Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cnap20

Omer Bartov, Erased: vanishing traces of Jewish Galicia in present-day Ukraine

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Published online: 15 Feb 2010.

To cite this article: Steven Seegel , John Paul Himka , Wendy Lower , Myroslav Shkandrij & Omer Bartov (2010) Omer Bartov, Erased: vanishing traces of Jewish Galicia in present-day Ukraine , Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity, 38:2, 291-305, DOI: 10.1080/00905990903522413

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905990903522413

Nationalities Papers
Vol. 38, No. 2, March 2010, 291–305

BOOK SYMPOSIUM

Erased: vanishing traces of Jewish Galicia in present-day Ukraine, by Omer Bartov, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007, xvii+232 pp.+illustrations, maps, indexes, ISBN 978-0-691-13121-4

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Omer Bartov's *Erased*, surely a work of history, is difficult to classify in terms of space and genre. It is all at once a Central European travelogue, a memory book, a historical meditation on genocide and provincial modernity, and post-genocidal memory. It is also a critical diary of an individual "guest" to Galicia, and a chronicle of this familiar stranger's elective and accidental paths of identity. Bartov's readers are challenged to look in the mirror. They're teased intellectually and politically, invited to deconstruct and reconstruct themselves, to challenge the concepts and categories of identity – normally relied upon by flat two-dimensional mappers of the region and, by extension, Ukraine.

Let me introduce Bartov's book by quoting from his concluding chapter. He writes:

> Ultimately this is not only a story about exhuming bodies, but also about unearthing a path of destruction whose very objective was to bury the traces of its crimes and the identity of the murdered along with their bodies. But such crimes have a predilection to resurface, both metaphorically and physically. They cannot remain hidden forever, and they cannot be confronted without a willingness to look back at all the hatred and atrocity, but also the beauty and creativity, of a world that ended up being trampled by vast external forces even as it devoured its own inhabitants. Those who stare at the past with eyes wide shut can only conjure fictions, legends, nightmares and phobias, however much they seek a pure, good, cleansed identity.
>
> We cannot bring back the dead, but we can give them a decent burial. We cannot bring back a rich, complex, and increasingly precarious multi-ethnic world, and we may not even want to do so, but we can recognize its failings and respect its accomplishments, not only for their own sake, but because we cannot understand ourselves and build a secure and confident identity without acknowledging where we come from and how we got to where we are today. We have just left behind us the bloodiest century in world history, and seem to be heading right into one that could prove to be even bloodier. Before we plunge into yet another ocean of blood, it behooves us to reflect on the causes and consequences of previous atrocities and to finally understand that the origins of collective violence invariably lie in repressing memory and misconstruing the past. (201)

Studies of mass murder and meditations on the absence of communities are nothing new. But nor are travelogues. They are at least as old as Homer and Herodotus. There is one long, direct teleological path to our contemporaries Anna Reid, Eva Hoffman, and Kate Brown. Another tradition is the memory-book. The first, written in 1296 by Yitzhak Shmuel in Nuremburg, was a record of Ashkenazi communities that were destroyed by Christian knights during the First Crusade. One focus is the town of Speier (or Speyer). Bartov moves between these genres and literary traditions. He offers neither victimology nor hagiography on a biblical scale, but a modern investigation into the political suppression of knowledge and historical memory. We should say that

ISSN 0090-5992 print/ISSN 1465-3923 online
DOI: 10.1080/00905990903522413
http://www.informaworld.com

heroes and villains, starting with those who have come to mythologize them, are subject to the most modern of intellectual skepticisms.

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Since we are starting with quotations, here are mine. In the introduction, Omer Bartov asks: "How could one give back to both perpetrators and to victims their humanity yet not deny or obfuscate the atrocity?" (xii–xiii). And in his final reflections he writes, in the same vein, that we have to sort out the past in order to recover both its "true tragedy" and its "full glory" (210). In the spirit of these passages, I am going to start with what I think is important in the book and then offer two sets of mixed feelings.

What is important about the book is that Bartov documents very well, on a local-regional level, the degree to which the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) are being glorified, and the degree to which their crimes and their victims are forgotten. And within the last few years we have moved into a new phase, in which this same pairing of heroic memorialization with criminal amnesia is promoted by the president of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, as well as by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory that he created, and by the Security Service of Ukraine. What was primarily a regional issue when Omer was conducting his research has now become national. Certainly there is now a much more powerful spokesmachine behind the glorification of the nationalists and the obfuscation of their crimes than what he describes in *Erased*.[1]

The champions of the OUN and UPA like to present them as opponents of two totalitarianisms, German and Soviet. But from 1941 to 1944 much of their energy was actually devoted to a project of cleaning Ukraine of people who were not Ukrainian. And in that process they killed an awful lot of people. They killed tens of thousands of Poles for sure; they killed many, many Jews; they killed Russians as well as local ethnic Germans and Czechs. They also killed people who taught the Polish or Russian languages, clergymen who had the wrong ecclesiological orientation, and political opponents of every stripe. They engaged in a large-scale "transformative project." And with this came also the need to subjugate its own population in order to ensure its support.

