

Голокост і пам'ять • The Holocaust & Memory

ALEK D. EPSTEIN
Hebrew University of Jerusalem
alekdep@gmail.com

Non-Self-Evident Memory:
Post-Soviet Jewry and the Holocaust

VLADIMIR (ZE'EV) KHANIN
Bar-Ilan University
Ariel University of Samaria
zeevkh@gmail.com

Sociological surveys show that in the whole world, even on the American continent, so far away from places such as Babi Yar and Auschwitz, the memory of Holocaust plays a crucial role in the collective self-identity of the Jewish people, competing with the essential features of Judaism and solidarity with the State of Israel. Since the violation of the rights of a human being and indifference in the face of suffering jeopardize the very existence of human society, the Holocaust is the most extreme example of such violations, and the greatest moral failure mankind has ever experienced. Confronting the Holocaust, as well as genocide, may contribute to understanding the importance of humanistic and democratic values, and help construct tools for making moral judgments. That is why courses on the study of genocide and the Holocaust have become part of the curricula of educational institutions in the United States and elsewhere. The question as to how to educate the youth about the Holocaust — its historical context, and its reasons and consequences — concerns educators, researchers, and community workers from different and distinct countries. Quite often the answers are utterly contradictory and diametrically opposed to one another.¹

The question as to how the Jews in contemporary Russia and other Post-Soviet countries are aware of what happened during the years of Holocaust stirs active debate among researchers, and there is no clarity on this issue so far. Even though in the past two decades there have been some significant efforts aimed at reviving the memory of what was silenced for decades, it is hard to say that those efforts have been successful. The population of the territory occupied by the Nazis and their allies was over 80 mil-

¹ See Yair Auran, *The Pain of Knowledge. Holocaust and Genocide Issues in Education* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005).

lion; among them around 3 million were Soviet Jews. At least 2.5 million of them perished, which makes almost half of all the Jewish victims of Nazism in Europe.²

However, in the four decades after the Department for Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist party prohibited publication of *The Black Book: The Ruthless Murder of Jews by German-Fascist Invaders Throughout the Temporarily-Occupied Regions of the Soviet Union and in the Death Camps of Poland during the War 1941–1945*, edited by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, the Holocaust was rarely mentioned in the USSR.³ *The Black Book* was printed partially in the Soviet Union by the Yiddish publisher Der Emes; however, the entire edition, the typeface, as well as the manuscript, were destroyed. First, the censors ordered changes in the text to conceal the specifically anti-Jewish character of the atrocities and to downplay the role of Ukrainians who worked as Nazi police officers. Then in 1948 the Soviet edition of *The Black Book* was scrapped completely. Typically, the official Soviet policy regarding the Holocaust was to present it as atrocities committed against Soviet citizens, without acknowledging the genocide of the Jews. A Russian-language edition of *The Black Book* was published in Jerusalem in 1980, and finally in Kiev, Ukraine in 1991. Some works such as the documentary novel *Babi Yar* by Anatoly Kuznetsov (the novel, published in *Yunost* monthly journal in 1966, included the previously unknown materials about the execution of 33,771 Jews in the course of two days, September 29–30, 1941, in the Kiev ravine Babi Yar), *Heavy Sand* by Anatoly Rybakov (an epic story of four generations of a Jewish family living in Communist Russia and its life in a ghetto during the Nazi occupation, culminating in their participation in a ghetto uprising), the works by Lithuanian Jewish writers Yitzhak Meras and Grigory Kanovich, the famous poem *Babi Yar* by Evgeny Evtushenko, as well as the *Thirteen Symphony* by Dmitry Shostakovich inspired by it, managed to get past the censorship, but the Holocaust was never included in any educational history program in the USSR.⁴

Although approximately one-third of all Jews killed in the Holocaust were Soviet citizens as of 1940, Soviet historians have usually either ignored the murder of Soviet Jews or submerged it in the story of fascist occupation, calling for no special examination.⁵ Those rare memorials which were erected on the sites of mass killings were dedicated “To the victims of the fascist barbarity,” even when the majority of the victims were Jews. Thus, no opportunity was given for a specific Jewish tragedy to occur.

² See Mark Kupovetsky, “The Human Losses of the Jewish Population within the Pre-War and Post-War Borders of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War,” *The Herald of the Moscow Jewish University* 2 [9] (1995): 135–155 [in Russian].

³ See Ilya Altman, “The Memorialization of Holocaust in Russia: History, Current Situation and Perspectives,” in *The Post-Soviet Jewry: Identity and Education*, ed. Alek D. Epstein (Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency for Israel – Open University of Israel, 2008), 186–209 [in Russian].

