CONFLICTING HISTORIES: THE CASE OF GENOCIDES IN UKRAINIAN HISTORY

Johan Dietsch, PhD, Department of Literature and Languages, East and Central European Studies, Lund University, Sweden.

A classic motif in general educational literature is the problem of how the school can aid their pupils in finding their place as responsible citizens in democratic societies. In recent years, several trends point to the employment of the Holocaust as a demonstrative illustration or rather pedagogical example. For example, in 2005 the Presidency of the Council of the European Union declared that the "significance of the Holocaust is universal. But it commands a place of special significance in European remembrance… it is out of that dark episode that a new Europe was born." Future generations could not be allowed to forget, and "lessons" drawn from the Holocaust were advanced as crucial for the prevention of future genocides.[1]

As an educational issue, the lesson of the Holocaust is a relatively new phenomenon.[2] Prior to the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, it was difficult to find the Holocaust on the educational agenda of any community, even those in Israel and the Jewish communities throughout North America. Since the trial in Jerusalem, interest in including the Holocaust as part of curriculum content has grown. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, of the OSCE concluded in a survey that a majority of member states indicated that the Holocaust is a mandatory subject within official school curricula.[3]

However, beyond political statements and glimpses of textbooks, Holocaust education is actually an extremely difficult and complicated issue which can not be reduced to formulas or universal programs. No matter into what country's or community's history the Holocaust is incorporated, it is bound to be placed within an existing historical culture that offers its unique possibilities and constraints.[4] After the fall of the Soviet Union, the experience from many states formerly behind the Iron Curtain show that the different national contexts are indeed imperative for how the Holocaust is taught and propagated in various states and communities.[5] Actual wartime experiences and events, together with subsequent developments come together to determine what kind of Holocaust will be conveyed, and this is especially effected by how different states formulate their own national history.

Ukraine presents a very interesting and ambiguous case. Out of the approximately six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, about quarter came from areas which today belong to the independent state of Ukraine. Yet, under the veil of Soviet censorship, little was officially made common knowledge. Authorities rather often excelled in underlining the treacherous character of Ukrainians and Ukrainian organizations who had collaborated with the invading Germans or orchestrated anti-Semitic, so-called "anti-cosmopolitan" or "anti-Zionist," campaigns of their own. Likewise, in Holocaust studies in general, the image of the Ukrainian *pogromchik* was often uncritically mediated in widespread publications.[6]

After independence, all Ukrainian presidents have underscored the need to teach the country's young about the Holocaust and enlighten them in order to combat racism and xenophobia. At the fiftieth anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre, Leonid Kravchuk, the country's first president, repeatedly emphasised the government's strong will to combat anti-Semitism and acknowledged the governments share in the guilt of the Holocaust. Ten years later, President Leonid Kuchma reiterated his predecessor's claims.[7] Similarly, the present president, Victor Yushchenko has pledged that the history of Holocaust must be learned and

extensively explained so that a similar tragedy would never happen again and that the Ukrainian government was doing their best to educate the young about it, so that "inter-ethnic conflicts" could be prevented.[8]

Political statements should of course not be regarded as necessarily reflecting real existing conditions. That is to say, that the average Ukrainian pupil does not necessarily study or learn a great deal about the Holocaust simply because the presidents have emphasized its importance. A study on what Ukrainian tenth and eleventh grade students knew about the Holocaust concluded that most were at least informed about the Holocaust, or rather the destruction of the European Jews. Nearly all students who participated in the study demonstrated sharp and negative attitudes towards the Holocaust, even though the overwhelming majority had a murky idea, at best, about anti-Semitism. Most importantly however, the study concluded that the students had to create an "independent public discourse" on their own, since there was no official "model at hand."[9]

However, recent trends in Ukrainian politics of history point in a completely different direction. On October 12, 2007, in order to mark the 65th anniversary of the founding of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the centennial of the birth of its commander Roman Shukhevych, Viktor Yushchenko posthumously awarded him with the highest honor of the Ukrainian state, the order of Hero of Ukraine, "in recognition of his special contributions to the national liberation struggle for the freedom and independence of Ukraine."[10] Shukhevych remains a highly controversial and divisive person in Ukrainian history. A freedom fighter and martyr to some, and a Holocaust perpetrator, *pogromchik*, to others. The decision to bestow him with honors re-opened the issue of the ideological use of history by the current presidency. However, such awards are simultaneously in line with the more general trend to nationalize history.

