



## An Attempt to Teach Multiculturalism: Introducing the Holocaust into History Classes in post-Soviet Ukraine

SIMONE ATTILIO BELLEZZA

### *A split among historians*

In the past two decades in Ukraine the study of the holocaust has flourished. But in the same time, memorials and other monuments commemorating the *shoah* have been repeatedly vandalized, revealing that anti-Semitism is still a searing problem. The reason for this can be traced to the lack of public memory and debate on the holocaust: Ivan Katchanovski asserted that, especially after the Orange revolution, the rhetoric on the 1932-33 famine has overshadowed the genocidal policies of WWII.<sup>1</sup> The Ukrainian-Canadian historian John-Paul Himka accused the Ukrainian diaspora of ignoring (or even concealing) the involvement of the Ukrainian nationalists in the holocaust, and affirmed that the Ukrainian debate on the holocaust is limited to a restricted group of intellectuals and that the Jewish community takes no part in it.<sup>2</sup> The social psychologist Elena Ivanovna has demonstrated that Ukrainian high school students, although negatively judging the Nazi persecutions of the Jews, consider the holocaust to be a crime committed

1 Ivan Katchanovski, *The Politics of Soviet and Nazi Genocides in Orange Ukraine*, in "Europe-Asia Studies", vol. 62, n. 6 (August 2010), pp. 973-997.

2 John-Paul Himka, *War Criminality: A Blank Spot in the Collective Memory of the Ukrainian Diaspora*, in "Spaces of Identity", vol. 5, n. 1 (April 2005), pp. 9-24; Id., *Debates in Ukraine over the nationalist involvement in the Holocaust, 2004-2008*, in "Nationalities Papers", vol. 39, n. 3 (May 2011), pp. 353-370.





solely by the Germans, and do not link it to anti-Semitism in Ukraine.<sup>3</sup>

Himka traces the poor understanding of the holocaust among Ukrainian citizens back to a division among Ukrainian historians:<sup>4</sup> after 1991, the historical community divided itself into a “patriotic” approach and a “post-modern” approach. Adherents to the former include the historians who provided the new state with a national version of Ukrainian history: members of this group usually do not speak Western languages, do not read the scientific production of foreign countries, and rely exclusively on Ukrainian and Russian sources. Their writings present a teleological version of history with the Ukrainian people as the main protagonist, where there is no place for the national minorities: the holocaust is overlooked or reduced to a German matter. This group exercises what Michael Schafir defined as “deflective negationism”<sup>5</sup>, which consists not in negating the holocaust itself, but in negating the collaboration of a particular group (in this case the Ukrainians). According to Himka and Georgyi Kasianov, the patriotic historians prevailed in the public discourse and received the support of politicians, especially during the Yushchenko presidency.

The second approach includes foreign historians of Ukrainian descent and Ukrainian “cosmopolitan” historians, who can speak English and German, often travel abroad, and read Western scholarship: this group rejects the national rhetoric of the “patriotic” approach and thinks of history as a struggle of discourses and not as a tool to educate or achieve “the Truth.” These historians believe that Ukraine needs a multi-national

3 Elena Ivanovna, *Ukrainian High School Students' Understanding of the Holocaust*, in “Holocaust and Genocide Studies”, vol. 18, n. 3 (Winter 2004), pp. 402-420.

4 John-Paul Himka, *The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Ukraine*, in John-Paul Himka, Joanna Beata Michlic, eds., *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln-London 2013, pp. 635-636.

5 See Michael Shafir, *Between Denial and “Comparative Trivialization”: Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe*, SICSA, Jerusalem 2002.





version of history, which would include all the nationalities living on Ukrainian soil, and would condemn the unwillingness of their society and politics to admit the collaboration in the holocaust.<sup>6</sup> This second group considers the “patriotic” approach responsible for the Ukrainians’ poor knowledge of the holocaust and accuses it of “placing obstacles on Ukraine’s path to Europe.”<sup>7</sup> Though members of the “post-modern” approach claim to be anti-ideological, it is clear that the idea of a Ukrainian state reconciled thanks to a new multi-national version of Ukrainian history is also somewhat ideological (even if it is much more shareable than the “patriotic” approach)<sup>8</sup>.

