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Life and identity in wartime Ukraine: a young woman's diary of the occupation

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A Young Woman's Diary of the Occupation[1]

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On January 16, 1942, an eighteen-year-old Komsomolka named Olga recorded in her diary her thoughts and impressions of an encounter she had with a German soldier in her occupied hometown of Znamianka (Znamenka), Ukraine. In the entry, she called him "a real fascist!" and indicated that "[h]e laughed when he found portraits of Stalin and Lenin in the dictionary." However, despite these observations, in her next sentence she proceeded to write: "I did not see anything familiar in him, but he interested me, precisely because there was nothing foreign in him either."[2] Rather than identifying the "fascist" soldier as her natural enemy, as one would expect, Olga seems to have perceived a level of commonality between herself and him. Considering the brutality of World War Two, especially on the eastern front between the Soviet Union and the Axis powers, it seems improbable that a professed Komsomolka would have shared such sentiments and yet Olga did.

In fact, Komsomol membership continued to be a source of pride for Olga for the duration of the occupation period. Not only did Olga continue to carry her Komsomol membership card with her after her city was occupied by the German military, but even as late as

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[2] Central State Archives of Civic Organizations of Ukraine, Kiev [hereafter cited as TsDAHOU] f. 166, op. 2, d. 4 "Diaries of an unknown author about the Occupation Regime in Ukraine" published in O. Betliy and K. Dysa, *Identychnist. Mizhkulturnyy Dialoh; Tom 1* (Kyyiv: Dukh I Litera, 2009), 320. Diary entry January 16, 1942. [Hereafter cited as "*Diary 1941-1942*"]

March 1943, she was still eager to declare her Komsomol membership to the German occupation authorities, which she did on several occasions.[3] One would expect given the state of the war that Olga would have been fearful of her past and would have hid this fact from the occupation authorities. However, during the occupation, Olga readily spoke of her Komsomol membership with her German acquaintances from amongst the soldiers and the administrators stationed in her hometown and seems to have not been afraid of the consequences of these actions. Such behavior contradicts established Soviet accounts of the occupation period, which emphasized the patriotism of Soviet citizens and downplayed any possibility of understanding or interaction between Soviet citizens and Germans. Furthermore, it raises questions regarding the nature of the Nazi occupation in Ukraine, the relationships and interactions that may have developed between the local population and the occupying forces, and the way in which this period was experienced on a day-to-day basis by the local population.

Present scholarship of the Nazi occupation provides few answers to these questions. To date, research has been limited to topics that have included the genocide of the Jews and other minorities, local collaborators, nationalism and nationalist elements, partisans, and the Volksdeutsche. Research in these important areas have shed much light upon the occupation and the conditions that existed behind the front lines during the Second World War. However, the majority of the local population, who were neither Jewish nor members of other minority groups who were systematically murdered by Nazi perpetrators have thus far been left out of historiography. This situation is not entirely surprising given the limited range of surviving sources as well as the strictly enforced, official silence surrounding the German occupation,

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[3] See TsDAHOU f. 166, op. 2, d.108 "Diary of a German Translator Luda Kalinkovich" published in O. Betliy and K. Dysa, *Identychnist. Mizhkulturnyy Dialoh; Tom 1* (Kyyiv: Dukh I Litera, 2009), 378. Diary entry March 23, 1943. [Hereafter cited as "*Diary 1943*"]

which had restricted the scope of discourse and memorialization of the occupation for the duration of the Soviet regime. Nevertheless, the history of the Nazi occupation and the Second World War will continue to be incomplete so long as the experiences of the local civilian population remain unexplored.

Much of what is known regarding the occupation in Ukraine largely consists of generalizations that differentiate between the prevailing conditions that existed in the cities and in the countryside. These generalizations address the major continuities observed throughout Ukraine, which included German atrocities, the treatment of prisoners-of-war, widespread famine, partisan warfare, and forced labor, both on occupied Soviet territory and in Germany. The generalizations impart a basic understanding of the occupation and illuminate the suffering of the local population. However, they fail to address the diversity of experiences that existed throughout Ukraine. Furthermore, while speaking about a collective suffering the generalizations do not give voice to the individuals themselves. In such a collective history the individual experiences and the complex motivations of members of the local population are lost. Without hearing the voices of those who lived through this devastating period it is impossible to understand the occupation and the profound effects that it had and continues to have on society.

In this paper I intend to trace the major events of the occupation by directly engaging Olga's diary and thereby allowing her to speak about her own experiences and the experiences of her family, friends, and neighbors through her own words. I also intend to analyze the day-to-day effects of occupation on Olga and her friends in order to see the way in which this period transformed her views about herself and the occupying forces. Furthermore, through a close reading of her diary I intend to analyze Olga's actions and motivations in order to propose an

explanation regarding the motivations behind actions that the Soviet authorities, following the war, deemed collaborationist in nature. In so doing, I hope to move beyond the generalizations that have been advanced and through an individual example illuminate the complexity of the occupation in Ukraine and also provide a deeper understanding of this life shattering period.

Olga was born on October 14, 1923 in the Soviet Union, most likely either in Znamianka or in its vicinity, although the actual location remains unknown. She was seventeen years old when the war started and she celebrated her eighteenth birthday soon after Znamianka was occupied by the German Werhmacht. Today, her full name and identity remain a mystery and the little that we do know about her comes from her diaries. During the Second World War Olga and her family remained in Znamianka, Ukraine, a small city located in Kirovogradskaya Oblast of Right Bank Ukraine, situated 40 kilometers northeast of the city of Kirovograd and about 30 kilometers west of the city of Aleksandriia near the Dnieper. Znamianka was founded in 1869, following the completion of the Odessa-Kharkov railway in the same year, and settlement of Znamianka centered around the railway station and the railroad junction.[4] During the intervening years before the war, Znamianka grew in significance and was considered to be of strategic importance because of the major railroad junctions that ran through it.[5] The total population of Znamianka in 1939 was 13,604 of which 653 individuals or a little over 20% were of Jewish decent.[6] After fighting in the area, Znamianka was occupied on August 6, 1941 by the

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4 Shmuel Spector and Geoffrey Wigoder, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 1515.

5 Ivan Aleksandrovich Gerasimov, *Kniga Pamiati Ukrainy: Kirovogradskaya* Oblast (Kirovograd: Tsentralno-Ukrainskoe Izdvo, 1994), 797.

6 Spector, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Life*, 1515.

Wehrmacht.[7]

Relatively little is known about the first days and weeks of occupation. However, from Olga's diary entries it seems that the local population began to interact with the Wehrmacht soldiers on an amicable basis as soon as the area had been secured and the front had shifted further east away from the city. Reading Olga's diary entries from late August and early September 1941, one gets the sense that the local population was rather more curious than afraid of the occupation soldiers. In Olga's first diary entry dated August 26, 1941 she described her father playing chess in their home with a soldier and later with a translator. "Dad checkmated him in the game and when they were playing the second match the translator came by. Dad asked for a good player and he put himself forward... He kept repeating that dad will be kaput just like the USSR. He was so nasty!"[8] However, despite his "nasty" demeanor, later that same night, the translator returned and made plans to go hunting with her father the next day.[9]

Olga devoted much of the following days entry to describing her evening, which she had spent at home talking and passing notes with her sister, Luda, the translator, Sasha, and another soldier named Ludolf. "We wanted to deliver a note that Ludolf had written, but our Ludka disagreed for a long time. And so we had to leave it at that. I had wanted to listen to music (they have a radio)."[10] During the following days Olga played dominoes and spent her evenings talking to the same soldiers.[11] On August 29 she wrote, with regards to Ludolf, that, "I am sure that I would have had a new love if he would have stayed here a little longer. But to great chagrin

