

Ukrainian Memories of the Holocaust: The Destruction of Jews as Reflected in Memoirs Collected in 1947

ABSTRACT: In 1947 the Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Education Centre in Winnipeg held a memoir contest. Sixty-four memoirs were submitted, and most of them are still preserved in Oseredok's archives. All extant submissions were examined in order to determine what they had to say about the Holocaust. Altogether twenty-five memoirs concerned World War II, and of these fourteen made at least some mention of the Holocaust. This body of memoirs is the earliest collection of Ukrainian memoirs of World War II that I am aware of, the closest in time to the events of the Holocaust. Already then, however, Ukrainians had become quite defensive about their behaviour towards the Jews; this perhaps explains why close to half the memoirs about the war omitted the fate of the Jews altogether and why the memoirs that do mention the Holocaust say almost nothing about Ukrainian involvement. The memoirists did, however, reproduce the image of Jews as agents of communism, particularly active in the organs of repression. The majority of the 1947 memoirs nonetheless indicated horror at and disapproval of the murder of the Jews by the Germans. Perhaps characteristically, the account expressing the strongest such feelings was written by an older man from outside Western Ukraine. Conversely, the most outright expression of lack of sympathy with the Jews came from a man twelve years younger and from Galicia. Although the latter felt pity for some individual Jews he knew and gave them alms, he expressly stated that he had no sympathy with them as a group, as "a nation that had done so much evil to my nation." Perhaps this is a case that corresponds to the phenomenon noted by Jan Gross in *Fear*, that individuals hate whom they have injured: this memoirist served in the civil administration.

In 1947 the Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Education Centre in Winnipeg held a memoir contest. Sixty-four memoirs were submitted, and most of them are still preserved in Oseredok's archives.¹ Eight have been lost or were returned to the author,² including one intriguingly entitled "Notes of a War Criminal."³ These are important sources to twentieth-century Ukrainian

¹ "Konkurs na spohady," Oseredok. I am grateful to Orest Martynowych for informing me about the existence of these memoirs and to Sophia Kachor for facilitating my research. All memoirs are in Ukrainian or Russian.

² Nos. 2 (Iurii Fiala, pseud. Mykola Levchenko), 9 (Mykola Uhryn-Bezhrishnyi, "'Moloda Hromada' v Peremyshli"), 13 (Stefan Fedoriv's'kyi, pseud. Danylo Mirshchuk, "V obiiimakh smerty [Iz shchodennyka uchasnyka UPArmii]"), 34 (A. Buravchuk, "Prosperity [Spomyn z proklyatoho mynuloho]"), 44 (Petro Kachura, "'Kyiv'—novelia ta 'Petro'—poema), 47 (Oleksii Boiko, "Notatnyk—u Kremianets'kykh lisakh. Z dii UPA, opys ochevydtsia i uchasnyka podii"), 60 (Vasyl' Strons'kyi, "Moi spohady").

³ No. 7 (P. Pliuiko, pseud. Pol' Polovets'kyi, "Zapysky Krigsferbrekhera").

Erfahrungsgeschichte. The memoirs range over the major events of the first half of the twentieth century in Ukraine, including the Ukrainian liberation struggle of 1917–1920,⁴ Soviet repressions,⁵ the famine of 1932–1933,⁶ and World War II. It is the latter group of memoirs that are relevant to this study.

Altogether twenty-five memoirs concerned the Ukrainian experience of World War II.⁷ Some of these did not concern events in Ukraine itself, for example, memoirs of some Ostarbeiter and memoirs of bombardment during the final days of the war in Germany. I examined all the extant submissions in order to determine what they had to say about the Holocaust. Fourteen made at least some mention of it.⁸ There was an array of information included in the latter memoirs. On one end of the spectrum is a rather indirect allusion found in the memoir of A. Piaskovs'kyi from Volhynia: “And one more misfortune that befell our beloved land was the red partisan movement. The Bolsheviks dropped armed parachutes. They organized a large partisan movement after gathering all the Poles and Jews to the red partisan movement. Instead of fighting with the Germans, they burned our villages and robbed the population [...]”⁹ On the other end of the spectrum were descriptions of the fate of the Jews in particular localities.

There are thousands of memoirs and testimonies of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust on Ukrainian territory. The most valuable and substantial collections are those gathered just after the war by the Central Jewish Historical Commission¹⁰ and now preserved in the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw¹¹ as well as the videotaped interviews conducted in 1994–1999 for a project initiated by Steven Spielberg and housed in the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute.¹² The latter collection includes a few interviews with Ukrainian rescuers. Dozens of Ukrainian memoirs of World War II, some of them mentioning the Holocaust, have been gathered by the Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre (UCRDC) in Toronto since the late 1980s.¹³ More recently, the French priest Patrick Desbois

⁴ Nos. 4, 5, 18, 22, 42.

⁵ Nos. 4, 5, 8, 11, 15, 16, 23, 27, 28, 36, 41, 49, 52, 54, 57.

⁶ Nos. 4, 28, 43, 46, 49.

⁷ Nos. 1, 4, 6, 11, 12, 15, 20, 23, 24, 27, 31, 33, 35, 36, 38, 40, 45, 46, 48, 49, 53, 54, 56, 58, 61.