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NATIONALIZING AND EXTERNALIZING THE HOLOCAUST

The Ukrainian state quickly launched national policies in the sphere of education. From the guidelines and programs produced by the state, it is possible to discern two overarching political messages: the claims of democratisation and nationalisation.[11] The content of education was to be adjusted to contemporary needs of the individual, to society, and to the task of building an independent Ukrainian state. At the same time as these democratic pedagogical approaches were affirmed, the restoration of traditional "national spirituality" and "historical needs" were advanced as important guidelines in the process of establishing a new national curriculum.[12] The adoption and publication of new history textbooks was part of an effort to create an all-encompassing Ukrainian national identity. However, many teachers disliked the use of history for ends they perceived as political, but nonetheless regarded the process as to be expected.[13]

Even though the Holocaust was only made a required topic as late as the 2001 Program of the Ukrainian Ministry of Education, references to the Jewish tragedy during the Second World War found its way into the first new history textbooks published after independence which dealt with Ukrainian history. This was of course a significant departure from Soviet textbook practice and general ideology, which incorporated the Jewish experience into the epic suffering of the entire Soviet population, ignoring its own uniqueness.[14] Simply mentioning Jews in the new Ukrainian history textbooks can thus be regarded as a considerable departure from Soviet history textbooks. However, the various mentions and allusions to both Jews and the Holocaust are anchored in a hesitant historical culture often preoccupied with the Ukrainian nation.

Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Koval has argued that Ukrainian independence made it possible for Ukrainian historians "to leave the swamp of dogmatism" that had prevailed under Soviet rule. The new found scholarly freedom made possible the reconsideration of the genocide of the Ukrainian Jewry during the Second World War. However, Koval emphasised that "the extermination of the Jews was just part of the Holocaust that all Ukrainian people went through".[15] Thus, not ignoring the Jewish fate during the war, Koval emphasised that Nazi-German occupational policies, and in fact the Holocaust, were something which the whole Ukrainian people suffered through. The Jewish tragedy was only a part of the national tragedy.

Such nationalization of the Holocaust has been common. The first new history textbook for the tenth grade provides a striking example and vivid account of the occupier's harsh regime in practice. During "the 103 weeks of the occupation, each Tuesday and Friday military and civilian residents of various ethnic identities were shot at

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Babi Yar, primarily Jews. Virtually every Ukrainian city had its own Babi Yar. In the first months of the occupation a total of 850.000 Jews fell victim to the Nazis." In total, the reader is informed that almost four million people perished in Ukraine during the war. A little more than a million of these were civilians.[16] Another textbook informs its readers that around 150 concentration camps, "factories of death," and 50 ghettos were built in Ukraine in order to exterminate the population. But other methods were used as well. At the beginning of the occupation, "special units" *(Einsatzgruppen)* of the SS murdered 800,000 Jews. "In Kiev, as early as during the two first days of occupation, 33.000 people were murdered at Babi Yar".[17]

Unlike previous Soviet treatment, the new history textbooks differentiate between the victims. However, prominence is implicitly given to Ukrainian victims. Jews are only portrayed as targets for destruction at the beginning of the occupation. There is no information given about what happened to the Jews prior to 1941 in the rest of Europe, to racial anti-Semitic policies, or to what happened to the Jewish population after the first months of occupation. Not a single clue is obtainable why the Jews were targeted, other than that they happened to live on the territory of what today is Ukraine. Furthermore, the Jewish victims are implicitly deemed less important, though not marginal, since the total number of victims is estimated to around four million.

It is reasonable to assume that the Jews are treated as a separate category of victims because if they were presented as the majority of civilian casualties, the impact of Nazi-German occupational policies directed against Ukrainians would be diminished. In essence, this amounts to a "victimhood theft," whereby the victims of the war are all portrayed as exclusively Ukrainian. This tradition goes back to wartime propaganda, when Russians, Poles and Jews were all considered less desirable peoples.[18]

In contrast, textbooks devoted to world history treat the Holocaust as an exclusive and distinct phenomenon during the Nazi regime in Germany, conceptualised as "the catastrophe for a large part of the Jewish population in Europe, as a result of an organised destruction by the Nazis and compatriots to Germany in their and other conquered territories 1933-1945," and a trauma affecting the whole of Europe. In this interpretation, the victims of Nazi-German racial policies and concentration camps are not conflated and interpreted as "Ukrainians" or "Soviet citizens" as in previous interpretations. Focus is exclusively on Jewish victims, illustrated in one account by the famous photograph of a little polish boy in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943. Because the horror was not only geographically confined to Germany and Poland, but also affected Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and others, the Holocaust is seen to "contain lessons for all of humanity that need to be reaffirmed forever so that such an event can be prevented in the future." By attaching significant and fundamental values to the Holocaust, it becomes enlarged, as this makes it an important moral touchstone for NOT ONLY Jews but gentiles as well.[19]

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WE KNOW ALL TOO WELL WHAT GENOCIDE MEANS

As a pedagogical example and demonstrative illustration of a negatively imagined future Europe, the Holocaust has been put to use for the understanding contemporary tragedies.[20] As a historical event, it has become crucial for many contemporary communities and individuals, serving as a cognitive blue-print to make sense of genocidal events in Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo and Darfur, among others.