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7 Spector, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Life*, 1516.
8 *Diary 1941-1942,* August 26, 1941, 287.
9 *Diary 1941-1942,* August 26, 1941, 287.
10 *Diary 1941-1942,* August 27, 1941, 287.
11 See *Diary 1941-1942,* August 28, 1941, 288. *Diary 1941-1942,* August 29, 1941, 288 regarding passing notes and playing dominoes and chess with the soldiers.

in the evening he said that tomorrow they will leave."[12] The following day Olga described their leave taking and her feelings: "[a]nd so we parted as two passers-by... and did not say a word of farewell to each other... He has left; he will not come back again. I only wanted one thing when they were getting ready: not to be upset and not to cry..."[13]

On August 31 a new regiment arrived in Znamianka to replace regiment K, whose members Olga had gotten to know well. Whereas the previous soldiers had not inspired much fear or antipathy in Olga, the soldiers that came to replace them were of a different sort. "In place of "K" arrived such disgusting ones... They were standing in Jean's yard. They are not Germans but something... like gypsies. Yes, and they were so brazen! Those that had driven by were all cultured, but these..." [14] Both their appearance and especially their behavior inspired disdain in Olga and during the following days her initial impression of these soldiers was only confirmed. Not only were they rude, but the new soldiers also began to solicit sexual favors from the local girls, which became a source of distress for the locals. On September 7 Olga recorded her anger and frustration following an encounter with a particularly flippant soldier who made such a proposition to her:

> At first he stood politely to talk, but afterwards, God! Forbid even once more to hear such nonsense. He spoke like the most depraved man, for whom there is no more shame. He said that he will come tomorrow and will invite me to go for a walk (and where: to the forest). Miserable creature! Such a bastard... I restrained myself so that I would not spit in his snout. This is beyond insolence, outrage...[15]

When these soldiers also left on September 9 to be replaced by a new regiment, Olga

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[12] *Diary 1941-1942,* August 29, 1941, 288.
[13] *Diary 1941-1942,* August 30, 1941, 288- 289.
[14] *Diary 1941-1942,* August 31, 1941, 289.
[15] *Diary 1941-1942,* September 7, 1941, 290.

"thank[ed] God" that the so-called "warriors" were gone.[16]

Even though such brazen and disrespectful behavior must have antagonized the local population one never senses fear of the occupying soldiers from any of Olga's diary entries. In fact, although the local population must have approached the situation with a certain degree of caution, there seems to have been no major distrust or animosity exhibited by the local population towards the occupying forces in Znamianka. Instead, the locals seem to have maintained a sense of general good will towards the Germans. Indeed this was often the case throughout Ukraine where a large portion of the local peasant population welcomed the Germans as liberators. Although, this phenomenon was most common in western portions of Ukraine where the population had only recently been "Sovietized" as a result of the Non-Aggression Pact signed between Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939, locals in Soviet Ukraine had there own reasons for dissatisfaction with the Soviet regime as well. Having suffered through dekulakization, collectivization, and famine during the late 1920's and early 1930's many peasants in Soviet Ukraine were not eager to remain under Soviet control and also welcomed the German military. Whether or not Znamianka's population held similar views towards the Germans is impossible to ascertain from Olga's diary, however a newspaper from September 1, 1941 suggests that such sentiments may have existed in the city, as well.

On September 3, 1941 Olga recorded in her diary that a newspaper was issued in Znamianka which, "criticized Stalin and the Soviets and sent a welcome to Hitler." Her own opinions regarding the contents of the newspaper were frankly expressed when she criticized the newspaper's Ukrainian authors for their unpatriotic sentiments. "Oh how vile is this Ukrainian people! I do not love them for this, although they are my people. But still they are better than

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[16] *Diary 1941-1942,* September 9, 1941, 291.

strangers."[17] Even though Olga did not support the contents of the newspaper herself, the way in which she criticized its authors suggests that the newspaper may have been written by locals. In fact, newspapers containing similar content were common throughout Ukraine during the late summer and early autumn months of 1941. Often these newspapers were published by local nationalists or individuals who were eager to show their loyalty to the occupation regime.

However, it was also common in large cities for newspapers with similar content to have been published by nationalist adherents originating from Poland or Western Ukraine who were known to have traveled alongside units of the Wehrmacht as translators and interpreters. It is certainly possible that nationalist representatives may have similarly entered Znamianka alongside the Wehrmacht and were responsible for the content of this newspaper. Both of these possibilities are equally plausible however, neither Olga's diary nor what little is known regarding the occupation in Znamianka can conclusively rule out either possibility.

Meanwhile, even as the local population began to interact with the occupying forces the imminent threat of violence was ubiquitous. The uncertainty of war rather than the conduct of the occupying forces during the first weeks of occupation seem to have been the greatest source of fear and anxiety. Although many locals throughout Ukraine welcomed the Germans and feared the possible return of Soviet power, there were also many who longed for a Soviet return. The early autumn of 1941 was characterized by the simultaneous hopes and fears of a Soviet counterattack. For Olga and the local population in Znamianka the uncertainty of war was underscored on August 27 and once again on September 15 when Russian planes flew overhead, and dropped bombs forcing people to hide in their bomb shelters.

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[17] *Diary 1941-1942,* September 3, 1941, 290.

> Two nights in a row we sat in our "fear shelter" as Soviet planes flew overhead. But I am not a bit sorry since I want them to win. I keep thinking that the Soviets will win even though it doesn't seem likely to happen. There are rumors that America has declared war on Germany and that Japan has declared war on them. We'll see whose victory it will be. Under no circumstances do I want to be with the Germans.[18]

Added to the general uncertainty caused by the war was the lack of information regarding developments at the front. Information was scarce and often consisted of unsubstantiated rumors that served to increase the anxiety of the local population and prevented many of them from initially fraternizing with and supporting the Germans. Meanwhile their conduct regarding Jews and other minorities and especially prisoners-of-war quickly turned many of the locals who had previously supported the Germans against them.

In September 1941 two prisoner-of-war camps were established in the nearby village of Bohdanivka, located approximately 14 kilometers northwest of Znamianka. According to eye-witness testimony collected after the war by Soviet authorities the prisoners were kept in unsanitary conditions in two former school buildings located in the village. Prisoners were subjected to "inhuman labor" and were issued a mere 200 grams of bread and bran soup once a day.[19] It is not known whether there were similar prisoner-of-war camps in Znamianka or in any of the other nearby villages. Nevertheless, Soviet prisoners remained a ubiquitous sight during the first months of occupation, as hundreds of thousands of soldiers were either taken prisoner or surrendered to the German military during the late summer and early autumn months following heavy losses incurred by the Red Army as it retreated. Long columns of Soviet prisoners-of-war marching under convoy to camps or prisoners on work detail were commonly seen throughout

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[18] *Diary 1941–1942,* September 15, 1941, 291-292.

[19] State Archive of the Russian Federation [hereafter GARF] f. 7021, op. 66, d. 123, l. 61: Act of 10 November, 1944

Ukraine in the late summer and autumn months. Scenes of suffering prisoners steeled the resolve of the local population, who often witnessed the brutal beatings and cruel treatment of the former soldiers. The inhumane treatment of prisoners-of-war became one of the major reasons why in the long run the German occupation forces were unable to win the hearts and minds of the local population in the countryside.

