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John-Paul Himka

Obstacles to the Integration of the Holocaust into Post-Communist East European Historical Narratives

ABSTRACT: Factors that have made it difficult for post-communist East European societies to integrate the Holocaust into their historical cultures include the communist heritage, which downplayed the specifically Jewish Holocaust; sensitivity to charges that a nation was complicit in the murder of the Jews; the framing of East European histories as national narratives into which it is difficult to incorporate the experience of other nations; the feeling that Jewish suffering is recognized, while that of other East Europeans is not; the positive re-evaluation of the interwar and wartime politics and culture after the collapse of communism; the survival and revival of anti-Semitism, with new inputs from the Middle East and from Western Holocaust deniers; the construction in the West of the Holocaust as a centrepiece of twentieth-century history; the influence of East European diasporas; the embedment of the discourse on the Holocaust in the political divide between nativists and Westernizers; the deployment of accusations of Holocaust collaboration as an instrument of foreign policy; and debate over the restitution of confiscated Jewish property. Often these factors come together into a reinforcing discursive structure. The essay's conclusion suggests how to overcome these obstacles to the integration of the Holocaust into East European histories.

The integration of the Holocaust into East European history and memory has proved to be a challenge.¹ The issue of local collaboration in the murder of the Jews has especially evoked responses of denial, since East European historical self-portraits generally omit what Joanna Michlic calls the "dark past."² The purpose of the present essay is to identify the obstacles to the integration of the Holocaust into East European historical cultures.

There are a number of examinations of how East European nations have or have not come to terms with the Holocaust since the collapse of communism.³

¹ I have presented versions of this paper in a number of venues, most recently at the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Slavists held in Saskatoon 26–28 May 2007. After every presentation, I revised the paper substantially in response to comments I received, and I am grateful for all the suggestions and criticisms. I particularly want to thank Karyn Ball, Melissa Jacques, Wilfried Jilge, Per Anders Rudling, Michael Shafir, Kai Struve, and Felicia Waldman. I also wish to thank Oksana Mykhed for research assistance.

² Joanna Michlic, *Coming to Terms with the "Dark Past": The Polish Debate about the Jedwabne Massacre*, *Analysis of Current Trends in Anti-Semitism*, 21 (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism, 2002) 2.

³ E.g., Randolph L. Braham, "Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in the Politics of East

These have been helpful to me in identifying the issues that impede the internalization of the Holocaust, and I will be citing some of them below. I have not, however, undertaken an exhaustive review of this literature, since my point is not to describe the situation since 1989, as this literature does, but rather to construct a general framework to understand the sources of resistance to Holocaust integration. Many of the points made below are familiar to scholars of the Holocaust and its reception, and some points made in a few sentences in this article could sustain a much longer treatment. But here I am interested in putting it all together in order to render the mutual reinforcement of Holocaust-resistant discourses more transparent. Often the existing literature works with unstated assumptions about why the Holocaust has been difficult for post-communist Europe. This article strives to make these assumptions explicit. It is interested in the broad outline of certain East European subjectivities.

Although I attempt here to discuss the factors in Holocaust resistance in such a way that it draws on the experience of, and refers to, Eastern Europe as a region,⁴ I am most informed by my research on Ukraine. I am somewhat uneasy about this combination of the general and the particular, but I hope that this rather makeshift approach can accomplish what is essentially a modest aim: to stimulate thinking on why it has been hard for East European societies to integrate the Holocaust into their historical consciousness. In my emphasis on commonalities and patterns, distinctions among the East European peoples are not given much attention, but that does not mean that such distinctions are not important and worthy of study in their own right.

I do not think that the resistance to incorporating the Holocaust is a simple matter; at play, rather, is a configuration of factors, an overdetermination. Throughout the region there are recurring discourses about the Holocaust that interlock and shape and reinforce one another. I believe that reflection on the obstacles is the precondition for developing an effective program for promoting Holocaust awareness in the region.

THE COMMUNIST HERITAGE

A readily identifiable reason for the tardiness with which East European countries have integrated the Holocaust into their history is that, by and large, the specifically Jewish Holocaust was downplayed or ignored under Communism.⁵

Central Europe," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 8.2 (Fall 1994): 143–163.