⁴ See Zvi Gitelman, “The Soviet Union Reacts to Holocaust,” in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 295–324.

⁵ See Zvi Gitelman, “History, Memory and Politics: The Holocaust in the Soviet Union,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 1 (1990): 23–37.

py a space in the Soviet collective memory. Instead, official politics insisted on glorifying generic “Soviet” heroes, in the person of partisans and the Red Army. In the 1970s, regular memorial gatherings in Babi Yar and Rumbula (the site of the murder of approximately 25,000 Jews from the Riga ghetto) attracted a growing number of Jews, despite the threat that such participation presented to the tranquility of their professional and private lives.

The first Holocaust studies research and education center in Russia was established only in June 1992. This is the first organization in Russia aimed at preserving the memory of Holocaust victims, creating museums and documentary exhibitions, including the subject in the curricula of schools and institutions of higher education, organizing commemorative events, erecting monuments, and gathering of evidence and memoirs. The first President of the Center was the outstanding historian and philosopher Mikhail Gefter. Now the Center is co-chaired by the writer Alla Gerber and historian and archivist Dr. Ilya Altman. Thus, the first Holocaust studies center in Russia was established thirty five years later after the Yad Vashem was opened to public. The Russian Federation has no official Holocaust Memorial Day.

At this time, two Holocaust research and education centers are active in Ukraine. The first one, called “Tkuma” (“Revival” in Hebrew) was established in the late 1990s in the city of Dnepropetrovsk, which is widely regarded as the “Jewish capital” of Ukraine. The “Tkuma” Center, which is currently officially called the “Tkuma” Ukrainian Institute for Holocaust Studies, is active and prominent in fields such as the history of Jews and the Holocaust in Ukraine; various Jewish education programs; public activities, including Ukrainian-Jewish dialogue; as well as organization of international, national and regional Jewish studies conferences, development of archive studies and Jewish museum programs, and widespread publication activities, including publication of academic journal and books on Holocaust and Ukrainian Jewish history-related topics.

The “Tkuma” Center is a founder of Ukrainian Museum of “Jewish Memory and Holocaust in Ukraine,” which was opened in Dnepropetrovsk on October 16, 2012, as a major part of the impressive Menora Dnepropetrovsk Jewish Community complex. The “Tkuma” Center, which now is in the process of transformation into the Academic Research Institute, is headed by Dr. Igor Schupak.

Another Ukrainian structure, the Kiev-based Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, was established in 2002. It is a non-governmental organization founded in partnership with the Institute for Political and National Relations Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. The main directions of the Center’s activities are Holocaust research and Holocaust education. The research comprises regional aspects of the Holocaust on Ukrainian lands, reflection of the Holocaust in the mass-media of the Nazi-occupied Ukraine; Nazi ideology and the mechanisms of its implementation, anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial, comparative research of the Holocaust and other cases of genocide. In frames of the educational activities the UCHS consults Holocaust history teachers of secondary schools and higher educational estab-

lishments, promotes the creation of curricula and manuals on the Holocaust, and organizes annual competitions of students' research and art works.

Since November 2006 different groups of Ukrainian school teachers annually visit the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem. In October 2011 the First Conference of Ukrainian Graduates of Yad Vashem took place in Kyiv. The Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies is chaired by Dr. Anatoly Podolsky.

Since the fall of the USSR, a number of scholars have published works on Holocaust. Many of them target mainstream readers, while some present a more academic and scientific analysis. Annual conferences in Jewish studies in Moscow, organized by the Sefer Center, pay attention to shedding light on the Shoah, especially in the USSR. During the first post-Soviet years, most scholars researching the Holocaust belonged to Jewish organizations. However, nowadays some scholars of non-Jewish origin affiliated with various universities in Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia and Latvia are active in Holocaust research as well.

Nevertheless, most of civil society in post-Soviet states, often including the intelligentsia, is still prisoner to numerous stereotypes and omissions regarding World War II history. The question of the local population's collaboration with the Nazis remains probably the most problematic issue. On one hand, progress has evidently been made in comparison with the Soviet era and the years of Perestroika. On the other hand, public discourse often remains either hostile or uninformed about what took place. Some of the important aspects of Holocaust history are still being omitted or misinterpreted.

Statements claiming that people are aware of the Holocaust and remember it in Russia and other post-Soviet states are often based on the belief that the memory of the war remains the core component to the civic self-consciousness of the Soviet people and of the citizens of most post-Soviet states.