In Ukraine, as in many other states from the former Eastern Bloc, an obvious point of emphasis has been the Soviet experience in general, and the Stalin era in particular. When Victor Yushchenko, then Prime Minister, delivered an official speech on behalf of the Ukrainian state at the conference *Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust*, in 2000, he said that the Holocaust was indeed a tragedy of universal scale and that millions of Ukrainians "passed through all circles of the Holocaust hell" and that Ukraine knew "all too well what genocide means," as the Ukrainians themselves had been subjected to it in the 1932–1933 famine.[21]

Since independence, the 1932-1933 famine, the so-called *Holodomor*, had become one of the centres around which a new integrative historical national narrative has revolved, with the aim of creating loyal Ukrainian citizens.[22] The famine is often integrated into to an interpretation of long oppression of the Ukrainian nation and the Ukrainian

people. Perpetrated by the Soviet authorities, or rather Stalin, and aimed at the heart of the Ukrainian nation, the famine is easily interpreted as genocide.[23] This conceptualisation is further strengthened since most history textbooks interpret the famine as a weapon whereby the authorities tried to physically destroy Ukraine's "troublesome population," especially the intelligentsia. The term genocide is often explicitly used to denote the horrible event.[24] In fact, the terms "genocide" and "Holodomor" are deemed of central importance to history education and introduced already in the fifth grade.[25]

Many historians in the newly independent Ukraine endorsed the thesis, advanced by Robert Conquest and James Mace a decade earlier, that the famine was a genocide directed against the Ukrainian nation. In turn, these two scholars from the west used the Holocaust as a cognitive basis upon which to interpret the Ukrianian tragedy. Robert Conquest, for example, compared Ukraine in the early 1930s to "one vast Belsen" in order to convey the magnitude of the historical tragedy to his readers.[26] But it was not until 2003 that the parliament voted in favour of officially labelling the *Holodomor* a genocide.[27]

Genocides always require perpetrators. In the Ukrainian 1990s the search and need for those who had instigated the famine coincided with the more general search for scapegoats for the Soviet system. Jews and supposed Jewish conspiracies became an appreciated topic. The Jewishness of Stalin's right hand man in Ukraine, at the time of the famine, Lazar Kaganovich, was regularly pointed out. Accusations and statements by the chairman of the Holodomor Researchers' Association in Ukraine, Levko Lukyanenko are among the more candid. He has accused the "Zionist government" in Ukraine in the 1930s and the "satanical Soviet government," controlled by Jews, of having put Ukraine and Ukrainians through all sorts of horrors and hardships.[28] More moderate accounts, and almost all history textbooks in use, point to Stalin, Kaganovich, Molotov and Postyshev as the perpetrators. But by ignoring lower levels, such as the local Soviet administration, these accounts are made to fit into an already existing historical narrative of Ukrainian suffering at the hands of external enemies.[29]

Victor Yushchenko expanded on his interpretation of the meaning and usefulness of the famine, already alluded to at the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, in a newspaper article in February 2003. By that time a hearing about the famine had since long been scheduled in the parliament. Yushchenko argued that the lessons of the famine were indeed the need and role of a free press. Also, that the country needed to integrate into the democratic European structures, which would implicitly guarantee Ukrainian sovereignty. If there had existed a politically independent Ukraine in the 1930s, the Communist regime could never had instigated such wide spread starvation and withheld the population relief.[30] Aside from being an overt attack on the Communist Party of Ukraine, Yushchenko implicitly, but highly deliberately, made comparative use of the *Holodomor* in order to render the transfer of political lessons between the past and the present simple and unproblematic.

This exemplary use of the *Holodomor* closely resembles the ways in which the Holocaust has been presented as containing values and norms important for the future of Europe.

HISTORY IN DISCORD

"We are sticking to the provisions of relevant documents by the Council of Europe which requires that the history of Holocaust must be taught in the educational establishments of the European countries as an event of the modern history which influenced the development of the continent and of the world in general," proclaimed Victor Yushchenko at the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in 2000.[31] But the Holocaust has in practice been divided between nationalized and externalized versions. In Ukraine, it is propagated as a tragedy that much more easily fit in to the national history.