⁴ As to why I use the old term Eastern Europe instead of the new ones (Central Europe, Balkans, Former Soviet Union, Eurasia, and so on), see John-Paul Himka, "What's in a Region? (Notes on 'Central Europe')," HABSBERG, 8 May 2002 (archived in H-Net Discussion).

⁵ Zvi Gitelman, "Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union," in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, edited by Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997) 14–42. Daniel

East European societies then were “protected” from having to consider the Holocaust and its implications. This is one of the reasons why, when the fall of communism allowed the issue to surface, some East Europeans reacted with suspicion to the sudden concern with the fate of Jews during World War II.⁶

It was also difficult for oppositionists under communism to confront the Holocaust because they found it hard to examine critically figures and movements that were condemned by their authoritarian regimes. And this hindered a frank assessment of local participation in the murder of Jews.⁷

GUILT, SELF-ESTEEM, REPUTATION

An obvious reason why those East European nations with a significant history of collaboration in the Holocaust are reluctant to speak about it is that they are ashamed to. They feel that to bring up such matters sullies the reputation of their nation. This reluctance to publicize the “dark past” is common enough everywhere, but it is particularly exacerbated in nations, such as the East European nations, with a complex of marginalization and even inferiority vis-à-vis the West. The feeling of inadequacy produces also narratives of self-glorification that make it even more difficult to admit to grievous wrongdoing in the national past.

It sometimes happens that Westerners know little about Ukrainians and Lithuanians except their reputation as anti-Semites and willing collaborators in the Holocaust. This is different than the knowledge about Germans, which recognizes their crucial role in launching the Holocaust, but also appreciates German cultural achievements and acknowledges that German history consists of much more than the Third Reich. At one time the same people who held anti-Semitic stereotypes also held anti-Slavic or anti-East European stereotypes. Since the Holocaust, the two prejudices have been decoupled, and an inveterate

Romanovsky, “The Holocaust in the Eyes of *Homo Sovieticus*: A Survey Based on Northeastern Belorussia and Northwestern Russia,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13.3 (Winter 1999): 355–382. An enlightening and original recent contribution is Mark A. Wolfgram, “The Holocaust through the Prism of East German Television: Collective Memory and Audience Perceptions,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 20.1 (Spring 2006): 57–79.

⁶ Felicia Waldman, “Holocaust Education in Post-Communist Romania,” *Studia Hebraica* 4 (2004): 92.

⁷ Kai Struve, “Eastern Experience and Western Memory: 1939–41 as a Paradigm of European Memory Conflicts,” in *Shared History – Divided Memory: Jews and Others in Soviet-Occupied Territories of Poland, 1939–1941*, edited by Elazar Barkand, Elizabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve, *Leipziger Beiträge zur jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur*, 5 (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007) 49.

anti-Semitism has been grafted on to the East European stereotype as one of its characteristics.⁸

NATIONAL NARRATIVES

Johan Dietsch has pointed out that it is difficult to integrate the Holocaust into a history that is structured as a narrative of a particular nation.⁹ In such a narrative there is no room for the experience of other nations except in relation to the nation that is the subject of the national history. Many histories are nation-centred, but this is particularly true of East European histories. When the modern discipline of history was being formed, most of today's East European states did not even exist. Necessarily, the histories were framed as narratives about peoples. Generally, too, these were heroic narratives about how the nation survived in spite of oppressive foreign rule.

VICTIMIZATION NARRATIVES

Victimization narratives, of course, notoriously interfere with the ability to see members of one's own group as perpetrators, and they also hinder the recognition of others' narratives of victimization. A classic formulation of the victim's attitude is that of the Polish journalist Jan Błóński, contained in his famous article "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto" (*Tygodnik Powszechny*, January 1987): "When we consider the past, we want to derive moral advantages from it. Even when we condemn, we ourselves would like to be above—or beyond—condemnation. We want to be absolutely beyond any accusation, we want to be completely clean. We want to be also—and only—victims."¹⁰ Such sentiments are commonplace in Eastern Europe. The introduction to the English translation of a wartime diary that frankly treated Romanian anti-Semitism and complicity in the Holocaust stated: "It remains difficult if not impossible to engage in a serious discussion about any challenge to Romania's self-image and self-definition as a nation of eternal victims, never perpetrators."¹¹ The Deputy Director of the Lithuanian Institute of History wrote: "...The active part played

⁸ A popular American film of 2006, *Borat!*, made use of this stereotype for comic effect. For an analysis of East European stereotypes, see Roman Rosdolsky, *Engels and the "Nonhistoric" Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848* (Glasgow: Critique Books, 1986).

