ghetto.

Soon, though, we confront the overt and savage violence of the Nazi regime in the person of Amon Göth. An SS officer, Göth runs Płaszów, a forced labor camp, with psychopathic cruelty. Schindler must enter an uneasy alliance with Göth to use his Jewish workforce, while continuing small acts of kindness to oppressed Jews. This approach works until 1944, when as the war becomes more obviously unwinnable and the prisoners are scheduled to die, Schindler's heart of gold realizes what must be done. Despite huge financial losses and business inconveniences, he relocates more than 1,000 of his Jewish workers to a new factory in his hometown, saving them from certain death. Although it's not good business, it's the right thing to do.

In the film, business is a powerful, if ambiguous, source for good. The negative side of business professionalism is undeniable, though, and takes two forms: control and euphemism. First, it is a conduit for control. Nowhere is this clearer than in forced labor camps, which Göth pitches to Schindler as a valuable addition to the normal private sector. In fact, the Nazi explains, "The SS will manage certain industries itself inside Płaszów, but it's private industry like yours that stands to benefit the most." The profiteering motive of the forced labor camps is even a justification for Jewish extermination; when Schindler complains about one of his workers being murdered, Amon laughs: "We are going to be making so much money that none of this is going to matter!"

The role of business is also one of euphemism and over-administration. As discussed at length during our FASPE trip, professionals often couch difficult topics in euphemisms⁹. At Auschwitz, Schindler asks Commandant Rudolf Höss¹⁰ to release workers sent there accidentally. Sitting in a darkly lit room, Höss obscures his words just as much as his shadowed face and defers responsibility to another officer, using words like "tasks" and "processes" to obfuscate shared meaning. Schindler himself adapts euphemisms when speaking with other Nazis, such as when he outlines the rules at his factory in Czechoslovakia to SS officials. This approach cuts both ways. "There will be no interference of any kind in production," he shouts—using "interference" as a stand-in for the arbitrary killing of Jews that plagued Płaszów. For much of the film, euphemism makes it easier for Schindler to focus on "business as usual"

⁹. Perhaps most infamously, "headcount reduction" for "mass layoffs." Some particularly memorable academic material on the subject from our coursework was found in the session on language and ethical fading.

¹⁰. Who will appear as the main character in *Zone of Interest* thirty years later!

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¹¹. An aside: this brief rant is also the closest that Schindler's List gets to accentuating the mass business and legal complicity of German society in the Holocaust. Each of the components of the list is produced by a business or regulated by a lawyer. And while there are quick namedrops elsewhere in the film to I. G. Farben, or ammunition manufacturers, the glimpse of the essentially universal profiteering off the war effort found in Göth's rant is unique in a story that, for the most part, keeps its lens narrowly focused on Schindler and his activities.

¹². "Group 3: Julius Madtrisch and Raimund Tisch", Yad Vashem.



a 40mm lens in Academy aspect ratio, oftentimes mere inches away from actors' faces, creating a narrow, claustrophobic field of vision and lending many of the shots a frenetic, point-of-view feel¹³. In interviews, Nemes discusses many of these formal decisions as "rules" the crew made, including that "this is not a beautiful film, so no beautiful shots" and that "the camera should [always] be trained at eye level, making it a very subjective experience"¹⁴. The film is comprised of only 85 shots across its 1:47 runtime; an average film has more than a thousand¹⁵. The result of Nemes' skill is a physical immersion that serves the third, and most shocking, aspect: its material. *Son of Saul* takes the viewer into a day in the life of a Sonderkommando¹⁶, a concentration camp prisoner who was forced to corral new arrivals, aid in gas chamber operations, and dispose of bodies. Therein lies the challenging relevance of the movie to this analysis: when professionalism is required within victimhood.