In Znamianka prisoners-of-war on work detail, possibly from one of the camps in Bohdanivka, were present. On November 12, 1941 Olga described such an occasion and her reactions in the following way:

> I saw how they beat our prisoners. Goodness! Tears splashed from my eyes when I saw how they strained under the oaks they were carrying. I sent curses at the torturers. They laugh, the scoundrels, and walk with sticks like savages. I know that many will work themselves to death in this way. So many Komsomols loyal to the homeland! All of them, poor things, like me, are awaiting our victory. Yes! But who will win? I believe in our victory although there is very little hope of this. I am sorry for all that has passed. I love my homeland though its inhabitants told many lies. Nevertheless! I will accept everything as long as its with my own people.[20]

Whereas Olga showed concern for the treatment of prisoners-of-war she was completely silent about the Holocaust and the fate of Znamianka's Jewish population. As you may recall, in 1939, a little over 20% of Znamianka's population was Jewish.[21] Taking into account the rapidity with which the German *Blitzkrieg* traversed Soviet territory it is doubtful that many of Znamianka's Jews would have been able to flee Znamianka in advance of the city's occupation on August 6. Meanwhile, by late July and early August 1941, the Holocaust in the East was beginning to take the form of widespread killing actions that were being carried out by units of the Einsatzgruppen, often with the help of local collaborators, under the guise of rear action pacification. During such actions, Jewish men, women, and children were rounded-up and marched into the nearby forest

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[20] *Diary 1941-1942,* November 10, 1941, pg. 299-300.
[21] Spector, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Life*, 1515.

where they would then be mercilessly shot. In many instances individuals were murdered within miles of their homes and it was therefore, almost impossible for the local Ukrainian population not to have known about or witnessed these actions.

Given the intimate nature of such actions Olga's silence is intriguing, and lends itself to a number of possible interpretations. Her silence may be interpreted as an indication of guilt. However, it is more likely that her silence is rather a sign of internalization as well as a means of coping with such an unimaginable event if she had in fact known about what had taken place. Although Olga herself never spoke about the fate of Znamianka's Jews it seems that she did not harbor any antisemitic sentiments. On November 9, 1941 she declared to her German acquaintances "that I have a love, who is a Jew. I had Vladimir in mind. I will never stop loving him and I will never stop thinking about him. They told me that Jews will be kaput and that the same will happen to my love. But I still remain firm in my convictions."[22] Taking into account the nature of these statements in November and the fact that they would have been uttered well after any *aktion* would have taken place as well as the boldness with which they were declared it leads one to question whether Olga knew about the fate of the Jews at all.

The *Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust* merely states that in October 1941 the Jews of Znamianka were marched into the forest and massacred.[23] Since Znamianka was located at a railroad junction it may be that the German authorities in carrying out this *aktion* may have said that the Jews were going to be transported somewhere else as a means to get them to willingly come to the appointed place. Such a ruse had been used successfully in the early months of the war in various locations in Ukraine including Kiev during

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[22] *Diary 1941-1942,* November 9, 1941, pg. 298-299.
[23] Spector, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Life*, 1515.

the Babi Yar Massacre. If this had indeed happened, then it would account for why Olga had uttered such words in November. On the other hand, Olga did not mention such a plan in her diary either and it seems likely that had an order for transportation been issued by the German authorities she would have probably mentioned it, at least in passing in her diary. Thus, unfortunately one is left wondering why she had remained silent on this issue.

Despite the information cited in the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and After the Holocaust* regarding an *aktion* having taken place in October 1941 it seems that a previous *aktion* may have taken place in Znamianka in September. In testimonies collected after the war by Yad Vashem many individuals stated that their loved ones were murdered specifically in September 1941, which suggests the possibility of an *aktion* having been carried out in Znamianka, possibly by a Sonderkommando unit at that time. Today only a portion of the reports sent by the Einsatzgrupp commanders to their superiors in Berlin regarding their activities in Ukraine remain. Unfortunately, for our purposes, these reports usually did not list the minor massacres in which the various Sonderkommandos participated. Therefore, from these reports it is possible to piece together only a rudimentary outline of their movements and actions. Nevertheless, when considered in conjunction with the post-war testimony these reports suggest that an *aktion* against the Jewish population did indeed take place in Znamianka in September 1941. Prior to relocating its headquarters to Kiev, following the occupation of the capital on September 19, 1941, units of Einsatzgruppe C were stationed and operated in and around the Kirovograd area in early to mid September 1941.[24] Besides undertaking actions in the city of Kirovograd itself, units of Einsaztgruppe C and Sonderkommando 4b, specifically, participated

[24] Operational Situation Report USSR No. 94

in a large *aktion* against the 4,300 Jews of the city of Aleksandriia in September 1941.[25]

Aleksandriia is located 30 kilometers east of Znamianka and today, depending on which of two possible roads you take from Kirovograd, you would have to pass through Znamianka en-route to Aleksandriia. Taking into account the strategic importance of Znamianka as a major railroad junction and the necessity of maintaining control and order in the area for the efficient function of the railroad it seems unlikely that Znamianka would have been overlooked or ignored by Einsatzgruppe C especially if its units were already participating in rear area actions in the neighborhood. Thus, both post war testimony as well as the movements of Sonderkommando 4b suggest that an initial massacre of Znamianka's Jewish population took place at some point in early to mid September 1941, possibly by Sonderkommando 4b which had undertaken a similar *aktion* in Aleksandriia located a mere 30 kilometers away.

This hypothesis is further reinforced by Olga's diary. Although she never outright mentioned the massacre of the Jewish population in any of her diary entries, in an entry from September 10, 1941 she recorded her fear following an unexpected search by a policeman in her home.

> I was so frightened when a policeman entered our home and demanded my passport. I showed it to him. Then he began searching for something. I opened all of the drawers for him. Afterwards, he sat near me and asked me a lot of questions about myself. When I told him that I want to continue to study, he invited me to go to Germany with him. At the war he is a policemen, but in general he is a machinist. I found him disgusting. [26]

By September 1941 mass killings and *aktions* in rear areas that fell under the rubric of rear area pacification were becoming routine. The procedure for such massacres usually involved the

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[25] Yehoshua R Büchler, "Unworthy Behavior: The case of SS Office Max Täubner," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 3 (2003): 415.

[26] *Diary 1941-1942,* September 10, 1941, pg. 291.

registration of the local population prior to the *aktion* in order to identify and separate the Jews from the rest of the population. In order to facilitate this process, members of police units would first and foremost rely on Soviet-era passports, in which the ethnicity of an individual was recorded. Therefore, by demanding to see Olga's passport this particular policeman was most likely trying to determine whether or not she was Jewish.

A further *aktion* against the remaining Jews of Znamianka most likely took place in late October or early November 1941 as suggested by the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Life*. In an article entitled "Unworthy Behavior" Yehoshua R. Büchler brought to light the fascinating case of SS Officer Max Täubner, who along with his men was placed on trail in 1942 by the SS for ostensibly unsanctioned and particularly savage conduct towards civilians during the war. In reality, Max Täubner was placed on trial for his insistence on taking trophy photographs during actions, which he then mailed home to family and friends. This type of conduct was strictly forbidden by the SS and it was because of this that he was sanctioned by the tribunal. As for the heinous crimes committed against the Jewish population, they were actually cited as mitigating circumstances during his sentencing as evidence of his patriotism.[27] Täubner himself was particularly zealous and before his maintenance repair platoon was even transferred to occupied territory Täubner declared that he intended to "get rid of at least 20,000 Jews," a sentiment that he had voiced on earlier occasions to his friends and family. [28]

In testimonies given during the trial it was indicated that "on its way to the camp bases allocated to it, the platoon murdered Jews and initiated Aktionen from Volhynia in the West to

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[27] See Büchler, "Unworthy Behavior," 416- 421. regarding the SS investigation and the importance of the photographs. See Bückler, "Unworthy Behavior," 421-422 about the mitigating opinions that were adopted by the SS tribunal regarding the crimes committed against Jewishs

[28] Büchler, "Unworthy Behavior," 412.

