

THE NAZI WEAPONIZATION OF JEWISH VICTIMS: Jewish Complicity and “Privilege” during the Nazi Occupation of Greek Salonica

Maya C. Gonzalez

Although generally neglected within Holocaust historiography, Greek Salonica (today's Thessaloniki) was home to about fifty thousand Jews before it fell victim to Nazi occupation in 1941. Nazi perpetrators and their Greek collaborators destroyed the Jewish community, while manipulating Jewish individuals through positions of “privilege” to facilitate certain aspects of ghettoization, deportation, and annihilation. This essay compares the exceptional experiences of “privileged” Jews to those of the general Jewish community of Salonica, in order to determine the significant factors in judging Jewish culpability in crimes against their own community.

Introduction

Holocaust memory, formed by a combination of historiographical work and collective memory, molds how future generations will learn about genocide. The perceived line between perpetrator and victim poses a dilemma for those studying Holocaust memory, which is frequently imagined as a simple binary with only two actors: German Nazis and Ashkenazi Jews. Within recent memory work, however, the acknowledgement of Russian prisoners of war, queer people, Sinti and Roma people, disabled people and those labeled “criminals” by the Nazi regime as victims of the Holocaust has complicated this oversimplification. Furthermore, scholarship regarding international collaborationist governments, such as the Vichy regime in France, Mussolini's Italy, and fascist Romania, expands the group of perpetrators beyond German forces. Here, it is evident that both the persecuted peoples and wartime government authorities involved in the mass genocide were not diametrically opposed. Ignorance of the varying levels of involvement in genocide lead to inadequate systems of criminal and restorative justice and weaken the collective memory of how such tragedies occur. Relying on written testimony by Holocaust survivors of Greek Salonica, this essay seeks to disprove the binary understanding of the Holocaust by emphasizing the spectrum of victims, collaborators, and perpetrators. Depending on the source, certain individuals could be labelled as both perpetrators and victims—they exist between the binary.

The unique history of German-occupied Salonica, today's Thessaloniki in Greece, reflects the varying degrees of this middle space, deemed “the grey zone” by Italian Holocaust survivor Primo Levi (1919-1987). As Levi noted, “Only a schematic rhetoric can claim that [the middle] space is empty: it never is, it is studded with obscene or pathetic figures whom it is indispensable to know if we want to know the human species.”¹ The terms “obscene” and “pathetic” invoke a dismissiveness towards those individuals defined as both perpetrators and victims—yet their experiences merit further consideration. Until relatively recently, Holocaust

¹ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Summit Books, 1988), 42.

historiography has focused predominantly on Ashkenazi Jews without including the stories of Sephardim who suffered a similar fate. Historians have particularly overlooked the experiences Greek Salonica, an exceptional Sephardi population.

As a symptom of Ashkenazi-centered Holocaust memory, historians have, until relatively recently, ignored Greece's role in Holocaust studies. The lack of attention given to Salonica is likely due to two factors: its Sephardi majority population, and the atypical experiences of Greek Jews living there during Nazi occupation. The only Jewish war criminal in Europe to be tried for the deaths of his own community members came from Salonica, where 50,000 Jews lived before German occupation in 1941.² Similarly exceptional, the postwar Greek narrative of the Holocaust labeled the Chief Rabbi of Salonica as a main persecutor. Historians remember these two figures as "privileged"; however, their experiences were distinct even within that category. "Privileged" Jews are defined by Holocaust historian Adam Brown as "victims who, in order to prolong their lives, were forced to behave in ways that have often been interpreted as contributing in some way to the killing process."³ By comparing the exceptional experiences of "privileged" Jews to those of the general Jewish community of Salonica, I will illustrate how German authorities weaponized Jewish victims against one another during occupation.

Salonica's most infamous individual, Vital Hasson (d. 1948), intentionally played a prominent role in the destruction of the Jewish community. Chief Rabbi Tzevi Hirsch Koretz (1894-1945), although portrayed as a persecutor of Salonican Jews, was an unintentional collaborator with Nazi occupiers. Those like Koretz, members of the Jewish Community Council and the *Sonderkommando* ("Special Squads" of Jewish prisoners maintaining the Auschwitz-Birkenau gas chambers and crematoria), can be categorized as "privileged" Jews who were acting not of their own volition or with malice but, instead, out of a desire to prolong their lives. The differences between these two individuals' collaborations with German forces reveal the variety of experiences of "privileged" Jews. To expand upon the historical understanding of "privilege," I will discuss Levi's concept of the "grey zone" further.