⁹ Johan Dietsch, *Making Sense of Suffering: Holocaust and Holodomor in Ukrainian Historical Culture* (Lund: Media Tryck, Lund University, 2006) 170.

¹⁰ Cited in Michlic, *Coming to Terms* 5.

¹¹ Cited in Kristian Gerner, "Hungary, Romania, the Holocaust and Historical Culture," in *The Holocaust on Post-War Battlefields: Genocide as Historical Culture*, edited by Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (Malmö: Sekel Bokförlag, 2006) 231, 238.

by some Lithuanians in the Holocaust undermines the myth embedded in Lithuanian consciousness that they and they alone are a martyred people."¹²

Self-identification as victim in Eastern Europe is older than the Holocaust. The Polish and Ukrainian victimization narratives go back to the 1830s and 1840s (Adam Mickiewicz and the Brotherhood of Ss. Cyril and Methodius), the Hungarian one to 1920 (the Treaty of Trianon). Since the late 1970s, the East European victimization narratives in the diasporas have often been reworked to closely imitate Jewish narratives of the Holocaust. With the disintegration and collapse of communism, these kind of victimization narratives appeared also in the home countries. Elena Ivanova has pointed out that Soviet narratives emphasized triumphal victories. But in the period of Gorbachev's reforms, victimization narratives appeared. They became particularly prominent in Ukraine when the country became independent in 1991: "...The schematic narrative template of a victimhood has been chosen as a common idea uniting society and one of the tenets for the reconstruction of collective memory and the creation of a new national identity."¹³

With reference to the Ukrainian diaspora I have argued that the emphasis on victimization since the late 1970s has at least in part been the result of efforts to counter accusations of widespread Ukrainian collaboration in the Holocaust.¹⁴

YET THERE IS THE ISSUE OF RECOGNITION

Although the East European victimization narratives are problematic in many respects, they are usually based on real injuries suffered. Ukrainians collectively remember the famine of 1932–1933 that resulted in millions of deaths. They also remember the massive purges of the 1930s, which claimed hundreds of thousands of victims, and the NKVD murders of 1941, which claimed tens of thousands. The Baltic nations remember the mass deportations of 1941. All East European countries remember the ferocity of the communist security police in the Stalinist era.¹⁵ The Poles in the General Government and the Ukrainians in

¹² Darius Staliūnas, "From Ethnocentric to Civic History: Changes in Contemporary Lithuanian Historical Studies," in *Emerging Meso-Areas in the Former Socialist Countries: Histories Revived or Improvised*, edited by Kimitaka Matsuzato (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2005) 327.

¹³ Elena Ivanova, "Changes in Collective Memory: The Schematic Narrative Template of Victimhood in Kharkiv Museums," *Journal of Museum Education* 28.1 (Winter 2003): 19.

¹⁴ John-Paul Himka, "War Criminality: A Blank Spot in the Collective Memory of the Ukrainian Diaspora," *Spaces of Identity* 5.1 (April 2005), <<http://www.spacesofidentity.net/>> (Accessed 7 August 2008), and John-Paul Himka, "A Central European Diaspora under the Shadow of World War II: The Galician Ukrainians in North America," *Austrian History Yearbook* 37 (2006): 17–31.

¹⁵ See the well documented study of police torture in Stalin-era Poland: Jan Marek

the Reichskommissariat¹⁶ remember not only communist persecution, but also the immense sufferings under Nazi occupation.