In April 2008 Yuri Levada Analytical Center — the biggest Russian institute for sociological research — conducted a representative survey among 1,600 Russians living in various regions of the country; 75.9% of them were planning on celebrating Victory Day on May 9th. No other holiday on the calendar was nearly as unifying as Victory Day. In 1999, 85.9% of those surveyed by the Levada-Center viewed the victory as the biggest event of the entire twentieth century.⁶ If during the post-Stalin era the ethos of the Great victory was competing with that of the Great Lenin, in the post-Soviet years the image of Lenin has faded away and the ceremonies of the state-mediated civil religion linked to the memory of him came to pass, leaving nothing but monuments and geographical names. Therefore, the Great victory has come to be the main legacy of the century in the post-Soviet Russia.

However, contrary to ordinary expectations, the Holocaust has no place in the national memory of the Great Patriotic War and World War II. While formulating the eight main results of the victory of the USSR in World War II, the sociologists from the Levada-Center did not even mention the fact that the victory led to the liberation of the pris-

⁶ See Boris Dubin, "The End of the Century?" *Public Opinion Monitor* 4 (2000): 13–17 [in Russian].

oners of the concentration camps, to the destruction of the factories of death, and to the end of Holocaust. The neutral answer that, “One of the main results of the victory is the triumph of the ideas of freedom, democracy, human rights over the fascist ideology and ethnic oppression” was chosen by less than a quarter of the respondents.⁷ The Russians remember the victory and honor it, but the Holocaust does not have a place in their historic vision of the Great Patriotic War and World War II. It seems obvious that the memory of that unprecedented tragedy is not particularly widespread, and without specifically targeted efforts it will be shared by a very limited circle of educated citizens.

In the book entitled *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the Soviet Union* Zvi Gitelman mentioned that,

Soviet treatment of the Holocaust had profound, if subtle, effects on both Jews and non-Jews in the USSR. On the one hand, it denied Jews any particular sympathy on the part of non-Jews. Unlike in the West, Soviet non-Jews, for the most part, did not feel a need to “make up” to the Jews, as it were, for any of the wrongs done to them. Many still do not feel that way today.⁸

More than half a million Soviet Jews fought in the Red Army, and about 150,000 were killed in combat. Like other Allied governments, the Soviet Union’s attitude to the Holocaust was driven by political and social considerations. But the Soviet perspective on the Shoah was radically different from that of its Western allies. Further, Soviet Jews themselves have attitudes toward World War II and the Holocaust very different from those of other Jews. Zvi Gitelman’s question sounds, therefore, quite logically:

Might Jewish veterans of the Soviet armed forces have construed their efforts, at least in part, as a form of resistance against the Holocaust perpetrated not only by the Nazis and their foreign allies (Romanians and Hungarians in particular on the Eastern Front) but also by significant numbers of people who had recently had Soviet citizenship forced on them (the Baltic peoples, Ukrainians, and Belorussians in what had been eastern Poland, and Romanians in Bessarabia and Bukovina)?

However, his answer is that,

Soviet Jewish soldiers, sailors, and pilots, both men and women, who fought the Nazis were indeed fighting against the perpetrators of the Holocaust, but that was not the motivation of most of them. Indeed, many seem not to have been aware that the Shoah was taking place in their country until they participated in the liberation of the western areas of the USSR in late 1943–1944. Their reasons for fighting were no different from those of other Soviet citizens.⁹

⁷ See Oleg Savelyev, “The Russians about the Victory day” (the press-release of the Levada-center, Moscow, May 7th, 2008) [in Russian].

⁸ Zvi Gitelman, “Politics and Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union,” in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 15.

⁹ Zvi Gitelman, “Internationalism, Patriotism and Disillusion: Soviet Jewish Veterans Remember World War Two,” in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Symposium Presentations* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, 2005), 96.

Therefore, the war veterans, who are still alive, could hardly serve as agents of commemoration of the Holocaust. Their memory, and their patterns of commemoration, are quite similar to those of the general public, and in most cases do not include any references to the Holocaust at all.

It should also be noted that current political considerations, conflicts, and interests complicate this issue even more, as it was shown on the West Ukrainian and Latvian examples, respectively by Sofia Dyak and Bella Zisere.¹⁰

The more time went by and the fewer were the witnesses of those events, the more the Holocaust seemed far away, even to the Jewish families. However, it should be pointed out that the question as to how deeply the memory of Holocaust is rooted in the self-consciousness of Russian Jews remains a subject of discussion. Unfortunately, a complex research of this issue has never been conducted: sociologists only analyze answers given by respondents from various target groups as part of different surveys that centered primarily on other issues. We would like to hope that in the foreseeable future a piece of research dedicated to the role played by the memory of Holocaust in the self-consciousness and the social life of the post-Soviet Jewry will be conducted after all.

