

Workshop 2: Teaching and Learning about Perpetrators within Memorial Sites

Anatolii Podolskyi, Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, Kiev

“Ukrainian-Jewish relations during Holocaust: aspects of collaboration. Memorial Sites. Teaching approaches”

Introduction

I plan to devote of my presentation to three aspects:

- Situation with memorial sites and understanding in modern Ukraine of role of perpetrators, local non-Jewish population in Holocaust;
- Holocaust Memory in Ukrainian society as a part of national (Ukrainian) history, situation with memorial places related to Holocaust History on the territory of Ukraine;
- Holocaust Teaching in Modern Ukraine.

The attitude of the non-Jewish population (i.e., not only ethnic Ukrainians, but members of other ethnic groups who lived on the territory of Ukraine) to the Holocaust in Ukraine in general ranged from collaboration through neutrality to rescue. The prevailing tendency was indifference to the tragic fate of Jewish fellow countrymen. Ukrainian Historian Yaroslav Gritsak stresses that saving a Jew under the conditions of Nazi authority in Ukraine were heroism, and heroism is not a routine event – people had to live, or rather survive, and not perform heroic deeds.¹

A look at the demography of Soviet Ukraine would seem to be relevant in a study of attitudes of Ukrainian citizens² under occupation toward the Jews. The total population of the Soviet Ukraine before the German invasion was over 30 million. About 5 million fought against Hitler in the Red Army; hundreds of thousands were evacuated or fled. According to Historian Alexander Prusin, no fewer than 150.000 only in Reichskommissariat Ukraine (Eastern Ukraine) collaborated with the Nazis.³ Data at Yad Vashem (Jerusalem) show that the number of non-Jews (mainly Ukrainians, but not only) who saved Jews during the Holocaust in Ukraine was slightly more than 2,700.⁴ Therefore, we cannot claim that collaboration with the Nazis in Ukraine was on the same scale (relative to the total population) as it was in occupied Lithuania, Croatia, Latvia, Estonia etc. However,

¹Y. Gritsak. Ukrainians in anti-Jewish actions during WWII// Journal “Yi”.-Lviv,1996

² It would be more historically correct to say ‘citizens of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic’, since before the Nazi occupation in June 1941, all historic-ethnic lands of Ukraine were a part of the USSR.

³ Alexander Prusin. The Ukrainian Police and the Holocaust in the Generalbezirk Kiev, 1941-1943:Activities and Motivations// Holocaust and Modernity.-1(2), 2007.-p.35

⁴ Data of Yad Vashem Authority (Jerusalem) to 1 Jan. 2008

undoubtedly, without the support of the local non-Jewish population, the extent of the Holocaust in Ukraine would have been reduced.

Collaboration of the non-Jewish population of Ukraine during the Holocaust took place, firstly, in units of the Ukrainian auxiliary police, most of whose members were recruited among volunteers, usually people who joined in order to save their own and their families' lives out of fear of the Nazi occupation, and others who joined for 'ideological reasons' – hatred of the Soviet regime and anti-Semitism, among others. These units took part, among other acts, in the murder of Jews, guarding places of execution, accompanying victims to such places, sorting objects and valuables and guarding confiscated property. However, members of the local Ukrainian police were also involved in the mass murder of Jewish men, women and children, and in raping Jewish girls and women. On the other hand, some Ukrainian policemen releasing victims for ransom or simply giving them the opportunity to escape before an action or from the ghetto, without payment, and thereby saving their lives.

In addition to the collaboration of police units, there were also spontaneous pogroms and murder of Jews by the local population, often initiated and supported by the Nazis. Such acts were motivated by one of the main anti-Semitic postulates of Nazi propaganda on the Soviet occupied territories: implication of the Jews in the crimes of Stalin's regime against Ukrainians, Poles, Belorussians, Russians and others. Lastly, there were also Ukrainian units within the German SS or Wehrmacht. These were military units, in most cases, young men of the SS Galichina division and Nachtigal battalion. They had no direct connection to the Holocaust in Ukraine, as they were created at the end of 1942 or in 1943, when the western areas of Ukraine were practically *Judenrein*.

