8 Illicit Food Access
Smuggling, Theft, and the Black Market

Raise the prices higher, higher,
Speculate with bread
Those who cannot pay a lot
Let them suffer from want.
Skin the poor, skin the paupers,
Suck the marrow from their bones
If there is still a spark of pity
Put it totally out.

– Mordechai Gebürtig, Kraków ghetto poet[1]

In an economy where legal means offer insufficient food for survival, people turn to illicit means to acquire food. In the ghettos, three major means of illegal food acquisition dominated: smuggling, theft, and the black market. While nonfood items were also attained in this way – and often with the goal of providing a means to acquire food – this chapter is focused specifically on direct food acquisition.

Food Smuggling

Food smuggling in the Łódź, Warsaw, and Kraków ghettos varied in volume by geographic location. The main determinants in how expansive smuggling was were the openness of the ghetto at any given point in time and the relative strictness with which smuggling was suppressed through policing and punishment. Smugglers utilized a variety of methods, ranging from stealing through holes in walls and fences to bribing guards to allow passage of people and items through the ghetto gates. Additionally, smuggling took place at both the individual and organizational levels, with some bringing in only enough food to support their families, and others smuggling whole trucks and people between ghettos.

Smuggling in the Kraków and Warsaw ghettos was rampant, and the food brought in illicitly represented a large portion of the food available in those ghettos. By contrast, smuggling was quite limited in the Łódź ghetto. In Warsaw, although the ghetto was officially closed, a

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large number of people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, held passes in and out of the ghetto for large swaths of its existence. For example, at the beginning of the closed ghetto period, over 15,000 people had passes to enter or exit the ghetto. The overwhelming majority were non-Jews who worked inside the ghetto. Over time, the number of passes was reduced, but many fake passes were produced in the ghetto as well.[2] Additionally, the ghetto had numerous illicit exits, which its residents exploited. Similarly, the Kraków ghetto was an open ghetto for a good portion of its existence, and until the June 1942 deportations, it was relatively easy for people in the ghetto to obtain passes to exit it, particularly as many individuals worked outside the ghetto. Even after June 1942, until October of that year, many people were able to exit the ghetto in groups that still enabled food smuggling and access to food outside the ghetto walls. The open nature of the Kraków ghetto for large portions of its existence made smuggling an important means of getting sufficient food, whether through people acting as smugglers themselves, having family members or individuals in their social networks who were able to smuggle, or having the means to purchase smuggled items on the black market. Non-Jewish workers in the Kraków ghetto also played a role in smuggling. Tadeusz Pankiewicz, the Kraków ghetto pharmacist, had three female employees – Irena Drozdzikowka, Helena Krywaniuk, and Aurelia Danek-Czortkowa – who utilized their ability to pass in and out of the Kraków ghetto to smuggle in food. This became especially important after individual passes out of the ghetto were no longer easily available to residents.[3] This widespread smuggling meant that in Kraków, hunger existed on a larger scale for only a short period, after October 1942.

In the Warsaw ghetto, smuggling was a significant source of food. While the official rations for the Warsaw ghetto were substantially smaller than those permitted by its Łódź counterpart, smuggling meant that far more food was available in the Warsaw ghetto.[4] In Łódź, smuggling made a negligible impact on overall food availability, largely because it was sealed and had a transparent border. Smuggling did take place in the early days of the ghetto, when gates still opened onto the "Aryan" streets that ran through the ghetto, allowing ghetto traffic to move across these streets. On July 16, 1940, however, the head of the Schupo (Schutzpolizei) closed the gates and forced ghetto traffic over bridges.[5] This reduced the number of entrances into the ghetto and made it harder to smuggle. Additionally, unlike the Warsaw and Kraków ghettos, which were surrounded by solid walls that could be approached, the Łódź ghetto was surrounded by a wire fence, and no one in the ghetto was permitted to walk close to the wire border. Even the Jewish police had to keep a distance of 50 m during nighttime perimeter duty. The barbed wire

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of the Łódź ghetto left activities on both sides of the wall visible to the guards, in contrast to the brick wall of the Warsaw ghetto, which helped conceal illicit activity. Additionally, the borders of the Łódź ghetto were strongly enforced early in the ghetto period, and the guards surrounding the ghetto were authorized to kill those crossing the border fence.[6] Even so, directives against smuggling were repeated many times, indicating that the practice continued for some time despite the guards and the transparent ghetto border.[7] Eventually, the prosecution of smuggling in the Łódź ghetto came into the hands of the Judenrat.

On January 22, 1941, a case of smuggling was referred by the German authorities to the internal Jewish court system – the first time such a referral was made. That August, a meeting was held between the Jewish ghetto administration and the German ghetto administration in which it was decided that the Jewish ghetto judiciary would be empowered to prosecute crimes that had hitherto been beyond its power, including smuggling.[8] The Jewish ghetto administration initially refused to implement the death penalty, which was the normal penalty for smuggling, but ultimately the judiciary did send smugglers to their death. The advent of the death penalty against smugglers effectively slowed smuggling. And yet, the practice was not entirely quashed. Smugglers continued to be caught throughout the ghetto period, and the border guards killed hundreds of people, testifying to the continued attempts of smugglers into the Łódź ghetto despite the risks.[9]

Smuggling in the ghettos took various forms, ranging from workers who entered and exited the ghetto for their jobs lining their pockets with a bit of extra food for their families, to professional smugglers bringing large carts of food through ghetto entrances, to children squeezing through holes in the ghetto walls. A variety of techniques facilitated the movement of food into the ghetto, including utilizing the sealed trams that ran through but did not stop in the ghettos. Smugglers would jump off the tram or throw packages from it. Also, Jews were not the only smugglers; non-Jews smuggled items into the ghetto through a variety of means.

In the early period, smuggling was common among adults who worked outside the ghetto and could enter and exit the ghetto walls licitly using ghetto passes. Multiple survivors reported that smuggling was facilitated at this time by the relative ease of movement. In this early period, they were able to supplement the food situation, staving off hunger for themselves and their families. Later, when the ghetto was sealed, the food situation became fraught. Even when movement was possible due to work permits, the workers were not supposed to bring food back into the ghetto. As a result, they were subject to food confiscation by the

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ghetto guards. Aron Grynwald had a permit to leave the Kraków ghetto for work. When he came back into the ghetto, he smuggled in food for his family.[10] Emanuel Ringelblum, writing on December 10, 1940, in the Warsaw ghetto, noted, "Jewish workers coming back to the ghetto from their work on the other side with more than two loaves of bread had the extra loaves taken from them."[11] Leon Leyson's father, and later his brother, who both worked in Oskar Schindler's Emalia (enamel) factory, would try to bring home a potato or piece of bread in their pockets. Leon's father would be surrounded by his children as he emptied his pockets at the end of the day, all of them waiting to see whether he had brought home something to eat.[12]

Some privileged Jews could enter and exit the ghetto. Max Falk's father worked for the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) during the war. As a result, he could enter and exit the ghetto.[13] Similarly, Mary Berg's mother, an American, was allowed to enter and exit the Warsaw ghetto by showing her passport at the entrance. As a result, she could post letters overseas and get special monthly food packages from the relief office of the American colony in Warsaw.[14] Marsha Jakubowicz-Loewi noted that her father and brother were able to engage in smuggling in the Łódź ghetto because her father was one of the few Jews who was allowed to remain outside the ghetto. Her brother was caught smuggling but swallowed the evidence before it fell into German hands and survived the beating meted out by the Kripo (Kriminalpolizei). After this beating, he ceased smuggling until his family began to starve again, and he then returned to smuggling despite the fear of being caught.[15]