Even though these narratives have been and are instrumentalized, they do reflect painful historical experiences. Many East Europeans feel that their sufferings have been rendered invisible, as though their dead are not equal to other dead, as though they are not recognized as endowed with the same human dignity as others. After all the special pleading is over, the question remains: "If you prick us, do we not bleed?"¹⁷

THE POSITIVE REEVALUATION OF THE PRE-COMMUNIST HERITAGE AFTER 1989

After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe (1989–1991) there was a general tendency outside the borders of the pre-1939 Soviet Union to overvalue the politics of the interwar and wartime eras, i.e., the immediate pre-communist period. However, many of the figures prominent before the postwar communist takeovers had been extreme nationalists, anti-Semites, or even fascists. Their cults were particularly embraced by rightist politicians, but they also had a larger popular appeal. The roles these figures played in the Holocaust were denied or downplayed. Alternately, the cult denied or downplayed the Holocaust itself. A pertinent example is the glorification of Marshall Ion Antonescu that arose in post-communist Romania. Two East European states that re-emerged after 1989, Croatia and Slovakia, had their first modern historical incarnation as allies of Hitler that cooperated in the persecution and destruction of the Jewish population. Nationalists tend to emphasize the positive features of these wartime states as the precursors of their present independence; liberals are reluctant to do so because of the anti-democratic nature and murderous policies of these states.

In Ukraine, the population is sharply divided in its assessment of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and, in particular, of its wing under the leadership of Stepan Bandera. The West and Centre of the country tend to evaluate it positively, the East and South negatively. Although the Ukrainian nationalists' role in the Holocaust is not as extensively documented as the role of the Romanian, Croatian, and Slovak governments, it is clear that they shared

Chodakiewicz, "The Dialectics of Pain: The Interrogation Methods of the Communist Secret Police in Poland, 1944–1955," *Glaukopis* 2/3 (2004–2005): 1–54. But also see where Chodakiewicz is situated in the historiography: Joanna Michlic, "The Soviet Occupation of Poland, 1939–41, and the Stereotype of the Anti-Polish and Pro-Soviet Jew," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* n.s. 13.3 (Spring/Summer 2007): 35–76.

¹⁶ Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ A recent work exploring the history and memory of the Holocaust from a Jewish perspective maintains sensitivity to the sufferings of others in Eastern Europe: Daniel Mendelsohn, *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*, photographs by Matt Mendelsohn (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

an ethnic cleansing project with the Germans and in various ways participated in the murder of the Jews.¹⁸ A Ukrainian Holocaust survivor, Borys Zabarko, said in an interview that without such collaborators the “Final Solution” in Ukraine would not have been as successful as it was: “Today there are people who want to draw a line under that past, which is still alive, and want to erase it as much as possible from memory. Especially unacceptable are attempts to place victims and perpetrators on the same level, attempts to make heroes of Nazi accomplices—collaborators and anti-Semites who destroyed or helped to destroy peaceful inhabitants, prisoners of the concentration camps and ghettos.”¹⁹ Most Western Ukrainians, however, honour the memory of the nationalists, primarily because of their armed resistance to the Soviets in 1944–1950. They would find Zabarko’s perspective very difficult to accept.

THE MIXED HERITAGE OF THE INTERWAR ERA

Not just the politics, but the culture of interwar Eastern Europe outside the Soviet Union was often saturated with nationalism, anti-Semitism, and fascism. If one were to purge the twentieth-century national pantheon of the politically incorrect, not many figures would be left. For example, Romanian intellectual life in the interwar period was chauvinistic and anti-Semitic, but also vibrant and interesting—the philosopher Emil Cioran and the religious studies scholar Mircea Eliade were both close to the fascists. Leading West Ukrainian poets of the 1930s, such as Olena Teliha and Bohdan Kravtsiv, were nationalists with fascist sympathies; Bohdan Ihor Antonych wrote a poem in honour of Francoist heroes of the Spanish Civil War. What does one do with such cultural figures? This is, of course, a variant of the question: What does one do with Martin Heidegger and Paul de Man?