Konotop in the northwest of Ukraine. The Ukrainian towns mentioned in the testimonies are Dubno, Zhitomir, Shepetovka, Iustinovka, Znamenka, Nikopol, Kremenchug, Putivl, and Konotop."[29] Details regarding the *aktion* in Znamianka are unfortunately unavailable since the SS tribunal focused their attention in 1942 to the larger *aktions* conducted in Novograd-Volynskii, Sholokhovo, and Aleksandriia and did not gather information about the locations where the killings were deemed to have been "routine" in nature.[30] However, taking into account Täubner's fanaticism and the fact that his unit sought-out and killed any Jews that they were able to find en-route to its various basis of operation as well as the fact that the unit had carried out an extremely brutal *aktion* with the help of the Ukrainian police while stationed in Aleksandriia from October 22 to November 12, 1941, after the area had already been "cleansed" by Sonderkommando 4b in September one can conclude, without much doubt, that the *aktion* about which Max Täubner's men had testified must have taken place at some point in late October or early November 1941 either while the unit was en-route to Aleksandriia or during the time that it was stationed in the city.[31]

Meanwhile, as the new regime continued to consolidate its power during the autumn of 1941 the prospect of a Soviet counteroffensive began to dwindle. Soon a modicum of order was restored to the area and the surviving local population started to rebuild their lives within the structure of the new regime. However, many quickly found that there was absolutely nothing for them to do. There was little work throughout the city and the schools remained closed. "Today is a day-off. But this is not like previous days-off. There is nothing to rest from. I am loafing about.

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[29] Büchler, "Unworthy Behavior," 412-413.
[30] Büchler, "Unworthy Behavior," 411.
[31] Büchler, "Unworthy Behavior," 414.

We do not go to school. There is no work. How nice it had been before: you come home from school exhausted, and take up a novel or something and read... falling asleep in front of the book. But now I go to bed and I cannot fall asleep. Boredom, boredom. I wrote poems... Now nothing comes to my mind. Yes, things are bad!"[32] Repeatedly, during the autumn, Olga wrote that she did not know how to pass the time and she longed for her old life when she had been able to go to school.

In *Harvest of Despair* Karel C. Berkhoff argued that one of the major grievances among the youth that ultimately resulted in their disaffection with the German regime was "sheer boredom, because the schools were closed and entertainment was hard to find. Most important, they saw no future for themselves, unlike before 1941."[33] Indeed during the autumn of 1941 boredom became a major problem for Olga. Lack of prospects as well as the monotony of everyday life resulted in rosy reminiscences of the past and an apathy towards the present. On November 22 Olga wrote that whereas before, "I was always waiting for something. Now I do not wait for anything." [34] There was nothing foreseeable in the future for which to wait. There were no opportunities and the only thing that life under the new regime seemed to bring were more tedious days that differed little from the previous ones. Under such conditions life under the Soviet Union seemed like a bright beacon shining from the past. On November 21 she wrote that, "I heard news: the Soviets are retaking. I want my previous life. Raia, movies, the garden, Vladimir, *** how pure and sweet! And now? There is constant longing for the past."[35] However, not everyone felt the same way that Olga did and in the same entry Olga went on to

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[32] *Diary 1941-1942,* September 28, 1941, 293.
[33] Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine Under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2004), 229
[34] *Diary 1941-1942,* November 22, 1941, 304.
[35] *Diary 1941-1942,* November 21, 1941, 303-304.

talk about her friend Jean who had no similar yearnings for her past life. "No matter what, Jean does not want our people to return. What's it to her? After all its all the same to her as long as she lives. But why can't I be like her?" [36] While many, like Olga, were becoming disillusioned during the autumn of 1941 with the German regime, there were others who were living their life in the present, forging new identities and relationships within the reconstituted society.

Most of the local population was interacting on a daily basis with the occupying forces. While most were merely engaging in conversations, there were many young women who were also beginning to flirt with soldiers and to go on walks and dates with them. As the prospect of a Soviet return began to vanish and German power in the area became entrenched things began to look like the Germans were there to stay. At the same time, there was little to do since the schools were closed, there was no work, and most other forms of entertainment were nonexistent. Meanwhile, German soldiers often had access to radios and it was possible to listen to music in their presence and for a time forget about the monotony of everyday existence.

On October 30 Olga wrote that, "Jean has become different from the way that she used to be. She has already come to understand a lot about beauty and has lost her modest look."[37] During the autumn Olga started to notice that her friends were beginning to change. This observation upset her, while their behavior shocked and frustrated her. On numerous occasions Olga complained about her friend's behaviors writing that "in the evening I kept looking at how terribly Alla and Luda behaved themselves with the Germans. It's already debauchery. But, no, I was not like them. I kept myself modest..."[38] On another occasion Olga observed that "[a]fter all, what do Ukrainian girls and German soldiers have in common; only that they allow certain

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[36] *Diary 1941-1942,* November 21, 1941, 303-304.
[37] *Diary 1941-1942,* October 30, 1941, 297.
[38] *Diary 1941-1942,* October 30, 1941, 297.

liberties."[39] Olga felt ashamed by her friends' brazen behavior and at first she could not see what commonalities there could be between Ukrainians and Germans; occupiers and the oppressed.

Meanwhile, during the early autumn months, Olga herself was quickly becoming jaded by the false compliments and easy flirtation of the German soldiers. As the novelty of the interactions began to wear-out these encounters added to her frustration and boredom. On October 2 she irritably wrote that, "I have nothing to write about. I am tired of these empty entries. What is there to write about? Once again about how Jean told me that the railroad worker shamelessly lied when he said that he loved me or that one or another was polite to me. This is repulsive. I would be delighted if this one at least looked like a hero."[40] The false pretenses irritated her and made her long for her old life. During the first months she compared those that she met with her idealized version of true love and was often left pining for Vladimir and her old life. In September Olga wrote that, "[w]hen I start to think that I am initiating conversations with my enemies I feel so sorry... I haven't lost my stupid habit of searching for the ideal but still Vladimir remains nice to me as before. I cannot live a minute without love and this love I transfer onto someone unknown."[41] Olga was eighteen years old and she longed for love, respect, and a sense of belonging. The war had shattered her life and everything that she knew. Without school or any foreseeable opportunities her teenage years and youth were gone while her future seemed poised to be likewise irrevocably destroyed.

Then on October 28, 1941 the local authorities appointed Olga to be a teacher. Although she was still only eighteen years old and had not finished the last year of high school she knew a modest amount of German. Due to this she was hired to teach in a school that was opened in the

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[39] *Diary 1941-1942,* November 9, 1941, 298-299.
[40] *Diary 1941-1942,* October 2, 1941, 294.
[41] *Diary 1941-1942,* September 25, 1941, 293.

neighboring village of Dmitrovka.

> I am a teacher. All of these sections and conferences seem like they have been familiar to me for a long time. But there is a problem. I was appointed to school number 1. I walked there and the director told me that the position has already been taken. I went to the "authorities" again. They appointed me to the Russian School Number 3 to the 5-7 classes. Oho! The 7th class. But somehow everything was arranged. They gave me the 3rd, 4th, and 5th classes. Besides that, I'll be teaching drawing. I am so uncomfortable here, its nasty, and awkward. I met my old teachers! But I'm still like a student. Everybody has an education, but me... I really don't want to get involved with this work, but going back also isn't easy.[42]

The assignment did not last long, since on November 3 she wrote that the school was going to be closed. Nevertheless, she was later hired once again on November 25 to work as a teacher in a new school in the nearby village of Orlova. Whereas she felt awkward and uneasy in the previous school Olga instantly developed a positive opinion regarding this assignment. "I immediately liked the director and the students are not bad either... Everything seems familiar to me and I feel wonderful."[43] At this school Olga was praised for her German skills by the director and even by the Komendant who wanted to hear her translate from German. Later, in January 1942, Olga attended a teachers conference in Dmytrivka where she was praised once again. "There were a lot of teachers and then all of sudden I was among the best. Oh! My future lies ahead."[44] Things were beginning to look up and for the first time Olga was able to see a future for herself within the new regime.