This involved a tremendous amount of violence, as every insurgency does. I once read that during the Vietnam War the Americans gave inoculations to the children of a village; the next day the Viet Cong came to that village and cut the children's arms off. I cannot vouch for the veracity of this particular incident, but this is what insurgencies do, and our Ukrainian insurgency did this kind of thing as well. The OUN and UPA killed their opponents; they killed communists and anyone who acquiesced to them, some 30,000 people, half of whom were peasants, chairmen of collective farms, their families, etc. So there are many crimes that are not being remembered.

In *Erased*, Omer offers the reflection that "the origins of collective violence invariably lie in repressing memory and misconstruing the past" (201). Repressed memory, of course, is not just the dangerous origin of violence, it is its continuation.

I think it constitutes a continuation of the violence for two reasons. The first has to do with recognition. These crimes cannot be undone. The only thing one can do by way of

restitution is to recognize the victims, apologize to the victims and their community, and make gestures of reconciliation. That is all that it is possible to do. And when even that hopelessly incommensurate action is not undertaken, then that neglect in effect continues the crime.

A second point about the repression of memory as a continuation of violence is that this enables the ideology of the violence to live on. Some argue that today's admirers of the legacy of the UPA are not resurrecting anti-Semitism or violent xenophobia but rather that they are simply looking for heroes, just like every other country has. But you really cannot bracket the issue of criminal responsibility, because sooner or later you are led to that same line of argument and justification that the nationalists used when committing their crimes. This has been happening recently in Ukraine. For example, a prime spokesperson of the Security Service of Ukraine is a 30-year-old historian and nationalist, Volodymyr Viatrovych, who has been working intensively as an apologist for the historical record of the OUN and UPA. In March 2008 he was interviewed in the press and defended the rehabilitation of UPA leader Roman Shukhevych. He was asked if he was sure that Shukhevych did not kill Polish and Belarusian civilian populations. He answered that in conditions of partisan warfare it is very difficult to distinguish the peaceful civilian population from combatants. By day they might be working like ordinary peasants, but in the evening they might arm themselves and attack a village. "With an automatic rifle, he's a soldier; with a hoe he's a peaceful civilian. When you kill him in an encounter, is he a civilian or not?" (Mishchenko). This answer was meant to justify the mass murders perpetrated by forces under the command of Shukhevych in both Belarus and Volhynia. This type of reasoning, of course, can be extended a short step to include as hostile elements the women and children who supported the potentially not so peaceful civilians that the nationalists sought to kill.

Omer's book makes a very powerful case against what is now going on in Ukraine at the national level by exposing the egregious erasure of memory on the ground.

As I said above, I have two sets of mixed feelings, which I will call "situated mixed feelings." The first one has to do with the documentation of the OUN's and UPA's murder of the Jews. I am uncomfortable with the way it is not clearly documented in Omer's text. Some of my friends – and these are scholars who have very similar ideas about the OUN and UPA as both Omer and I do – say: Oh, Bartov uses Wikipedia, and he doesn't cite this or that, and he should have gone to the archives, etc. I understand that Omer's book is an extended essay in the form of a travelogue, and I can accept it and welcome it as such. Yet I have repeatedly seen that when accusations are made that are not sufficiently careful or sufficiently documented, the defenders of the nationalist heritage in Ukraine and in the Ukrainian diaspora use the deficiencies to score propaganda points. They say: Well, look – they accuse us, but they have no proof.

On the other hand – and this is why I call my mixed feelings "situated" – I find myself in Omer's position as I work on an article called "The Reception of the Holocaust in Post-communist Ukraine." I am supposed to open the text with a description of the Holocaust in Ukraine and of instances of local participation in it. Now I think I have a fairly good idea of what happened. But I cannot document it completely or to my satisfaction because some of what I understand happened comes from rather indirect evidence or from arguments by analogy to what happened elsewhere. So I cannot actually prove everything I have to say. And I think it is a pity and also symptomatic of the repression of memory that Bartov is unable to cite monographs on particular instances of murders because they do not yet exist. Some survey works do exist, such as the excellent overview of the Holocaust in Galicia by Dieter Pohl. Pohl's work, however, is based largely on German

documentation, and we still need studies based on a greater complement of sources, including survivors' testimony and photographic evidence, and integrating to a greater extent comparative analysis and contextual factors. So it is not difficult to understand the situation which produces Omer's under-documented account of Ukrainian nationalist complicity in the Holocaust.

The second set of mixed feelings is more complex. It is very, very difficult to understand the Other's point of view and to empathize with the Other. The very subject of Omer's book, after all, is the miserable failure of contemporary Ukrainian Galicia to enter into the subjectivity of the murdered Jews, to feel horror or guilt or even loss in the wake of their slaughter. But it also seems that his book does not fully empathize with the situation of those who are unable to mourn, or who are unable to remember.