THE SURVIVAL OR REVIVAL OF ANTI-SEMITISM

Traditional anti-Semitism did not die in the region during the years of communist power. Accusations of ritual murder surfaced shortly after the war in Poland and Ukraine. “Everyday anti-Semitism” can be encountered in many of the East European countries and their diasporas.²⁰ Sometimes the communist

¹⁸ The best studies are: Dieter Pohl, “Ukrainische Hilfskräfte beim Mord an den Juden,” in Gerhard Paul, ed., *Die Täter der Shoah. Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002) 205–234. Frank Golczewski, “Die Kollaboration in der Ukraine,” in *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus*, vol. 19: *Kooperation und Verbrechen: Formen der “Kollaboration” im östlichen Europa 1939–1945*, edited by Christoph Dieckmann, Babette Quinkert, and Tatjana Tönsmeier (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003) 151–182.

¹⁹ Oleksandr Kanevskyi, “Zhyttia i smert' v epokhu Holokostu,” *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* 3–9 February 2007.

²⁰ For an interesting statistical study of xenophobia in Ukraine in 1994–2006, see

regimes mobilized anti-Semitism for their own purposes—for example, the “anti-Zionist” campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s. The communist legacy of “anti-Zionism” has been inherited by some post-communist projects, such as the Interregional Academy of Human Resources in Ukraine (generally known by its Ukrainian acronym MAUP).²¹

The issues of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in Eastern Europe have become embedded into the international political conflict around the Middle East. The Iranian ambassador has appeared at MAUP conferences and is now involved in organizing a conference on the Holocaust in Warsaw.²² The leading activists at MAUP have enjoyed visiting professorships in Kuwait. On the other hand, Israeli scholars and institutions have been promoting the integration of the Holocaust into East European education and historical research.

The opening up of the public sphere in post-communist Europe not only allowed the new Middle-Eastern-mediated anti-Semitism to filter into East European societies, but also the new literature of Holocaust denial written by David Irving, Robert Faurisson, and others.²³ David Duke is a frequent guest at MAUP events in Ukraine.

Volodymyr Illich Paniotto and Valerii Ievhenovych Khmel'ko, “Dumky naseleennia Ukrainy pro holodomor 1932–33 r. Dynamika ksenofobii v Ukraini 1994–2006,” *Ahenstvo “Ukrains'ki Novyny*,” 9 November 2006. The study was conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. See also: “ADL Poll Shows 44 Percent of Russians Hold Strong Anti-Semitic Views as Political and Popular Acts of Anti-Semitism Rise,” Press Release, Anti-Defamation League, 21 September 1999. <http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASInt_13/3469_13.asp#survey> (Accessed 12 January 2008). Anti-Defamation League, *Attitudes towards Jews and the Middle East in Six European Countries*, July 2007. <http://www.adl.org/anti_semitism/European_Attitudes_Survey_July_2007.pdf> (Accessed 12 January 2008).

²¹ Per Anders Rudling, “Organized Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Ukraine: Structure, Influence and Ideology,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 48.1–2 (March-June 2006): 81–118.

²² Information from Jolanta Żyndul, 2 November 2006. Anatoly Podolsky, the Director of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies in Kyiv, wrote of MAUP authors working “for Libyan and Palestinian money.” Anatolii Podol's'kyi, “Znovu pro banal'nist' zla” (this can be found on the Center’s website [www.holocaust.kiev.ua] under the rubric “Doslidzhennia.”) An English translation, “Once More about the Banality of Evil,” was circulated on Dominique Arel’s Ukraine List. A *Kyiv Post* editorial of 9 June 2005 wrote of Palestinian and Syrian representatives attending a MAUP conference on Zionism as the greatest threat to contemporary civilization. An article for the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs attributed increased anti-Semitism in Ukraine partly to “propaganda efforts of Arab students.” Betsy Gidwitz, “Jewish Life in Ukraine at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Part One,” *Jerusalem Letter* 451 (1 April 2001): 3.

²³ Michael Shafir, *Between Denial and “Comparative Trivialization”: Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe*, Analysis of Current Trends in Anti-Semitism, 19 (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism, 2002) 6.