So far, we can only present three general interpretations and implications of this issue.

The supporters of the first one claim that the memory of the Holocaust comprises one of the cornerstones of Russian and Ukrainian Jews national identity. For instance, over 77.9% of the respondents in the review conducted by Zvi Gitelman et al. in 1997–1998 described the memory of Holocaust as the main aspect of their Jewish national self-consciousness, and this aspect was clearly more important than all the other aspects suggested by the researchers.¹¹ More than 86.9% of the Jewish activists from the CIS countries surveyed in 2002 by Alek D. Epstein et al. regarded the memory of the Holocaust as a very important factor contributing to the development of the feeling of belonging to the Jewish people, and more than 97.9% said that this issue was getting particular attention within the Jewish audience.¹² The research conducted among the USSR/CIS immigrants in Israel in 2000, confirmed the memory of Holocaust to be one of the cornerstones of national identity of the Russian-speaking Jews. 94.9% of the respondents believed this factor to be crucial to maintaining their feeling of affiliation with Jewishness. Out of the seventeen factors suggested by the researchers, the memory of Holo-

¹⁰ See Sofia Dyak, "In Place of Displacement: Commemorating Deportations in Lviv after 1991" (paper presented at the Fourth Annual Danyliw Research Seminar in Contemporary Ukrainian Studies, University of Ottawa, Canada, October 23–25, 2008); Bella Zisere, "The Memory of the Shoah in the Soviet Latvia," *East European Jewish Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2005): 156–165.

¹¹ See Zvi Gitelman, Valeriy Chervyakov and Vladimir Shapiro, "Ethnic Consciousness of the Russian Jews," *Diasporas* 3 (2000): 69 [in Russian].

¹² See Alek D. Epstein, Nina Kheimets and Moshe Kenigstein, "Educational Programs and National Identity of the Russian-Speaking Jewry," in *Between Myth and Reality. Problems of Jewish Identity and Civilization in History and Today*, eds. Konstantin Burmistrov and Alexander Militarev (Moscow: The Jewish University in Moscow, 2005), 277, 281 [in Russian].

caust turned out to be the first one for Russian-speaking Jews and only the fifth one for native Israelis.¹³

The research conducted among the Russian-speaking Jewish tourists visiting Jerusalem in 1998 revealed that Yad Vashem, the World Center for Holocaust Research, Documentation, Education and Commemoration was the most important place for them that “awakened” a sense of ethnic identity and made them feel deeply connected to Jewish history. Because the topic of the Holocaust was strictly banned by Soviet censorship, thus making the slaughter of six million Jews by the Nazi regime a taboo subject, it was the absence of any memorial to the Jewish Holocaust in Russia that could explain, at least partly, the dramatic impression of the Yad Vashem memorial. An emotional effect of Yad Vashem on the tourists exceeded even the impressions of the sacred sites in the Old City of Jerusalem.¹⁴ Fifteen years of experience of the Open University of Israel’s Academic project in Jewish history in the CIS countries has demonstrated that the course “Days of Holocaust and Struggle” was selected by more students than any other course offered. According to the abovementioned survey conducted in 2002, 39.9% of the respondents who were familiar with the courses of the Open University thought that the books on Holocaust were the most meaningful ones when it came to strengthening Jewish identity. Thus, in the respondents’ opinion, the course “Days of Holocaust and Struggle” was the most important among all the Open University’s courses translated to Russian. (As a matter of fact, that course was the only one to be published in Ukrainian, as well.)

However, some experts, such as an anthropologist Elena Nosenko, who conducted dozens of in-depth interviews with Russian Jews (including the children from mixed marriages), suggest that today’s Russian Jews’ knowledge of the Holocaust is extremely sparse, and the role of the memory of the Holocaust in their personal and social identity is insignificant.