There are some passages that reveal, I think, the psychological resistance to the Other that Omer himself wrestles with in the book. In introducing his subject, he says that his generation in Israel associated the Polish language with "powerful vodka-drinking gentiles with Jewish blood on their hands" (x). He concludes the chapter on his mother's home town, Buchach, with a depiction of the afternoon he left the town: "... The sky cleared and the sun lit the main square and the still handsome, though dilapidated, town hall, with a soft afternoon glow." He describes the townscape as viewed from the place where the synagogue once stood and also a funeral procession winding its way to the marketplace. "A coffin was being carried on the back of a truck. In front of the procession marched two men carrying flags: the blue and yellow national flag of Ukraine, and the black and red flag of UPA. Ukrainian Buchach had come into its own" (141). This is to reduce the story of Ukrainian Buchach to the butchery of the nationalists. But the story is far more complex and far more harrowing to listen to than that, so that the end result of this literary flourish is to respond to the Other's deafness with a deafness of one's own. There is another passage, on Husiatyn, where he contrasts "the elegant edifice" of the former synagogue with a "tasteless" and "gaudy" Soviet monument with "primitive figures." The comparison leads him to conclude that "despite all pronouncements to the contrary, civilization seems to have made little progress in the three centuries since the synagogue was built" (107–09). Ukrainians are sensitive to such comparisons. It has not been long since most of them emerged from the peasantry, and they take offense easily when it is implied that they are less civilized than others. And in all the cases cited, Omer implies the superiority of the group he identifies with over the group that for him constitutes the Other so resistant to comprehension.

There are other things that need to be taken into account when trying to understand the psychology that resulted in Galicia's Ukrainians repressing the memory of the nationalists' murder of the Jews during the war and accepting the nationalist versions of history and memory. For example, individuals may not have been complicit in anything, but nationalist partisans came to their door at night and asked to be fed; and they fed them, because the alternative was not very nice. People could spend 12 years in the Gulag for such a thing. So there are complexities here that need to be worked into the story somehow.

Note

1. Yushchenko's initiation of the new politics of history began in June 2007 when he ordered the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of UPA Commander-in-Chief Roman Shukhevych. An accompanying postage stamp bore the flag and emblems of the OUN. A few months later Shukhevych was posthumously awarded the title "Hero of Ukraine."

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I will try not to repeat some points that have already been made. The book has a travelogue feel to it, it is a tour of history to the backwater as well as the historic jewels in the former Austrian Crown land of Eastern Galicia. Bartov's characterization of the region as a true borderland is an important historical theme in his research. Galicia was, according to Bartov, the "meeting place of numerous cultures, religions and ethnicities which is at the same time located at the periphery, a site where identity is all the more vehemently asserted precisely because of its often tenuous and fluid nature" (8).[1]

In another book on Ukraine by Anna Reid, *Borderland: A Journey through the History of Ukraine*, borderland is defined not as a meeting place but as a literal translation for *Ukrainia*, meaning frontier, a place on the edge. She calls it "flat, fertile, and fatally tempting for invaders" (Reid 1).

The legacies of such a battlefield, such an imperial terrain, are that enormous suffering and violence reigned; and rebellion, civil wars, pogroms, famine and genocide have left its Ukrainian survivors with (according to Anna Reid) a "tenuous equivocal sense of national identity" (Reid 1). While Reid's journey focuses on Kyiv as the epicenter of Ukraine's borderland history, Bartov's destination is Eastern Galicia, where he's in search of traces of its Jewish past. And I raise this notion of borderland because regional differences are very important in how you analyze your story on Eastern Galicia. What this concept of borderland indicates of Ukraine is: where does this borderland begin, and where does it end in terms of overlapping cultures?

There are indeed many important regional differences in how Jewish pasts are memorialized (their remnants) and in how the educational processes assert national identity. And that is in transition right now. Some surveys are coming out. For instance, Professor Elena Ivanova (Department of Psychology, Kharkiv National University) found that those surveyed in Western Ukraine about Holocaust history gave more "politically-correct" answers. So some of the assumptions we have about the entrenched nationalism in Western Ukraine should be reconsidered. The tourism of Israeli, American, and Polish groups in Eastern Galicia, and the region's historically more Western European orientation may increase awareness of the region's multicultural, Jewish history.

Bartov's initial aim in undertaking this journey was not only to research the region's history but also to reconnect with his family roots. Dissatisfied with the large body of Holocaust literature that discusses the way Jews were killed, or the perpetrator studies that seem to reduce Jews to the number of corpses or portraits of passive victims, Bartov sought to correct and establish how Jews lived and what they lost.

Bartov explores the dimensions of a Polish–Ukrainian–Jewish triangle and the relations in the region. In *Erased*, Bartov stops short of re-creating the social fabric of

Jews, Ruthenians, Poles, and Germans who lived in Galicia for centuries before the Second World War, though he finds traces of the Poles and Armenians as represented in the architectural ruins of certain areas.

Thus in this book it is not clear just how interwoven this social fabric was before the war. How deep were the socio-economic or ethnic cleavages that allowed such violence to occur there, and continue to ethnicize often anti-Semitic memories of Ukrainians who still reside there?