The Grey Zone: A Brief Historiography

Primo Levi was an Italian Holocaust survivor who was interned in the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. In his first work on the Holocaust, *If This Is a Man* (1947), Levi provided an objective record of his suffering and resilience for future generations. After its publication, Levi distanced himself from writing about Auschwitz, instead publishing poetry and short stories for many years. One of his later works, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1988), returned to the topic of Auschwitz and contextualized questions of morality within his own experiences. It is in this latter text that he first introduced the concept of the grey zone. He claimed that "the time [had] come to explore the space which separates (and not only in Nazi Lagers) the victims from the persecutors, and to do so with a lighter hand, and with a less turbid spirit than has been done."⁴ Levi extended his examination of the issue of power within the German war machine beyond the typical soldiers and military leaders, instead focusing on those who were manipulated by Nazi forces into working as "external auxiliaries," such as the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) of Warsaw and the

² "German-Occupied Greece," *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945, Volume II: Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 1844; Sarah Abreveya Stein, *Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey through the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019), 170.

³ Adam Brown, *Judging 'Privileged' Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation, and the 'Grey Zone,'* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 2-3.

⁴ Levi, *Drowned*, 42.

Sonderkommandos of Auschwitz.⁵ These groups were comprised of Jewish individuals coerced by Nazi-occupiers to assist in carrying out the Final Solution. Levi recalled Chaim Rumkowski, a man who served as the president of a ghetto in Poland, and how he became integrated into the Nazi system:

He enjoyed a certain esteem and was known as the director of Jewish charities and as an energetic, uncultivated, and authoritarian man ... He soon came to see himself in the role of absolute but enlightened monarch, and he was certainly encouraged along this path by his German masters, who, true enough, toyed with him, but appreciated his talents as a good administrator.⁶

Levi used Rumkowski to exemplify the effects of political coercion on those seeking compromise in an unpredictable situation. By putting those in peril in semi-powerful positions, Nazi propagators also pressured the rest of the community to conform.⁷ Levi regarded these individuals, who assumed positions of power over their peers, as powerless nonetheless: “We come to terms with power, forgetting that we are all in the ghetto, that the ghetto is walled in, that outside the ghetto reign the lords of death, and that close by the train is waiting.”⁸

Writing on *The Drowned and the Saved*, Adam Brown broke down Levi’s assessment of “privileged” Jews in his comparative historiography, *Judging ‘Privileged’ Jews* (2013). For Brown, when considering the history of Holocaust memory, it was this group who poses the most difficult ethical dilemma. Brown examined the historiography on “privileged” Jews through other illustrations of Levi’s grey zone, including the monumental documentary *Shoah* (1985), Raul Hilberg’s staple Holocaust historical work *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961), and Steven Spielberg’s Hollywood hit *Schindler’s List* (1993). Levi wrote on the grey zone in a way that acknowledged its precarity, while also emphasizing its importance in Holocaust remembrance. And Brown’s most poignant argument placed value on the destabilization of “clear-cut moral distinctions” when discussing the zone.⁹ The question of applying moral judgement to complicit Jews arose again for Brown when recalling scholar Hannah Arendt’s personalized assessment on the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann.

Arendt (1906-1975), a German-American political philosopher, produced the most contentious work to come out of the Eichmann Trials due to her treatment of the Jewish response to German persecution. Postwar political, historical, and philosophical thinkers heavily criticized Arendt’s tone toward the victims of the Holocaust. She marked a clear distinction between the masses who went “with submissive meekness” to their death and the minority of resistance groups who she believed did not represent the general Jewish population.¹⁰ Her discussion of the *Judenrat* (Jewish Civil Council) system and Jewish police carried this same tone of harsh condemnation.¹¹ She believed that the “otherwise inexplicable readiness” of German Jews to cooperate with the Nazi regime could be explained by centuries-long pervasive anti-Semitism; however, Arendt claimed that anti-Semitism did not sufficiently explain why Jewish Councils contributed to violence against their own communities during the Holocaust.¹² Arendt also wrote on the morality of accepting testimony as truth from Eichmann in her 1964 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

⁵ Levi, *Drowned*, 43.

⁶ Levi, *Drowned*, 62.

⁷ Levi, *Drowned*, 38.

⁸ Levi, *Drowned*, 69.