⁸ Nos. 1, 12, 20, 23, 24, 27, 31, 40, 46, 48, 49, 53, 56, 58.

⁹ No. 23, f. 23–3v. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this article are mine.

¹⁰ Natalia Aleksium, “The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1944–1947,” *Polin* 20 (2008): 74–97.

¹¹ Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego [AŻIH], zespoły 301 and 302.

¹² A selection of the interviews lies at the basis of Serhii Bukovs'kyi's film *Spell Your Name* (USC Shoah Foundation Institute and Film Plus, 2006).

¹³ The memoir section is entitled “Spomyny.”

has led teams across Ukraine to interview older inhabitants about the Holocaust.¹⁴ The videotaped interviews are housed with Yahad-In Unum in Paris. The memoirs on the Holocaust from the Oseredok competition, although not numerous, are the earliest collection of Ukrainian accounts of the destruction of the Jews and provide an insight into the spectrum of Ukrainian attitudes towards this mass killing.

The extent of Ukrainian participation in the Holocaust and the Ukrainian memory of the Holocaust have been controversial issues. Although Ukrainians settled in North America before World War I, the immigrants who came after World War II increasingly set the tone in the community. Many of the latter had followed the German army out as the Soviets advanced after 1943 or had surrendered as members of the Waffen-SS at the end of the war; among them was a higher proportion of those who had collaborated with the Germans in various capacities than among the population left behind in Soviet Ukraine.¹⁵ Since the 1970s, in particular, North American Ukrainians have reacted vociferously and defensively to portrayals of Ukrainians as inveterate anti-Semites and to charges of collaboration in the Holocaust. Among the nodal points of controversy have been the TV miniseries of 1978 *The Holocaust*,¹⁶ which showed some Ukrainians as perpetrators and others as bystanders laughing at the execution of Jews; the long-running trials of death camp guard John Demjanjuk;¹⁷ the establishment in 1985 of the Deschênes Commission to investigate war criminals who had immigrated to Canada;¹⁸ and a 1994 *60 Minutes* episode entitled “The Ugly Face of Freedom,” which looked at anti-Semitism in independent Ukraine.¹⁹

¹⁴ Patrick Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁵ On the general political complexion of this Ukrainian diaspora, see 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; Per A. Rudling, “Multiculturalism, Memory, and Ritualization: Ukrainian Nationalist Monuments in Edmonton, Alberta,” *Nationalities Papers* 39.5 (2011): 733–768 (and see the “Erratum” published in the subsequent issue).

¹⁶ Yaroslav Bilinsky, “Notes on the Study of Ukrainian-Jewish Relations During the Second World War,” *Contact* 2–3 (1980): 129–168.

¹⁷ Glenn Sharfman, “The Quest for Justice: The Reaction of the Ukrainian-American Community to the John Demjanjuk Trials,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 2.1 (2000): 65–87.

¹⁸ Yury Boshyk, ed., *Ukraine During World War II: History and Its Aftermath. A Symposium* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1986).

¹⁹ Andrew Gregorovich, *Jews & Ukrainians: Analysis of the CBS 60 Minutes Program The Ugly Face of Freedom, October 23, 1994* (Toronto and Scranton: Forum, 1995). This is a reprint from *Ukrainian Review* 91 (1994).

In Soviet Ukraine, discourse about the Holocaust was largely muted, but after independence, debate over Ukrainian memory and Ukrainian perpetration did emerge.²⁰ The debate was connected with the glorification, particularly in Western Ukraine, of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its armed force, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (known from its Ukrainian initials as UPA). To some, these nationalists of the 1930s–1940s were heroes; but to those who were aware of their role in the Holocaust, this heroization was highly problematic.²¹ The debate reached a crescendo in early 2010 when outgoing President Viktor Yushchenko officially declared Stepan Bandera, the leader of the largest faction of OUN, a Hero of Ukraine. The controversy was immediately transferred also to Canada, where the Ukrainian Canadian Congress called upon the Canadian government to award veterans' benefits to surviving members of OUN and UPA in Canada.²² Although recent scholarship shows convincingly that OUN was an anti-Semitic organization that orchestrated pogroms and recruited for the Ukrainian police in German service (a primary instrument of the Holocaust in Ukraine),²³ the mainstream Ukrainian diaspora press and much of the Ukrainophone press in Ukraine itself refuses to accept the evidence.

During the Holocaust about one and a half million Jews lost their lives on the territories that today constitute Ukraine.²⁴ The Holocaust played out differently in

²⁰ Stefan Rohdewald, "Post-Soviet Remembrance of the Holocaust and National Memories of the Second World War in Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 44.2 (2008): 173–184.

²¹ Omer Bartov, *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007). John-Paul Himka, "Debates in Ukraine over Nationalist Involvement in the Holocaust, 2004–2008," *Nationalities Papers* 39.3 (2011): 353–370.

²² Tarik Cyril [Syril] Amar, Ihor Balyns'kyi, and Iaroslav Hrytsak, eds., *Strasti za Banderoiu* (Kyiv: Hrani-T, 2010). Dominique Arel, comp., *The Ukraine List (UKL)* 441: <<http://www.ukrainianstudies.uottawa.ca/pdf/UKL441.pdf>> (Accessed 18 September 2012) and 442: <<http://www.ukrainianstudies.uottawa.ca/pdf/UKL442.pdf>> (Accessed 18 September 2012).