In the Kraków and Warsaw ghettos, a number of non-Jews were able to enter and exit the ghetto and brought food in with them. Workers at the ghetto pharmacy smuggled in food, as did Dr. Ludwig Zurowski, the city health commissioner for Kraków, who brought in fats in particular.[16] It is not possible to say how many Poles participated in such efforts, as they generally appeared in contemporary accounts only when they got caught, such as Jakub Gelkopf of Pabianice, a town bordering Łódź, or Stanislaw Wisniewski.[17] One fourteen-year-old non-Jewish smuggler, Zawadzki, was apprehended and put in the ghetto hospital, from which he escaped. When he was again caught, he told the Germans that he had escaped with the aid of a Jew and a bribe to an officer of the Jewish police. The officer on duty at the hospital was then questioned and tortured for two days.[18]

Passing through the gates of the ghetto, however, came with some risk. In the Warsaw ghetto, the gates proved dangerous, as German guards entertained themselves at the expense of those passing through by forcing them to climb walls and do difficult exercises holding bricks, and by hitting them as they tried to run past.[19]

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It was not only those with passes who used the gates for smuggling. Sometimes people who did not have passes took advantage of the large numbers of pass-holding ghetto dwellers at the gates to illegally pass between the ghetto and non-Jewish portion of the city. Some tried to pass unnoticed, but many resorted to bribing the guard on duty, either to gain passage without a pass or to avoid the confiscation of whatever was being illicitly taken through the gate. Jewish ghetto police in the Łódź ghetto were bribed by ghetto smugglers to look the other way.[20] Similarly, in Kraków, ghetto police could be bribed to allow passage. William Schiff went on smuggling runs two to three times a week from the Kraków ghetto. He passed through the gate by handing the police officer money and telling the officer what time he would return. Sometimes, even when the guard he knew was not there, he would risk it.[21]

Although suppressing smuggling was among the tasks of the ghetto police, some ghetto chroniclers reported that the Jewish and non-Jewish police forces were heavily involved in smuggling and shared in its profits.[22] Writing on December 20, 1940, Ringelblum noted that the cost for a smuggler to pass through the Leszno courtyard was 5 zloty. Moreover, even those passing through illicit openings such as a hole in the ghetto wall were subject to paying a bribe. Ringelblum claimed that Jewish police took 20 groschen per loaf of bread from smuggler boys.[23] Sometimes the Jewish police organized or facilitated large-scale smuggling operations.

It was not just the Polish guards at the gates or the Jewish police patrolling inside the ghetto who were accomplices in Jewish smuggling. Sometimes smuggling was arranged and negotiated between ghetto inmates and ethnic German guards – some of whom had known each other before the war.[24] Sometimes it was negotiated with natives of the Reich. Chaim Kaplan in his Warsaw ghetto diary complained, "A certain percentage of the ghetto population has become rich by trading on their brothers' privations … the Jewish leeches, who thrive on smuggling and black marketeering. I refer especially to the big-time smugglers who promote schemes in partnership with the Nazis and divide the spoils between them."[25]

In the Kraków ghetto, a German guard by the name of Bousko brought food into the ghetto in exchange for payment and in some cases escorted Jews out of the ghetto.[26] Similarly, Jacob M., a member of the fire brigade in the Łódź ghetto, recalled that "Germans who would at times come into the ghetto with 1 pound of bread or margarine would leave with a trunkful of new things."[27] Berg noted in her Warsaw ghetto diary, "Sometimes a German sentry is bribed and a whole wagon full of all kinds of merchandise manages to get through the gates."[28]

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The gates of the ghettos were not the only way to pass between the ghetto and the outside world. Trams ran through all three ghettos, and while it was forbidden for the tram to stop or people to throw things from the tram, this was nevertheless a common means of smuggling in the ghettos. Survivor Henry Greenblatt, then a child, smuggled food into the Warsaw ghetto by first smuggling himself out, buying food packages, and then throwing them from the tram that ran through the ghetto. His parents waited inside the ghetto, along the tram tracks and, as he put it: "I'd push a package through that opening. And my father would catch it on the other side."[29] Christians also engaged in smuggling by streetcar. Ringelblum wrote: "Christians spring off the streetcar carrying bundles, particularly at Muranow Place. There, the conductor and policeman on guard are paid 100 zlotys per trip. The conductor slows down, and they jump off with whole bags of groats or flour. A vast amount of smuggling goes through the Jewish graveyard, Christians entering the Ghetto and Jews leaving it."[30]

Additionally, smugglers might throw a bag over a fence or, in the case of the Łódź ghetto, stow a package that could then be retrieved much later. One chronicler in the Warsaw ghetto noted, "Opposite Przejazd Street 9, smugglers have hacked a few bricks out of the wall, creating something like stairs, which help them climb the wall and smuggle goods into the ghetto. I have often seen young Polish women, perhaps from the Warsaw suburbs, and Polish smugglers handing milk cans and other goods over the wall in that spot." This same location, however, was not without its dangers. The same writer noted that he had observed a man climb up the wall and look over only to be shot dead.[31] Other popular locations for smuggling in Warsaw were buildings entered onto both the ghetto and the Aryan side. The municipal court building, for example, had entrances for Jews and non-Jews from their respective sides of the ghetto wall. One of the most ingenious smuggling setups involved two barrels that were set into the wall of an apartment that sat between the Warsaw ghetto and Christian side of the city. One barrel was filled with grains, and the other with milk. Someone on the Christian side would fill the barrels and then give a signal, and their accomplice on the Jewish side would then open the spigot on the barrel to fill containers of milk or grain to be sold on the market.[32]

Some smugglers were very brazen. William Schiff described smuggling live chickens into the Kraków ghetto. He smuggled them live so that they could be killed in a kosher manner. He wore baggy clothes with a long overcoat to conceal the items he was smuggling. His mother created a white cloth sack with holes in it that fit one chicken. He would purchase four chickens and attach two chickens to each side of his belt. He had

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other pockets inside his coat to carry fruit and other items.[33] Schiff was not the only smuggler bringing in live chickens. Abraham Blim, a child smuggler, procured live chickens for the Kraków ghetto elite, including for Symche Spira, the head of the Jewish police.[34]

Many smugglers in the ghettos were children. They were not subject to wearing a Jewish star or armband and were small enough to slip in and out of small spaces. Kaplan in his Warsaw ghetto diary commented,

> there are also Jewish boys under the age of ten, who not being marked by the "badge of shame," sometimes manage to sneak across the border.... These children are clever, and they are sent by their parents to buy food cheaply. Usually they are successful in their mission and bring home bargains. This week I got a bargain of this sort myself: a quarter-kilo of butter for six zloty, which our relative Emek brought in from the other side of the wall. God bless him![35]

Sometimes children just snuck under a wire fence or wall. Bernard Offen, a child in the Kraków ghetto, recalled a prewar non-Jewish family friend passing bread to him through the wire.[36] He also described sneaking out of the ghetto, noting,