⁹ Brown, *Judging ‘Privileged’ Jews*, 14.

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann on Trial* (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1964), 60.

¹¹ Brown, *Judging ‘Privileged’ Jews*, 20.

¹² Arendt, *Eichmann on Trial*, 10.

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Eichmann's description of the Jewish Councils' formation and functioning as "left to the discretion of the Council" revealed to Arendt the unfortunate level of cooperation by European Jews in the application of the Final Solution.¹³ Unlike Levi, Arendt failed to acknowledge the effects of coercion and anti-Semitic intimidation in the actions of Jewish Councils.

Arendt and Levi paved the way for future Holocaust historians and preservers of popular memory (authors, filmmakers, etc.) to discuss Jewish involvement outside of victimhood. While Levi seemed hesitant to pass judgement on those in the grey zone, Arendt challenged his method by removing the morality of the victim/persecutor dichotomy and pointing blame where she saw fit. For this reason, her analysis was incredibly lacking.

In her discussion of Greek Jews, who have historically been ignored by European Holocaust historians as victims, Arendt detailed the liquidation of the Salonican ghetto briefly. She identified Jews with foreign passports and members of the Jewish Council as the only "privileged" groups in Salonica. She mentions Chief Rabbi Koretz, who was labeled a persecutor by the Greek government and surviving Jews in the years after the war.¹⁴ Whether due to the lack of available sources at the time or the overwhelming devastation felt by the European Ashkenazi population, Arendt failed to mention the largest Jewish perpetrator in Greek Salonica, Vital Hasson. As a major contributor in Holocaust history and discussions of what Levi would eventually call the grey zone, this oversight on the part of Arendt is noteworthy. The experiences of "privileged" Jews varied, and the unusual experiences within Greek Salonica need to be addressed.

The Jewish Community and Nazi Occupiers

The German occupation of Salonica began on April 9, 1941. At the time, there were roughly 50,000 Jews living within the city.¹⁵ Almost immediately, Nazi Germans infringed upon the rights and freedoms of the Jewish community by closing Jewish community offices, shutting down the Jewish press, and imprisoning community leaders. They captured the Chief Rabbi of Salonica, Tzevi Hirsch Koretz, in Athens and imprisoned him in Vienna until February 1942.¹⁶ Nazi Germans began implementing the Final Solution in Salonica in July of that same year; all Jewish men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, except those with Italian or Spanish passports, were ordered to meet in *Plateia Eleftherias* (Freedom Square). German authorities humiliated these men with physical exercise, beatings, and attacks from their guard dogs. By the end of September, the occupiers sentenced between two and three thousand Jewish males to build military roads under the German Müller construction firm.¹⁷

In February 1943, Eichmann's specialists in Greece began their preparations for the liquidation of Jews from Salonica. Dr. Max Merten, the German military representative for the area, organized the Jewish Council and the Baron Hirsch ghetto.¹⁸ The ghetto fenced in Salonica's western Baron Hirsch neighborhood, which was originally built to house Russian Jewish refugees and included an infirmary funded by the Jewish philanthropist who was its namesake. The ghetto maintained his name for the duration of the war.¹⁹ Chief Rabbi Koretz was named the leader of the

¹³ Arendt, *Eichmann on Trial*, 60.

¹⁴ Arendt, *Eichmann on Trial*, 89.

¹⁵ "German-Occupied Greece," 1844.

¹⁶ "German-Occupied Greece," 1844.

¹⁷ "German-Occupied Greece," 1844.

¹⁸ Arendt, *Eichmann on Trial*, 89.

¹⁹ Stein, *Family Papers*, 168.

ghetto's Jewish Council; to Koretz, the other "privileged" Jews within the ghetto were those with foreign passports and his fellow Jewish Council members.²⁰ The majority of the Jewish community suffered greatly from hunger, with food supplies being irregular and unreliable throughout Greece.²¹

The entire community of Salonica was deported via freight cars within a two-month period.²² Most Jews were sent to Auschwitz II-Birkenau in Poland, and the Baron Hirsch ghetto's location next to the train station meant that its captives were among the first deported to Auschwitz, which likely explains why a great number of *Sonderkommando* (Special Squad) prisoners were Salonicans.²³ Seventy-four Jewish communal leaders, including Chief Rabbi Koretz, along with 367 Jews with Spanish papers, were sent to Bergen-Belsen in Germany at the end of deportations in August 1943.²⁴ Many of those who were not deported to camps survived by hiding in nearby mountain passes.²⁵ As these individuals—and an estimated two thousand others—returned to Greece following the close of the war, they found that much of their property had been confiscated or bought by Greek collaborationists.²⁶ Salonica was no longer home to its pre-war population of 50,000 Jews, and the memory of those lost would be skewed by the Greek government in the coming years.