Son of Saul's plot is deceptively straightforward. The film opens with a title card in Hungarian defining Sonderkommando—including that "they work no longer than a few months before being executed"—and mentioning an alternative job title: Geheimnisträger or "bearers of secrets." We are introduced immediately to Saul, whose bloodied lip, darting eyes, and sunken face suggest recent hardship. Saul waits in a concrete basement chamber, shuffling between people undressing, as a calm but firm German voice monologues: "you're exactly the kind of people we need in our workshops. Everyone gets work and a good salary. After the shower and the hot soup, come directly to me. We need nurses in our hospital. We need craftsmen of all kinds. Tablemakers, carpenters, masons, cement workers, mechanics locksmiths, electricians." The Nazi deceit rests on the lie that the concentration camp is similar to the forced labor camps to which the Jews would have been accustomed. The voice leverages the same industrial language of business and "usefulness" to calm the nervous crowd. Of course, it's a ruse and once the heavy iron door shuts, screams begin to emit from the chamber. Completely desensitized, the clang of the door and the clamor inside are background noise to Saul as he immediately and mechanically begins picking up all the clothes, searching them for any luxury items, and keeping his thousand-yard stare fixed into the distance. As Saul continues throughout his "workday," the camera remains locked onto his face, leaving the background fuzzy: blurred clothed bodies ushered from the trains, blurred naked living bodies in the undressing room, blurred naked dead bodies in a pile in the gas chamber. These horrors make no sense. Neither does Saul's own forced complicity, so he disassociates from his own life as we see in the out-of-focus backdrop. Professional euphemism is everywhere in the chambers amongst the laborers; Nazi officers scream at Sonderkommandos to "burn the 'pieces'"—referring to the human remains. The clockwork schedule of the gas chambers gives the men only a minute of downtime before they are told to "get back to work" with a new batch of Jews.

After a grisly killing in the gas chamber, the Sonderkommandos find a boy who has somehow survived. They alert a Nazi doctor, who arrives, takes the boy's pulse, and then wordlessly suffocates him with his bare hands before instructing his assistant to "open him up."¹⁷ Saul watches this unfold and then hurries to the clinic, where he pleads with the assistant to let him take the boy's corpse. The assistant says no but, himself a prisoner, is sympathetic and offers five minutes with the boy later that night. Saul rushes to the Sonderkommandos' rabbi-in-residence and reveals his purpose for asking about the boy: "Rabbi—there's someone I want to bury!" But the rabbi is just as beaten down as all his fellow forced laborers and mutters, "just say

13. See the photograph accompanying the article cited here; that proximity between the camera and actor is very challenging, and heavily contributes to the film's feel. Gregg Kilday, "How 'Son of Saul' Defied the Dangers of Re-Creating the Holocaust", *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 16, 2015.

14. Zhuo-Ning Su, "Son of Saul Director László Nemes on Capturing a Portrait of Hell and the Spiritual Experience of Cannes", *The Film Stage*, October 8, 2015.

15. Greg Miller, "Data from a Century of Cinema Reveals How Movies Have Evolved", *Wired*, September 8, 2014.

16. German for "special unit"—an example of wartime Nazi euphemism.

17. An instance that—like other scenes in both this movie and *Schindler's List*—could be an important teaching tool for FASPE Medical cohort colleagues.

the prayer and get rid of it. Do you know the kaddish? I'll say it. What's his name? There's nothing more to do."

In the camp's hellish world of forced work, Saul views this response as an abdication of professional responsibility and storms off, intent on finding a new rabbi. He hears there may be one "outside"—that is, among the men who work burning bodies in the field. So, he joins a work group there, where he meets a man who is covertly taking photographs of the mass cremation—a nod to real-life photos we saw on our FASPE trip¹⁸.