Though structurally many have described Bartov's book as a historical travelogue, it also contains elements of a lamentation because of its passionate plea to take notice of Galicia's Jewish past and its current erasure. This book has a literary flair of an elegy with its reflections and poetic images. As a mixed genre, Bartov's book offers a new structure for analyzing the past, which is part historical travelogue, part archeological and social-anthropological fieldwork. In parts, Bartov takes on the voice of a romantic naturalist who reads into the landscapes of church steeples, meadows, rolling hills, and sees more than meets the eye in its vine-covered, overgrown ruins of synagogues and tombstones. But any hint of nostalgia is overshadowed by the bare fact that he presents the mass murder of the Jews, and what comes through more clearly in the end is that Bartov is trying to navigate a post-genocidal society, a term which has been used primarily in reference to Ukraine and Rwanda. But in Ukraine the victims and perpetrators do not actually live side by side today. There are no more living Jews, just their ghosts. As if the human loss was not tragic enough, now we see they're past being erased, chapter by chapter, in a new national narrative of Ukrainian history, as Jewish sites are being converted to marketplaces and youth centers. Thus Jewish sites have been turned into places that honor Ukrainian martyrs, or have become platforms for asserting Ukrainian pride and victimization. To impose what is Ukrainian onto what was Jewish. A form of replacing. Obviously distortion and suppression of a dark and increasingly alien Jewish past. This manipulation is more upsetting than the crumbling neglect of Jewish edifices, of synagogues, a sure sign of neglect and poverty.

Scholars of Ukraine, such as James Mace, refer to Ukraine as a post-genocidal society, but in reference to the famine, the Holodomor, not as inheritors of a landscape scarred by the Final Solution, let alone actors in a systematic removal of their Polish and Jewish neighbors. Mace called on a new generation of Ukrainians to rewrite history, to take the Russian-Soviet distortions out, embrace Ukrainian language, and salvage the remnants of what was produced in periods of a flowering Ukrainian culture, such as the 1920s. And in his words, "make Ukraine Ukrainian" (*The Day*, 18 February 2003, www.ukemonde.com/stalin/mace.html). The only problem now, Bartov finds, is that this effort leaves out the Jews. Does making Ukraine Ukrainian necessitate making it non-Jewish or non-Polish for that matter?

For as Bartov argues, "This plan is in the throes of creating a single national narrative of events, peoples, institutions, culture and politics, an undertaking of mass simplification that not only distorts its past but threatens to impoverish its future" (8). Bartov compares this process to similar ones made in post-Second World War Europe, arguing about Galicians and Western Ukrainian leaders in Kyiv or in Lviv. And I just question that because the agency is not clear, in this case, as to who is doing the denying or what these local discourses are. He argues that the denial of that past is more visible than in many other parts of Europe, thanks to neglect and forgetfulness.

Modernization in the West, connoting a forward-looking imperative with the capital to literally tear town old buildings, erect new ones, pave over historic sites . . . this process has all but erased Jewish history from the towns in Germany, for instance, but not so in

Ukraine. Soviet suppression of historical ethnic differences in the Great Patriotic War, and its own brand of anti-Western anti-Semitism, as well as the general poverty, left these sites around (albeit abandoned and left to decay).

The lack of development for historians or archeologists looking for physical traces of the past does have its advantages, but not when this visible neglect is also a sign of intellectual ignorance, denial, and distortion. What Bartov finds in Galicia as especially disturbing is the politics of these sites as a "seething nationalism persistent in the region that wanted full expression after 1991 and is offensive to the historical reality to the region" (8). One example that stands out is the statue of Bandera on the site of the former Jehovych ghetto. And it would be interesting to know how Ukrainians regard this site, if there are generational differences in terms of how the site is regarded, how much that site is the center of local activity and education. I think I was thinking of James Young's work *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Memory* and how much he really gets at the history of the creation of these sites, the neglect of them, and of local perceptions.

Bartov also presents the interesting significations of plaques at these sites, and describes the inconsistent and often grammatically incorrect presentation of these sites in Hebrew, Ukrainian and English, with each language directed at a different audience with slightly different messages. In the monument text at the Brody Jewish cemetery, the Hebrew text tends to be more explicit, stating that Jews were murdered there in a common grave, and may God avenge their blood, and that in contrast some of the Ukrainian texts seem to be more vague and passive.

How accurate is Bartov's picture of the past? What is he able to salvage from the records? Though not all 20 places on his tour were given equal treatment – some only a few pages, others more substantial chapters – in the end Bartov is able to convey a lost Jewish world that was very much at the very center of Galician urban life, represented by dominant, towering, fortress synagogues. One gets the sense that, other than an occasional monastery or statue of Shevchenko or Bandera, Ukrainian culture was and remains very primitive in contrast to traces of Jewish religious buildings or Polish schools. There is a contrast of cultures, as John Paul has pointed out, which would need to be explained.

His research on the Holocaust also reinforces the more general patterns of destruction that occurred between late June 1941 and summer 1944. Pogroms, mass shootings, ghettos, forced labor, mass shootings again, and camp liquidations, the latter of which most Lviv residents (according to Bartov) aren't aware. The cab driver couldn't find the Janowska camp; the site was characteristically fenced off, thus discouraging visitors, mourners, and researchers.

Bartov finds that Ukrainians do not value their Jewish heritage. The Jewish–Ukrainian–Polish triangle has bequeathed triple memories: they're wildly different, although in reality the three have converged. The war was an ethnically defined genocidal conflict that resulted in a demographic revolution in Galicia. The memories of events are as divided as these conflicts, and continue to challenge full reconstruction, let alone appreciation of the multi-ethnic realities of Galicia's history.