For those who remained in the Baron Hirsch ghetto during the war, daily life was permeated by Nazi interactions. German occupiers seized Jewish homes as their own shelters, sometimes allowing the Jews to remain within them. As told by Shlomo Venezia, a Salonican Holocaust survivor, "The Germans easily persuaded [the Jewish Council] that the occupation forces were going to allocate lodgings to them depending on the size of each family ... We were naïve and didn't know what was happening politically."²⁷ In a 2005 interview with *Centropa*, Eugenia Abravanel recounted her more positive experience of having a Gestapo man live in her home: "He was a painter, may have painted my house close to ten times, and he also gave me as a gift a painting with a boat in the sea. The carpenter fixed and mended whatever was broken."²⁸ As a collective force, the Nazi-occupiers were antagonistic and destructive; however, as individuals, they may have partially recognized the humanity of the occupied Jews.²⁹ Moreover, by gaining the trust of some, the Nazi weaponization of individual Jews could occur with less resistance. Abravanel further remembers, "Whenever [the soldiers] heard shooting outside their house by Gestapo men, they would freeze and become different people. They were terrified of each other."³⁰

While the Nazi military system relied on terror, it appears that before the humiliation in Freedom Square, not all Salonican Jews greatly feared for their own lives. While living conditions were increasingly degraded, Jews held the belief that the Germans would not destroy their community if they remained compliant. Survivor

²⁰ Arendt, *Eichmann on Trial*, 89.

²¹ "Jewish Leaders in Greece. Including Chief Rabbi, Sent to Nazi Concentration Camp," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, February 5, 1942; Renée Levine Melammed, *An Ode to Salonika: the Ladino Verses of Bouena Sarfatty* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 215-17.

²² Arendt, *Eichmann on Trial*, 89.

²³ "German-Occupied Greece," 1846.

²⁴ "German-Occupied Greece," 1847.

²⁵ "First List of 3,300 Greek Jews Received by J.D.C.," *The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee*, May 31, 1945.

²⁶ "Greek Official Admits Law Expropriating Jewish Property Still in Force in Salonica," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 30, 1945.

²⁷ Shlomo Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers: Eight Months in the Sonderkommando of Auschwitz* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2011), 10.

²⁸ Eugenia Abravanel, interview by Valia Kravva, *Centropa*, November, 2005.

²⁹ For further reading on Nazi soldier psychology, I recommend Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1998).

³⁰ Eugenia Abravanel, interview by Valia Kravva, *Centropa*, November, 2005.

Mico Alvo recalled his father’s wishful thinking for the German occupation, “[My father] thought that by having a good behavior towards the Germans, their luck might be different from the others. I think that if they had known that they were going for certain death, at least half of them would have left.”³¹ Alvo’s father appreciated the scientific work produced in Germany and thought highly of their industry, and others echoed this sentiment. When writing on the Salonican relationship to occupiers, Venezia shared that “people thought the Germans were precise, decent people. When you bought something ‘made in Germany’ it worked properly. It was precision-made.”³² These accounts reveal how German forces invaded the lives of Salonicans both physically and mentally. As noted earlier, almost the entire Salonican Jewish population would be transported to concentration camps within two months. Jews’ misplaced hope in German individuals is worth noting as a precursor to their weaponization; however, it is not entirely indicative of how the German liquidation of the Salonican Jewish community was carried out.

“Privileged” Jews In and Out of the Ghetto

Under Nazi occupation, all European cities with Jewish populations were ordered to have a Jewish Civil Council. These councils, consisting of up to twenty-four men, were responsible for overseeing ghetto operations and implementing Nazi policies.³³ Arendt claimed in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*,

If the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people. (According to Freudiger’s calculations about half of them could have saved themselves if they had not followed the instructions of the Jewish Councils.)³⁴