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The two catastrophes here discussed do not only share the fact that they both took place in areas which today make up Ukraine, both have also been labelled as genocides. But while one can be said to be the paradigmatic genocide, the other's status as one is contested. Even though an emphasis and presence of the *Holodomor* increases genocide awareness, it also steers attention away from the Holocaust. The two genocidal histories in Ukraine are in discord. Both tragedies make for an uneasy fit in Ukrainian historical culture. Formulaic Holocaust educational programs become superfluous as the Ukrainian historical reality already has another dark episode to which democratic values and other "lessons" can be ascribed.

NOTES

Unless otherwise specified, this article builds upon Johan Dietsch, *Holocausts. Nazi and Stalinist Terror in Ukrainian Historical Culture*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming 2010.

[1] "EU Presidency Statement—Holocaust Remembrance", http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_5224_en.htm (accessed 2009-05-12)

[2] See Dianne K. Rosking, "Teaching the Holocaust to children: A Review and Bibliography", New York: Ktav 1975 and Chaim Schatzker, "Formation vs. information: Trends in Holocaust Education in Israel." *Forum*, Spring/Summer 1978, pp. 30-31.

[3] *Education on the Holocaust and on Anti-Semitism. An Overview and Analysis of Educational Approaches*, Warsaw: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights 20006, p. 41

[4] See, Klas-Göran, Karlsson, "Making Sense of the Holocaust after Sixty Years. An Introduction", in Karlsson, Klas-Göran & Zander, Ulf (eds), *Holocaust Heritage. Inquiries into the European Historical Cultures*, Malmö: Sekel 2004. A very informative example of the programmatic formula approach is Jean-Marie Lecomte, *Teaching about the Holocaust in the 21st Century*, Strassbourg: Council of Europe Publishing 2001.

[5] See for example Tomas Sniegon, "Their Genocide, or Ours?. The Holocaust as a Litmus Test of Czech and Slovak Identities", in Klas-Göran Karlsson & Ulf Zander (eds), *Echoes of the Holocaust. Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press 2003; Kristian Gerner, "Hungary, Romania, the Holocaust and Historical Culture" in Klas-Göran Karlsson & Ulf Zander (eds), *The Holocaust—Post-war Battlefields. Genocide as Historical Culture*, Malmö: Sekel bokförlag 2006; Kerstin Nyström, "The Holocaust and Croatian National Identity", in Klas-Göran Karlsson & Ulf Zander (eds), *The Holocaust—Post-war Battlefields. Genocide as Historical Culture*, Malmö: Sekel bokförlag 2006.

[6] See for example Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: the Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945*, New York: Harper Collins 1992, pp. 60–61; Leni Yahil, The Holocaust: *The Fate of the European Jews*, New York: Oxford University Press 1990, p. 265.

[7] Yohanan Petrovsky-Stern "Reconceptualizing the Alien: Jews in Modern Ukrainian Thought", *Ab Imperio*, No. 4, 2003, s. 520.

[8] Victor Yushchenko, "Message by the Prime Minister of Ukraine at the Plenary Session, 27 January, 2000", The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. A Conference on Education, Remembrance and Research, Stockholm, Sweden, 26-28 January 2000, Proceedings, Stockholm: Svensk Information 2000, pp. 75-76.

[9] Elena Ivanova, "Ukrainian High School Students' Understanding of the Holocaust", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2004, pp. 402-420.

[10] "Ukaz prezydenta Ukraïïny No. 965/2007 pro prysvoennia R. Shukhevvychu zvannia Heroi Ukraïny," Oct. 12, 2007. http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/6808.html (Accessed 2009-05-12).

[11] *The Law of Ukraine on Education*, Preamble. The original law was published in *Vidomosti Verkhovnoyi Rady*, No. 34, 1991, pp 451–452. During the 1990s several amendments have been made.

[12] See Dershavna natsionalna programa "Osvita": Ukraina XXI Stolittia, Kiev: Raiduga, 1994.

[13] Peter. W. Rodgers. "Compliance or Contradiction'? Teaching 'History' in the 'New' Ukraine. A View from Ukraine's Eastern Borderlands" *Europe-Asia Studies*. Vol. 59. 2007. Pp. 503, 507.

[14] Zvi Gitelman, 1997. "Soviet Jewry before the Holocaust", in Zvi Gitelman (ed), *Bitter Legacy. Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997, pp. 14-42

[15] M.I Koval "The Nazi Genocide of the Jews and the Ukrainian Population, 1941-1944', in Zvi Gitelman (ed.), *Bitter Legacy. Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR,* Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1997, p. 51.