Situation with memorial sites and understanding in modern Ukraine of role of perpetrators, local non-Jewish population in Holocaust

The issue of collaboration of the non-Jewish population (including Ukrainians, Russians, Belorussians, Poles, Romanians, Moldavians, Hungarians and Crimean Tatars) with the Nazis in the persecution and murder of Jews on the occupied territories of Ukraine (1941–1944) is one of the most complexes, ambiguous and yet least studied aspects of modern Ukrainian Holocaust historiography.

After the collapse of the Soviet system, The Holocaust became a theme in modern Ukrainian historical studies. Over the past eighteen years Ukrainian historiography has seen the creation of a new branch – Holocaust studies. Most importantly, the conceptual approach to modern Ukrainian historiography has changed. Today the Holocaust is studied as a premeditated genocide against the Jews, a unique policy of the Nazis aimed

at the extermination of a people based on their ethnic background or Jewish descent. However, until now in Ukrainian society not enough understanding, that Holocaust History its integral part of Ukrainian history during WWII and not yet responsibility for past (see below in this presentation next chapter: “Holocaust Memory in Ukrainian society as a part of national (Ukrainian) history,...”)

One of the most complex aspects of Holocaust studies in Ukrainian historiography is, incontestably, the issue of collaboration in Ukraine during the war. No specialized work on this issue has so far appeared, although the theoretical foundations for study of the collaboration of Ukrainians and other non-Jewish populations of Ukraine have been more or less determined. In one of the first works on the topic, Ukrainian historians⁵ formulated a primary approach to the topic, which serves as a guide to modern Ukrainian historians and philosophers. At its basis lies the dictum that above all it is necessary to admit the fact of collaboration of Ukrainians with the Nazis in the Holocaust; that this fact should be neither rejected nor concealed; and that it is imperative to investigate the reasons for this phenomenon, and the motives which drove various groups of the non-Jewish population to collaborate with the Nazis in the Holocaust in Ukraine.

It is only in this case that the history of World War II in Ukraine and the history of Ukrainian-Jewish relations of the period will not be falsified. Moreover, exposing as many factual, objective materials as possible on this complex and tragic period of history will facilitate the restoration of political and socio-cultural relations between Jews and Ukrainians. A range of well-known Ukrainian scholars in the country and in the Diaspora support this view.⁶ In recent years, debates over Ukrainian collaboration during the Holocaust have appeared in the scientific and cultural journal *Kritika*. Among well-known scholars and public figures involved are: Iaroslav Gritsak, Zhanna Kovba, Sofia Gracheva, Miroslav Popovich, Andreii Portnov, Sergeii Grabovich, Miroslav Marinovich, Taras Vozniak, Andreii Portnov, Ivan Khimka and Marko Carynyk. It seems that the point of this discourse is to find common ground and to relate the facts since, as Sofia Gracheva wrote, “they lived amongst us.” They were part of our society, part of Ukrainian history and culture. The Holocaust practically destroyed Ukrainian Jewry and today, perhaps, Ukrainian society needs to form an honest opinion about collaboration, not by presenting objective facts which might or might not justify collaboration, but rather in a completely different way, by calling the phenomenon by its name.

Currently, there is a discussion among Ukrainian researchers concerning levels of collaboration with the Nazi regime during the war in Ukraine. Philologist Zinoviï Antoniuk believes that those who betrayed Jews in times of the occupation, or took part in the work

⁵ See Gritsak. Ukrainians in anti-Jewish actions during WWII// Journal “Yi”.-Lviv,1996

⁶ Including Ukrainian scholars M. Popovich, Z.Kovba, P.Potichnyi, J. Himka, Z. Antoniuk, S. Gratcheva and I. Dziuba.

of police units, extermination actions, or guarded the concentration camps (notably, Treblinka camp was guarded only by Ukrainians⁷) should be called not collaborationists, but 'toadies',⁸ as they were mostly people of low moral standards, motivated not by ideology but by primitive instinct. A second criterion included the Ukrainian formations within Nazi military units, such as the Galitchina SS division, made up of Ukrainians volunteers in 1943.