As Bartov points out, there are no minorities present that challenge Ukraine's presentation of the past to outsiders. Ukrainian leaders in Kyiv and local nationalists who perceive themselves as patriot-builders, building an independent Ukraine, wanting to secure Ukraine's status as a nation-state, often express extreme concern for Ukraine's image. They want to undo history to place Ukrainians in a positive or sympathetic role, for example undoing what was perceived as a Soviet mismatching of Nazis and nationalist collaborators, such as Shukhevych, who was named a Hero of Ukraine.

National identity formation from above and below was first and foremost a process of collective story-making, mythmaking, idolatry, and memorializing in a selective manner that necessitates erasure, forgetting, suppression and oversimplification. This process of rewriting history has become the norm. And it can offer opportunities for real advance in Ukrainian academic culture, or it can devolve into pure politicization of history books and curriculum. Unfortunately, misguided attempts by the Education Ministry to rewrite Ukraine's history textbooks have manifested in an unwillingness to deal with the country's own Holocaust Jewish history. Recent surveys of the curriculum reveal how Ukraine differs from several emerging post-Soviet nations because it is not integrating Holocaust history to the extent that Poland, the Baltic, Romania, and Hungary have. In Ukraine, a combination of regional and local attitudes, class patriotism, an unstable polity and economy, anti-Western fear and suspicions all hamper progress on the educational front.

For this beautifully composed and reflective book, where does this bring us? Bartov's book is a call to attention and I'd like to say that it is a region suspended in time. It's really in flux and he's trying to freeze the moment, throw light on it, and perhaps influence us in some way. Soon it too will be "swept with the tide of modernization". We shall see if what seems will be inevitable in Ukraine, but in the meantime we should heed Bartov's warning. His book, which will reach a broad audience, will place this region and its history on the map of many English readers. One hopes that Bartov's passion and plea will inspire more critical and popular debates on Ukrainian heritage. But I must admit that I can imagine the landscape 50 years from now, where one may find hints of Jewishness in its historic buildings and graves, that Bartov's snapshots will, too, be totally gone. Perhaps a future scholar or historian will carry this book with him/her and try very hard to find physical evidence of a Jewish history in the region. That research would be helpful to Bartov, but I also share in his disappointment and frustration

Note

1. Some of Lower's comments were published in her longer review of Bartov's book in *East European Jewish Affairs* 38 (2008): 345–48.

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I would like to give credit to Omer Bartov for raising many important issues: the issue of the Holocaust in Ukraine, the silence of local authorities, and the attempts to force a discussion from this provocative and forcefully written book.

As I see it, Bartov focuses particularly on the violence, the pogroms, the killing of Jews in 1941, the complicity of some OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) members, and then on the hunting down of Jews, the process of memorializing victims of the Holocaust and the whole problem of how to memorialize the war. The main issue here is the selective memory and the erasure of Jewish presence. All or these are very important topics, on which there is now a growing literature following the opening of archives. Also very important is the recent translation into Ukrainian of Western works that has encouraged a much closer investigation of this history, based on hard evidence and good scholarship. There are now organizations in Ukraine, such as the Center for the Study of Holocaust and the Judaica Institute, that are doing this kind of work, "adding" Jewish "sites" to the cognitive map. Bartov's text is an exercise in discourse intervention, and in bringing together several discourses.

I will focus on some of the problems I have with the book, in particular difficulties for people who come from a different discourse. If you want to reach these people, you have to understand how they think and where they are coming from, to create a framework that explains your goals as fully and honestly as possible. Bartov's goals, as I see them, are conceptual, ethical, and political. The ethical imperative is the duty to bear witness to those who died in the Holocaust. The political goals are to reach the broadest layers of people with this message, and to encourage a wider discourse on this subject. The first difficulty in achieving these goals is the reality that there have been waves of extermination in this region, and that its history is multi-layered: there is not one version of this history, and not one version of the Ukrainian past. The contest of discourses is not a simple story; just as one should not accept nationalist simplifications of the past, one should not be quick to accept other simplifications based on other versions of the historical narrative.

First of all, the history of Ukraine is not only a history of anti-Semitism. It is also a history of philo-Semitism, and the history of philo-Semitism that also needs recouping. It helps to explain a lot. Bartov, for example, describes the Western Ukrainian People's Republic of 1917–1919 dismissively as an "ephemeral republic," a statement that touches many nerves. In the first year of the Revolution, this government was first allied to and then fused with the Ukrainian National Republic (the UNR). Ukrainians did establish independence, which was greeted with great joy by almost the entire Jewish population as well as the Ukrainian population. The government proclaimed a policy of national personal autonomy for minorities, which was part of a great rapprochement between Jews and Ukrainians. Many Jews fought for this republic. All this is important to recall, because the defeated officers of this national liberation movement were those who in 1929 created the OUN. They were sometimes well aware of this Jewish–Ukrainian rapprochement, and they came from a generation who often had sympathy for it. Therefore, to see the OUN and UPA (the Ukrainian Insurgent Army) as at all times being *one* and reflecting *one* idea or *one* approach to the Jewish question is wrong. It was a different organization in 1929, for example, from what it was during the war, or in 1950.