While explaining their unawareness, the respondents blame their poor memory, their troubles with concrete numbers, the fact that it is too hard for them to read about that etc., i.e. that is they try to justify their lack of personal interest in this issue. Overall, the lack of awareness of the themes of Holocaust and Resistance among the people in whose veins flows the Jewish blood, is flat-out shocking,

admits Elena Nosenko. She points out that,

It turns out that the people know something about the persecutions of the Jews, about the governmental anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, but they are completely unfamiliar with the event that had a huge impact on the destiny of the whole Jewry, and they do not even take an interest in it just like they do not express any interest in Jewish partici-

¹³ See Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinsohn and Elihu Katz, *A Portrait of Israeli Jewry. Beliefs, Observances, and Values among Israeli Jews – 2000. Research Report* (Jerusalem: Israeli Institute of Democracy – Avi Chai Foundation, 2002), 132.

¹⁴ See Alek D. Epstein and Nina Kheimets, “Looking for Pontius Pilate’s Footprints Near the Western Wall. Russian Jewish Tourists in Jerusalem,” *Tourism, Culture and Communication* 3, no. 1 (2001): 37–56.

pation in the Resistance. This could be only in part attributed to the situation in the Soviet Union. Apparently, there is a severe lack of such information in contemporary Russian society, as well. The gap is partly filled by various Jewish organizations, but even they are obviously not that successful in educating even their own employees and their regular members.”¹⁵

Elena Nosenko also mentions that practically none of her respondents expressed a desire to learn more about this topic, although the Jewish community press constantly publishes materials about Holocaust and the Resistance. “It is a paradox, but the events that played a major role in the fates of the Jewish people leave the modern Jews and their family members absolutely cold. It means that Klaas ashes is not striking to their heart.”

The third perspective points out that the destruction of the memory of the Holocaust in Jewish and non-Jewish circles was really happening during the Soviet era, but in the 1990s–2000s the situation has changed dramatically. This was related to a number of factors: first, it was due to the activities of the different Israeli and international Jewish organizations; second, this was the result of the fact that in some countries (for instance, in Ukraine, in Moldova and Lithuania) the theme of Holocaust was included in the school and university educational programs. Third, this was linked to the relatively high popularity of such Oscar-winning films as Steven Spielberg’s epic drama *Schindler’s List* (1993), Roberto Benigni’s *Life Is Beautiful* (1997) and Roman Polanski’s *The Pianist* (2002) and some others in CIS countries as well as in Western countries. Needless to say, all of those films center on Holocaust events. *Schindler’s List* is based in the true story of Oskar Schindler who becomes concerned for his Jewish workforce in Poland after the rise of the Nazi party. *Life is Beautiful* places everyday life in direct opposition to the tragedy of Nazi death camps and paints a strong picture of resilience in the face of oppression. *The Pianist* is a story of a talented musician who struggles to survive in the ghettos in his attempts to elude extradition to a concentration camp (Roman Polanski himself was a survivor of the very ghetto featured in the narrative and this extremely personal touch has a reverent effect upon viewers). Several original Russian films should be mentioned as well, including the television series *Heavy Sand* by Anatoly Rybakov produced in 2008.

Holocaust denial has appeared in Russia only recently and the phenomenon remains of marginal significance, while the majority of material is of Western origin. The Soviet war experience and associated anti-Nazi feeling arguably act as restraints on those who would propagate Holocaust denial.¹⁶ On the other hand, in the years that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in the newly independent states emerged different (and in fact, contradictory) narratives of the World War II. Sometimes they include

¹⁵ See Elena Nosenko, *To Be or to Feel? Main Aspects of Jewish Self-Identification among the Offspring of Inter-marriage in Today’s Russia* (Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, 2004), 251 [in Russian]. Translated from Russian by the authors.

¹⁶ See Stella Rock, “Russian Revisionism: Holocaust Denial and the New Nationalist Historiography,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 35, no. 4 (2001): 64–76.

the issues related to Holocaust, and sometimes not, and almost none of them mentions the collaboration between the Nazis and the local population in the persecution and annihilation of the Jews. Stefan Rohdewald compared changes in remembrance of the Holocaust and the Second World War in three successor states of the Soviet Union: Russia, Ukraine, and Lithuania. He argues that despite important distinctions, in all three states the new practices of remembrance are developing in similar ways. While the Holocaust is remembered, memory of it often remains marginalized or is appropriated for particular ends.¹⁷