Saul eventually finds the rabbi shoveling ashes into the Sota, and when this man won't help either, they scuffle. SS officers intervene, mocking Saul and killing the rabbi. Stuck once again without a rabbi to conduct a Jewish burial, Saul is pulled into a rebellion plot by fellow Sonderkommandos, for which he must go to the women's camp in Kanada and get a package of explosives. Under the cover of night, he uses the opportunity to search for a new rabbi amongst a new group of Jewish arrivals who are being led into the woods and indiscriminately executed. Believing he's found one, Saul smuggles the man into their bunks and explains that the dead boy is actually his son. Although we don't know if this is true—a fellow Sonderkommando believes it is not—Saul goes to bed looking forward to the burial. But the next day, the rebellion begins, and Saul must escape.

Throughout its runtime, *Son of Saul* handles the Sonderkommando's role through one man's eyes alone. This creates a level of ambiguity that is critical to the film's perspective, namely how the horrors of the Holocaust blurred lines among perpetrators, victims, witnesses, and bystanders, often making people play more than one role at once. Historically, fellow inmates disliked the Sonderkommando; in fact, at a screening of *Son of Saul* in Berlin, an Auschwitz survivor recounted: "We hated them more than we hated the Germans, because they were from my people [...] and they lent a hand in the killing process."

Seen one way, there's no doubt they are complicit. The men clock in and do their job every day. Throughout the film, for instance, a Jewish Oberkapo named Biederman is especially brutal to other Jews, even though he's one of the leaders of the planned uprising. In one particularly telling spat between the German Biederman and a Jewish "equal," Biederman sucker-punches the man and spits, "Jewish rat," underscoring the complex hierarchy among prison functionary roles, religion, race, and the constantly shifting power dynamics between the men vis-à-vis their jobs.

On the other hand, Sonderkommandos are obviously also victims. The same survivor from the Berlin premiere went on to explain that it wasn't until many years after the Holocaust that he realized that the Sonderkommandos' "suffering was much greater, much deeper, much more profound than my suffering"¹⁹. Indeed, Saul actor Géza Röhrig vehemently disputed a journalist's claim that the men were "half-victim, half hangman," saying rather, "they are 100% victims"²⁰. Either way, *Son of Saul* presents a protagonist who, due to the demands of his (forced) job, operates in a moral gray zone. Saul is so robotically efficient in his role, shifting automatically from sponging up blood to clearing the shoes of the newly murdered, that it's especially heartbreaking when we learn that he was just a watchmaker in the unimaginably distant past before Auschwitz. The profession seems cruelly poetic, though, as we observe his tightly wound motions, like those of an automaton.

Son of Saul leaves the reality of simultaneous victimhood and perpetration unresolved. Can one man be both? Even as Saul is subjected to horrific treatment—and we are told that he's likely next in line to be gassed—he singularly focuses on burying a young boy's lifeless body.

¹⁸. Inspired by the real Sonderkommando photographs taken by a Greek Jew named Alex, as learned during FASPE.

¹⁹. Jacqueline Shields, "Concentration Camps: The Sonderkommando", Jewish Virtual Library, American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2024.

²⁰. Toby Axelrod, "Is Germany ready for 'Son of Saul's up-close Holocaust experience?", The Times of Israel, February 29, 2016.

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21. Anne Thompson, "From the EW archives: How Steven Spielberg brought Schindler's List to life", *Entertainment Weekly*, January 21, 1994.

22. Jake Kring-Schreifels, "Sounds that Cannot Be Unheard: Sound Designer Johnnie Burn on The Zone of Interest", *Filmmaker Magazine*, December 15, 2023.

from J. A. Topf & Söhne, the prestigious engineering firm which was the largest of twelve companies that designed and built gas chamber ventilation systems and concentration camp crematorium ovens. They jump right into the meeting, explaining the intricacy of their innovative new design to Rudolf and his comrade: "the other side of it is the next chamber. In here is the next load ready to burn, once the 'pieces' in here," he says pointing with a pen, "have been completely incinerated"²³. Rudolf's interest is piqued: "in how long?"