Meanwhile, on December 7, 1941 the local theater was opened. Life was beginning to regain a semblance of normalcy. However, even though the reopening of the theater was a long awaited event the occasion did not bring much happiness to Olga.

Today for the first time during the war our theater was operating. This day was so

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[42] *Diary 1941-1942,* October 28, 1941, 296.
[43] *Diary 1941-1942,* November 25, 1941, 304-305.
[44] *Diary 1941-1942,* January 8, 1942, 319.

> upsetting for me! The Germans took all of the first rows, while everyone else had to take the back. The soldiers chose girls and sat them next to themselves. It was all so immoral! Of course none of the chosen girls were to my taste. Shurena, Jean, Olga, and I all sat together, but only Olga could understand me right then. She was also indignant at the German antics and she was upset for her country's pride, but we remained silent. Nobody will hear us anyways. We sang the song "Dear country, dear fatherland" with such delight! We will get what we are waiting for! They won't remain on top of us![45]

Olga was ashamed of her fellow Ukrainians' behavior. She wanted to feel pride for her country and her people but she was unable to do so when she witnessed her fellow Ukrainians submitting to the second-class treatment that the Germans were meting out. Although these sentiments can be construed as being nationalist in nature Olga does not seem to have held any nationalist leanings. Her nationalism seems to have manifested itself only in a desire to feel pride in herself and her people as well as a desire for Ukrainians and herself personally to be accepted as equals. Even though on this occasion she declared that the Germans will not rule over us forever she commonly expressed similar opinions in conjunction with positive assessments of a Soviet return.[46] Therefore, it seems most likely that when she recorded these words she did not have a Ukrainian state in mind, but was rather thinking of a Soviet return that would drive the Germans out of Ukraine. At the same time, these words were most likely also influenced by a certain degree of jealousy since she continued the entry with an admonition of herself and her inability to hate her enemies.

> Even though my anger boils, nevertheless I can't drop this habit (or how do you call it); I mean I cannot look with disdain at my enemies if not the complete opposite. I am sorry for myself: I need love, life, energy, and what has life given me? I have eternal longings for the ideal, but instead I only have constant dreams and memories... Why do I not have a happy today like everyone else.[47]

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[45] *Diary 1941-1942,* December 7, 1941, 308.
[46] *Diary 1941-1942,* December 14, 1941, 308-309.
[47] *Diary 1941-1942,* December 7, 1941, 308.

Although Olga remained faithful to the Soviet cause her feelings towards the occupying forces were beginning to change. She no longer saw the Germans as purely enemies, the way in which the Soviet Union and the Komsomol had taught her to see them. Olga was spending an increasing amount of time with her friends and their German acquaintances. As time went on she began to develop feelings towards some of them and considered them as belonging to her own group of acquaintances and even friends. Gradually she began to identify with them and at times she even preferred their company over that of her own friends. On December 5, 1941 she wrote that, "[t]oday our Germans are leaving the school for Znamenka. And I am sorry since it was nice with them. And Paul also! Now I will be bored again. I am completely uninterested in Jean and Olga. They constantly complain about everything! People speak badly about Jean, its unpleasant to me, since I am often with her and people will think the same thing about me."[48] Olga was beginning to find her friends fatiguing as well as a source of shame, while the Germans were different and interesting.

Olga was eighteen years old and although the war had forced her to grow up she was still a young woman. She wanted to live, to be young, and to have a good time. As Soviet power became a thing of the past and life under occupation regained structure she began to look for love and acceptance within the new society. However, most of the Ukrainian men were away at the front and there were virtually no local young men left. Therefore, Olga, like many of the other girls whom she had previously admonished, began to look for her version of the ideal from amongst the Germans with whom she was now spending time. Their respect and acceptance gradually became of paramount importance to her. On November 11, 1941 she wrote that, "Gary!

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[48] *Diary 1941-1942,* December 5, 1941, 308.

You will be on my side just like Kegart. I will win over your respect! And Olf also. But what is all of this to me? This is so stupid! Why?"[49] Although she was seeking their approval and respect Olga questioned her own motivations. Meanwhile, she continued to believe in the Soviet Union and her Komsomol upbringing. In the same entry she wrote that, "I keep repeating that I am a member of Lenin's youth. I also quarrel over politics with Gary. No one will ever break me. I am a patriot of my homeland. And there are thousands, millions like me. But for now I am alone and I have nothing to occupy myself with."[50] However, even as she continued to espouse her Soviet beliefs Olga was beginning to find it hard to feel the antipathy and hatred that she knew she was supposed to feel towards her enemies.

In December 1941 compulsory labor service was introduced in Ukraine. "Under the regulations non-Jews who were unemployed had to register at the Labour Exchange and would be assigned to specific work. Work was to be paid according to fixed rates and the sanction of imprisonment was available to punish those refusing to comply."[51] Since Olga was working in the school this order did not apply to her at first. However, in late January Olga's school was closed.[52] As a result she was now eligible for compulsory work as well as the possibility of being selected for forced labor in Germany as part of the *Ostarbeiter Program* that was initiated in January 1942 in Ukraine.[53] However, Olga remained unemployed for several months, which leads one to assume that the orders were not immediately implemented in Znamianka, but rather came into effect at some point during the spring. This is reinforced by Olga's entry from

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[49] *Diary 1941–1942,* November 11, 1941, 300.
[50] *Diary 1941–1942,* November 11, 1941, 300.
[51] Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-1944* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 112.
[52] *Diary 1941–1942,* January 31, 1942, 323-324.
[53] Dean, *Collaboration,* 112.

February 23, 1942 in which a soldier named Frantz notified Olga about the order following an argument that they had had over his assertion that "Russia has no culture".

> He told me that there is an order that all citizens ages 14 and up who do not have jobs must work building roads. I say that this will never happen to me and that I will never work for "somebody else" and that nobody will own me and that I will be free. Frantz contradicted me and said that I will absolutely have to work and that this is not being done for Ukraine.[54]

Although Frantz's threats were premature by late March 1942 it seems that the *Ostarbeiter Program* was initiated in Znamianka. On March 25, 1942 Olga mentioned for the first time the possibility of being sent to Germany. "How I wish I had a friend right now! Right now, when things are so worrisome, when at home mother is crying that her children may be taken to Germany to work. Oh! How terribly hard it is![55] Olga was young and therefore relatively healthy and without work the German authorities saw her as the perfect candidate for work in Germany. Her parents were devastated and her mother clung to every possible prospect of work in order to save her daughter.[56]

> Its painful to me that I am now facing unemployment and like everyone else I am looking for comfort somewhere. I never imagined what it could mean not to have a job! All of the unemployed are being driven like cattle to Germany. Decent girls from large cities are going there saying, "What can I do, I don't want to die!" They are starving and many are taken by force. I wasn't home all day. I go anywhere just so that I do not have to see the worried faces of my parents.[57]

Initially the occupation authorities called for volunteers for work in Germany and indeed there were those who volunteered to go, especially from the large cities where conditions were terrible and the local population was often starving. However, the number of volunteers quickly began to dry-up as rumors and letters began to filter back home illuminating the often terrible conditions

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[54] *Diary 1941-1942,* February 23, 1942, 332.
[55] *Diary 1941-1942,* March 25, 1942, 338- 339.
[56] *Diary 1941-1942,* March 27, 1942, 339- 340.
[57] *Diary 1941-1942,* March 30, 1942, 340-341.

under which Eastern workers were forced to live. As this occurred people began to be rounded up forcefully, while "volunteers" from the larger cities, such as Kiev, were actually hunted down in the streets. Based on Olga's entry it seems that Znamianka was either a stopping point or a collection point from which trains full of eastern workers traveled towards Germany. Luckily for Olga, she was able to find work on March 31, 1942 as a translator in the train depot and was therefore spared this fate.[58]

The *Ostarbeiter Program* became one of the major grievances of the local population as it tore families apart underscoring the powerlessness of the Ukrainians in this new society. While Olga was faced with the prospect of being sent away she blamed the Germans and the authorities for her fate. "Things are so hard for me that I am avoiding people's glances! What is the reason for this? They liberated us... From science, from calm, from... What have I been doomed to? Why are the girls indifferent towards this?"[59] She realized that the Germans' so-called liberation had brought another brutal form of bondage and that thus far under the occupation she had never been free. Meanwhile, she found her friends indifference upsetting. Life under occupation was unpredictable and everyone was living their lives in the present moment, only concerning themselves with their own survival.