²³ Among the most noteworthy contributions are Marco Carynnyk, "Foes of Our Rebirth: Ukrainian Nationalist Discussions About Jews, 1929–1947," *Nationalities Papers* 39.3 (2011): 315–352; John-Paul Himka, "The Lviv Pogrom of 1941: The Germans, Ukrainian Nationalists, and the Carnival Crowd," *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue canadienne des slavistes* 53.2–3–4 (2011): 209–243; Gabriel N. Finder and Alexander V. Prusin, "Collaboration in Eastern Galicia: The Ukrainian Police and the Holocaust," *East European Jewish Affairs* 34.2 (2004): 95–118; Per A. Rudling, *The OUN, the UPA and the Holocaust: A Study in the Manufacturing of Historical Myths*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies, 2107 (Pittsburgh: Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2011).

²⁴ The best single volume on the Holocaust in Ukraine is Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower, eds., *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization* (Bloomington

different regions of the country. In Galicia and Volhynia,²⁵ Ukrainian nationalism was very strong and led to ideologically motivated collaboration with the Germans in the murder of Jews. But elsewhere the Germans were also able to enlist or force the local population to provide manpower for their genocidal operations. In Galicia, which was part of the General Government, Jews were both transported to the death camp at Belżec and shot at local mass killing sites. In the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, to which Volhynia and the greater part of Ukraine belonged, Jews were shot at local sites.²⁶ The greatest number of victims of the Holocaust was in the western parts of Ukraine, like Galicia and Volhynia, since not many Jews had evacuated to the east, behind the front. The western regions were surprised by the German attack and were taken by early July 1941. But the rest of the country came under German rule only in the fall. As news of the German and local collaborationists' atrocities spread, Jews in the more eastern territories fled to the Soviet rear. The Ukrainian regions of Bukovina and Transnistria were under Romanian occupation; the Holocaust here was not as thorough as in the rest of Ukraine, but hundreds of thousands of Jews were nonetheless murdered by the Romanian forces as well as by ethnic German units. In Bukovina Ukrainian nationalists also executed Jews in the summer of 1941.²⁷

Such is the context for examining how the Holocaust was represented in the memoirs solicited by Oseredok in 1947. The longest treatment of the Holocaust appeared in a memoir written by an older veteran of the Ukrainian movement in the Poltava region, Ivan Zhyhadlo.²⁸ He devoted eleven hundred words to a description of the murder of the Jews of Lubny. Since information on the destruction of the Jews in Lubny is limited,²⁹ Zhyhadlo's account is an

and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008).

²⁵ Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997). Shmuel Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews 1941–1944* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, The Federation of Volhynian Jews, 1990).

²⁶ On the Reichskommissariat, see Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine Under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

²⁷ Vladimir Solonari, "Patterns of Violence: The Local Population and the Mass Murder of Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, July-August 1941," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8.4 (2007): 749–787. Ivan Fostii, *Pivnichna Bukovyna i Khotynshchyna u Druhii svitovii viini 1939–1945 rr.* (Chernivtsi: Oblasne viddilennia Poshukovo-vydavnychoho ahenstva "Knyha pam"iati Ukrainy," 2005) 130–134.

²⁸ No. 1. Ivan Zhyhadlo (b. 1876, d. late 1950s) had been arrested in 1929 in connection with the fabricated Union of the Liberation of Ukraine and was exiled to Kazakhstan. He was able to return to his home town of Lubny later in the 1930s and spent the war there until February 1943. He died in the United States.

²⁹ A survey of the Holocaust in the Poltava region indicated that the testimonies about

important supplement to our knowledge. He wrote that the Germans killed several thousand Jews on 16 September 1942. A few days previously, the Germans had posted notices around the city that all Jews had to assemble at the suburb of Zamostia in the morning of the appointed day, bringing warm clothing and food for three days. The people of Lubny saw the Jews walking towards Zamostia, but they never saw them return. Zhyhadlo was able to mention some of the victims by name: “The octogenarian widow of Bars'kyi, once a popular physician in Lubny who did a great deal of good for the poor, perished in the action. It was also the end for the gentle seventy-year-old teacher Hlozman, who served as a teacher for a long time, first as a *melamed* and later as an instructor in the German language.”³⁰ As the Soviets re-conquered Ukraine, Zhyhadlo retreated with the Germans. At one point he ended up in Brest-Litovsk, then in Reichskommissariat Ukraine but now in Belarus. He noted that trade in Brest had passed to the Poles after the destruction of the Jews. “The Jews here, people said, were wealthy and had fine buildings and stores, because trade in Brest was lively. If I’m not mistaken, the number of Jews who died here was huge—just under 17,000. While we were in Brest, Gypsies were settled in the former Jewish ‘ghetto’; this was a people to whom the Germans were equally ill disposed. Somewhat later they were transported elsewhere, and people said that they would meet the same fate as the Jews.”³¹ Two other memoirists, Mykola Balanchuk and Fedir Pigido (pseud. Pravoberezhnyi), offered substantial accounts of the massacre at Babi Yar in Kyiv at the end of September 1941.³²

Unsurprisingly, the memoirs reveal that the Ukrainians had memories that diverged from those found in postwar Jewish testimonies. The memoirs were generally reticent about Ukrainians collaborating in the persecution or murder of Jews. This stands in sharp contrast to Jewish memoirs from the immediate

Lubny and the surrounding region are “very scanty.” Anatolii Muchnyk, *Ievrei i Poltavshchyna. Istorii...Imena...Doli...* (Poltava: Oriiana, 2005) 22. The only other known testimonies are those collected by the Extraordinary Commission. I was able to consult these at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), R.G. 06.025*02, vol. 17, no. 21. There is some brief discussion of shootings in Lubny in German documents as well. A. Kruglov, *Sbornik dokumentov i materialov ob unichtozhenii natsistami evreev Ukrainy v 1941–1944 godakh* (Kyiv: Institut iudaiki, 2002) 98, 109–110.