### *A drive for change*

The Ukrainian Centre for Holocaust Studies of Kyiv (UCHS) was founded in 2002 as a non-governmental organisation in partnership with the Kuras Institute for Political and Ethnic Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. It clearly belongs to the second post-modern trend. The Centre collaborates with many similar institutes all around the world and its task is twofold: it conducts original research on the holocaust in Ukraine,<sup>9</sup> and it also promotes many public initiatives to spread the knowledge of the history of Jewish persecutions and foster a public discussion on their wider civic significance. Appalled by the lack of popular knowledge of the holocaust in Ukraine, the UCHS has devoted itself to spreading the teaching of the holocaust in Ukrainian schools

6 Georgyi Kas'ianov, *Dějã vu!*, in “Krytyka”, vol. 11, n. 3 (berezen' 2007), p. 22.

7 John-Paul Himka, “The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Ukraine,” cit., p. 653.

8 As recent events demonstrate, the idea that the different nationalities living within the Soviet-fixed borders of Ukraine constitute a single political community is also a matter of political opinion and cannot be automatically accepted as true or more genuine.

9 Particularly laudable is the study of the persecutions of Roma: see Mykhailo Tiahlyi, ed., *Peresliduvannia ta vbyvstva romiv na terenakh Ukraïny: zbirnyk dokumentiv, materialiv ta spohadiv*, UCHS, Kyiv 2013.





and universities, organising conferences, courses and seminars for teachers, and founding a national contest for best paper on the holocaust written by a high school student. Thanks to the partnership with more than twenty other institutes (among them the Yad Vashem and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum), in the last decade the UCHS has emerged as one of the most important actors promoting the memory of the holocaust in Ukraine.

In particular, the Centre has published a series of manuals with the task of covering a subject otherwise missing from both the Ukrainian ministerial programs and history textbooks. These books provide a very interesting example of the way a Ukrainian non-governmental organisation is trying to introduce this sensitive subject into a country that obliterated the memory of these events until 1991 and never started a public discussion about it or about the role its citizens played in it.

One should not underestimate the importance of the events of World War Two for the national consciousness of the Ukrainian nation: since independence, the new patriotic rhetoric has rehabilitated the movements like UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) and OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists), which fought against both the Nazis and the Soviets, occasionally collaborating with the former. The collaboration of Ukrainian partisans and nationalists with Nazi Germany has been extensively used in the political contest, and different reconstructions of the role of Ukrainians in WWII characterised the two major political formations until 2014 (Party of Regions vs. *Nasha Ukraïna/Bat'kyvshchyna*).<sup>10</sup> We should therefore keep in mind that books addressing the questions of holocaust and collaborationism, especially if directed at students, involve a re-definition of Ukrainians as members of their nation and political community. These books consequently may contain an

<sup>10</sup> See David Marples, *Heroes and Villains. Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine*, CEU Press, Budapest 2007.





explicit or implicit definition of what Ukrainian citizens are or should be. In this contribution I will analyse the educational publications of the Centre, identifying their main purposes both in the practice of teaching holocaust history and in fostering a different idea of citizenship.

*What is studying the holocaust for?*

The first educational publications of the Centre were printed in 2007, thanks to funding from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports of the Netherlands and within a wider project implemented from 2002 by the UCHS and the Anne Frank House of Amsterdam. The holocaust was nearly completely ignored in Ukrainian history textbooks: the first task of the Centre was to remedy this lack with two tools for both students and teachers. The first one was a dictionary-reference book entitled *The Holocaust in Ukraine (1941-1944)*, containing all the classical headwords of such publications (from Abwehr to Yad Vashem). Two experienced textbooks authors, Oleksandr Hisem and Oleksandr Martyniuk, edited it with the collaboration of the Centre's researchers. In spite of the title and of a feeble declaration in the introduction, the dictionary devotes no particular attention to Ukraine and it aims simply at clarifying the meaning of the most common terms of holocaust studies. The only exception is the entry *OUN*, which is evidently longer than in similar non-Ukrainian publications, providing a lot of information on its involvement in WWII. Oddly enough, the definition does not address the question of collaborationism of OUN members with the Nazis, especially with regard to Jewish persecutions, and discards the whole question with the single sentence: «Anti-Semitism was also present in the ideology of the OUN until 1943».<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the editorial committee decided that this question was too delicate to be addressed in a publication

<sup>11</sup> Oleksandr V. Hisem, Oleksandr O. Martyniuk, eds., *Holokost v Ukraïni (1941-1944)*. *Slovnyk-dovidnyk*, Sfera, Kyïv 2007, p. 54.





like a dictionary, which was intended as a specialized reference book. It is noteworthy, however, that the whole book has no other specific Ukrainian characterisation.