> There were secret places where you could get over the ghetto wall, especially during the early days of the ghetto. When the ghetto was cut in half, my father and mother and sister and sometimes my brothers, used to come, look out for the police, and lift up the barbed wire. Then they said, "OK now! Go!" I slipped under and headed very fast into the Podgórze hills nearby. There I traded things for food. I did that many times.[37]

Sometimes children crossed through the gate. Erna Fridman crossed out of the Kraków ghetto and went to the stores her family had frequented before the war.[38] Some child smugglers in the Warsaw ghetto were observed by a chronicler, who wrote:

> I was passing the gate on Nalewki Street at 7 p.m. On the corner of Sto-Jerska and Nalewki streets I saw a group of 6–7 children, about 10 years old, waiting on the Aryan side with stuffed pockets, trousers, and bags. They were scared but they must have sensed that the gendarme guarding the gate was not a bad man.... The children were indeed right, because after a while the gendarme called a Jewish policeman and told him to escort the children into the ghetto. Later I heard one of them talking to her mother. The mother and the child entered a gate and the girl removed a bag of potatoes from under her blouse. Radiant, she informed her beaming mother that she had waited for the change of guard and that now with that gendarme, she would manage to do three more "rounds."[39]

Josef Meszorer, a baptized child in the Warsaw ghetto, continued going to school outside the ghetto. He was met by someone who gave him food to smuggle back into the ghetto.[40] The ability to have someone outside the ghetto who assisted in smuggling operations was extremely

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helpful. Esther Netzer smuggled food from the village she and her father were residing in to her mother and siblings inside the Kraków ghetto.[41] Murray Pantirer's family members outside the Kraków ghetto sustained themselves in part by smuggling food into the ghetto to their uncle, who sold it. They smuggled in "flour, bread, eggs sometimes—whatever they could lay their hands on. Even sometimes a piece of meat."[42] The smuggling was carried out by Pantirer's blond-haired and blue-eyed siblings.

Getting caught, even for a child, might come with harsh penalties. A child smuggler in the Warsaw ghetto recalled a time when he was caught and punished:

> [A] policeman waited for me on the outside.... And he started to beat me up with a rubber hose. And I started to run back into the ghetto. And he kept on running after me, hitting me in the head. And by the time I got out back into the ghetto, I passed out. And I don't know how long I was laying there, but I remember it was already pretty dark when I came to myself. But there was no surprise a kid laying in the street. There were a lot of kids laying in the street. So I kind of came back to myself. And I got up. And I made my way home. It was pretty late in the evening already by the time I got there.[43]

Henryk Łagodzki, a Christian smuggler into the Warsaw ghetto, recalled the fate of some very young Jewish smugglers trying to get from the Aryan side back into the ghetto:

> Sometimes they were so loaded that they couldn't get through. And very frequently the Germans were already waiting on the other side for them. They would grab them and pull very hard through. They were smashing them. If a boy had potatoes on him then they would literally break his ribs, because they would pull him by his hands and they would smash him. Later they would grab him by his feet and shake him out.[44]

Łagodzki was able to enter and exit the ghetto because his school was initially located inside its border. He brought food for his Jewish friends and visited with them. He was shocked by their rapid economic decline.[45]

Child smugglers used various techniques to carry their bounty. In the Kraków ghetto, Offen smuggled food by filling his pants with it. He snuck under the wire or bribed a guard to get through the gate.[46] Smuggling food in clothing was a common technique – especially among younger smugglers. Greenblatt's mother sewed pockets into his jacket that allowed him to hide bread there, which was another common technique. Greenblatt noted that carrying two loaves of bread was heavy, but, "bringing in two breads, that was quite a[n] arrangement because I could sell one, and the other one I was able to eat with my family."[47] David Efrati did similarly, saying, "I got some clothes that I could hide food in and it just looked like I was fat."[48]

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A lot of smuggling involved small food items just to supplement the family's larder, but it was not limited to that. Large-scale smuggling operations also took place in the ghetto. Berg contended that Mr. Kohn and Mr. Heller acted as intermediaries for things that entered and exited the Warsaw ghetto, taking a commission on such items: "The starving people of the ghetto must all pay higher prices for bread and potatoes in order to fill Mr. Kohn and Mr. Heller's pockets."[49] Some large-scale smugglers operated whole enterprises in the ghetto. Berg noted that loads of hand-milled grain were smuggled in. The flour was sold, as was the chaff, to make a special type of black cake.[50] On December 10, 1940, Ringelblum noted, "Yesterday, a truck full of fish was driven into the ghetto, at the cost of thousands of zloty in bribes."[51] Similarly, the movement of whole cows into the ghetto for kosher slaughter was an enormous enterprise.

Although smuggling was necessary to provide enough food for the ghetto to preserve the life of its inhabitants, particularly in Kraków and Warsaw, smuggling was a criminal endeavor. Punishment varied, depending on when and where the smuggling took place, and who caught the smuggler. Punishment could range from confiscation of the contraband, to beatings, to the death penalty, in all three ghettos. In addition to the threat of punishment, smugglers often had to contend with blackmailers. Mrs. C, a former corset maker who turned to smuggling after she was interned in the Warsaw ghetto, was threatened by informers, whom she had to pay off or evade to survive. After the death penalty was introduced in Warsaw for smuggling, she stopped her operations, stating, "I used to take risks to survive. But it would be nonsense to take risks to die." Unfortunately, a friend of hers, a mother of several children, continued to engage in smuggling and was caught by an informer when she did not have sufficient funds to bribe him. He turned her in, and she was sentenced to death.[52]

After June 1942, German guards began guarding the Kraków ghetto, in place of the more lenient Polish police. As a result, prices of food inside the ghetto rose significantly. Further affecting the ability of smugglers to supply the ghetto with food, on July 28, 1942, Rudolf Pavlu, Stadthauptmann of Kraków, decreed that Jews could not buy food in the city. Nor could non-Jews purchase food in the city for a Jew. The new rule: "Only members of Jewish organizations with special permission from the city commissar were allowed to shop in the city." The new laws punished not only store owners but also ordinary people who made purchases on behalf of Jews.[53] The Kripo, the German police section that was initially in charge of combating smuggling, largely eradicated smuggling from the ghetto. It even began operating inside the ghetto, relying on paid

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informants and information obtained in torture sessions.[54] Smuggling as a whole was heavily curtailed after the deportations in October 1942, although it did continue on a lesser scale until the end of the ghetto. Aneta Weinreich noted that her mother smuggled food into the Kraków ghetto but that when she was no longer allowed to work outside the ghetto, the family began to experience hunger.[55]

Warsaw initially had less severe policing of smuggling. In fact, the Germans acknowledged to Adam Czerniaków that smuggling took place in the Warsaw ghetto and that they were looking the other way.[56] However, eventually, smuggling was more stringently policed. The death penalty for leaving the Warsaw ghetto took effect on November 6, 1941.[57] Shortly afterward, a number of people caught outside the ghetto walls were executed. The Jewish police were ordered to carry out the executions but refused, leaving it to Polish policeman to carry out the sentence.[58] Kaplan recorded, "All over the ghetto groups of Jews stand in front of wall posters signed by the ghetto commissar, Auerswald, announcing that eight Jews caught leaving the ghetto without permission had been sentenced to death. The sentence was carried out on November 17, 1941. The eight martyrs were six young women and two men."[59] Ringelblum related that many people – Jews and non-Jews alike – died trying to smuggle food. Some of the Jewish smugglers were as young as ages 5 and 6. He added: "Despite that … the smuggling never stopped for a moment. When the street was still slippery with the blood that had been spilled, other smugglers already set out, as soon as the 'candles' had signaled that the way was clear, to carry on with the work."[60] Many others who were not sentenced to death were held in ghetto prisons for smuggling. Ultimately, in all three ghettos, smugglers were among the first to be sent on deportation trains to the death camps.[61]