By taking a broad brush to his denunciation of nationalists, the OUN, and UPA, which he continually links – as Soviet propagandists did for over 40 years – and by invariably defining OUN and UPA members as Jew-killers, Bartov raises objections. Does he feel that Ukraine's struggle for national independence during the Second World War was mistaken? If not, how were Ukrainians supposed to struggle for it? What were the choices for the young men in the villages? To join the Soviets, whose rule they had experienced in 1939–1941 during the Hitler–Stalin pact, and whose history of repression in inter-war Ukraine was well known. To join the Germans? To join the resistance in the woods? Or to go and work in Germany as forced labor for the German war effort? These were difficult

dilemmas. Often all choices proved fatal. In some places all the males were killed. One has to look at the broad picture, to empathize with these people and the impossible decisions they had to make.

I also sense in Bartov's book a denigration of the national struggle in general. Not once in the book is the word "national" mentioned, whereas "nationalist" is used many times. Bartov's brief excursions into more distant Ukrainian history are also revealing. He appears to deny the legitimacy of the drive for independence not only in the 1940s but also over the previous centuries, diminishing, even disparaging, the national dimension throughout Ukraine's history. As he looks into the past, he describes Symon Petliura's forces in 1919/1920 as having "robbed and raped," and their leader as being "remembered for pogroms." Bohdan Khmelnytsky, the leader of the 1648 revolution, is recalled as "the scourge of the Jews" (although on one occasion he is also characterized as "the uniter" of Ukraine). Ivan Mazepa, Ukraine's leader at the time of the 1708/1709 revolt against Peter the Great, is noted as the leader of a "briefly independent Ukraine." The author seems unaware that vestiges of Ukrainian autonomy were still being curtailed late in the eighteenth century. The choice of bibliographical references reveals a similar bias. The inclusion, alongside Henry Abramson's fine scholarly monograph on the 1919 pogroms, of Saul S. Friedman's appallingly unbalanced *Pogromshchik* (1976) – which Bartov describes simply as "a more accusatory view" of Petliura – only serves to discredit the author's credentials as a commentator on Ukrainian history.

The whole book, from my point of view, is full of narrative tropes of which the author may not even be conscious. Galicia is detached from the Ukrainian struggle for freedom. It is constructed as a "borderland," the "periphery of Europe," a place where people have no historical memory and in particular no memory of the Jewish presence. Their freedom fighters, it is suggested, were really perpetrators. This diminishes the national liberation narrative, which is a key to understanding Western Ukraine. But more irritating for many Ukrainians is the fact that this "borderland" trope plays into a long tradition in Russian and Polish national history of denigrating Ukraine's national aspirations, of describing the land as an anarchic and dangerous place, inchoate, and lacking a national identity of its own.

Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Ogniem i mieczem* [With Fire and Sword, 1888] is included in the bibliography under the rubric of "Polish Romantic Literature." This novel presents Ukraine at the time of the 1648 revolt led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky as an anarchic borderland, inhabited by a half-civilized people who are mobilized by a drunken, violent leader. Its message is that the country needs the civilizing hand of Poland, which must act ruthlessly to suppress revolution. The novel was made compulsory reading in Galician schools in the inter-war period and Ukrainian students were forced to imbibe its colonialist attitude at the same time as the increasingly authoritarian Polish state was beating Ukrainian villagers (the policy known as "Pacification") and imprisoning activists. Sienkiewicz's book predictably gave rise to an anti-colonial reaction, of which the formation of the OUN was a part. If this bibliography is the only image of Ukrainian history on offer, the reader must inevitably conclude that violence and irrational nationalism are the nation's only claim to fame. There is no rubric in Bartov's bibliography for Ukrainian literature, art, culture, or political thought. Surely Ukrainians have a literature worth reading? Is their self-image not important or valuable? These are questions that are clearly going to be raised when people look at *Erased*.

My main point is this. The way to achieve the author's desired conceptual, ethical, and political goals – with which I am largely in agreement – is to tell the full story and recognize the suffering of all. This opens up space for a discussion of what happened in 1941, of

perpetrators and victims, and does not a priori rule out more complex stories. I agree that there is certainly a resistance against the narrative of the Holocaust. And, as Bartov suggests, in some cases the reason for this it is partly guilt, and partly the new nationalist narrative. I also agree that, locally, this nationalist narrative has assumed outrageous anti-Semitic forms. The local press seems to get away with the most disgraceful expressions of hatred, and this is something that clearly has to be challenged. But there is also a legitimate need to tell one's own story. Ukrainians do have a story of national victimization and suffering. And they were denied the ability to tell this narrative until 1991. Even now it does not figure in international consciousness, in films, in popular literature, in many scholarly gatherings. It needs to be discussed, negotiated, constructed, and deconstructed, in the same way as are other national narratives. Among other things, Ukrainians want the counter-tropes that have for long been used to deny their language, culture, and history to be challenged.

My own study of Jews in Ukrainian literature has led me to many examples in which the Ukrainian and Jewish suffering has been combined. This is not to suggest that one should eclipse or diminish the other, but that both should be acknowledged. By allowing the story of Ukrainian suffering to be told, one in fact makes the narration of Jewish suffering easier (including the story of the complicity of some Ukrainians in the Holocaust). By acknowledging both, one disarms opposition when the question "Well, what about us?" is raised. In fact, the answer in most cases, of course, is "They *were* us!" This aspect of the issue has also led to the interweaving of narratives in fictional works.