³⁰ No. 1, f. 18v.

³¹ No. 1, ff. 37–37v.

³² No. 48, ff. 48 – 23–25. No. 49, ff. 89–93. The latter memoir, which won the memoir contest, was published as F. Pihido-Pravoberezhnyi, “*Velyka Vitchyzniana Viina*” (Winnipeg: Vydannia “Novoho Shliakhu,” 1954); the printed account differs little from the manuscript in Oseredok, and the section on the Jews can be found on pp. 106–111. There is also a second edition of this book. Pigido was born in Kyiv gubernia in 1888 and died near Munich in 1962.

postwar period which frequently described anti-Jewish actions committed by Ukrainian individuals and groups.³³

For example, the memoir of a Hutsul folk artisan, Dmytro Iakobchuk, contains an account of the murder of the Jews of Kosiv. It describes a large action on 16–17 September 1941 in which about 2700 Jews perished.³⁴ The same action is described also in testimony taken in 1945 from a Jewish survivor, J. Gärtner, but the dates Gärtner gives are for a month later, 16–17 October.³⁵ But the most striking difference between the two accounts is whom they identify as the perpetrators of the pogrom. Iakobchuk wrote only of Germans involved in the action, with Ukrainians only figuring as rescuers, and that at great risk (“where they caught Christians who hid Jews and gave Jews food, the Germans shot them along with the Jews”). In Gärtner’s account, however, the Ukrainians were perpetrators along with the Germans, sometimes even independently of the Germans, and seemed glad to see the Jews go. He confirms, however, that some individual Ukrainians did indeed help the Jews.

An exception to the general rule of silence on collaboration is Zhyhadlo’s memoir, which reported frankly on denunciation of Jews by Ukrainians to the German authorities: “Among the ‘active mass’ demoralized by the Soviet regime, which for years had become accustomed to ‘expose’ people they didn’t like to the authorities, there erupted a pestilence of denunciations directed to the German command. These not only reported on Jews who by some miracle managed to hide but also on the progeny of mixed marriages with Jews, even if not in the first generation. These denunciations were motivated by revenge, envy, and greed [...]. None of these [denounced] people ever saw the light of day again.”³⁶

Two other memoirs reveal behaviour complicit in the Holocaust, although that was not their intention. One of these also has to do with denunciation. The author, Emiliia Prybytkivs'ka, originally from Sanok, was fleeing west as the Red Army advanced and found herself in January 1945 in a Czech village.³⁷ The Germans at the same time were evacuating Soviet POWs, and about sixty of them managed to escape. “After some time passed, the prisoners began to

³³ AŽIH, 301/20, 45, 75, 86, 98, 134, 148, 176, 193, 196, 197, 198, and many more.

³⁴ No. 20, notebook 1, unpaginated.

³⁵ AŽIH, 301/134, typescript, ff. 5–11. See also Jehoschua Gertner and Danek Gertner, *Der Untergang von Kosow und Zabie: Zwei Augenzeugenberichte einer Katastrophe* (Vienna: Wiener Verlag, 1998) 47–72. There is also an English translation: Jehoschua Gertner and Danek Gertner, *Home Is No More: The Destruction of the Jews of Kosow and Zabie* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000) 66–98. Iakobchuk’s entire account revolves around what happened on particular dates and seems to have been based on a diary.

³⁶ No. 1, f. 19.

³⁷ She later settled in Ontario.

emerge from the woods. Although the Czechs are very stingy, they clothed and fed the POWs.” Her Czech host also took in one of these escaped POWs and told her that he was a Ukrainian. “I was interested in talking to him, but you can imagine my amazement when he could barely speak Russian, let alone Ukrainian, and his face betrayed his Jewish origin. His strange eyes, penetrating and small, give me the creeps even now when I recall this ‘countryman.’ That was the end of our acquaintance. When I revealed to [my host] my suspicions about the Ukrainian origin of the POW, he said: ‘It’s not possible. He’s a Ukrainian from the Crimea. He often takes the cross off my wall and kisses it. No, he’s no Jew.’”³⁸ Her discussion with her Czech host amounted to a denunciation that could have resulted in the purported Jew’s execution, but she herself did not consider that she had done anything unusual or immoral.