The Black Market

> "Saccharine, saccharine, saccharine…. *Ayersemmel*, *ayersemmel*. Eggs, eggs." There is a boom for saccharine today. I hear prices: 12 zlotys for 500 pieces. The today's price in stores is 20 zlotys…. The packaging looks fine…. I buy some and at home I discover that it is a cheap, bungled, and poisonous fake.[62]
>
> – Stanisław Różycki, Warsaw Ghetto

The black market operated in all three ghettos. It posed risks as it sold unregulated products, but it was also the main means by which those in the ghetto supplemented their allotted rations. The black market served all social classes from the very poor, who sold high-value rations for bulkier foods, to the privileged, who bought luxury food items and indulged

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in better foods. What was available within the ghetto depended heavily on the relative porousness of the border between the ghetto and the Aryan side of the city. In Kraków and Warsaw, where there was tremendous movement across this border, much of the food on the black market was smuggled in.[63] Sometimes the smugglers themselves conducted the black-market selling, while at other times, middlemen did so.[64] In the Łódź ghetto, where far less smuggling took place, the food on the black market was predominately from official rations, items brought into the ghetto upon moving into it, or packages sent to individuals in the ghetto through the mail. In Łódź, the market was predominantly made up of the poorer segments of the population, selling high-priced items such as fat, meat, and bread in order to buy large quantities of vegetables and other low-priced items. Those from the middle class sold off their vegetables to buy items such as bread, sugar, and margarine. The community's elite, the upper 10,000 Jews – high-ranking members of the administration, including doctors – only engaged in the market to buy commodities.[65] The poor in the Warsaw and Kraków ghettos also sold rations issued to them. During the period when soup was subsidized in price in the Warsaw ghetto, some people who were eligible to purchase soup would buy a soup ticket and sell it on the black market. Auerbach wrote about one such man, an Adolf Bund, who when he became swollen with edema shunned soup and traded his soup ticket for bread or other solid foods.[66] Jacob M., a fire brigade member in the Łódź ghetto, recalled that people sometimes sold their bread so that they could get extra soup tickets and perhaps feel more full.[67] Mrs. K is a classic example of ghetto inmates who sold high-priced items to stretch their food allotment: A street vegetable seller in the Warsaw ghetto, she had owned a large fruit stand prior to the war. However, between the beginning of the war and the spring of 1942, she was heavily impoverished, to the point where she sold vegetables all day to earn between 5 and 6 zloty. With this meager income, she could not afford bread for her whole family, so she sold her and her children's rations to obtain some groats to add to potato peel soup.[68]

In Warsaw and Kraków, the zloty was the internal ghetto currency as well as the currency outside the ghetto. In Łódź, the ghetto mark was the ghetto currency, and it was not in use outside the ghetto. It is therefore easier to compare prices between Warsaw and Kraków than to compare either to Łódź. However, one thing was universal in the ghettos: Many people traded valuables for food on the black market. Boots, shoes, overcoats, and other personal items were often traded for bread and other food necessities. Łódź ghetto survivor Alfred Dube described having traded "leather boots for a loaf of bread … the next day, it was a suit, the following day, a shirt."[69]

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Additionally, furniture was traded for use by other families, as well as for firewood. Linens, lamp wicks, and other goods were freely traded for food. Many ghetto families traded the last of their possessions for food, medicine, or firewood but were still unable to avoid starvation. Kraków ghetto survivor Leyson's family ran through the family's savings, the secret stash of gold coins they had smuggled into the ghetto and began to sell off the father's suits.[70] Eventually, they ran out of valuables. Similarly, Kraków ghetto survivor Tola W. noted that by 1942, many other families had run through their valuables; if they did not have a gold ring or diamonds to sell, they experienced hunger.[71] Kraków ghetto diarist Halina Nelken complained: "To buy food, my parents have already sold most of the jewelry they were keeping at my nanny's. They hold on to their wedding rings, as I do to my forget-me-not earrings and the gold ring with my initials that Papa gave me for my birthday in 1938. If I only knew how, I would sell the ring to buy food for Mama, who is so weak."[72] This trading of goods for food was so prevalent that it found its way into ghetto song, such as in this lyric: "I've already sold the cabinet and my mother-in-law's bed. I'll get bread and butter and horsemeat meatballs."[73]

Horsemeat meatballs were among many items that were made in the ghetto and sold as ready-to-eat food. Cooking fuel was an additional cost consideration in the ghetto, making already-prepared foods desirable. Pankiewicz, a non-Jewish Pole who ran a pharmacy within the confines of the Kraków ghetto, recorded his impressions in his postwar memoirs. He recalled that the ghetto had a lively "street trade" where "sandwiches and cookies sold briskly."[74] Sometimes a black-market enterprise was just the fuel or a place to cook food. Anatol Chari worked in the gas division in the Łódź ghetto and arranged for his girlfriend's family to have a gas line without a meter. Using this resource, they ran an illegal kitchen out of their home with ten or twelve gas burners that people paid to use.[75]

Food Prices

Łódź

The most important item for sale in the ghetto was bread. Oskar Singer called bread the "gold value" of the ghetto.[76] The cost of a loaf of bread fluctuated throughout the existence of the ghetto: The official price set when the ghetto was sealed was 0.60 Reichsmark for a 2 kg loaf.[77] In January 1941, it might cost as much as two almost-new tablecloths and a sheet, or 6.5–11 ghetto marks.[78] The price of bread in the ghetto rose over the course of January that month. The price increase was triggered

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Table 8.1 *Black-market food prices in the Łódź ghetto in January 1941*[79]

Food item	Amount	Price in ghetto marks
Bread	1 kg	6.5
Potatoes	1 kg	2.5
Kasha	1 kg	12

Table 8.2 *Black-market food prices in January 1942*[80]

Food item	Amount	Price in ghetto marks
Bread	2 kg loaf	19–21
Potatoes	1 kg	3.5–4
Kasha	1 kg	30
Rye flour	1 kg	16
Wheat flour	1 kg	20
Oil	1 liter	35
Margarine	1 kg	50
Butter	1 kg	120
Beets	1 kg	2
Turnips	1 kg	1.80
Horse meat	1 kg	Above 10
Saccharine	6 tablets	0.10
Marmalade	1 kg	8–10
Sugar	1 kg	10

by a reduction in supplemental bread rations for workers but an overall increase in bread rations for all individuals in the ghetto.