The Council’s work was not simply following Nazi extermination protocol; instead, it was their job to entirely maintain the Jewish Community during occupation. Jewish leaders organized the ghetto in its early stages, distributed work permits (for those in danger of Nazi liquidation), maintained community health and sanitation, distributed food rations, and provided Jews to meet forced labor quotas.³⁵ With the multitude of responsibilities placed on the Council during occupation, their small mistakes often yielded grave consequences. When Nazi forces demanded the destruction of Salonica’s Jewish Cemetery, the Council hesitated to act—apart from Rabbi Koretz’ denied request to have the demolition delayed. The cemetery was quickly looted and destroyed, with only a few hundred Jewish families having time to move the bones of their dead relatives.³⁶

The hostage system was another Nazi method utilized to control the Jewish population. The Germans acquired a list of between fifty and one hundred distinguished Jewish community members and declared them “hostages.” If any of these people attempted to leave, the Nazi forces threatened to kill other innocent Jews. Survivor Mico Alvo, whose father was a hostage, recalled that “their mentality was threatening. And my father thought, ‘Twenty young people to be killed because of me?’”³⁷ This position was not considered “privileged”; however, the

³¹ Mico Alvo, “Mico Alvo,” interview by Paris Papamichos-Chronakis, Centropa, November, 2005.

³² Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers*, 10.

³³ Brown, *Judging ‘Privileged’ Jews*, 7.

³⁴ Arendt, *Eichmann on Trial*, 61.

³⁵ Brown, *Judging ‘Privileged’ Jews*, 7.

³⁶ “Greek Authorities Collude with Nazi Officers to Raze the Jewish Cemetery in Salonica (1943),” in *Sephardi Lives: a Documentary History, 1700-1950*, ed. Julia Philips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 285.

³⁷ Alvo, interview.

acknowledgement of how the elite within the community were treated is worth consideration. German authorities understood the chain of command within the community and how to manipulate individuals into weapons to be used against one another.

Levi argued that the Nazi institution of genocide attempted to shift the burden of guilt onto the victims so “they were deprived of even the solace of innocence.”³⁸ In exceptional situations, Jews within concentration camps also found themselves in “privileged” positions, such as that of the Sonderkommando. As has been previously mentioned, the Jews of Salonica were some of the first to arrive at Auschwitz, where Sonderkommando members were selected from the male Jewish population to operate the gas chambers and crematoria. Sonderkommando members organized new arrivals, kept them calm, cut their hair, transported bodies, and removed gold from the teeth of the dead.³⁹ They were ensured meals for the duration of their service but every few months, all Sonderkommando members were “selected for transfer”—a euphemism for extermination.⁴⁰ For those in this nightmare reality, a more accurate descriptor than “privileged” would have been imprisoned. Shlomo Venezia, a Sonderkommando survivor, emphasized this in his interview-style memoir: “We were forced, whereas collaborators, in general, are volunteers. It’s important to write that we had no choice.”⁴¹ These men did the work Nazi soldiers refused to do but, if given the choice, they would have refused as well.⁴²

Reassessing Known Collaborationists

Apart from one individual to be discussed later in this paper, Jewish Salonicans took part in German extermination efforts under incredible duress. As evidenced by the hostage and Sonderkommando systems, Nazi authorities weaponized victims against other victims. In this way, “privilege” was defined as an increase in responsibility paired with the potential to prolong one’s life. The primary case of “privilege” in Greek Salonica was Chief Rabbi Tzevi Koretz. Koretz was born in Galici, and arrived in Athens as a graduate of the Berlin Rabbinical Seminary and Ph.D. laureate of the University of Vienna.⁴³ Koretz became the Chief Rabbi of Salonica in 1932 and was forced to lead the Jewish Council by Nazi authorities. He met with German representatives twice a week, serving as a medium through which Nazis inflicted their policy onto the community.⁴⁴ In postwar accounts by survivors and historians, Koretz is largely portrayed as the primary Jewish collaborator with Nazi authorities; however, recent historical accounts instead view his role as one conducted under duress and with the intention of prolonging one’s own life.

Koretz was first implicated as a collaborator during the Freedom Square incident. Survivor Moshe Burla described his experience with Koretz in a 2005 interview:

We were hiding at home. We urged others not to go [to Freedom Square] either, but the Jews were following Koretz, who was telling them, ‘We are Jewish, and we should go.’ ... I had a great problem with the rabbi, who had a gathering at the synagogue and was urging people to go, and was saying to people that they were going to live in a different country, get money, new clothes, tools to work, and he was

³⁸ Levi, *Drowned*, 53.

³⁹ Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers*, 54.