The other such case comes from the memoir of Dmytro Honta, who had once served in Petliura’s army, but later settled in Lviv.³⁹ During the war he played a major role in Ukrainian printing in Lviv. On 30 June 1941, which was the first day of the German occupation, he took control of the largest newspaper print shop in the city and set to work publishing broadsides for Ukrainian organizations, including the proclamation “Ukraine for Ukrainians” issued by OUN (Bandera faction). The great demand for printed material required more labour. Honta sent some of the printers out to find reinforcements. “[...] After a while they came back with ten or so citizens who in September 1939 were kissing Bolshevik tanks and artillery, and whose co-religionists (*odnovirtsy*) were managing the printers’ movement in Galicia.”⁴⁰ This refers, of course, to Jews. On that same day, 30 June 1941, the Ukrainian nationalist militia was pressing Jews into service to exhume the bodies of thousands of prisoners murdered by the NKVD. This was the beginning of the infamous Lviv pogrom. From Honta’s memoir we learn that some Jews were also pressed into service in the print shop that he had seized.

Many of the Ukrainian memoirs, and not just those that referred to the Holocaust, indicated that Jews were very prominent in the Soviet apparatus, something that one does not find clearly reflected in the Jewish memoirs from Galicia.

The engineer Hryhorii Bozhok, originally from the Chernihiv region, had served in the White Army during the Civil War. At that time he was arrested and interrogated by the Cheka. He reported that the Cheka office was as well appointed as offices were in pre-Soviet times. “Only the people in the government had changed: instead of old, ink-stained officials there were now young, elegant, modern people with the typical physiognomies and noses of

³⁸ No. 56, ff. 56 – 7–8.

³⁹ I received information on Honta’s background from Marco Carynnyk, letter of 30 October 2008.

⁴⁰ No. 40, f. 40–16.

‘God’s chosen people.’”⁴¹ Ivan Zhyhadlo prefaced his account of the murder of the Jews of Lubny with a sketch of Ukrainian-Jewish relations prior to the war. He noted that “since the time of the 1917 revolution the Jewish nation has given a much larger percentage than other nations of the Soviet Union of responsible party workers and employees of the Cheka, GPU, and NKVD, and they, as is well known, made life miserable for all the other nations, while the Jewish nation during the whole time after the revolution enjoyed favour and privileges from the Soviet authorities.”⁴² The former owner of an electrical business in Przemyśl and an official in the Przemyśl region civil administration during the war, Dmytro Duchyns'kyi, knew from experience “that the first and foremost preachers and carriers of socialism and later communism, both in Russia and Poland, were Jews [...] Trotsky, Kaganovich [...] mainly in the NKVD. Before the war in Przemyśl and other cities the Jews collectively took part in First of May parades, carried red flags, made speeches, and sang the Internationale.”⁴³ Nikolai Ivanenko, a rather uneducated UPA sympathizer perhaps from the Kuban, left an odd Russian-language memoir of a trip he made from Germany to the Soviet Union in 1947. In it, he equated Jews (*zhidy*) and communists entirely, referring to the “Kremlin Jewish dictators” and “the rule of the Jewish race.” He discerned a sign of resistance in Soviet territory—signs on buildings and railroad cards saying “Beat the Jews and save Russia.”⁴⁴

Some Ukrainian memoirists, while reiterating the standard story of the close connection between Jews and communism, also recorded contradictory information. Fedir Pighido, describing the situation in Kyiv, wrote that the Jews supported Soviet power more than any other nationality in the Soviet Union and were particularly predominant in party institutions, but by the eve of the war, anti-Soviet sentiments were also widespread among the Jews. In fact, many Jews declined evacuation, because they found it difficult to imagine that their situation could be worse under Hitler than under Stalin.⁴⁵ A Galician teacher, Ivan Bodnaruk,⁴⁶ also reported that the Jews played an important role in supporting the Soviet regime. As a result, he observed, anti-Semitic attitudes had become widespread in the Soviet Union, to which Galicia had been recently annexed. Russians who came to Galicia complained about the preferential treatment of Jews. “Damn it,” said a newly arrived teacher, a Russian. “Wherever you go, the Russian people are suffering in prisons, while the Jews

⁴¹ No. 11, f. 55.

⁴² No. 1, f. 18.

⁴³ No. 12, f. 20.

⁴⁴ No. 64, ff. 64–9, 64–10, 64–13, 64–14, 64–20.

⁴⁵ No. 49, ff. 89–93; Pihido-Pravoberezhnyi 106–111.

⁴⁶ Bodnaruk was born in a village near Buchach in Western Ukraine in 1903. He settled in Brazil in 1948, but moved to Chicago in 1960. He died in 1990.

are everywhere in charge.” Bodnaruk also quoted an anecdote that circulated at that time about how Jews changed their names and took high positions in the apparatus.⁴⁷ “Living under the Bolsheviks, each of us had the opportunity to realize that anti-Semitism was growing even among party members and the communist elite.” However, he felt obliged to qualify the story he was telling: “Justice requires me to state that many Galician Jewish *intelligentsia*, even those who once dreamed about the Bolshevik paradise, had a critical or even hostile attitude toward the Bolshevik regime [...]. Perhaps it will not be an exaggeration to say that almost the entire Jewish intelligentsia in Galicia was hostile to bolshevism and communism.”⁴⁸