The two salesmen realize they've hooked him in and start reeling: "seven hours. Four to five hundred at once," says one. Not to be outdone, the other chimes in, "closer to five hundred!" He hands it back:

So, once that's happened, you close this chimney. Then simultaneously open the next. The fire will follow the air, through this baffle of course, into this chamber and burn this load. In each case, the chamber directly opposite the fire zone, which is burning at around a thousand degrees, has by now cooled to around forty degrees. Cool enough to unload the ash then reload pieces.

The explanation is smooth and the handoffs between the two men well-choreographed; they've done this before and understand their customer. The euphemisms need no explanation, but once the camera cuts to the blueprint's illustrated chimneys and architectural key, we understand that what he's describing is co-creating a new product explicitly for the camp. As the realization dawns on us, Rudolf becomes visibly more engaged. The entire scene is disturbingly indistinguishable from a 21st-century account manager selling a new piece of tech to a legacy client.

Beyond the crematorium salesmen, the rest of *The Zone of Interest* continues to convey the massive nature of the business community's complicity. This unflinching look at the core failures of ethical professionalism during the Holocaust is damning. In a letter to Reichsleiter Bormann²⁴, an ally of Höss's discusses the downsides of his proposed transfer in terms of a decline of Auschwitz's industrial efficiency. Even here, the film hammers home the deep intertwining of the Nazi military apparatus and its private-sector counterparts, as the ally highlights Höss's "close contacts with the Silesian armaments industry" and the "groundbreaking ideas [Höss has brought] to the whole field of KL practice"²⁵. Indeed, the letter of recommendation closes on a modern professional commendation one would receive in academia or engineering: "his particular strength is turning theory into practice."

When the letter of recommendation doesn't work and Rudolf is to be transferred away from the camp, Hedwig gets upset. He has no better explanation than just that the move is a result of drably corporate "structural changes." In the meantime, he reaches back out to the crematorium salesmen in fawning professional admiration: "Bischoff and I both agree the ring crematorium is definitely the answer. What a difference it will make—bravo! I welcome your suggestion that the design should be patented in order to secure priority; I will follow up with a letter of intent."

As with any good business relationship, he implies that his new promotion could be mutually beneficial. His current job is closer to his heart, but it's always best to follow the money. Höss knows this better than anyone, learning from countless Nazi leadership meetings such as one where a peer is promoted "for consistently hitting his labor targets," and celebrated for his service to industry. A superior exclaims, "I get fan mail from CEOs for this man!"

Post-promotion, Höss leans into the Nazis' corporatism as professionally as any modern-day

²³. Patrick Hipes, "The Zone of Interest: Read The Screenplay For Jonathan Glazer's Searing Holocaust Drama About Humans' Capacity For Evil", Deadline, January 9, 2024.

²⁴. Reichsleiter translates to "national leader" or "Reich leader"; Martin Bormann was one of the few men elevated to the position, which was the second-highest political rank in the Nazi Party.

²⁵. KL here is the abbreviation of Konzentrationslager, or "concentration camp."



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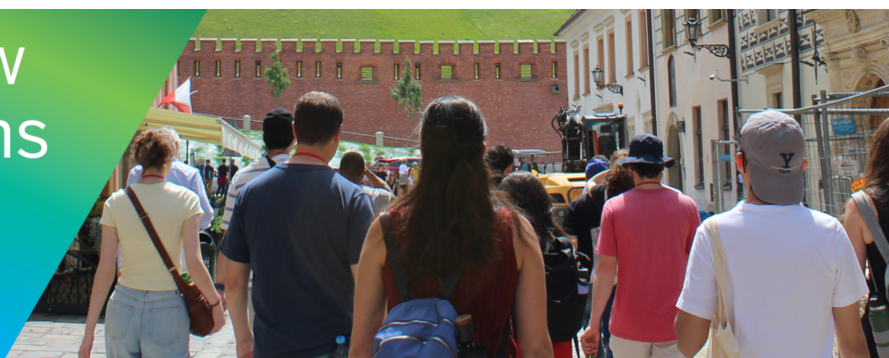
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UKRAINIAN SOURCES ON HOLOCAUST HISTORY (1991-2024)

In the newest EHRI Document Blogpost, Maryna Mykhailiuk examines memoirs, interviews, and document collections published in Ukraine between 1991 and 2024 that document the Holocaust in different occupation zones.