Much more interesting was the second 2007 publication, a book by the Centre's director, Anatolii Podol's'kyi, entitled *Lessons of the Past: the History of the Holocaust in Ukraine*. Podol's'kyi is an expert on holocaust and Jewish history, who has published many scientific and educational works and who worked in many different institutions until his appointment as director of the UCHS. He conceived this book as a supplement to the history textbooks for the last two years of high school. Externally the book looks very serious and "old-school": it is mainly composed of text, with just a few images and no colours, like a typical scientific publication. Though not too long, it consists of around 80 pages of text which the students are allegedly required to read in addition to their manual.

The originality of Podol's'kyi approach, however, comes into view in the very first page of the introduction: instead of indulging in the necessity of remembering past murders or of accusations against forgotten criminals, Podol's'kyi links the study of the holocaust to an observation of the present:

Nowadays the majority of people understand and accept the fact that today there is no country in the world where the representatives of only one nation live. Similarly, many ethnic groups and nations live in Ukraine and therefore the history and the culture of Ukraine are the history and the culture of all the nations which inhabit it. Consequently the tragic assassination of Ukrainian Jews in the years of Nazi occupation of our territory is not only a page in the history of the Jewish nation, but also a part of the history of Ukraine in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup>

On the one hand, this sentence claims a legitimate place for the history of the holocaust in Ukrainian national history.

12 Anatolii Podol's'kyi, *Uroky mynuloho: istoriia Kholokostu v Ukraïni, Sfera, Kyïv 2007*, pp. 5-6.





On the other hand, it affirms the unavoidable reality that all countries are multi-national societies and that the idea of a single nation-state is false. This passage is strictly connected with the task of the book, which Podol's'kyi declares after he defines that the persecution of anyone on the basis of ethnic or national belonging as irrational:

This book has been called a training manual, and I believe that this is right, because its main idea consists exactly in trying to learn to sympathise; in this particular case to **sympathise** with a tragedy, but not only, also to experience a different culture, to understand that we have no other choice but learning to understand and to treat the other and different cultures with **tolerance...**<sup>13</sup>

Podol's'kyi makes no secret of the goals of his book and of the efforts of the Centre: teaching tolerance and sympathising with the other in a multinational society is the main task of studying and remembering the holocaust. These affirmations are not further elaborated in this publication, which continues with the story of Jewish communities in Ukraine in the period 1918-1939. Nevertheless they are the core of the educational activities of the Centre, as we will see in the following publications.

Podol's'kyi's book is divided into five chapters dedicated to the history of Ukrainian Jews between the two World Wars, the Nazi occupation and the persecutions of Jews during the war (two chapters with a mainly geographical focus), the question of collaboration with the Nazis and the efforts made by Ukrainians to save Jews, and the Jewish resistance movement. A short glossary, a timetable of events and a bibliography close the volume. The different chapters provide a well-informed and efficiently summarised account of the main events and dynamics of the holocaust in Ukraine, with specific attention paid to the differences in the various regions (Western and Eastern Ukraine, zones under Romanian administration, Crimea etc.). Podol's'kyi clearly knows his subject well and he

<sup>13</sup> Ibid; bold in the original.





has done great work in presenting it in a form that is easily readable for students. One possible criticism would regard the choice not to include events prior to the First World War in the narrative: since Podol's'kyi seems to belong to those historians who interpret the holocaust as an episode in the multi-national history of Eastern Europe,<sup>14</sup> the inclusion of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century-early 20<sup>th</sup> century pogroms should have been an important tile in this complex mosaic.