⁴⁰ Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers*, 54..

⁴¹ Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers*, 102.

⁴² Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers*, 103.

⁴³ Minna Rozen, “Jews and Greeks Remember Their Past: The Political Career of Tzevi Koretz (1933-43),” *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series 12, no. 1 (2005): 115-17.

⁴⁴ “German-Occupied Greece,” 1845.

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deceiving people to go there ... The ten of us went to the rabbi's office on another day and asked him to go and be in charge of the people and leave with them to save them from the Germans and not to chain them down. He treated us really cruelly, telling us, 'If you don't get out of here now and leave I'm calling the Gestapo.'⁴⁵

The rabbi pressured Salonican Jews to follow the orders of the occupiers, which, in the eyes of many, implicated him in their crimes. This behavior was not unique to Koretz, however, as Nazi authorities mandated all leaders of the Jewish Councils to act accordingly. Koretz had no choice but to enforce Nazi policies within Salonica—possibly because he believed the Germans were truthful in their promises of better living conditions, or because he feared what might happen if his community members disobeyed. Koretz was also criticized over the Jewish Council's lax attitude towards crucial decisions. When Greek authorities demolished the ancient Jewish cemetery, many blamed Koretz' tendency to procrastinate. In reality, the Greek authorities were devoted to destroying the cemetery, and any delays made by Koretz would have been futile. The combination of the Nazis' zealous devotion and power ensured that this destruction was inevitable.⁴⁶ Koretz made decisions for the community up until he was deported to Bergen-Belsen alongside his family in August 1943; in June 1945, he died of typhus, a few weeks after liberation from Bergen-Belsen.⁴⁷

As has been previously mentioned, newly available archives and a reassessment of Koretz have interpreted him as a less malicious character than originally depicted. His characterization was a product of the Jewish community's need to attribute culpability for its trauma, the Israeli government's desire to create a uniting anti-diasporic sentiment, and the Greek government's need to assuage its own guilt.⁴⁸ Koretz was molded into an Ashkenazi outsider to fit the collaborationist model, and his policy of conciliation toward the German authorities further painted him as a collaborator. The German forces of Salonica selected Koretz as the leader of the Jewish Council, implicating him as their mole, so it is understandable that he became falsely associated with German malice.⁴⁹ Following the war, Koretz was assumed to be a collaborator by Israeli authorities. He "had to be found guilty in order to enable Israeli society to dissociate itself from the diasporic experience he stood for, ... [and] to vindicate the Greek collective consciousness for not having done enough to prevent the deportations."⁵⁰ While Koretz' actions were less than admirable, he ultimately was not a collaborator; however, powerful governments manipulated his character in an attempt to rebalance the post-traumatic world.

In contrast, Vital Hasson, the antithesis of the Jewish victim, was truly malicious in his violence against his Jewish community. While accounts are unable to agree upon whether he received his "privileged" position after being chosen by Rabbi Koretz, being employed by German authorities, or simply volunteering, it is certain Hasson served as the chief of the Jewish police in Salonica under German occupation.⁵¹ He was granted powers within the Baron Hirsch ghetto to fulfill Nazi orders, specifically "plans to isolate, deport, and annihilate Salonican Jewry."⁵²

Hasson became infamous for his treatment of women. He was known to have sexually humiliated and raped hundreds of Jewish women and "killed children in front

⁴⁵ Moshe Burla, "Moshe Burla," interview by Stratos Dordanas, Centropa, October, 2005.

⁴⁶ "Greek Authorities Collude," 284.

⁴⁷ "German-Occupied Greece," 1847.

⁴⁸ Rozen, "Jews and Greeks Remember," 111.

⁴⁹ Rozen, "Jews and Greeks Remember," 115-17.

⁵⁰ Rozen, "Jews and Greeks Remember," 130.

⁵¹ Stein, *Family Papers*, 171.

⁵² Stein, *Family Papers*, 171-73.

of mothers and mothers in front of children.”⁵³ During the International Military Tribunal of 1945 and 1946, a witness said the following of Hasson: “I warned my wife to keep away from Hasson and not to pay any attention to what he was saying ... [Hasson and his organs] would enter the camp and get any girl they liked and do with her anything they wanted ... Finally, one day, as I insisted, she told me that Hasson had handed her over to the Germans, together with her sisters.”⁵⁴ Hasson was a weapon of his own making, enabled by his circumstances. He chose to serve the Nazi antagonists and, whether for life-prolonging reasons or otherwise, caused suffering. Hasson not only targeted women but also those in vulnerable positions.