At the end of January 1941, new bakeries went into operation in the ghetto, and by March, bread had fallen in price to 5 ghetto marks. By June, after the invasion of the Soviet Union, prices were recorded at 12 ghetto marks. This price would remain through the end of 1941 despite two drops in bread rationing in September and November.[81] That winter, the price of bread in the ghetto rose tremendously. This also coincided with ration reductions and the deportations out of the ghetto to Chelmno. In January 1942, the price of bread started at 20–22 ghetto marks and rose all the way up to 35 ghetto marks.[82] The rise in cost was due to a combination of a devaluation of the ghetto currency, the reduction in overall rations, and deportations – when deportations occurred, the price of bread rose.[83]

By May, bread prices skyrocketed to 350–450 ghetto marks. After the deportations subsided, the prices fell again. In June, during the lull

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in deportations before they resumed in September 1942, the price of bread went back down to 100 ghetto marks.[84] Prices also rose as people arrived to the ghetto, the inflation triggered by their bringing new items to trade and reducing the food rations available. Food restrictions also affected food prices. In February 1944, after Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski announced in a speech that food distribution points would be closed during the working hours of 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., food prices on the black market rose, with the price of a kilogram of bread rising to 1,100 ghetto marks.[85]

Kraków

The prices of food on the Kraków ghetto black market are more difficult to track due to the small number of diaries. The prices, though, did rise as the war went on. Irena Gluck, writing in her diary in May 1941, mentioned receiving a letter from a friend in the Kraków ghetto who informed her of the high prices of food there.[86] Writing on May 22, 1941, in her ghetto diary, Renia Knoll noted the price of several staples: One egg was 60 grosz; 1 L of milk was 2 zloty and 50 grosz; 1 kg of meat was 12 zloty; 1 kg of sugar was 24 zloty; 1 dag of tea was 3 zloty and 50 grosz; and 1 kg of butter was 35 zloty. In Kraków, 1 kg of oranges was 18 zloty.[87] By comparison, also in May 1941, a liter of milk cost between 4 and 4.5 zloty in the Warsaw ghetto, and butter was 40 zloty per kilogram.[88]

Two months later, on July 7, 1941, Kroll recorded the following prices: One pair of shoes was 400 zloty; one pair of boots was 1,000 zloty; 1 kg of sugar was 32 zloty; 1 kg of flour was 30 zloty; one pair of socks was 10 zloty; 1 kg of meat was 26 zloty; one hen was 80 zloty; one cigarette was 55 grosz; and 1 L of milk was 3 zloty and 20 grosz.[89] By comparison, also in July, Berg recorded that sugar in the Warsaw ghetto was 30 zloty per pound.[90] Knoll reported from Kraków on July 15, 1941, that 1 kg of potatoes cost only 5 zloty and shoes cost 450 zloty.[91]

The price of food on the black market was affected by the prices and availability of food outside of the ghetto walls in the city of Kraków. Bread was rationed in the city. On December 21, 1941, Adam Kaminiski noted in his diary that Poles in the city were only receiving 20 dag of bread per day. On May 1, 1942, the daily bread ration in the city was reduced to 15 dag.[92] On February 25, 1942, Kaminski listed foods available in the city of Kraków with prices: wheat flour was 12–14 zloty; a kilogram of beans was 10–12 zloty; barley was 9–10 zloty per kilogram; a homemade loaf of bread weighing 1.4 kg was 7–10 zloty; 1 kg of sausage was 30–35 zloty; 1 kg of ham was 40 zloty; and 1 L of vodka was 90–100

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zloty. By November of that year, the price of flour had risen to 16–18 zloty per kilogram on the black market in the city of Kraków.[93] On May 12, 1942, Kaminiski noted that a whole pack of cigarettes was not even available, and a single cigarette costs 30–45 grosz. He also discussed the price of butter in his diary. He noted that by mid-May 1942, it was difficult to find a stick of butter on the black market; later that month, the cost of butter was 90 zloty for a kilogram.[94] Inside the ghetto, it cost more than double that.[95] A few months later, in November 1942, butter outside of the ghetto had risen to 120–40 zloty per kilogram. By the end of May, bacon cost was about 1 zloty per decagram.[96] To put these prices in perspective, a Jew working in a factory in the ghetto doing piecework would make about 15 zloty per day.[97] Moreover, these were the prices on the black market outside the ghetto. Jews in the ghetto could easily pay double the price.

The higher prices inside the ghetto compensated the smuggler both for the risk taken and for the food lost in the smuggling process. It could take a long time for a smuggler to recoup their losses after seizure, jettisoning in an escape attempt, or degradation due to the smuggling process. For example, Sela Selinger went into the city of Kraków to obtain butter and sausage, but she could not successfully smuggle the products into the ghetto. Pressed up against her body, the butter melted and the sausage went bad.[98]

Warsaw

Various ghetto diarists tracked the price of food on the black market in Warsaw. Writing at the end of November 1940, Ringelblum noted that "prices keep going up daily…. Bread is not to be gotten, costs 4 zlotys per kilo; the same high prices for flour and other items."[99] He continued to track prices on the black market during his time in the ghetto. Kaplan, writing at the end of November 1940, noted that 100 kg of potatoes cost 100 zloty. Ringelblum noted that when the ghetto was closed off, food prices rose. For example, in March 1941, he wrote, "The last few days the price of produce has risen steeply…. Aryans have been denied access to the Ghetto and the price of bread and other items has gone up."[100] During April and May 1941, food prices steadily increased, with potatoes going from 1.5 zloty for a kilogram to 3 zloty for a kilogram, while bread jumped from 7.5 zloty to 12 zloty, and milk rose to 4–4.5 zloty for a watery liter. In comparison, milk available in the Kraków ghetto, undiluted, cost 2.5 zloty per liter.[101] At the end of May, Czerniaków noted that white bread rose from 24 zloty in the morning to 31 zloty in the evening. Around this same time, he noted in his diary that the Germans

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allocated only 13 grosz per day, per Jewish person, for food in the Warsaw ghetto.[102] By November of that year, Kaplan lamented that

> the price of all foodstuffs is now thirty to forty times higher. Food is available but the only ones who can buy it are the lucky few who earn a good living by today's inflated standards. Because of the exorbitant prices on even essential foods, such as bread and potatoes, most families bring food home from the public soup kitchens … a bowl of watery soup. For this one pays eighty pennies [groszy].[103]

Just a few months earlier, in March 1941, soup kitchen meals were 40 groszy.[104]

Bread prices gradually increased during the ghetto period. In November 1940, bread was 4 zloty per kilogram. The price rose quite a bit in February 1941, to 10 zloty per kilogram, then shot up during the food shortages of May 1941, to 12–16 zloty per kilogram. It lowered again in June after some initiatives were made to address the widespread hunger in the ghetto.[105] By May 1942, however, Kaplan was reporting bread prices as having risen to 15 zloty per kilogram.[106] Beginning that July, with the great deportations from the ghetto, the price of bread in the Warsaw ghetto skyrocketed to 150 zloty for a kilogram of bread.[107]

Dangers of the Black Market

In addition to unprocessed food items, foods that had been transformed through labor were also abundant on the black market. In some places, private restaurants, some even in people's homes, served food made from smuggled items or served items directly from the black market. Sometimes people purchased processed foods on the black market, such as hot coffee, soup, or candies. A meat allowance might be made more valuable by processing it into horsemeat meatballs, or a saccharine allotment might be turned into candies. Warsaw ghetto diarist Berg observed a plethora of food vendors selling various processed food items, ranging from saccharine candies to horse-bone gelatin to fish cakes.[108] She noted, "The street vendors stand in the gateways, offering candy and tobacco for sale. They carry small boxes slung over their shoulders. These boxes contain a few packages of cigarettes, and a handful of candy made without a grain of sugar and sweetened with saccharine."[109] In the Łódź ghetto, the sale of sweets was dominated by child sellers, who disappeared after the mass deportation of children in September 1942.