Podol's'kyi openly addresses the questions of anti-Semitism and collaboration with the Nazis in the OUN as well as in the wider population: he underlines the role of Ukrainian policemen in the persecutions and presents the anti-Jewish attitudes of the OUN-UPA formations. Explaining the negative popular attitude towards Jews, Podol's'kyi writes:

Nazi propaganda [...] here in the Ukrainian territories declared the Jews responsible for the crimes of Stalinism. Moreover, Nazi propaganda spread the thesis, according to which the Bolshevik regime was the creation of the Jews, that it was first and foremost a Jewish power. Nazi propaganda and the newspapers published in the occupied territories constantly wrote about “Judeo-Bolshevism”, “crimes of Judeo-Communists”, “the conspiracy of Stalin with the Jews”. This awful untruthful propaganda led to the participation of the non-Jewish population in the Holocaust, and made the murder of Jewish women, children and elderly easier for the Nazis...<sup>15</sup>

When turning to the reasons for anti-Semitism in the OUN, Podol's'kyi repeats the same explanation, adding that the Jews actually supported the Soviet Union against Nazi persecutions and that the Ukrainian nationalists saw Germany as the only political actor able to confront the Soviet power in Ukraine<sup>16</sup>.

14 One of the best examples of this historiographic school for Ukraine is Shimon Redlich, *Together and Apart in Brzezany. Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians, 1919-1945*, Indiana UP, Bloomington-Indianapolis 2002.

15 Podol's'kyi, *Uroky mynuloho*, cit., pp. 25-26.

16 Ivi, pp. 67-68.







Though Podol's'kyi's reasoning seems realistic, I cannot help noticing that he failed to mention the particular visibility of Jews in the Soviet Union, the first political power which did not discriminate against them. The fact that Jews in the USSR could fill important political roles, unlike the situation in Poland or in the Tsarist Empire until 1917, made them particularly visible and corroborated the bias of Bolshevism as a Jewish-led regime.<sup>17</sup>

It must be added that each episode of Ukrainian collaboration with the Nazis is paired with an episode of solidarity towards the Jews: in the chapter on collaboration the discussion of the OUN is followed by the story of the well-known Metropolitan Archbishop Andryi Sheptyts'kyi, who saved more than 150 Jewish children. Though one would have expected a stronger discussion of the present political myths of the OUN, Podol's'kyi clearly decided not to introduce such a sensitive matter: this decision is understandable if one looks at the task of the book, which is not to distribute fault, but to foster a wider reflection on racial/national persecutions. A polemical paragraph on the OUN could have been counter-productive, as it risked linking the book to endless political polemics.

Each chapter is interspersed with exercises, the task of which is to provide the students with some additional information or documents (usually memoirs) and to make them think about the particular conditions of the holocaust. The goal of these exercises is not, as in usual textbooks, to test the knowledge acquired with the study of previous paragraphs: all the questions are meant to foster a reflection on how the holocaust was implemented and on what factors influenced human actions in such a situation. I will quote two clarifying examples. The first is an excerpt from a newspaper:

17 See Andrzej Zbikowski, *Local Anti-Jewish Pogroms in the Occupied Territories of Eastern Poland, June-July 1941*, in Lucjan Dobroszycki, Jeffrey Gurock, eds., *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941-1945*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk-London 1993, pp. 173-179.





“In Berlin there are no streets named after Jews. Berlin city administration changed the names of those streets that carried a Jewish family name. In one day, 18 streets received names of glorious people instead of names like Wassermann, Heine, Einstein and others...

«Ukraïns'ki visty» – L'viv – 10 October 1938

### **Exercise**

In addition to the informational function, periodical press often carries out ideological tasks or reports the position of particular political or social groups.

1) In the previous text, are there opinions and values? Quote and explain.

2) What reactions is the author of this piece of news expecting from the readers?<sup>18</sup>

Though perhaps unusual, this exercise can still be considered within the scope of school education: critical reading and thinking is surely among the goals of a good education. The second example is a reflection on the question of collaborationism:

### **From the memoirs of those who survived:**

“I have in front of me the letter from my 86 year old mother, which I received at the end of June 1941 from my native village Hrymailov. She wrote that three of her sons, my brothers, and her 18 y.o. grandson died... In particular she wrote ‘I cannot understand it. God gave me a long life so that my eyes could see how my children shed their blood? How come it is the same peasants, those who often came to our place, often stayed overnight, and were in very friendly relationships with my children, and now these same people took my sons and murdered them without mercy? That day they shot nearly all the men in the village.» Where one can find the roots of such horrific and ubiquitous hate?”