However, although Olga was conscious of the idea that the Germans were to blame for many of the ills that the occupation had brought to her life she never blamed the individual Germans themselves. Whereas in 1941 she had gradually begun to find it hard to identify the soldiers as her enemies and had begun to find certain men attractive, by 1942 she was preferring their company and was developing an aversion towards Russian or non-German men. Less then a

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[58] *Diary 1941-1942,* March 31, 1942, 341.
[59] *Diary 1941-1942,* March 27, 1942, 339-340.

month after almost being forcefully sent to Germany on April 27, 1942 she talked to her friend about the difference between Russian and German men. "We said that our Russian boys are really offended by our girls. That all our attention right now is directed at the Germans. And to tell the truth, I don't know why, but I find our Russian boys to be so disgusting. I am even hostile towards them because they are at the front. I hate them for this."[60] Instead of blaming the Germans Olga blamed the Russians for having left. She blamed them for being away at the front, for having fought and retreated so quickly, and thereby having left them to this fate.

Meanwhile, the winter and early spring of 1942 saw renewed anxiety on the part of the occupation authorities. On January 10, 1942 Olga recorded that, "[t]hroughout the streets of the city there are patrols everywhere checking documents. I somehow walked by, even though I had no papers with me. It means that they feel something. Everywhere there is anxiety. Our people are already nearby. A Soviet plane dropped leaflets." [61] Then again on January 31, 1942 Olga wrote that, "our people are close and the progress of the Germans has been shaken." [62] These entries seem to suggest that the Germans were on the alert possibly because of renewed activity in the area as a result of the Soviet winter offensive. Even though the Red Army was able to make some gains during the winter of 1941 to 1942 these gains were not significant enough to pose a major threat to the German position in Znamianka. Therefore, although the presence of the Red Army may have been felt it seems more likely that partisan activity in the area posed a more tangible threat. Indeed from 1942 Znamiansky rayon became the center of partisan activity in the Kirovograd oblast.[63] Partisans used the nearby forests as bases of operation from which

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[60] *Diary 1941-1942,* April 27, 1942, 347.
[61] *Diary 1941-1942,* January 10, 1942, 319.
[62] *Diary 1941-1942,* January 31, 1942, 323-324.
[63] Gerasimov, *Kniga Pamiati Ukrainy*, 797.

they concentrated their efforts at disrupting rail service in the area.[64]

During the autumn and winter of 1942 increased partisan activity was witnessed in the area. At some point during the winter of 1942 actions were carried out by the local police against citizens in the area who may have assisted or were suspected of assisting partisans. Following the completion of the war, exhumations were carried out by Soviet authorities in and around the area of the railroad hospital located in Znamianka. In the course of one of the exhumations carried out from December 21- 23, 1943 a mass grave was found within the grounds of the railroad hospital in what was once a antitank ditch. The grave was determined to have been between 12 and 18 months of age dating from some point in mid to late 1942. From within the grave the bodies of 31 men, 23 women, and 9 children were recovered. Of these remains, it was determined that 30 people had been shot at point blank range with a Russian rifle, while most of the teenagers and children were killed from blunt force trauma to their skulls. Furthermore, 32 shells were recovered from the grave and all of the bodies were still dressed in their winter clothes. [65] Unfortunately, due to the age of the grave and the remains the Soviet authorities found it impossible at the time of the exhumations to ascertain the identities of those who were interred within.

However, from the evidence recovered from the grave it is possible to make a few observations regarding the victims and the perpetrators. The fact that children were among the victims immediately rules out the possibility that this was a Soviet atrocity dating from before the war that was then made to look like a Nazi atrocity, since Soviet authorities did not kill children. At the same time, the victims were most likely Ukrainian or Polish since the local

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[64] Gerasimov, *Kniga Pamiati Ukrainy*, 797.

[65] GARF f. 7021, op. 66, d. 123, l. 65: Act of December 23, 1943 regarding exhumations conducted on December 21-23 on the grounds of the railroad hospital in Znamianka

Jewish population had already been murdered during the fall of 1941. Furthermore, if the victims had been Jewish survivors from the earlier actions that may have been housed in a local ghetto then they would not have been dressed since it had been common procedure dating from the early autumn of 1941 to undress Jewish victims prior to *aktions* in order to facilitate the redistribution of their goods. Also the extent of decomposition that the Soviets used to determine that the grave was dated from autumn or winter of 1942, suggests that this was the result of a partisan action since by 1942 partisan activity was on the rise and was the major threat to German stability in Ukraine. Furthermore, 1942 throughout Ukraine witnessed the increase of not only partisan activity but also the rise of retaliatory actions directed against the civilian population in order to forestall any assistance that it may provide to the partisans. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that most of these individuals were most likely locals who had been murdered as part of a partisan action in retaliation for providing real or imagined assistance to partisans.

Since Olga's diary ends on April 30, 1942 and the next volume does not resume once more until January 4, 1943 it is unknown whether or not she had any knowledge of these events. However, it is likely that Olga and other individuals residing in Znamianka may have heard rumors of similar actions taking place even though they may not have personally witnessed them. On March 9, 1943 Olga recorded her impressions after witnessing two partisans hanging from a tree by the side of the road:

> Today we also saw two hanged partisans with signs on their chests saying that they were killing civilians. This did not have such a big effect on me. I am so rude in these feelings! It seems to me that this is a common phenomenon. These are the first hangings that I have ever seen in my entire life. Also they are hanging from a tree

> that stands exactly on the street where the most amount of people walk by. [66]

Olga seems to have been unmoved by this sight and the fact that she wrote that "it seems to me that this is a common phenomenon" suggests that such actions against real or imagined partisans were common throughout the area. The prevalence of such actions is underscored in an entry from the following day in which Olga recorded a conversation that she overheard between her German coworkers. During the conversation one of the Germans complained about the local's reactions and the fact that the hangings seem to have had little effect on them.

> That women walk past with their children, and it does not bother them. Young, old, they all walk past while smiling and for them it is nothing. That it is such savagery that we have no feelings of regret! And what is it to me? I cannot begin to feel anything before this spectacle. This, apparently, has not come to my conscience yet and that is why it does not bring fear to me. Yes and what is there to fear in a dead person? [67]

In some ways, the local population must have become inured towards violence after having been exposed to it through war and occupation for so long. After more than a year and a half of occupation they may have no longer been surprised by the brutality of the German occupation and many must have come to the realization that life was not worth as much as it had been before. However, many must have avoided thinking about the violence all together. Maybe the act of distancing themselves from the violence was a mechanism through which they were able to survive because otherwise confronting it would have made it impossible to continue to live under such uncertain conditions.