Purchasing food on the black market could be a dangerous thing. As a result of it being sold illegally, there were no controls on what was being sold. Singer reported about people who were being deported and, while trying to sell their belongings for food, were being taken advantage of.

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In one case, a pair of shoes was traded for 150 g of margarine. Then, "unfortunately, he discovers that what he got is a piece of rutabaga (turnip-rooted cabbage—which by the way has gone bad) covered with margarine. So he gave his shoes for 50g. of margarine and 100g. of rutabaga." Singer cynically remarked, "the only thing that the cheater was precise with was weight." Singer also told of a man who "exchanged his suit for a ½ kilogram of flour. Only at home he discovers that flour is mixed with baking soda." In yet another event retold by Singer, a man bought a loaf of bread for 150 marks, only to discover that it was hollow and stuffed with paper.[110]

Even official shopkeepers engaged in unscrupulous practices. It was not uncommon during famine periods for legitimate shops to also be the sites of illicit food sales. Licit food shops often sold items "under the counter" at black-market prices rather than exchanging them for ration coupons. To obtain sufficient food for sale or to cover the shortfall when selling under the counter, food store managers sometimes short-weighted their customers' rations. Josef Zelkowicz described meat shopkeepers in the Łódź ghetto who sold meat rations for prices higher than they were supposed to charge with a ration coupon. Additionally, in order to cover for their private sale of meat, they bought up meat coupons from those who could not afford the ration. By spring 1942, fewer Jews were being supported by the ghetto welfare system, a large number having been deported. The result was that a larger percentage of the population wanted to buy the rations they were entitled to with their meat coupons.[111] Rather than sell these rations to those holding meat ration coupons, the meat shopkeeper beat away the customers so he could continue selling the meat on the black market.[112] Similarly, it was widely held in all the ghettos that those engaged in distributing food were often skimming to sell products on the black market. This practice was not unique to the ghetto. During World War I, shopkeepers in imperial Russia were accused of denying having food in stock and then selling it to the well-to-do for exorbitant prices.[113]

The unregulated black market was dangerous not only for consumers but also for sellers. At various points, the authorities cracked down on black-market sales in the ghettos, and food was often confiscated as part of those actions. Berg's father helped facilitate the illicit use of the bakery ovens during the night in his building in the Warsaw ghetto. The authorities sometimes conducted raids, finding "unauthorized bread" that was then seized and distributed to children's homes.[114] In the Łódź ghetto, there were calls to ban the black-market sale of food in December 1940, May 1941, September 1942, and at other points.[115] In Warsaw, the German authorities ordered the liquidation of the black market in January

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1942.[116] At various points, black marketeers were arrested, and many of those imprisoned ended up on deportation trains. Despite these measures, the black market persisted throughout the existence of the ghettos.

Food Theft

Thieves are not despised who steal only to satisfy their appetite when they are hungry.

– Proverbs 6:30

In addition to smuggling and black-market purchases, theft was another important method by which individuals in the ghetto obtained additional resources to purchase food or obtained food directly. Theft was a daily occurrence in the ghetto, and it was an essential part of survival for many ghetto dwellers, as the food supply allotted by the Germans did not allow survival for all ghetto inhabitants. Theft could take many forms, from petty food stealing from individuals to large-scale embezzlement from the community. Individuals from the lowest of workers to the administration elites engaged in theft in the ghetto. Given the lack of food, and the fact that survival on the assigned rations alone was not possible, theft was a basic survival strategy in the ghettos – just as it often is during times of famine.[117] As a popular song in the Łódź ghetto related, "No one feels shame, Everyone only wants to grab; just so his stomach will be full."[118] Two types of theft dominated in the ghetto, whether the target was communal resources or private individuals: (1) opportunity thefts, which were often small scale and/or unplanned, and (2) large-scale thefts that were highly planned or involved multiple actors.

One common type of opportunity theft was stealing from the carts used to transport food. Czerniaków in his diary lamented, "The hunger is so great that the poor people are snatching bread from the equally poor bread vendors. They tear the bread in two and bite into it immediately afterward—in that condition, bread can't be sold."[119] Thefts from food carts were so rampant in the Łódź ghetto that on September 20, 1940, an announcement went out declaring that children must stop stealing food from transports.[120] In Łódź, a special guard had to be created that protected food transports in the ghetto from theft, and in Warsaw, the Order Service similarly had to guard bread.[121] These bread guards, however, also engaged in their own food theft.[122] Thefts from food carts could sometimes grow from a single opportunity grab into a large-scale theft born of opportunity, such as when a group of people rushed the food transport, and in some cases, individuals were even killed during such food rushes.[123] More often, however, such thefts were small scale and done out of desperation to survive. Alice H. recounted someone grabbing her bread rations in the Warsaw ghetto as well as little children running

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up to people, stealing their bread, and eating it as they ran away, before they could be caught.[124] Berg, in the Warsaw ghetto, similarly noted:

> It is not easy to walk in the street with a parcel in one's hand. When a hungry person sees someone with a parcel that looks like food, he follows him and, at an opportune moment, snatches it away, opens it quickly, and proceeds to satisfy his hunger. If the parcel does not contain food, he throws it away. No, these are not thieves; they are just people crazed by hunger. The Jewish police cannot cope with them. And, indeed, who would have the heart to prosecute such unfortunates?[125]

An incident in the Łódź ghetto recorded by the *Chronicle* as typical was of a woman leaving a distribution point with two long rolls of white bread that were torn away from her. The assailant immediately consumed the rolls. In the efforts to find compensation for the woman, it was determined that the thief had already sold his food vouchers well in advance.[126] One Warsaw survivor similarly noted:

> If they would see that you carry something, they would snatch it. I don't think they would be interested in anything except food. I think if it was not food, they probably would throw it or something. But if it was food, they would immediately eat it up on the spot before—even if they were beaten up. Even if people would try to snatch it back from them, they would stuff it immediately into their mouth like bread or whatever it was.[127]

Sometimes the assailant grabbing the food was known to the victim. A writer in the Warsaw ghetto told the story of a twelve-year-old girl named Frania S. who purchased a roll and took a bite out of it, only to have it torn from her: "a starving adolescent scruff and beggar, the ghost of a lad, greedily and brutally snatches the roll that Frania has barely bitten into. He immediately devours it, oblivious to the crowd gathering around him and hitting him with fists and walking canes." Frania recognized the boy as a former neighbor, fourteen-year-old Josek Kapusta.[128] The girl was distraught to see someone she had formerly admired fall so low.