Anti-Semitism is a factor blocking the integration of the Holocaust into the historical narrative, and conversely its incorporation functions as a measure against the preservation and diffusion of anti-Semitism.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE HOLOCAUST

In the West the Holocaust is considered to be an event of universal significance. It is the topic of a vast scholarly literature and of belles lettres and film. It has become the standard to which all other genocides and atrocities are compared. It is a centrality in contemporary Western thought and culture, "a transnational *lieu de mémoire* for the Western world," perhaps "the center of an emergent common European memory."²⁴ In fact, as a corollary, one form of expressing radical anti-Westernism is to belittle the Holocaust, as Iran did by sponsoring a Holocaust Cartoon Contest in 2006.

The Holocaust's centrality has not been readily accepted in Eastern Europe. Partly this is because nations that feel themselves to be beleaguered are not inclined to the universal, and nationalism naturally comes into conflict with universalities. Furthermore, when the construction of the Holocaust as a universality/centrality occurred in the West, the East European nations, then under communism, were isolated from the process.

DIASPORAS

I use the term diaspora in a particular way, to refer to the generation descended from the persons displaced after World War II. The latter were émigrés disproportionately associated in one way or another with collaborationist regimes or movements in Eastern Europe. Often, they were evacuated when the German army was retreating westward. In the case of the Poles, where collaborationism as such was not widespread, many émigrés nonetheless maintained the rightist, nationalist, and anti-Semitic attitudes that had been widespread in interwar Poland. The children of these original émigrés were particularly stung by charges of East European complicity in the extermination of the Jews. On the one hand, they loved their parents, knew about their traumatic experiences in Europe,²⁵ and valued the cultures transmitted to them; on the other hand, raised in the West and coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s,

²⁴ Struve 44.

²⁵ Here the concept of "postmemory" is useful. "Postmemory most specifically describes the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they 'remember' only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right." "The children of victims, survivors, witnesses, or perpetrators have different experiences of postmemory...." Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14.1 (Spring 2001): 9.

they well understood the centrality/universality of the Holocaust. They often responded to this emotional dissonance by rejecting out of hand accusations of their parents' generation's complicity or, less commonly, by maintaining that the murder of the Jews has been blown out of proportion. Since 1989 the diasporas have been influencing the original homelands, contributing to the resurrection of pre-communist political trends as well as promoting a narrative of victimization and sometimes their defensive views on the Holocaust.

The diaspora often feels that their side of the story is not given a fair hearing.²⁶ At the same time, the diasporas have been unable to examine the history of the Holocaust dispassionately enough to articulate an alternative view plausible to outsiders.

EMBEDMENT IN ISSUES OF INTERNAL POLITICS (EUROPEAN/NATIVIST ORIENTATION)

There has been a longstanding fissure in East European nations between Westernizers and nativists, predating the Holocaust by about a century. The best known such division is that between the Slavophiles and Westernizers in Russia, but similar divisions also existed among Poles,²⁷ Ukrainians, Hungarians, and other peoples in the nineteenth century. The discourse over the Holocaust in post-communist Eastern Europe is embedded in that same division.

The very term Holocaust came to Eastern Europe, for the most part, only in the late and post-communist period, and it came from the West. With it came the ideas about the Holocaust as they had been worked up in the source cultures. The West, and in this context we should include Israel, was also the chief promoter of Holocaust consciousness in Eastern Europe. Cases in point are the Stockholm Forums and the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. The idea to establish a Commission on Holocaust History in Romania was "not an endogenous phenomenon but the direct result of influence from abroad, primarily the United States and Israel."²⁸ The cult of Antonescu was curbed largely as a result of pressure from the United States and Germany.²⁹ In Ukraine the restoration of a

²⁶ See Robert Cherry, "Contentious History: A Survey on Perceptions of Polish-Jewish Relations during the Holocaust," in *Polish-Jewish Relations in North America*, edited by Mieczysław B. Biskupski and Antony Polonsky, Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry, 19 (Oxford and Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007) 339–340.

²⁷ Jerzy Jedlicki, *A Suburb of Europe: Nineteenth-Century Polish Approaches to Western Civilization* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 1999).

²⁸ Gerner 242.

²⁹ James P. Niessen, "Romania," in *Eastern Europe: An Introduction to the People, Lands, and Culture*, edited by Richard Frucht, vol. 3 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005) 788.