Such an approach is that used by those involved in Holocaust education in Ukraine. They make the further step by stressing the point that Ukrainian Jews were, after all, "us," and insist that all "their" suffering should be seen as "ours." There is no attempt to construct a hierarchy or an equivalence of suffering, nor to deny the specificity of the Jewish genocide, but this approach does encourage the building of conceptual and ethical frameworks that can activate the values of compassion, fairness, and understanding – the bedrock of Ukrainian culture and of the wider Judeo-Christian tradition.

My last points are questions to Omer: I was interested in the issue of property. Who owns it? How are transfers made? How are issues dealt with in different regions? Can we have examples of how these issues are managed elsewhere? If these are primary concerns, one wonders why no effort seems to have been made to explore them. From the information presented, it appears that the responsibility for erecting monuments to the past and for restoring buildings is primarily municipal. A great number of monuments to the Holocaust of various kinds have already gone up since 1991, as the book indicates. Much has already been done in sensitizing the public to related issues. One would like to hear more about the relationship between the local and the national. How does the national feed into this process of memorialization?

At the national level, throughout Ukraine scholarly and popular books have been published, conferences and exhibitions have taken place, sometimes organized with the participation of bodies like the Judaica Institute or the Centre for Holocaust Studies. This kind of work is a broad-based effort by scholars, curators, and prominent political and cultural figures to remedy past neglect. These initiatives, which are led by respected and prominent figures in the country's cultural centers, need amplifying, and then – crucially – transferring to the local level, where they can marginalize expressions of narrow-mindedness and prejudice. There is much support for this kind of effort among contemporary authors like Yury Andrukhovych, Maryna Hrymych, and Volodymyr Yeshkilev, who represent Ukrainian culture as reflecting diverse histories

and traditions, including the Jewish. A narrow-minded politicization of history can be challenged by broadcasting the alternative discourses sympathetic to multiculturalism that these writers elaborate. Their work represents a change from within, and one that has already rebuilt the cultural landscape. It is one of the strongest indicators of a groundswell of opinion sympathetic to the achievement of the goals that Bartov outlines.

If an intervention is to be effective, it needs a multi-pronged approach. One aspect can be the shame and blame approach, but there should also be an effort to understand another's history and experience, and to speak from within it. It is possible to apply both approaches. One has to be aware, however, of the obstacles. I am fairly optimistic that *Erased* can be used to extend this important discourse.

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Thank you. These comments are important, because I see this book as a gateway into another project. *Erased* is not an attempt to write Galicia's history, to be sure. It is about what is happening *now*. So for me, today's response makes me think about what I need to do right now: so that's just by way of introduction to what I tried to do. I didn't really try to rewrite history.

Let me say a couple of words surrounding the context of *Erased*. In the last few years I have been collecting materials for a book on a town in Galicia. My idea was to write a biography of a town that had existed as a multi-ethnic community with a Jewish, Polish, and Ukrainian population for several centuries, and to see how people had lived side by side, how people interacted, and then to follow that up to the years in which the multi-ethnic community was destroyed through genocide and ethnic cleansing. This was the rationale for my journeys there: both to work in the archives and to discover the region.

In the process of traveling there, I encountered what the town looks like now and what was left of what had been there previously. It struck me that many people knew little about this past. I became interested in reconstructing what such towns had been like before the war, what happened in them during the Second World War, what remains in them now, and what is the current politics of memory in these towns right now.

This book retraces several trips through 20 towns and cities in Galicia and Western Ukraine, starting in Lviv and going down all the way to the southern part and then coming up from the eastern part of this area. I have to say that, in part, the reason that I wanted to write this book was because I felt there was a tremendous amount of neglect of what was left in the country. Much was destroyed and was not about to be resurrected, but there were a few remnants remaining in the country whose condition was rapidly deteriorating.

I felt that if I were to write about this, then perhaps some of what was left could be saved. And not saved in any way that would resurrect their former function, but merely by preserving them as sites of memory, rather than sites of destruction, of erosion, and ultimately of utter void. And I had a certain sense that if the population in these towns – which is, by and large, now engaged in creating its own national memory and its own

past – could be made aware of that other past, if it could be shown that this other past was not antagonistic to its own national past that is currently being created but would rather enrich it; and that if one could show this past also to communities that live outside of Western Ukraine – such as Jewish communities in America or in Israel or in France, who might invest some effort in preserving these places, and to other communities – e.g. Polish, who are more interested in preserving their own sites – then perhaps this recognition could help awaken foreign awareness of what is happening in these towns now, with the hope that maybe this trend would be reversed.

Some more important elements: Steven mentions the notion of "guest" in the region. My journey to Galicia was, in a sense, more personal, on two different levels. One level was that my mother actually came from one of the Ukrainian towns in 1935 when she was 11, after which she moved to Palestine. The rest of the family perished. And I wanted to see that place for this reason. On another level, that of empathy, I grew up in North Tel Aviv. My own neighborhood was made up of Jews who had been expelled from communist Poland. The neighborhood right next to this was inhabited by Jews who were expelled from North Africa. But in fact that had previously been an Arabic village whose people had fled under pressure in 1948. And it never occurred to me that I was growing up in a town in which another people, another culture, had been erased. It took me by surprise, later, to stand next to these houses, fallen mosques, destroyed houses, which were often called "abandoned property." And yet Jews were housed in them. Some of this came to me and I thought: how are these Ukrainian kids growing up next to these synagogues? On some level these were personal questions to me and one can't quite reflect it in a book like this.