David Kakhane

18 Podol's'kyi, *Uroky mynuloho*, cit., p. 12.





## Diaries of L'viv Ghetto

### **In your opinion:**

How is it possible to answer (if it is possible at all) David Kakhane's and his mother's questions? Give a reasoned answer.<sup>19</sup>

This exercise demonstrates that the focus is not on the right answer (i.e. Nazi propaganda, etc.) but on the attempt to trigger a reflection about how violence begins, even when it involves people who know each other and apparently have good relations. These questions, like those about the students' feelings when reading the testimonies of the persecutions, or about why well-educated people like the Nazi leaders became anti-Semites, clearly qualify this book as an attempt to generate a civic conscience in the students.

Podol's'kyi has done his best in trying to fulfil the intentions declared in the introduction. However, the story of the holocaust and the exercises seem to be confined to a far past: nor do the text and exercises directly refer to the current situation of Ukraine or to the real life of students in nowadays Ukraine. In this first manual, past and present are still divided by an invisible but perceptible line: if the students could learn something relevant for their present life from the history of the holocaust, they were left alone to make this last connection.

### *The holocaust and you?*

In order to teach tolerance and peaceful coexistence one more step was needed: from March 2008 three more textbooks and one guidebook for teachers were published by the UCHS thanks to a collaboration with the Anne Frank House, the Ukrainian association Nova Doba, and the support of the Office for Democratic Institution and Human Rights of the OSCE. These four books are the translation and adaptation of similar publications of the Anne Frank House, vastly modified to fit into the Ukrainian context. As part of a wider program

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, p. 67.





of translations and publications of materials on the holocaust throughout Europe, the Centre prepared these four booklets, of which 15,000 copies were printed. In addition, all educational materials by the UCHS are downloadable from its website for free. The translation and adaptation of the texts (with the addition of facts about Ukraine and the reformulation of exercises) was carried out in collaboration with the association “Nova Doba” (New Epoch). The association unites teachers of history and other social subjects from schools and universities, and organises various initiatives and collaborations to foster the teaching of a sense of civic responsibility and of citizenship in a multinational society. After consulting with Nova Doba, the authors of the modifications were Podol’s’kyi, Vitalii Bobrov (a young associate of UCHS with experience as a teacher), and Oleksandr Voitenko (a trainer of Nova Doba and a teacher from the Poltava region, particularly interested in the teaching of human rights).

The introduction of the teacher’s book affirms that, in addition to teaching some episodes of the history of Jews and of the holocaust, this series’ goal is to fight against prejudices:

Exploiting the examples of anti-Semitism of the past and the present, this series uncovers the consequences of prejudices, linking this subject to contemporaneity and to the concrete experiences of the students. The goal of the project is to provide a detailed explanation of the question of anti-Semitism and of prejudices in general. The strategic task consists of education on tolerance among students.<sup>20</sup>

The instrumental role of the holocaust is explicit: although the Centre is interested in teaching some notions of Jewish history and of the holocaust, the main aim of the project is teaching tolerance and fighting prejudice, any prejudice. According to the introduction, the fight against prejudice cannot be conducted only through knowledge, but also with a

<sup>20</sup> *Antysemityzm: davni ta novi uperedzhennia. Metodychnyi posibnyk dlia uchitelia*, Dim Anne Frank-UCHS, Kyiv, 2008, p. 3.





“ability to sympathise”<sup>21</sup>, which is what the series helps to teach. The holocaust is not conceived as a unique event, something severed and incomparable, but is just an example (perhaps the most violent) of what prejudices can lead to.

At first glance, these books represent a different approach to teaching: they are colourful and contain many pictures, while the text is much shorter and simplified in comparison to Podol's'kyi's manual. The first student book is entitled *Part 1 Jews in Europe until 1945* and is dedicated to the history of Jews and the holocaust. However, the first unit of this book is not about the history of Jews in ancient times, but about what identity is: the first page presents two young Jews, Ihor from Ukraine and Sara from the Netherlands. The former's first statement, which was also used as the title of this chapter, reads: “A Jew? My father is Jewish and my mother is Tatar, but I always thought that we are all Ukrainians”<sup>22</sup>. In this way the multi-national nature of the Ukrainian population, which was just a statement in Podol's'kyi's book, is presented as an incontestable reality which, perhaps, is common to many other students. The following two pages invite the students to meditate on identity as something imposed by others through prejudices and on the struggle to conquer a personal identity: students are asked to state their national origins and whether these origins define them more than the things they like, or what they would like to do in their lives. Later on the booklet presents a short and simplified (perhaps even over-simplified) history of Jewish communities and of the *shoah* (called by this name here). Even in this more “historical” first book the links to contemporaneity and to the students' lives are numerous: the teacher's book recommends explaining what the Jewish diaspora is, using the example of the Ukrainian diaspora, and addressing the question of Jews speaking Yiddish by making