“memory” about the Holocaust is sometimes seen “as a concession to external pressure (on the part of the ‘civilized’ countries of the West).”³⁰

The pro-European trends in Eastern Europe are generally more open to writing the Holocaust into their national histories than the nativist trends. There is a rift in Romania between a new post-communist generation of intellectuals, especially students, and a xenophobic and anti-Semitic new right.³¹ Pro- and anti-integrationist ideas generally correspond to the urbanist-populist divide in Hungary. One of the populist FIDESZ spokespersons on the issue, Mária Schmidt, argued in 1998 that the social democrats and liberals in Hungary had “decided on the overexposure of the ‘Jewish question’” in order to discredit their opponents.³² During the crosses controversy at Auschwitz, the right-wing Polish activist Kazimierz Switoń displayed banners saying: “Jews out of Poland,” “No to NATO,” and “Europeans out of Poland.”³³

The division is complicated because some of the European-oriented intelligentsia is also anti-Semitic. This particular phenomenon can be found in Romania, Western Ukraine, and the Baltic republics. Here European-oriented can also be understood to mean anti-Russian. Moreover, it should be remembered that the orientation on European values in the interwar period led East European intellectuals to the fascists and national socialists; where the prestige of the interwar era has revived, the idea of Europe is not necessarily liberal.

The difference between the two orientations can often take the form of a debate over whose crimes were greater, the communists’ or the fascists’.³⁴ In this context, emphasizing communist crimes is seen as de-emphasizing the Holocaust and vice-versa. But there is no reason why critical thinkers and scholars should accept the dichotomy. The issues of national socialist and communist crimes against humanity can be uncoupled.³⁵

A variant of the Europeanist/nativist divide in politics can also be found in historical scholarship. In Ukraine, historians who have been trained exclusively in the native, often communist educational system and who read no Western

³⁰ Elena Ivanova, “Konstruivanie kollektivnoi pamiaty o Kholokoste v Ukraine,” *Ab imperio* 2 (2004): 377.

³¹ Gerner 242.

³² Gerner 246.

³³ Janine P. Holc, “Memory Contested: Jewish and Catholic Views of Auschwitz in Present-Day Poland,” in *Anti-Semitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland*, edited by Robert Blobaum (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005) 310.

³⁴ See, e.g., Gerner 249.

³⁵ Michael Shafir has made a particularly powerful and personal plea for this after a magisterial review of Holocaust negationism in post-communist East Central Europe. Shafir 36.

languages have been protecting their institutional positions against generally younger, Western-trained, and Western-oriented scholars. The former tend to hold fast to an unsullied national narrative, while the latter are more open to critical reassessments of the past, including the “dark past.”

EMBEDMENT ALSO IN ISSUES OF EXTERNAL POLITICS

Accusations of participation in the Holocaust were regularly used to discredit émigrés in Soviet times and also to discredit independence movements during *perestroika*. In the late 1980s, for example, “Soviet propaganda ‘recalled’ Lithuanian participation in the murder of Jews... to frighten the world with the ‘dangerous Lithuanians,’ who were seeking independence from Moscow.”³⁶ In Croatia the recognition of the Holocaust is complicated not only by a certain national investment in the Ustasha, but also by the role accusations of atrocities played in the wars of the Yugoslav succession in the 1990s.³⁷ Many in Western Ukraine evaluate positively the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrainian acronym—UPA) because they were anti-Russian, anticommunist, and dedicated to establishing Ukrainian statehood. While their Ukrainian admirers, of course, do not wish to recognize the atrocities perpetrated by these groups, Russian publications are happy to publicize them.³⁸ The latter follow in the footsteps of the Soviet media which vilified the nationalist organizations to discredit their representatives in emigration and the diaspora.

RESTITUTION OF JEWISH PROPERTY

The issue of the restitution of Jewish property in post-communist Europe is complicated by, among other things, the communist governments’ nationalizations of property. Further, given the massive scale and effectiveness of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe and the absence of satisfactory records, it has often been difficult to prove inheritance rights to property whose original owners have perished. The restitution of Jewish property is also tangled up with the issue of the restitution of formerly German property in Poland and the Czech Republic. Although conflicts between Poles and Jewish claimants, usually from abroad, have done nothing to improve Jewish-Polish relations, they have not played a prominent role in Polish debates over the Holocaust.³⁹

³⁶ Staliūnas 327–328.