Meanwhile, as the partisan activity increased in the rear during 1942 and 1943 the Germans in the autumn of 1942 were fighting in the streets of Stalingrad. By early 1943 their position in the embattled city was becoming tenuous and rumors began to filter back that they

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[66] *Diary 1943,* March 9, 1943, 372-373.
[67] *Diary 1943,* March 10, 1943, 373.

were once again suffering setbacks. On January 25, 1943 Olga recorded in her diary that

> Rumor has it that the Germans are not doing very well right now, that they are retreating at full speed. Is this true? But there cannot be smoke without fire. I cannot imagine a time when we will be free of the Germans again. Well and even now I do not feel myself to be a slave, after all I love Heinz and I will go with him anywhere. I even want to live there.[68]

Although, Olga had experienced hardships and grief at the hands of the occupiers she was no longer looking forward to a Soviet return as she had been in 1941 and was actually contemplating going to Germany on her own. This dramatic change in her worldview, which began to develop gradually during 1941 seems to have been accelerated in 1942 when Olga fell in love with a German soldier named Heinz. Whereas in 1941 Olga had seen no future for herself under German rule, now she had love, a position where she was praised and needed, and friends and acquaintances.

> Yes, everyone is awaiting the Reds. This same time last year I felt likewise. And what has changed me? Or will I once again be of my earlier opinion? Maybe I do not want this because of Heinz. He loves me and I also find him sweet and we could be happy together. But what should I do? Maybe something will push me towards different thoughts, but right now these thoughts that our people are near are not happy for me... Oh! What a traitor I am to my own thoughts! Since only a few months before I had written that I would never betray our traditions! Oh! How lightly I had written this word that under all circumstances is so terrible. Could a former Komsomol think this way? But I had not seen anything good in Russia. Its all dreams... If it wasn't for the dreams and hopes for the future my life would seem like a gray thread.[69]

Having lived for so long under occupation Olga had been exposed to a different way of life. The new regime provided an alternative to the Soviet system that Olga had grown-up with. Deep down she seems to have continued to question the alternative that the Germans represented and at times she saw that it was no better than the life that she had left behind. However, on some

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[68] *Diary 1943,* January 25, 1943, 359-360.
[69] *Diary 1943,* January 26, 1943, 360

level she seems to have been enthralled by their European-ism and their foreignness and the alternative way of life that they represented. Olga wanted all of the things that they had and she wanted to be acknowledged as an equal in their society. After having watched a German movie, Olga remarked on January 23, 1943 about German women that:

> I love them because they are beautiful girls, but I am envious of them. I feel envy towards their way of life that is both so cozy and cultured. What do I see here in Znamenka? Oh, how tired I am of this existence! And our best years are doomed to this fate. I keep hoping that we will live better and so I must tolerate everything. If I did not hope for something better then life would be torture. [70]

Life was terrible, but hope for a future where life would be better and the promises of the Germans would come true seem to have sustained Olga. Olga dreamt of a life where she would be respected and accepted as an equal. She knew that the war and the Germans were to blame for her hardships but while she blamed the occupation regime Olga rarely blamed the individual soldiers and administrators with whom she was acquainted with.

While looking at German graves in April 1943, Olga observed that there are "[s]oldiers the same age as me and some even younger, some a little bit older and some even quite elderly. Are they guilty that death has crept up so early to them and if not early then on foreign soil. Are they my enemies or not?"[71] Olga saw that they were people and she felt a level of empathy towards them. Such displays of empathy at German grave-sites were actually common throughout Ukraine and German officials often noted how both young and old peasants cried at German grave-sites during burials.[72] Berkhoff attributed this phenomenon to a "'premodern' sense of compassion, which disregarded nationality" and it does seem that at the beginning Olga did empathize with the Germans precisely because she was able to see a common humanity

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[70] *Diary 1943,* January 23, 1943, 359.
[71] *Diary 1943,* April 14, 1943, 384-385.
[72] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 215.

between herself and the German soldiers.

Meanwhile conditions in early 1943 continued to deteriorate. Partisan warfare was increasing and the Germans were experiencing setbacks in Stalingrad. In Znamianka a deterioration in food supplies was witnessed during the winter and spring months in the area. On January 29, 1943 Olga complained in her diary that there was nothing to eat except for soup, borscht, and potatoes.[73] By February when the Germans were retreating with all haste from Stalingrad after their defeat, Olga noted that there were very many soldiers in Znamianka and it seems that due to the railroad lines that ran through the city that many units were retreating through Znamianka on their way farther west.[74] Olga also noted that the apartments were all full of German or Russian evacuees.[75] Soldiers passing through Znamianka brought news of defeat from the Caucuses that created panic in the city. On February 18, 1943 Olga recorded that Ernest, a soldier she had met more than a year before had returned from the Caucasus. When they spoke he assured Olga that, "the Germans will not win and there will come a time when he will show himself as the real Ernest from Poland! He told us that he was together with Franz in the Caucasus and that the Soviets are really pushing them out of there. A German pilot talking like this!"[76]

With news of German defeats, rumors began to circulate that all young people would be taken to Germany along with the evacuated machinery.[77] Fear was palpable and people refrained from going to public places fearing that they would be driven off to Germany.

We are hurrying with Jean to the theater, but it is all in vain since nothing took

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[73] *Diary 1943*, January 29, 1943, 361.
[74] *Diary 1943*, February 15, 1943, 367.
[75] *Diary Entry,* February 21, 1943, 369-370.
[76] *Diary 1943,* February 18, 1943, 368-369.
[77] *Diary 1943,* February 21, 1943, 369- 370.

> place because there are too few people here. And who will come, if everyone is afraid? They are afraid that the youth theater is once again going to Germany and that they may just encircle the theater and force everyone to go... There is such panic already, but I wont see reason. I still don't believe in the collapse of the Germans.[78]

For some the panic was made worse by other rumors that the Soviets were punishing people who had collaborated with the Germans and that things would be especially bad for translators.[79] By February 21, 1943, Olga described the situation and the panic that was gripping the people as being similar to what was happening just before the Germans occupied the area back in 1941.[80]

Many locals rejoiced at these news and waited for the Soviet army to return. Although they were fearful of what the Germans might do in desperation they were eager for the return of Soviet power. Olga on the other hand continued to be of her previous conviction and did not want the Red Army to return. Although she did not want to continue to live the life that she had been living under occupation, she did not want to return to the life that she had lived under the Soviet Union. On March 12, 1943 Olga wrote that, "[w]e are people without a homeland, we are people without a homeland! Goodness! Is this really true? There is no need for any other answer but yes!"[81] Having been exposed to an alternative Olga no longer saw the Soviet Union as her home. Meanwhile the rumors about Soviet reprisals against collaborators and translators, a job which she herself was holding, must have added to her desire to remain under German control.

Despite the rapid German retreat following Stalingrad the Soviet army did not immediately threaten the region where Znamianka was located and German power remained in the area although it was experiencing even heavier partisan opposition. By spring 1943 the

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[78] *Diary 1943,* February 20, 1943, 369.
[79] *Diary 1943,* February 16, 1943, 367-368.
[80] *Diary 1943,* February 21, 1943, 369-370.
[81] *Diary 1943,* March 12, 1943, 374.

Ostarbeiter Program was once again expanded and a large number of locals were forcibly "evacuated" to Germany for work. On April 6, 1943 Olga recorded in her diary that her supervisor had taken her passport and that Luda's supervisor had likewise taken hers. "I am beginning to feel very sorry for my mother. What will she do if both of us will have to leave her?"[82] Olga did not know why her passport had been taken away from her and she began to fear that she would be taken to Germany. By May Olga's fears proved real and both she and her sister Luda received summons to appear before the health commission to determine their eligibility to be sent to Germany.