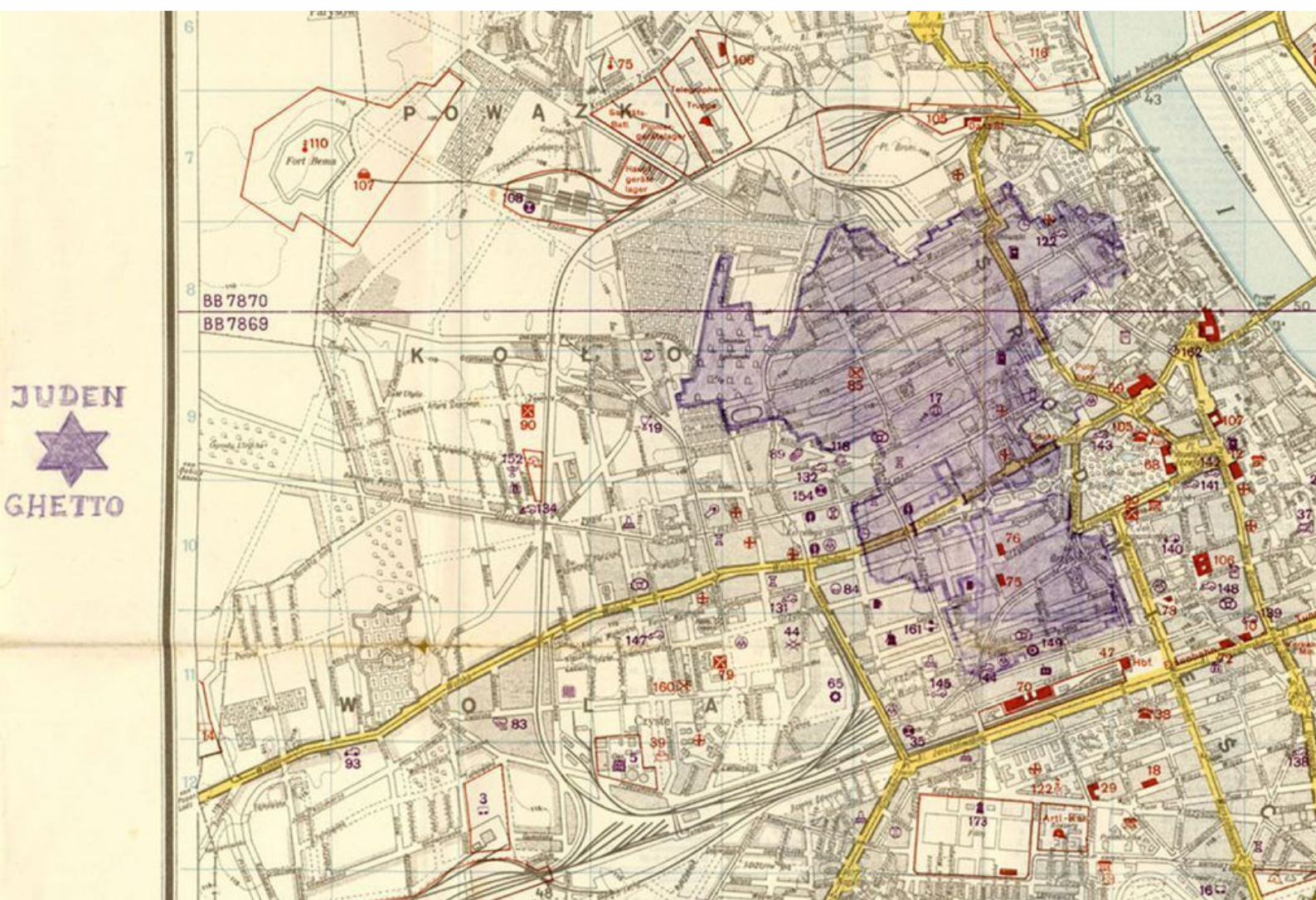
She systematically arranges sources ranging from ego documents to archival publications, capturing both Jewish and non-Jewish perspectives on persecution, survival, and inter ethnic relations. In doing so, the article demonstrates the growing contribution of Ukrainian scholarship to Holocaust studies and to the preservation of historical memory.