Another controversial issue concerns the activities of Ukrainian national organizations and groups during the occupation of Ukraine – OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, consisting of two branches: OUN-Melnik and the more radical OUN-Bandera) and UPA (Ukrainian Rebel Army created at the end 1942). These patriotic organizations, which were set up with the purpose of creating an independent Ukrainian state (Ukrainian Independent Sovereign State⁹), fought simultaneously against two totalitarian regimes – that of Stalin and that of Hitler. However, OUN-Melnik, and to some extent OUN-Bandera, supported the Nazi genocide of Jews and in their program documents accused Jews of cooperation with the Bolshevik regime and crimes against the Ukrainian nation. In fact, Jews were equated with Communists, as in Nazi propaganda in the Eastern Territories.¹⁰

It can be stated that modern Ukraine, where the foundations of a civil and pluralistic society have only now begun to permeate, has so far neither conducted a relevant objective evaluation of the historic role of Ukrainian national forces and their activities in World War II, nor admitted to Ukrainian collaboration in the Holocaust. Nor have the Ukrainian authorities come up with a balanced approach to these phenomena and to this period of Ukrainian history. The government has been too busy declaring peace among all forces and assuming that the past is past. It seems that only the Ukrainian academic world has been continuing the discussion, and it is from here that some voices have been calling more loudly and distinctly for the truth – no matter how painful – to be told about Ukrainian history, including Ukrainian collaboration in the Holocaust. However, these debates and, more importantly, their conclusions have not reached a wider audience, especially students and youth in general. Nor are they heard by the authorities. At the same time, contrary forces are at work, which declare that during the interwar period Ukraine was ruled by 'Jewish-Bolsheviks' (that is to say, repeating the maxims of Nazi propaganda and supporting collaboration and the Holocaust), and they were solely responsible for the problems of modern independent Ukraine, which is now in the "clutches of Zionism."

⁷ See Martyna Rusiniak. Treblinka Paradox: Extermination Camp as a Source of Revenue for Administration, Guards, and local Population. // *Holocaust and Modernity*.-1(2), 2007.-p.60

⁸ Presentation of Zinovy Antoniuk.- www.holocaust.kyiv.ua.

⁹ For example: K. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair. Ukraine under the Nazi Occupation* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Materials of the Second Krakow Summit of OUN in 1940. See, for example, Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, pp.78-79

In light of this insidious trend, it would seem imperative that the issues raised in this presentation contribute to modern Ukrainian historiography and are exposed to Ukrainian society in general. Only by telling the truth can we avoid a return of totalitarianism, which brought so such problems to Jews as well as Ukrainians.

Holocaust Memory in Ukrainian society as a part of national (Ukrainian) history, situation with memorial places related to Holocaust History on the territory of Ukraine;

Today in Ukraine exist at least to approaches to the Holocaust Memory (Holocaust Studies, Teaching Holocaust). 1) The omission of everything Jewish in official Ukrainian historiography cannot be explained solely by the continued existence of the mono-cultural Soviet approach to history. Ukrainian society seems incapable or unwilling to perceive its national history as a history of various cultures. The “other” tends to be excluded and viewed as something alien. Apparently, it is more comfortable to talk about “us” and “others”, for example about “our Great Famine” and about “the others’ Holocaust”. A certain narrative is taking shape, in which the Holocaust does not appear. This is leading to a situation in which Ukrainian society, especially the younger generation, does not know the background to the Holocaust in Ukraine. A notion has even taken hold that the Holocaust took place exclusively in Western Europe and is not of any importance to Ukraine.¹¹ The generally acknowledged, indisputable fact, as depicted in numerous Western and Ukrainian works of historiography, that the primary victims of the German occupation in Ukraine and other European countries were the Jews is being ignored or withheld.¹² What is more, in recent times, the Great Famine in Ukraine is increasingly being called “the Ukrainian Holocaust”. The fact that the Jews were the Nazis’ chief victims is being obscured.¹³