³⁷ Kerstin Nyström, “The Holocaust and Croatian National Identity: An Uneasy Relationship,” in *The Holocaust on Post-War Battlefields*, edited by Karlsson and Zander 259–288.

³⁸ For example, Bogdan Vozniuk, “Ukraina: perelitsovka istorii. Palachei v geroi natsii?” *Morskaia gazeta* 16 February 2002.

³⁹ Dariusz Stola, “Die polnische Debatte um den Holocaust und die Rückerstattung von Eigentum,” in *Raub und Restitution des jüdischen Eigentums in Europa*, edited by

The issue of reparations flared up briefly in Romania, when President Ion Iliescu spoke against them in an interview with *Ha'aretz* on 25 July 2003. "After all," he said, "that is liable to generate sentiments not of a positive nature toward the Jewish population... Is it worth continuing to skin those who are living in distress today... And just in order to compensate others? I don't find that appropriate." In the aftermath of this controversial statement, Romania declared its intent to return confiscated Jewish property.⁴⁰

In Ukraine the issue of Holocaust reparations is marginal. Ukraine had no state during World War II, and the mass of Jewish property was confiscated under the rubric of socialization rather than aryanization. Moreover, the restitution of any kind of socialized property in Ukraine has yet to be worked out.⁴¹ Only extreme anti-Semites have tried to make propaganda with the reparations issue. According to Hryhorii Musiienko, a professor of philosophy and political science at MAUP, the Jews have decided to make Russians and Ukrainians pay for the Holocaust. "After all, you can't take anything from dead Nazis, but from live Ukrainians there is something to filch."⁴²

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

The obstacles to the acceptance of Holocaust history in Eastern Europe are manifold, and they sometimes connect with one another to shore up a larger structure of resistance. Effective education about the Holocaust in Eastern Europe needs to develop strategies for overcoming or neutralizing these obstacles. Education should proceed from a respectful stance, avoiding blanket generalizations and accusatory rhetoric. In explaining the Holocaust and its importance, care must be taken not to minimize by comparison and disparage the sufferings borne also by non-Jewish East European peoples. In particular, the relation between the recollection of communist atrocities and the resistance to consciousness of the Holocaust has to be broken. At the same time, the cultivation of victimization narratives should not be encouraged. Admittedly, this is a difficult set of parameters in which to work. I imagine that the task would be made easier if East European history on its own terms were better integrated into Holocaust history. Scholars writing about the Holocaust in

Constantin Goschler and Philipp Ther (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2003) 205–224. But see also Struve 52, n. 34.

⁴⁰ Waldman 91–93. I am citing Iliescu from Laurence Weinbaum, "The Banality of History and Memory: Romanian Society and the Holocaust," *Post-Holocaust and Anti-Semitism* (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs) 45 (1 June 2006): 9.

⁴¹ For an excellent survey of the issue almost through 2001, see Iosif Zisel's, "K voprosu o evreiskoi sobstvennosti v Ukraine (Popytka predstavleniia temy)," <http://www.judaica.kiev.ua/Conference/Conf59.htm> (Accessed 12 January 2008).

⁴² Hryhorii Musiienko, "Babyn Iar: reanimatsiia holokostu i pryvatyzatsiia Ukrainy," *Personal Plus* 39 (190) (29 September–5 October 2006).

Eastern Europe should develop a deeper knowledge of the languages, histories, and cultures of the region. The knowledge of the German language and of modern German and Jewish history are not sufficient for a sensitive investigation of East European aspects of the Holocaust. And only informed, sensitive investigations have any prospect of being acceptable to East European populations.

The analysis above has also shown that the discourse about the Holocaust has been developing in particular relations to other, larger discourses about domestic, European, and international affairs. Let me risk the prediction that such issues as the conflicts in the Middle East and immigration to Europe from Asia and North Africa will probably exercise a greater effect in the future on the discourse over the integration of the Holocaust legacy.