After hunting down Jews in hiding, Hasson would seize their possessions and sell them.⁵⁵ He forced those within the ghetto to give up whatever wealth they had. He also imprisoned Jews who had attempted to escape alongside the wealthy, using an old Jewish mental asylum to torture them into surrendering their wealth.⁵⁶ Hasson was arguably the most “privileged” Jew within Salonica, yet he was still sent to Bergen-Belsen with the Chief Rabbi and Jewish leaders in August of 1943. He survived the camp and fled Germany after liberation in April 1945, dodging multiple governments in their attempts to arrest him in the immediate postwar period. Yet, his return to Salonica ultimately marked the end of his exploits. He was quickly recognized by a group of Jews who had survived deportation to Auschwitz, who then beat him and handed him over to the Greek police.⁵⁷ During his subsequent trial conducted in a Greek court ordered by the Jewish Community of Salonica, Hasson was found responsible for facilitating the German execution of Jews, raping Jewish women, arresting and assaulting Greeks who hid Jews, and carrying out the search, arrest, and deportation of Jews and non-Jews alike. As witnesses gave testimony against him, Hasson laughed and challenged their stories. Hasson was the only Jew tried as a war criminal for actions against his own Jewish community.⁵⁸ He was sentenced to death and executed in 1946.⁵⁹

Hasson’s place within “privileged” European Jewry is exceptional. His example stands in contrast with the Jews previously mentioned within this paper—in most cases, privilege was *not* typically a symptom of malice, intentional collaboration, or a drive to kill. Other “privileged” Jews or accused collaborators were weaponized by the Nazi authorities against their own community, but there is little doubt Hasson worked of his own volition.

Conclusion

Historians of Holocaust Studies use the term “privilege” to illustrate how individual Jews became cogs in the Nazi extermination machine. Occupiers intended to shift the guilt of their crimes during the war onto their Jewish victims, but this shifting did not stop when the war ended. While official war tribunals did not try “privileged” Jews, individual nations used the narrative of “privilege” to place guilt as they needed. In the case of Greece, the government’s lingering guilt from the lack of resistance by the non-Jewish Greek population led to a victim-blaming narrative, which strongly

⁵³ Stein, *Family Papers*, 170.

⁵⁴ “The Trial of a Nazi Collaborator,” in *Sephardi Lives: a Documentary History, 1700-1950*, eds. Julia Philips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 315.

⁵⁵ “The Trial of a Nazi Collaborator,” 315.

⁵⁶ Stein, *Family Papers*, 174.

⁵⁷ Stein, *Family Papers*, 177.

⁵⁸ Stein, *Family Papers*, 170, 202.

⁵⁹ “German-Occupied Greece,” 1846.

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implicated the Jews in their own destruction.⁶⁰ The Greek national archives are still limited in access and manipulated by the state; therefore, without access to archival materials, insight into the Greek government's treatment of Holocaust memory must instead be garnered from public information. In a 2013 speech, Greek Prime Minister Antonis Amaras implied that the Jewish deportations from Salonica occurred by accident and, with the lack of official comments from the state, these words are that much more impactful.⁶¹ This rhetoric is not just limited to Greece, but persists in other European countries.

By exploring the definitions used by historians and popular memory-shapers to discuss victims, collaborators, and persecutors, I aim to contribute to the body of knowledge that refutes Holocaust denial and victim-blaming. The weaponization of Jews against their community members cannot be considered collaboration. By illustrating the differences between presumed collaboration by those under duress and those intentionally executing the Nazi genocide program, I argue that manipulation by German authorities and intent are the differentiating factors. Furthermore, the way in which presumed collaborators and "privileged" Jews have been discussed in the postwar era contributes to the misunderstanding of this contrast. The acknowledgement of Nazi atrocities cannot be limited to Ashkenazi or Eastern European victims, as the geographic presence of Holocaust trauma is much broader. By discovering the trauma of the misunderstood "privileged" Jews within the ignored Jewish Salonican community, Holocaust memory is made fuller and truer.

⁶⁰ Andrew Apostolou, "Greek Collaboration in the Holocaust and the Course of the War," In *The Holocaust in Greece*, eds. Giorgos Antoniou and A. Dirk Moses, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 90-91.

⁶¹ Apostolou, "Greek Collaboration," 90-91.

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