2) Liberal historians in Ukraine and abroad, independent publications, non-government organisations are working to counter this simplification.¹⁴ They clearly

¹¹ See, for example, Olena Ivanova, “Konstruiuvannia kolektyvno_pam’iaty pro Holokost v Ukra_ni”, *Ab Imperio*, 2 (2004); Wilfried Jilge, “Competing Victimhoods-Post-Soviet Ukrainian Narratives on World War II”, in E. Barkan, Elizabeth Cole, Kai Struve, eds., *Shared History- Divided Memory. Jews and Others in Soviet-Occupied Poland, 1939–1941* (Leipzig 2007).

¹² Dieter Pohl, *Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944. Organisation und Durchföhrun eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich 1997); Ray Brandon, Wendy Lower, eds., *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization* (Bloomington 2008); Dieter Pohl, “Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Western Ukraine – A Research Agenda”, in Barkan et al., eds., *Shared History –Divided Memory*.

¹³ On the brutality and totality of the Holocaust in Ukraine, see, for example, Omer Bartov, *Erased. Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine* (Princeton 2007); Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005); Shmuel Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews 1941–1944* (Jerusalem 1990); Karel C. Berkhoff,

Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

¹⁴ Barkan et al., eds., *Shared History – Divided Memory*; Brandon, Lower, eds., *Shoah in Ukraine*. Those particularly worthy of mentioning are the periodicals *Krytyka* and *Ī*, the Committee Babii Jar, die Association of National Minorities, the Ukrainian Centre of Holocaust Studies, the teachers’ association Nova Doba, and the publishing house Dukh I Litera.

understand the Holocaust in Ukraine as an integral part of Ukrainian history. But they are not supported by the state, or only insufficiently so, and therefore have only little influence on public opinion. With the subordination of academia to political interests, Ukrainian historiography as an institution is continuing the Soviet tradition.

In Ukraine, there is no official remembrance of the Shoah. There is no state museum

of the history of the Holocaust. The sites where the mass shootings took place are not always indicated. At Babi Yar, there is no memorial complex. January 27, the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, is not officially observed in Ukraine. All of this, although Ukraine signed the Stockholm Declaration in 2000.

The numerous existing monuments and memorial plaques that indicate where there ghettos or mass shootings took place can all be traced back to Jewish communities, nonstate entities, and individual persons and donors.¹⁵ However, these memorials, according to Omer Bartov, are located on the periphery of public memory.¹⁶ To date, the state has shown no willingness at least to maintain these memorials. The overview of research and education policy has already demonstrated that the Ukrainian government has no interest in promoting a discussion of Jewish life and the Holocaust in Ukraine.

Most politicians do not see the Holocaust as a part of Ukrainian history, but as a tragedy of another people, which is also responsible for commemorating it. In public, the topic of the Holocaust is hardly discussed. Instead of remembrance of the Holocaust, there is a looming “competition of victims”. Some “researchers” weigh the number of dead from the Great Famine against the number of dead in the Holocaust and have coined the incorrect designation “Ukrainian Holocaust”. It is thoroughly justifiable to analyse the mechanisms and basic features of the Great Famine and the Holocaust in comparative manner, but an equation of the two is fully inappropriate.

The omission of the Holocaust in Ukraine leads back to the fact that Ukraine does not accept any responsibility for the past, because neither the National-Socialist, nor the Stalinist crimes have been legally or historically assessed in full. Thus a usable model for remembering the history of the 20th century and the Second World War remains missing.