The history of the Holocaust remains of preeminent interest to researchers because of its profound impact on the history and memory of European societies – Ukrainian society in particular. The Ukrainian scholarly community, alongside with its European counterparts, has undertaken extensive research into the history of the Holocaust and continues to work toward the preservation of its memory. A central objective of these efforts is the cultivation of tolerance among younger generations toward the Jewish community, which has resided in Ukraine for centuries and whose sons and daughters, as citizens of contemporary Ukraine, serve in the national defense and scarify themselves in the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War.

Since Ukraine's independence, the Holocaust has been the subject of attention from numerous local researchers. Most of their works are devoted to the study of regional peculiarities of the Holocaust and interethnic relations. A considerable amount of materials has been accumulated on the course of the Holocaust in Ukraine. Especially primary sources catch our attention, since they allows us to investigate the suffering of both Jewish and non-Jewish survivors who witnessed the genocide during the Nazi occupation.

For the purpose of this blog post, I have collected, analyzed and systematized published primary sources on the Holocaust in Ukraine, diverse in origin, nature, purpose, content, and genre. These sources of personal character make it possible to conduct a comparative historical study of Nazi policies toward the Jewish population across in various occupation zones of Ukraine. The source base comprises written sources published in Ukraine in both Ukrainian and Russian, as well as Polish, German and English sources published in translation. Translations from other languages are also discussed, although their number is small. The categories are:

- 1) Ego documents (memoirs, letters, diaries, reflections) – These are primarily recorded by Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, and Russians who describe their experiences during the Holocaust.
- 2) Interviews with Holocaust survivors – Most of the interviews present the



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The history of the Holocaust remains of preeminent interest to researchers because of its profound impact on the history and memory of European societies – Ukrainian

HOW ORDINARY JEWS FOUGHT PERSECUTION IN HITLER'S GERMANY

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum invites to a public program dedicated to Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. It will take place on 3 December 2025 at 7 pm ET. Registration is required.

Jewish resistance during the Holocaust is still mostly understood as rare armed-group opposition in the Nazi-occupied east. New research based on a broader definition of resistance, including individual acts, draws from sources ranging from police and court records to survivor testimonies. Hundreds of Jews—women and men of all ages, education levels, and professions—resisted persecution in a wide variety of ways from 1933–1945 in Nazi Germany and annexed Austria.

Join us to learn about the surprisingly widespread individual resistance that obliterates the common view of Jewish passivity under Nazi persecution.

Opening remarks

Dr. Lisa Leff, Director, Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Speaker

Dr. Wolf Gruner, J. B. and Maurice C. Shapiro Senior Scholar-In-Residence, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Shapell-Guerin Chair in Jewish Studies and Professor of History, University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Founding Director, USC Center for Advanced Genocide Research

Moderator

Dr. Elizabeth Anthony, Visiting Scholars Director, Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

This program is free and open to the public, but registration is required.

Registration

For more information, please contact [here](#).



Lizi Rosenfeld, Żydówka, siedzi na ławce w parku z napisem „Tylko dla Aryjczyków” w Wiedniu, Austria, sierpień 1938 r. Muzeum Holokaustu w Stanach Zjednoczonych, dzięki uprzejmości Leo Spitzera.

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ASSISTANT EDITOR

Agnieszka Juskowiak-Sawicka

EDITED BY

Bartosz Bartyzel
Marek Lach
Łukasz Lipiński

CONTACT

memoria@auschwitz.org