[16] F.G Turchenko, Novitnia istoriia Ukrainy. Chastyna perscha (1917–1945). Pidruchnyk dlia 10 *klasu serednoi schkoly,* Kiev, Heneza 1994, p 295.

[17] I. Koliada, O. Suschko & O. Ilkova, Istoriia Ukrainy (1917–1944 rr). 10 klas: Zoschit-konspekt temp, Kiev: A.S.K. 1997, p. 113

[18] John-Paul Himka, "Victim Cinema. Between Hitler and Stalin: Ukraine in World War II—The Untold Story", in Georgiy Kasianov & Philipp Ther (eds) A *Laboratory of Transnational History. Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*, Budapest & New York: CEU Press. 2009, p. 218.

[19] Ia.M. Berdichevskyi, T.V. Ladichenko & Y.Ia. Shchupak, *Vsemirnaia Istoriia. Uchebnoe posobie dla 11 klassa srednei obshcheobrazovatelnoi shkoli*, Zaporozhe: Premer 2000, pp. 50-55

[20] Daniel Levy & Nathan Sznaider, "Memory Unbound. The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory", *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol 5. No. 1, 2002; William F. S. Miles, "Third World Views of the Holocaust", *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2005.

[21] Victor Yushchenko, "Message by the Prime Minister of Ukraine at the Plenary Session, 27 January, 2000', The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. A Conference on Education, Remembrance and Research, Stockholm, Sweden, 26-28 January 2000, Proceedings, Stockholm: Svensk Information 2000, pp. 75–76.

[22] Georgii Kasianov, "Razritaia mogilia: golod 1932-1933 godov v ukrainskoi istoriografii politike i massovom soznanii", Ab Imperio, No 3, 2004. On the formation of the famine as a "Ukrainian Holocaust" by the Ukrainian diaspora in the 1980s see Johan Öhman (Johan Dietsch), "From Famine to Forgotten Holocaust. The 1932–1933 Famine in Ukrainian Historical Cultures", in Karlsson, Klas-Göran & Zander, Ulf (eds), *Echoes of the Holocaust. Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press 2003.

[23] It should be pointed out that there is serious scholarly disagremeent over the genocidal character of the 1932-1933 Ukrainian famine. See for example Michael Ellmann, "The Role of Leadership Perceptions and of Intent in the Soviet Famine of 1931-1934", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 57, 2005; R.W. Davies & Stephen G. Wheatcroft, "Stalin and the Soviet Famine of 1932-1933: A reply to Ellmann", Europe-Asia Studies, Vol 58, 2006; Yaroslav Bilinsky, "Was the Ukrainian famine 1932-1933 genocide?", *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol 1, No 2, 1999; Hiroaki Kuromiya, "The Soviet Famine of 1932-1933 Reconsidered", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol 60, No 4, 2008

[24] Valeriy Smolii, "1933 rik v nashiy pamat i v nashiy istorii", in Holod-genosid 1933 roky v Ukraini. Istoryko-politolohichnyi analiz sotsialno-demohrafichnikh ta moralno-psykholohichnykh naslidkiv, in Stanislav Kulchytskyi, Oleksandra Veselova, Levko Lukianenko &, Vasyl Marochko (eds), *Holod-henotsid 1933 roky v Ukraini: istoryko-politolohichnyi analiz sotsialno-demografichnikh ta moralno-psykholohichnikh naslidkiv*, Kyiv & New York: M.P. Kots, 2000. pp. 11-15.

[25] Victor Mysan, *Opovidannia z istoriyi Ukrainy*, Kiev: Heneza 1997, pp. 175-177

[26] Robert Conquest, The Harvest of Sorrow. Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine, New York: Oxford University Press 1986, p 3

[27] Resolution No. 789-IV, May 15, 2003. *Verchovna Rada Ukrainy*. http://www.rada.gov.ua (accessed 2009-04-30). See also *The Ukrainian Weekly* June 1, 2003.

[28] Levko Lukyanenko. "Do Evreiskoho pytannia abo Chy isnuie v Ukraini anti-Semitism?", *Personal Plius*, 2004: 26, p. 4. See also Rudling 2006.

[29] Johan Dietsch , "Struggling with a 'Nuremberg Historiography' of the Holodomor", *Ab Imperio*, No 3, 2007.

[30] See *Holos Ukrainy*, February 11, 2003.

[31] Victor Yushchenko, 2000, pp. 75-76