¹⁵ To be highlighted here are Borys Hydalevych, with whose support 22 commemorative plaques were put up to honour the murdered Jews of Odessa and Transnistria, and Il'ia Kabanchyk, who independently installed dozens of commemorative plaques in Galicia, Volhynia, and Podolia. Andriy Portnov, “Pluralität der Erinnerung. Denkmäler und Geschichtspolitik

in der Ukraine”, in *Geschichtspolitik und Gegenerinnerung. Krieg, Gewalt und Trauma im Osten Europas* [= *Osteuropa* 6/2008], pp. 191–204.

¹⁶ Bartov, *Erased*, pp. 208-209.

Holocaust Teaching in Modern Ukraine.

No less important than research into the Holocaust is discussion of the topic in school so that the memory of the fate of Ukrainian Jewry is preserved and passed on to future generations. Starting in the first half of the 1990s, the Holocaust was included in the official school curriculum, to be precise: in the basic course “History of Ukraine and World History”. In 2000, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine recommended universities introduce a special course on the history of the Holocaust in Ukraine and Europe. This decision was apparently motivated by the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in 2000, at which Ukraine gave its approval to a declaration to preserve the memory of the Holocaust through research and education.

Since 2006, questions on the history of the Holocaust have been included in the final examinations of general-education schools. Although all of the preconditions have been formally met, the Holocaust can hardly be taught in Ukrainian schools. First, the curriculum does not provide enough time for the topic. The Holocaust is to be handled in just one class as part of the more general topic “National-Socialist Occupation Regime”. Second, official textbooks lack compelling explanations of the Holocaust as part of Ukrainian history.

Here, too, the Soviet tradition of maintaining silence on the Holocaust is being continued. In Soviet textbooks, the Holocaust was not even mentioned. Yurii Komarov, a teacher and training specialist from Kiev, has compared the treatment of the Holocaust in textbooks from Ukraine, Germany, and Great Britain. He has noted that, under such conditions, it can hardly be expected that Ukrainian pupils see the connection between Babi Yar and the Holocaust.¹⁷ In a study of how Ukrainian pupils receive the Holocaust, Professor Elena Ivanova of Kharkiv concluded that the Holocaust was for youth an abstract event without any kind of connection to Ukrainian national memory.

Since the mid-1990s, the non-state education sector in Ukraine has been a source of invaluable impulses. Step by step, institutions such as the Committee Babi Yar, the Association of National Minorities of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Centre for Holocaust Studies, the history teacher association Nova Doba, the centre Tkuma are working towards changing official education policy and embed within Ukrainian society an awareness of the responsibility to remember the Holocaust. With almost no state support, these organisations have developed a system for conveying the history of the Holocaust. They organise educational-methodology seminars for teachers and university instructors, work

¹⁷ Iu. Komarov, “Formal’ni mozhlyvosti: mistse temy Holokostu v navchal’nykh kursakh MON Ukrainy”, *Informatsiino-pedahohichnyi Biuletyn’ Ukrain’s’koho sentru vyvchennia istorii Holokostu Uroky Holokostu*, 2, 14 (2008).

with schoolchildren and university students, hold competitions and summer schools, and facilitate internships in international Holocaust centres. In addition, they publish instruction materials that go far beyond official curricula and textbooks. Numerous teachers and instructors have since used them. The state does not place any obstacles in the way of teachers who want to learn more about the topic of the Holocaust. Unlike in Soviet times, the Holocaust is not taboo. However, discussion of the topic in school is not given any special support.

Remembrance culture in Ukraine now exist in extremely difficult situation. The only way out is not through continued adherence to totalitarian models of remembrance that allow only black and white but no grey tones. What is needed is an open discussion led by the desire to accept the “other” as well. Unconnected, isolated histories lead to the expression of memories that are isolated from one another. Each is in and of itself biased. The risk that aggression and intolerance in Ukrainian society will increase is considerable. The only solution is to accept history responsibly and to promote the exchange and reconciliation of competing narratives.