The memoirs present a spectrum of Ukrainian attitudes to the murder of the Jews. The account most sympathetic to the Jews was Zhyhadlo’s. He wrote that Ukrainians in Lubny greeted the Germans in 1941 with reserve, but without hostility or fear. At first the Germans also demonstrated a pro-Ukrainian orientation. But it did not take long for the Germans to alienate the population through the mistreatment of POWs, a ruthless agricultural policy, preference for a Russophone orientation, and arbitrary arrests and executions.⁴⁹ “But what most turned the sympathies of the population away from the Germans and disturbed people the most were the events of 16 October (1942), when the Germans destroyed perhaps several thousand of the local Jewish population.” Zhyhadlo remembered that on the day of the action the rumour began to circulate that the Jews had not been deported, but executed. “Almost no one wanted to believe this rumour, thinking it must be an insinuation, a fiction thought up by anti-German elements. And it was indeed difficult to credit that such unheard of barbarity, such bestial cruelty could take place now, in the middle of the

⁴⁷ This anecdote is untranslatable:

“Післав Бог до большевицької Росії святого Луку, щоб він поглянув, що там твориться. Довго не вертався св. Лука, аж вкінці прийшла від нього записка такого змісту:

‘Сиджу в Чека!

Євангелист Лука.’

Післав тоді Бог св. Іллю, кажучи до нього: ‘Ти проворніший від св. Луки, може тобі вдасться принести якісь вісті.’

Але за кілька місяців прийшла з Советського Союзу від св. Іллі депеша:

‘Сиджу і я!

Пророк Ілля.’

Тоді порадили Богові післати на землю Мойсея. І ось незабаром прийшла від нього депеша такого змісту:

‘Живий і здоров!

Комісар Петров.’”

⁴⁸ No. 54, ff. 54 – 52–54.

⁴⁹ No. 1, ff. 12–17.

twentieth century. But it was not possible to conceal the true facts, and the truth gradually rose to the surface, filling peoples' souls with horror."⁵⁰

The account most forthright in its negative attitude towards the Jews as a group was Duchyns'kyi's:

Of the sixty thousand inhabitants of Przemyśl, Jews constituted 45 percent. – All of them were capitalists. Factory owners, merchants, industrialists, artisans, lawyers, doctors were Jews [...]. The Jews lived well at the expense of our peasant, ate tasty food, and walked about finely dressed [...]. In the spring of 1942 the Germans began to drive the Jews into the ghetto which was set up in one district of the city. I had many acquaintances and fellows in the profession [electrical engineering] who were Jews and with whom I lived in peace and towards whom I had no hate. – On the contrary, I was sorry to see how every morning and evening they were taken to work and back from work, unshaven and hungry. I very often gave acquaintances some bread or a cigarette—these were people. – As people I was sorry for them, but as a nation that had done so much evil to my nation—no!

On the whole Ukrainians sympathized with the Jews, and our peasantry saved a lot of them from inevitable death and did not stop to think about how they were exposing themselves and their family to danger. – The police found a bunker in which one peasant near Przemyśl hid twenty-five Jewish men and one Jewish woman. They liquidated the Jews and sent the peasant to Auschwitz, whence he never returned.⁵¹

A number of memoirs placed the murder of the Jews in the larger context of Nazi genocidal projects. A few mentioned the murder of Roma (*tsyhany*).⁵² Hryhorii Sova, from somewhere between Kyiv and Poltava, wrote: "It was our good fortune that in our raion there were no Jews and we did not see the nightmare of their destruction. But in December 1942 five families of Gypsies, about twenty-five persons, perished. There were infants. They were all destroyed by the gendarmerie at the order of the Gestapo."⁵³ Some indicated that although the murder of Jews held priority for the Germans, the Germans were also beginning to murder the Ukrainian (or Slavic) population.⁵⁴

Among the memoirs is also a fictional or belletrized sketch of a Soviet partisan official who murdered Jews to raise money for the partisan movement. The sketch was written by Oleksii Andriienko and concerns an unidentified locality on the Buh river with a fortress built by the Turks. "At that time in the city, which had been taken by the European invader, the German fascist, the first frightening, disturbing rumours began to crawl like slender vipers: the Germans

⁵⁰ No. 1, ff. 18–18v.

⁵¹ No. 12, ff. 20–22.

⁵² Nos. 1, 37v; 49, ff. 89–93; Pihido-Pravoberezhnyi 106–111; no. 54, f. 54–193.

⁵³ No. 46, f. 46–110.

⁵⁴ Nos. 24; 31, f. 44; 53, ff. 53 – 25–26; 54, f. 54–193.

are preparing to wipe out completely the Jewish population, thus executing the will of their insane Führer.” But rumours were also circulating that an underground communist group was rescuing Jews, hiding them and then transporting them by plane behind Soviet lines. Terrified Jews clutched at these rumours like a drowning man clutching at straws. The most prominent and richest local Jews—directors of banks and factories, their wives and daughters—sought out the leader of the communist underground, a certain Busygin. He would promise them rescue and ask them to come back with large amounts of money. When they did come back, Busygin shot them with his pistol and threw them into the cellar of the Turkish fortress. The Germans eventually found out about this and discovered 130 corpses in the basement of the Turkish fortress. Another seventeen corpses washed to shore on the banks of the river Buh.⁵⁵ It is difficult to assess the meaning of this sketch. On the one hand, it is a piece of fiction easily inspired by the circumstances of the time (compare Christian de Chalonge’s film of 1990 *Docteur Pétiot* and Paul Verhoeven’s of 2006 *The Black Book*).⁵⁶ On the other, it is clearly meant to discredit the red partisan movement as complicit in the murder of the Jews.