> Oh! What a horror! Both Luda and I have received our summons to go to Germany... What is happening to me? I am like a crazy person, screaming at everyone and cursing my dear mother... But here I am at the doctor's and I have a certificate in hand that Luda is there. She will not have to go... But what about me? I give my summons to Giza and he returns it to me unsigned... This means that they do not need me here and that is why they are sending me away... Oh![83]

Luda was allowed to remain in Znamianka after securing a doctor's note stating that she was not well enough to go to Germany. It seems that this occurred because earlier in the month Luda found out that she had become pregnant by a German soldier who had been staying with them in their apartment. Although, she was forced to go to the infirmary where she had an operation this prevented her from being sent away.[84] Meanwhile, although Olga vacillated between going to Germany voluntarily and staying behind she finally settled on remaining in Znamianka out of fear of the unknown as well as out of concern for what it would do to her

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[82] *Diary 1943*, April 6, 1943, 382.
[83] *Diary 1943,* May 29, 1943, 392.
[84] *Diary 1943,* May 10, 1943, 388- 389. *Diary 1943,* May 19, 1943, 389- 390. *Diary 1943,* May 25, 1943, 391.

parents and family.[85] In order to stay Olga asked her friends and co-workers for help, however when they refused to sign paperwork that would have allowed her to remain she turned to more drastic measures.

> I have lost hope that my summons will be canceled the way it was for Olga and the other girls. That is why I am resorting to different measures; I am going to make myself sick... What have I come to! I am going to make myself sick only so that I cannot pass the commission and will not have to go THERE! Oh! If only all of these woes would soon end! Well I am not really afraid to go but if it weren't for my mother, father... They do not want to make me drink poison! To drink cooked tobacco so that I become unhealthy or so that I will be laid up in bed.[86]

Like thousands of other Ukrainians that faced a similar fate Olga decided to make herself sick in order not to pass the commission. Luckily for her, she did not have to go through with the plan and instead she convinced Luda's doctor to sign the paperwork necessary for her to remain in Znamianka for health reasons.[87] In Znamianka alone between February 1942 and July 1943 over one thousand young people injured themselves in similar ways in order to avoid having to be sent to Germany.[88] In all, 1121 young people were sent to Germany from Znamianka throughout the period of occupation.[89]

By summer and early fall 1943 Olga noted that very few girls were staying with the Germans.[90] Sensing that the end of the war was coming and that it was only a matter of time before the Soviet forces reoccupied Znamianka the local population began to distance itself

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85 *Diary 1943,* May 31, 1943, 393.
86 *Diary 1943,* May 31, 1943, 393.
87 *Diary 1943,* June 3, 1943, 394-395. *Diary 1943,* June 4, 1943, 395-396.
88 Berhkoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 269.
89 Gerasimov, *Kniga Pamiati Ukrainy,* 798.
90 *Diary 1943*, August 11, 1943, 412-413.

from the Germans. However, Olga continued to walk with the Germans and many began to look reproachfully at her for her behavior. She was having more arguments with her parents over the issue and by September 11, 1943 her father who had never before really reproached her for her relationships with the Germans vowed that if she and Luda did not stop then he would leave them.[91]

On October 19, 1943 the battle for Znamianka commenced. [92] Olga and her family left the city, which was being subjected to heavy bombardment by Soviet aviation, and went to stay in a nearby village with relatives.[93] Olga was reluctant to leave the city and when she arrived at the village she found the people to be boring and backward.

> Out of boredom we go with Luda to relatives in a nearby village. People notice us. But there is no one here before whom to be fashionable. These people are a beaten, gray mass... I am disgusted by the simple behavior of the Ukrainian guy, Shura. Ah! How I want to be in Znamenka again.[94]

Olga found the simple peasant ways of her relatives boring and the Ukrainian men unattractive and even abhorrent. Olga no longer wanted a Soviet return or victory. Furthermore, by October and November 1943 Olga seems to have adopted a German view of the Red Army. She used the German pejorative "Ivan" when referring to the Russians and she even described the front line Red Army soldiers as Mongols.[95] More than two years of occupation had left their mark on Olga and had changed her views not only about herself but about her people

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[91] *Diary 1943,* September 11, 1943, 416.
[92] Gerasimov, *Kniga Pamiati Ukrainy,* 798.
[93] *Diary 1943,* October 21, 1943, 423.
[94] *Diary 1943,* November 1, 1943, 426-427.
[95] *Diary 1943,* October 26, 1943, 425; *Diary 1943*, November 20, 1943, 430.

and her way of life as well. On November 29, 1943 after returning to Znamianka her mother and sister fell victim to Soviet bombing and passed away during the following days.[96] Although Olga remained in Znamianka after the Soviet liberation of the city on December 9, 1943 and continued to live there for some time her future fate is unknown since her diary abruptly ends in February 1944. However, from her last entries it seems that she was cooperating with Soviet authorities.[97]

Gradually, Olga started to return to her previous life, but she was unable to forget the years that she had spent under occupation. She began interacting with the Russian soldiers and even went on dates, but she continued to compare them to the Germans and she found them lacking. On January 17, 1944 Olga wrote that,"[t]hen I felt different from the way that I am now. I was very much loved." She questioned whether she would ever be loved as much again. However, she said that even if she was it would not be the same because then she had been loved by a foreigner.[98] On February 2, 1944 Olga wrote that:

> In this moment the 2.5 years of my life with the Germans seemed like a dream, departed, but remaining in my memory forever. Precisely forever, like a good dream, full of hardships, but also full of some of the nicest minutes of my life. And even if there is something bad in them,- the good is stronger and has eclipsed the bad forever. [99]

For Olga the occupation and the German regime had provided an alternative model of the world that she had never thought could exist. Olga had been born and raised in the Soviet

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[96] *Diary 1943,* November 29, 1943, 433; *Diary 1943,* December 2, 1943, 434; *Diary 1943,* December 3, 1943, 435.

[97] *Diary 1943,* December 7, 1943, 437.

[98] *Diary 1943,* January 17, 1943, 440.

[99] *Diary 1943,* February 2, 1944, 443.

Union and she knew no other life except that which had been instilled in her. Having come face to face with new possibilities Olga was forced to reevaluate everything that the Komsomol and the Soviet state had taught her. Although she wrestled with questions of loyalty throughout the occupation it seems that her belief in the Soviet system was thrown into doubt by everything that she had experienced. The foreignness and European-ism of the Germans had a profound effect on Olga. She wanted to win over their respect and admiration and above all else she wanted to be loved and accepted by them. After having spent so much time with the Germans she found her own people and especially Russian and Ukrainian men drab and unappealing.

Whereas many were originally drawn towards the Germans out of Nationalist sentiments Olga seems to have harbored no similar feelings. Rather during the first months of occupation she was incensed by such notions and felt ashamed of Ukrainian men and women, many of whom seemed to quickly realign themselves with the German regime. Gradually, as the prospect of a Soviet return began to diminish Olga began to seek a new life in the new society. While the prospect of work remained low and schools remained closed Olga continued to long for her old life. However, when things began to improve and she was able to find work first as a teacher and later as a translator Olga began to dream of a new future.

Her actions, following the completion of the war, would have most likely been considered collaborationist in nature, if for no other reason than that she had worked as a translator. However, Olga had neither been motivated out of hatred for the Soviet Union, Nationalist aspirations, or out of ideological identification. Olga was motivated by a

number of much more basic and fundamental factors. First and foremost, she worked for the German authorities because that was what she had to do in order to survive under a new regime that seemed poised to remain. On the other hand she initiated conversations and relationships with the Germans because she was young, full of life and energy, and she wanted to live. The war and the occupation had shattered her youth and her future, but she was determined to live her life in the present and despite all of the horrors and hardships that the occupation in Znamianka entailed Olga attempted to build a new life within the new society.