John Paul raises two questions: What do we know exactly about the complicity of Ukrainians? Who were the killers exactly? There are two types of sources to that. One kind comprises German sources that explain the role of the Ukrainian police, which was under German control. At times they describe the Ukrainians as doing the killings, at other times they speak about them rounding up the Jewish population. For June–July 1941 there are reports of Ukrainians helping to build security police offices in various towns. There is pretty extensive documentation here.

There is another source – which is testimony. There are huge piles of testimonies that can be used as historical documents, a huge amount of material on what was happening at a day-to-day level. And we can crosscheck the records of the same event using several testimonies: we can then determine who was there, which statements are consistent, and so on. This is a crucial source.

In between, we have a very rich documentation that tells us not only about complicity on a vast scale (robbery, looting) as well as collaboration in the killing, but also about universal participation in genocide – to the extent that no one is a bystander: everyone becomes a participant at some level. Yet there is also a great deal of material on altruism, which was in the midst of tremendous violence, motivated by a variety of reasons, and crucial because most of the people who survived were only those who were sheltered by gentiles (Poles and Ukrainians).

So if and when I write the bigger book, I will do my best to have better documentation that would go straight to the people who were describing what was happening to them. There are also testimonies by Poles and by Ukrainians. They are as reliable and as problematic as Jewish testimonies but they tell their own versions of these events and must therefore be included. *On empathy*: I have to say, John Paul, that what you mention in relation to page 109 is not really about Ukrainian primitiveness. It is about a Ukrainian memorial that was built in the Soviet period. One I have in mind was a god-awful and atrocious

communist attempt to misrepresent the typical Ukrainian national dress (which happened to be built next to a synagogue).

But about the ability to mourn, to address Wendy's comment, I was thinking about a wonderful book, W. G. Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction* (originally in German), and the argument that the Germans were unable to write with empathy about the Holocaust because they had not written about their own suffering. His argument was that if Germans had written about what happened to German civilians in the terrible bombing of German cities, then they would be liberated from their inability to mourn. You cannot mourn others unless you can mourn yourself. So what I was trying to get at is that people living in these towns, in these cities, if they can think with empathy about what happened to their Jewish neighbors, then they can also think about their own heroes and their own not-so-heroic people. The need to create the artificial history of heroes comes from an inability to empathize with others. I'm not against this point and I think you are right: there is a hard and soft edge in this book. There is anger at the ignorant neglect and malicious neglect. But the way to deal with it can only be through empathy.

A couple of things on accuracy about the past: when you read about urban life in these towns, whether in the mid-1920s or late nineteenth century, back then there was actually much more urban life than there is now. But in the little towns, if you simply count the number of hotels, restaurants, bars, Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish associations, and so forth, you realize that these towns were *much* more vibrant before the war than after. What happened after the war was a relocation of populations from the rural to the urban. Perhaps this explains the conspicuous loss of national memory: the people who moved there either came from nearby villages or from the countryside elsewhere and they have not yet developed an urban mentality.

History is a very complicated story. I can't do it justice now. There is material that shows that even good, decent, optimistic men ended up as murderers. These were the young men from the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). And I think that's important to write about. But this book was not about understanding the other side. It tried to say the opposite: that there was another life in these towns and that it was materially erased. This is what I wanted to write about. That is not to say that there isn't another story to tell: they did live together, these people. But you can't tell this in a context in which the towns were emptied, then re-filled by new populations, and then had monuments erected . . .

Final comments: my father used to distinguish between monologue and dialogue thus: in a monologue one person speaks to himself, and in a dialogue two people speak to themselves! On property, I think the minute people are living on stolen property they wash their hands of the events that led to the original theft. It's a whole important issue that we can't go into too much.

When I speak about empathy and mourning I don't mean a competition of victimhood. When President Viktor Yushchenko comes to Israel and states that the Holodomor was an act of genocide, then that is competition of victimhood. But I am talking about a certain notion of empathizing at the most basic psychological level: if you cannot come close to your own history, if you have a one-sided and forced history, then you cannot come to any historical understanding. The best rule in writing history is the idea that you must *feel yourself into the people that you are writing about*. And that may seem to be neither here nor there but is a crucial issue. Jewish life in Western Ukraine is non-existent. You have tourists. You have buses, often with Israeli tourists, who have no interest in the Ukrainian people. And they demonstrate their anger when they go to these sites.

On funding, some cities are given money to renovate sites of historical importance. But who will fund the synagogues? Usually money goes as far as it goes. If you do renovate something like a synagogue, who will use it if not Jews? If you have Roman relics in Tuscany, then you preserve them because you think it's something important to you. Yet you do need investment from the outside. Just like Poles go to sites in Western Ukraine to renovate churches, you need money from Jewish communities in the US and Canada to preserve these sites!

Finally, if you go to Sambir, there are three crosses in a Jewish cemetery. That is a statement and a political one. And that must be confronted. People like you should speak not only with Ukrainian Jews but also with Ukrainian scholars and say "That is shameful, to place a cross there ... Take it down on account of your own self-respect".

Reference

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