The starved ghetto inhabitants were capable of terrible thefts in their moments of desperation. Neighbors stole from one another. People would find that food was stolen during the day while they were at work or from their garden plots during the night. Estusia Joskowicz recorded that she and her sister began to notice that bits of food were missing from the bundles they created out of their daily food rations. One day they took matters into their own hands, staying home from work and hiding in a corner. The thief was a neighboring orphan, who promptly returned the food when caught and ceased stealing from them, thus solving the moral dilemma of confronting such an unfortunate.[129] Perhaps, the thief moved on to the apartment of Lucille Eichengreen, who recorded in her

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memoir that bits of her family's provisions disappeared from the shelf in their apartment.[130] The Eichengreens suspected a neighbor. Neighbors were often suspected of theft, and lying in wait for a thief often revealed that it was neighbors, usually poor neighbors, who were stealing. Avraham Hasman, writing of his family's garden plot, noted that his neighbors often stole the garden vegetables during the night. He discovered this one night by lying in wait and catching a neighbor in the act.[131]

Heartrending examples of theft existed within homes, as well, when family members stole from one another. Hungry people left alone in the house with the meager food stores had an extraordinarily difficult time dealing with temptation and stole food from the family allotment. This caused fights and arguments as well as intense guilt. An anonymous girl noted in her diary:

> I ate all the honey. I am selfish. What will the family say? I'm not worthy of my mother, who works so hard…. It appears I have no more heart. I have no more pity. I eat anything I have in front of me. Today I quarreled with my father. I verbally abused him and even cursed him for the following reason: After I weighed 20 decagram of farfel, the next day I took just a spoonful of it, and in the evening when my father came he weighed it once more and, of course, there was less. My father complained. He was right. Am I entitled to eat this individual decagram which our Chairman [Rumkowski] gave us to cook? I got excited and cursed my father. What did I do! I am sorry for what happened, but what is done cannot be undone. My father will never forgive me. I will not be able to look him straight in the eye. He stood at the window and started crying like a small child.[132]

A more calculated theft of a family member's food was enacted by an older woman who kept house while her daughter worked. The mother had secretly made a copy of the key her daughter used to lock her food ration away. The old woman was sneaking slivers of bread, justifying it to herself on the grounds that her daughter received a soup portion at work, while she, the mother, starved at home.[133] It was not only blood relations who stole from one another. Zelkowicz reported that many orphaned children living with foster families had their bread rations stolen from them by their foster families. Fictionalized stories written in the ghetto also testify to the realities of low rations. In Isaiah Spiegel's story "Bread," written in the Łódź ghetto in 1943, the father of the family, overcome with hunger, eats his family's bread ration, leading his wife to accuse him, "A father, eh? A fa-ther, is it? *Murderer*!"[134] At the end of the tale, the husband is deported, and the family eats the father's bread ration.[135]

Sometimes theft involved finding a way to obtain additional rations. In all the ghettos there were extensive reports about people hiding the deaths of loved ones so that they could hold on to their ration cards and

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continue to collect their food allocation. After the infamous deportation of September 1942 in the Łódź ghetto, the survivors were warned that the food distribution coupons of the deported had to be turned in. Apparently, this warning went unheeded, as a few days later it was announced that those using the ration cards of the deported would be punished.[136] The practice of using the ration cards of the dead was so widespread that Yankele Hershkowitz, a street musician in the ghetto, sang of the corruption whereby people would use the ration cards of the deceased.[137]

Ration card scams existed in other ghettos as well. As recalled by a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto, "One Jewish family had a young child, and they kept a goat in their flat for milk for the child, and they registered this as Mrs. Goat. And they got food cards for Mrs. Goat."[138] In the Łódź ghetto, the ration card department had a criminal division responsible for prosecuting ration card abuse. A scandal occurred when Jakob Ratner, the head of this division, was prosecuted for using bread and ration cards of deported individuals and then selling the food thus obtained. He was ultimately sentenced to "3 years of prison, a biweekly day of fasting and 15 cane strokes upon incarceration." Stealing the remaining possessions of the dead was a regular occurrence in the ghettos. In the Warsaw ghetto, "an old beggar woman … sheltered exhausted persons under the pretext of taking care of them and then waited until they passed away so she could sell their clothes."[139] Similarly, Oskar Rosenfeld reported that after deaths for which no family was present to guard over the body, neighbors would often break into the apartment and steal what remained, including the remaining food.[140]

Sometimes people stole so that their family members could survive. Some thefts may have started out from desperation to feed oneself and one's family. Meyer Margulis took the job of fecal remover in the Łódź Ghetto. Usually, this job was taken by the most desperate in exchange for the extra food ration. Margulis, however, quickly devised an elaborate routine of petty and large-scale theft that allowed him to go from working the lowliest of professions to being able to state that "my family was never hungry in the ghetto." His "major" "job" in the ghetto became stealing food for himself and his family.[141] In his memoirs, Margulis reported, "neither the trial nor the penalty deterred me from continuing to steal, since this was the only way to stay alive…. I never missed an opportunity to steal." In addition to participating in large-scale thefts of bread and flour from the bakery, Margulis stole food from food spills in the nearby public kitchen (the "accidental" spills were often caused by him). Additionally, he stole vegetables from garden plots, reserving the vegetables for himself and his family and selling off the leaves.[142] This constant, regular theft of food

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either through embezzlement or through more organized means was one of the only ways to obtain enough food to survive in the ghetto.

Dube described his job in an orphanage kitchen, from which he stole a bit of food every day. He expressed no guilt over stealing from an orphanage, noting guilt only when he had to face his starving family empty-handed, having failed to obtain that extra bit of food. Dube described a man who worked in the kitchen with him who was caught selling stolen food and, as a result, lost his job. The punishment was meant to deter others. Dube noted, however, that "nothing, not even death, could stop people dying of hunger from stealing."[143] Zelkowicz decried the situation of a ghetto worker who was forced to steal because he did not have a minimum standard of living. He blamed this on the ghetto officialdom.[144]

Generally, large-scale thefts were well organized and involved either the acquisition of very large amounts of food at one time or the constant "skimming" of food over a period of time. This kind of theft was usually enough to raise the thieves above starvation levels. Very often, organized or large-scale thefts took place within departments that directly handled food. At different points in the ghettos' history, entire food departments, such as the meat provisioning departments, fell under suspicion. Whole food production sections would be involved in food theft. Margulis recorded his involvement in the theft of bread from a bakery in the Łódź ghetto. The theft was performed in cooperation with the bakers themselves. Although heavily guarded by police, who knew the number of bread loaves a sack of flour should yield, the bakers managed to come up with a way of adding more water to flour to make each flour sack yield an extra bread or two. The bakers then hid the extra loaves of bread, which were removed by Margulis when he cleaned the bakery attic. He would then smuggle the loaves to his apartment, where he divided the booty and distributed it to the bakers at their homes.[145] Similarly, bakers in the Kraków ghetto would skim the flour used to make ghetto bread. Then, at night, the bakers baked bread illicitly to be sold on the black market.[146] Berg's father in the Warsaw ghetto was a building manager. He supported the family in part by providing entrance to their building to bakers who were illicitly baking bread at night.