Misinterpretations of historical narratives are sometimes far from the truthful and impartial representation of the historic events, and it is worth mentioning that nowhere else except for Israel is the Jewish tragedy the prism through which all the events of the late 1930s and early 1940s are viewed.¹⁸ At least since 2003, the Russian authorities have been drawing parallels between the unity of the Allies in their struggle against the Nazism in the 1940s and the necessity for a similar consolidation in the fight against “international terrorism” in our days. As was correctly noted by Dmitry Andreev and Gennady Bordyugov, “the memory space was falsely replaced by one of its functions — the actualization of the past events in the context of the present moment.”¹⁹ It is also important to say that the War has brought so much suffering to the peoples of the Soviet Union that everyone deplores “their own” loss, and the memory of Holocaust is left to the Jews, since no one else claims to have a right to it, and because no one really needs it. In the memory of Nazism, preserved by the Soviet regime, the Holocaust was always left a place in the shadow; this was the same for the Jews themselves.²⁰ The process of institutionalization of Holocaust commemoration really takes place (memorial sites and museums are opening, new books dedicated to this theme are being published, and so forth), but a large number of cases of silencing and denying the Holocaust²¹ could not be ignored as well. In any case, this topic has not yet become an integral part of the general public’s historical agenda.

The problem can be clearly seen from the data collected by Alek D. Epstein, Vladimir (Ze'ev) Khanin and Vyacheslav A. Likhachev among the pupils of the Jewish

¹⁷ See 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, no. 2 (2008): 173–184.

¹⁸ For further discussion see Martin Evans, “Memories, Monuments, Histories: The Re-thinking of the Second World War since 1989,” *National Identities* 8, no. 4 (2006): 317–348.

¹⁹ See Dmitry Andreev and Gennady Bordyugov, “The Memory Space: The Great Victory and the Authorities,” in *The 60th Anniversary of the End of the World War II and the Great Patriotic War: The Winners and the Losers in the Context of Politics, Mythology and Memory*, eds. Falk Bomsdorf and Gennady Bordyugov (Moscow: The Friedrich Naumann Foundation, 2005), 140.

²⁰ See Maria Ferretti, “Unversöhnliche Erinnerung. Krieg, Stalinismus und die Schatten des Patriotismus,” *Osteuropa* 55 (2005): 45–55 [in German].

²¹ See Pavel Polyán, “The Soviet and Post-Soviet Traditions of Silencing and Denying Holocaust,” in *The Denial of the Denial, or the Battle of Auschwitz*, eds. Alfred Koch and Pavel Polyán (Moscow: Three Squares, 2008), 48–66 [in Russian].

schools in Russia and Ukraine in 2008. All of the respondents admitted to having been told about the Holocaust at school, but only 54.9 of them (that is just a little more than a half!) remembered having heard something about the Holocaust at home. While answering the question “Try to remember, what was your age when you first heard about the Holocaust?” more than half of the respondents chose the age from 10 years and older; more than a quarter of the respondents did not hear about the Holocaust until the age of twelve. The overwhelming majority of the young adults learned about the Holocaust at school, though many of them mentioned the impact of films and books as well. In addition, it is with mentioning that even those few who first heard about the extermination of the Jews during World War II from their family members, received this information from their parents (or heard about it in the parents’ conversations), rather than from their grandmothers and grandfathers (who largely were not witnesses of the Shoah, at least they had not achieved a merely mature age).²² Later Dina Pisarevskaya conducted another research among the participants of various Hillel Jewish Student Union programs in Russia. Her conclusion was that the respondents’ interest in the Holocaust can be linked to their trip to Israel within the framework of the Birthright program (during this trip all of them visited the Yad Vashem memorial complex) rather than to their family background. According to the data she collected, the “discovery” of the Holocaust had a serious impact both on those students who grew up in the ethnically-mixed families and those who came from ethnically homogenous Jewish families.²³

In summation, Holocaust memory is not passed down from generation to generation, but is developed from the outside, as if it concerned some distant historic events rather than something that happened only seven decades ago in Russia and Ukraine, where these teenagers live now. The declining numbers of Holocaust survivors and the historical distance from the events poses a fundamental challenge to the memory of the Holocaust in the 21st century. Serious efforts are still needed in order to develop educational programs to transmit the memory of the Holocaust to future generations.

²² See Alek D. Epstein, Vladimir (Zeev) Khanin and Vyacheslav A. Likhachev, “‘Between Grandma and Teacher’: Is the Intergenerational Dialogue Essential for the Formation of the Memory of the Holocaust among the Jewish Youth in the Contemporary Russia and Ukraine?” in *Dialogue of Generations in the Context of Slavic and Jewish Cultural Traditions*, ed. Olga Belova (Moscow: “Sefer” Center – Institute of Slavic Studies, 2010), 188–206 [in Russian].

²³ See Dina Pisarevskaya, “Life Styles of Jewish Youth of Russia,” *Diasporas 2* (2011): 104–105 [in Russian].