* * *

Having reviewed the information on the Holocaust provided in the 1947 corpus of Ukrainian memoirs assembled by Oseredok, it is necessary to say a little more about them and draw some conclusions.

This body of memoirs is the earliest collection of Ukrainian memoirs of World War II that I am aware of, the closest in time to the events of the Holocaust. But the memoirs were not written in the immediate aftermath of the war and so are not as proximate to the events as the collection of Jewish testimonies gathered by the Central Jewish Historical Commission already in 1945. When the Ukrainian memoirs were produced, most of the authors had already spent about two years in displaced persons’ camps.⁵⁷ The camps were a place of intense interaction among Ukrainians refugees and forced labourers, a place where they could tell stories to each other and work out narratives together. The displaced persons were well aware that they were being screened to see if they had participated in war crimes, and if they had, they could be sent back to

⁵⁵ No 58, ff. 58 – 15–17 (Oleksii Andriienko, “Provokatsii Kremlia na Ukraini,” “Liudyna ponad zakonom”).

⁵⁶ Father Patrick Desbois ran across a case of a robber and murderer of Jews who lured them into his home on the pretext of hiding them. A villager told him: “You see the house down there on the left, the modern house. Well, down there he hid Jews during the war. He hid a lot. And each time he killed them during the night. He smothered them with quilts. When they were dead, he stripped them and took their bodies to the quarry to get rid of them.” Desbois 207.

⁵⁷ See Anna Holian, “Anticommunism in the Streets: Refugee Politics in Cold War Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 45 (2010): 134–161.

the Soviet Union for trial. Already at this time Ukrainians were subject to blanket accusations of complicity in the Holocaust and were refuting these charges in their press. For example, in 1946–1947 generalizations about Ukrainian anti-Semitism and participation in the murder of Jews appeared in Eugen Kogon's book on concentration camps, *Der SS-Staat*, and the nationalist Volodymyr Ianiv responded to them in a newspaper for Ukrainian displaced persons published in Fürth (Bavaria).⁵⁸ In 1946 a periodical associated with the Melnyk faction of OUN wrote: "In their bestial hatred of their political opponents the Bolsheviks try to brand them all as fascists, bandits, war criminals."⁵⁹ Thus, by the time our memoirs were written, Ukrainians were already quite defensive about their behaviour towards the Jews during the war, and it is reasonable to assume that this influenced how the memoirists presented the Holocaust. This perhaps explains why close to half the memoirs about World War II omitted the fate of the Jews altogether and why the memoirs that do mention the Holocaust say almost nothing about Ukrainian involvement.

The silence about the murder of Jews in a number of the memoirs is particularly noticeable. Peter Kalynowycz (Kalynovych), although originally from near Poltava, became involved with the Galician nationalists, may have joined UPA for a while, and probably also served in some Ukrainian unit in German employ. He wrote about mass shootings of Ukrainians by Germans, but he makes no mention at all of the shooting of Jews.⁶⁰ Eustachius Minczak (Ievstakhii Minchak) was a Galician, a member or sympathizer of the Bandera faction of OUN. He reported on the impressment of Ukrainians for forced labour in Germany, but he had nothing to say about Jews.⁶¹ Mykhailo Beztalannyi was another Galician. He barely escaped the NKVD massacre of prisoners in Sambir as the Germans advanced on the city. He wrote about the activities of UPA, but nothing about Jews.⁶² Stepan Mykolyn (pseud. Or. Chornohirs'kyi) served as a Ukrainian policeman and later joined the Waffen-SS Division Galizien. He not only wrote nothing about the Holocaust, but omitted altogether from his memoirs anything to do with the Nazi occupation or World War II.⁶³

This same pattern of bracketing the Holocaust and passing over the issue of complicity holds also for those Ukrainian memoirs from later periods that I have

⁵⁸ Volodymyr Ianiv, "Za dobre im'ia ukrains'koho narodu (Do zlobnoi kharakterystyky Kogona v ioho knyzhtsi pro nimets'ki kontstabory)," *Chas* (Fürth) 18 May 1947.

⁵⁹ "Armiia henerala Andersa—bandyty i viis'kovi zlochyntsi," *Za samostiinist'* 1.3–4 (1946): 27.

⁶⁰ No. 4.

⁶¹ No. 6.

⁶² No. 36.

⁶³ No. 63. The information on his service in the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police and Galizien Division comes from a postcard preserved in the file.

looked at. The most egregious silence was a several hundred-page memoir of the war by a former Ukrainian policeman that never mentions the Holocaust.⁶⁴ The 1947 memoirs we have examined did contain a few instances where one can discern complicity in one form or another. There seems to be less of this in later Ukrainian memoirs, but it is not entirely absent. For example, Petro Maslij, a veteran of the Waffen-SS Division Galizien who ended up in Britain, wrote in his memoir about two young Jewish women who had been hiding in the environs of his village (Luchyntsi, Rohatyn raion, Ivano-Frankivsk oblast). As to the ultimate fate of the women, he first wrote that he would not say anything about it, since he left the village in June 1944. Then a little later in his memoir he wrote: "I heard that at the time Polish colonists were being murdered, those who ignored the request to leave Ukrainian lands and return to indigenous Poland, these [two Jewish women] were also murdered and buried in the fields where there was once a wonderful meadow. I cannot guarantee this, because I only heard about it."⁶⁵