This was a much smaller type of theft than the large-scale operations performed by professional thieves, such as those who might have pulled off the January 1941 theft in which ninety-one loaves of bread were stolen from a food distribution point.[147] If the theft of a single sack of flour necessitated the cooperation of Margulis, the bakers, and two police officers, then large-scale thefts would have involved bribery and a network of accomplices, as for example with a complicated theft of flour in

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which the theft was disguised as a funeral. This theft was immortalized in ghetto song; as the song relates, the thieves were caught when the funeral wagon fell over and the three "corpses" that fell out turned out to be sacks of flour.[148]

On a smaller scale, managers of food stores were notorious for short-weighting their customers' rations. In fact, all dispensers of food items were accused privately or publicly of some sort of food theft. Those dispensing food in ghetto factories were also accused of giving smaller rations than required. Zelkowicz commented that the 50 g sausage ration for children working in the ghetto usually weighed 40 g.[149] There was even a term in the ghetto for a worker's soup container that did not have the full allotment: *mamser'l*. It derives from the prewar term *mamser*, which means "bastard" in Yiddish, though in prewar Łódź, it also meant "a little extra."[150]

Kitchen theft was rampant. An anonymous girl writing in her diary recorded that her father, who was painting at a communal kitchen, reported on the sort of meals that the kitchen staff prepared for itself: "How do they get the ingredients? Of course, from our soups."[151] Arline T. Golkin, a scholar of hunger, notes that "stories of people in famine zones stealing food or plundering food shops are commonplace."[152] A song from the Łódź ghetto records the misdeeds of a soup kitchen worker who indulged in more than the minimum rations, relating, "Madam Wydzielaczka: You're fat like a washtub…. For oil and for oatmeal you bought yourself a pair of silk stockings…. You've stolen some beets."[153] Similarly, Cormac Ó Gráda notes the story from Irish famine folklore of two local women who were responsible for making and distributing soup during the famine. They "gave the first and thinnest part of the gruel to the people, while they kept the thicker part at the bottom of the pot for themselves."[154]

Ghetto officials regularly took advantage of their positions to obtain extra food rations, in ways other than directly stealing from distribution points. In many cases, these officials targeted the most vulnerable. In a speech on December 20, 1941, Rumkowski cited a scandal whereby patients and hospital staff were stealing medicines and meals from hospital patients.[155] One year later, on December 20, 1942, Rosenfeld recorded a sketch of a ghetto doctor who took away the bread and food ration cards of those about to die.[156] He was not the only official to steal ration cards from the dead: A ghetto song tells of an administration secretary who did not pass on death certificates to the authorities, withholding them so that she could live off the food and bread rations of the dead.[157] Accusations were also made that food was stolen from food packages sent to the ghetto through the post office. Kaplan in his

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Warsaw diary even speculated: "Food packages are always minus some of their contents. Sometimes a quarter, sometimes a third, sometimes half is missing. The cynics claim that the clerks eat their breakfasts from the open parcels of their customers, but it is possible that their Aryan superiors are doing the stealing. Aryanism cannot protect one from the urge to steal."[158]

Prosecution of Theft and Smuggling in the Ghettos

According to a song in the Łódź ghetto, "The one who has will eat double portions, And the one who has not—will chew on a bone."[159] Many of the petty thefts and smuggling operations in all three ghettos were carried out by individuals merely seeking a bone to chew on – meaning those who were doing it to stave off starvation. Often those already entitled to a double portion were engaged in larger operations, organizing large-scale thefts or smuggling enterprises. Since bribery was often key to avoiding prosecution from theft or smuggling, those who had these large operations were often not subject to punishment.

Punishments for theft and smuggling varied over time in the ghettos, and the entity capturing a person might determine their fate.[160] In the Warsaw ghetto, the ghetto police would sometimes deal with the thief. In one case, Moszek Goldfeder confessed to stealing a loaf of bread and consuming it out of hunger as he ran. He "apologized to his victim and promised to mend his ways."[161] Sometimes one of these "grabber" thefts on the streets was addressed by the surrounding crowd of witnesses with a thorough beating of the thief or an attempt to get compensation for the victim. The poorest thieves, however, had no resources to offer in compensation. Jails and tribunals in all three ghettos dealt with offenses like petty theft or smuggling.

Two cases in the Warsaw ghetto were juxtaposed in the newspaper: One was the story of Josek M., who ordered tea and bread at a cheap restaurant and then confessed he couldn't pay. He was given the chance to repay the debt when he found work. In another case, Rubin Z. enjoyed an extravagant meal at a fancy Warsaw ghetto establishment and was unable to pay. For this offense, he was referred to the Polish police.[162] In the Łódź ghetto, a Summary Court was established that was meant to end crime in the ghetto. Those who stood before it ranged from a tailor who absentmindedly took a piece of thread from his workplace to the chairman of the Summary Court himself. The tailor had some thread on his shoulder so that it would be easily available but, forgetting, put his jacket on over it. He was "caught stealing" and sentenced to dismissal from work and three months of prison and hard labor. Additionally, his

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family was denied relief money and thus had to suffer with the "guilty."[163] The end result was that workers and their families were condemned to starvation. The chairman of the Summary Court was arrested after evidence surfaced of his having taken bribes, thus ending the period of the Summary Court.[164]

These courts also had to deal with smuggling. In the case of the Warsaw ghetto, the most famous punishments were the executions carried out in November and December 1941 for smuggling, shortly after it was declared a capital offense. These were done by Polish police after the Jewish police refused to carry out the sentence. Warsaw ghetto chronicler Shimon Huberband related in detail how the trial and executions took place. According to him, there was no real trial or anyone to represent the defense, and the smugglers who were condemned were all young people under the age of 40 who were just trying to survive.[165] Ultimately, in all three ghettos, the ghetto prisons filled up with smugglers and thieves who were mostly imprisoned for crimes committed from hunger. When deportations out of the ghettos began in 1942, those who were in the prisons were among the first to be deported.

Conclusion

While licit food access and sources varied across ghettos and time periods, the amount of food made available by the Germans to the Jews in the ghetto was almost always insufficient to stave off hunger. Illicit food access was a key factor in survival in the ghettos. Smuggling, theft, and the black market were all means of obtaining additional food in the three ghettos, but all of these methods were also, at various times in each ghetto's duration, activities that could be punished in a lethal manner. Obtaining food outside of legal means was necessary to survive but potentially deadly.

Illicit food access in the ghetto created a space for survival and food access, which enabled individuals who might otherwise have been consigned to starvation to obtain food and survive. For example, through theft, individuals were able to increase their food allotment without trading capital. It is for this reason that theft was quite common across various famines. Theft in the ghetto, however, came with great risk as being caught could result in deadly punishment. In the Łódź ghetto, for example, petty thefts that were punished with deportations. It also had the ability to change the circumstances of another person who did have resources and endanger their lives. Ultimately, many took the risk, in the ghettos and in other famines, because it was the only way to avoid death by starvation.

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Similarly, Jews with some resources were able to obtain much more through risking their life and engaging in smuggling outside the ghetto. While this risk taking could transform someone's circumstances, it could also lead to being subjected to violence. In the Warsaw ghetto, where food was extremely scarce, Jews crossed in and out of the ghetto illegally to obtain food. In this process, they met with beatings, imprisonment, and ultimately a death sentence was carried out on food smugglers. Various smugglers struggled with the need for food versus the risk of death. The lack of food led to a robust black market that was not static. It was affected by deportations, tightening of restrictions on food, crackdowns on illicit activity, and other measures. This meant that while an individual or family might be able to supplement their food resources early in the ghetto period, prices and access became increasingly prohibitive toward its end. The selling and buying of food resources in a community where starvation loomed is typical of famine situations. All black-market purchases resulted in someone trading their possessions for food. Those with more were able to obtain more food or better quality food while those becoming more and more vulnerable were often forced to sell better quality food items to obtain greater quantity. The black market in a sense was the embodiment of the economic disparities in the ghetto.

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