The memoirists' image of Jews as agents of communism, particularly active in the organs of repression, was a commonplace in Eastern Europe before, during, and after the war. It remained and remains present in Ukrainian-diaspora thinking. To cite just two examples among very many, Orest Horodys'ky in 1958 urged his fellow Ukrainians to counterattack against the slanders of their enemies ("white and red Muscovites, Poles, and Jews"). He recommended them to read Wolfgang Bretholz's *Ich sah Sie stürzen* because it relates that "Jews were the first to participate en masse in the Bolshevik militia in the cities and towns; they were the first to conduct arrests among Ukrainians; they were the investigators of the NKVD and the bloody executioners in NKVD prisons."⁶⁶ More recently, in connection with the debates over Bandera and OUN, the former president of the Ukrainian World Congress, Askold Lozynskyj, has also been reiterating the view that the Jews were in great measure responsible for Soviet crimes against Ukrainians and that they hush this up in the press they control.⁶⁷ In post-Soviet, independent Ukraine the idea of Judeo-communism has also reappeared in public discourse.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ UCRDC, "Spomyny," no. 33 (Ivan P"iatka).

⁶⁵ Letter of P. Maslij to the UCRDC, 29 January 1991, UCRDC, "Spomyny," no. 51.

⁶⁶ O[rest] Horod[ys'kyi], "Druha svitova viina, ukraintsi i nasha dyvizia," *Visti* 91 (1958), in UCRDC, "Spomyny," no. 7, ff. 12–13.

⁶⁷ Askold S. Lozynskyj, "Rewriting History: An Evidentiary Perspective," *Kyiv Post* 16 February 2010: <<http://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/op-ed/rewriting-history-an-evidentiary-perspective-59650.html>> (Accessed 20 September 2012). Askold S. Lozynskyj, "How Insensitive Bigots Continue to Play Ukrainians and Jews Against Each Other," *Kyiv Post* 8 November 2010: <<http://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/op-ed/how-insensitive-bigots-continue-to-play-ukrainians-89252.html>> (Accessed 20 September 2012). Askold S. Lozynskyj, "Anti-Semitism Charges Don't Stick Against Ukrainian Nationalist Group," *Kyiv Post* 20 December 2010: <<http://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/op-ed/anti->

The majority of the 1947 memoirs indicated by their language horror at and disapproval of the murder of the Jews by the Germans. Perhaps characteristically, the account expressing the strongest such feelings was written by Zhyhadlo, an older man (he would have been in his mid-sixties when the Jews of Lubny were annihilated) from outside Western Ukraine. This veteran of the Ukrainian movement was formed in a time and place in which Ukrainian nationalism was not influenced by Central European fascist ideologies. Conversely, the most outright expression of lack of sympathy with the Jews came from a man, Duchyns'kyi, who was twelve years younger than Zhyhadlo and from Galicia. Although Duchyns'kyi felt pity for some individual Jews he knew and gave them alms, he expressly stated that he had no sympathy with them as a group, as “a nation that had done so much evil to my nation.” Perhaps this is a case that corresponds to the phenomenon noted by Jan Gross in *Fear*, that individuals hate those whom they have injured.⁶⁹ Duchyns'kyi served as a volost elder in the civil administration of the Przemyśl region. In that capacity he may well have had duties that affected the Jewish population. He reported in his memoir that by the end of 1943 “tens of thousands of Ukrainian stores appeared in the cities, towns, and villages, and the cities took on a Ukrainian character.”⁷⁰ It would not have been untypical for the civil administration to be involved in transferring aryanized Jewish property to new Ukrainian owners. Moreover, Duchyns'kyi was apparently trusted enough by the Germans that he was allowed to witness an execution of Jews by “Uzbeks.”⁷¹ By believing that the Jews as a nation were in the wrong, that they were both capitalists who exploited simple Ukrainians and communists who served in the NKVD, Duchyns'kyi relieved himself of the need to reckon with anti-Jewish actions that he may himself have taken. And he could remain in his own eyes a decent individual because he gave cigarettes and bread to his Jewish acquaintances,

[semitism-charges-dont-stick-against-ukrainian-93235.html](#)> (Accessed 20 September 2012).

⁶⁸ See, for example, Serhii Bilokin', “Do pytannia pro derzhavu v derzhavi,” *Berezil' 2* (2004): 138–151.

⁶⁹ Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006) 164, 256; see also 247–248.

⁷⁰ No. 12, ff. 16–17.

⁷¹ “Uzbeks were slant-eyed citizens of the Soviet Union recruited from POWs who formed a separate organization attached to the German army in German uniforms; they were there to help the Gestapo. – They carried out executions of Jews (I saw this with my own eyes in Medyka), dug pits, filled them up, and in general carried out the secret affairs of the Gestapo [...]. They murdered with pleasure [...].” No. 12, ff. 22–23. The exact same things, of course, have been alleged against Ukrainians as well. Duchyns'kyi is comfortable about identifying this behaviour rather with Asiatics.

who were now reduced to slave labourers and who stood on the verge of extinction.