21 Ibid.

22 *Chastyna 1: Evreï u Jevropi do 1945 roky*, Dim Anne Frank-OSCE ODHIR, Kyïv 2008, p. 2.





reference to the many languages Ukrainians speak both in their homeland and in the diaspora.<sup>23</sup> The Jewish and Ukrainian peoples are presented as having much in common in their history.

Some passages reveal interesting parallels in the practice of teaching the history of anti-Semitism: just like any Western European history textbook presents the emergence of anti-Semitism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the “Affaire Dreyfus”, this manual presents the “affaire Beilis”, the famous case of the Jew Mendel Beilis who was unjustly accused of the murder of a Christian child (including the following mobilisation of intellectuals in the Russian empire and final acquittal).<sup>24</sup>

The final pages present the Babyn Yar massacre through the verses written by the Russian poet Yevgeny Evtushenko and the Ukrainian poet Dmytro Pavlychko: the teacher can introduce the question of the Soviet silence on the holocaust, pointing out the examples of those Russian and Ukrainian intellectuals who struggled with the Soviet Jews for the recognition of what happened during World War Two. This first book seems to be a good exemplification of how to present the history of the Jewish diaspora and of the holocaust as something close and knowledgeable for Ukrainian students, who can empathize with many of the recounted events.

The other two booklets for students touch on completely new subjects: as declared in the teacher’s book, the tasks of the second manual are to explain “the link between the holocaust and the Universal declaration of the human rights,” teaching the student to “disprove the anti-Semitic declarations of the Neo-Nazis, in particular, the negation of the Holocaust”, and finally “tell apart the criticism towards Israel from anti-

23 *Antysemityzm: davni ta novi uperedzhennia*, cit., pp. 5 and 7.

24 The Beilis affair has become increasingly popular in post-Soviet historiography of the holocaust in the last few years and it is a splendid example of cultural translation (the book actually presents the Dreyfus affair as a Western version of the Beilis affair! See *Chastyňa 1: Evrei u Jevropi do 1945 roky*, cit., p. 11).





Semitism”<sup>25</sup>. In fact the *Part 2: Is Anti-Semitism an Eternal Fight?* presents the history of the consequences of the holocaust starting in 1945: it begins recounting the story of the Jews who survived the *shoah* and decided either to emigrate or to return to their native villages. The book illustrates the decision to write the declaration of the human rights as a nearly direct consequence of the holocaust and the re-emergence of anti-Semitism both in the Soviet Union and in the post-Cold War world. The foundation of Israel is introduced as a phase of the global success of nationalism worldwide, but the identity between Israel and Jews is strongly contested: the teacher's book reads: “It is also important to underline that the majority of Jews lives outside Israel. This information will be important for the next chapter, which illustrates the question of the relation between the criticism of Israel's policy and anti-Semitism”<sup>26</sup>. On this point the manual presents a very clear way to tell apart legitimate criticisms from anti-Semitism: “Criticism towards Israel is not anti-Semitism *per se*. But when this criticism is based on prejudices about ‘what Jews are’, or leads to a theory of a [Jewish world] plot, or is directed against all Jews, then you can consider it an expression of anti-Semitism”<sup>27</sup>. With that in mind, in the exercises the students are invited to reflect on many different examples of anti-Semitic propaganda (usually in the form of satirical cartoons). Once again, often there is no “right answer” to the questions: the book asks the students why there are neo-Nazi formations in the contemporary world. Some of the exercises seem to be a practice for further action in the real world: on page 11 the students are faced with an anti-Semitic caricature of Ariel Sharon and requested to write a letter of protest to the website which published it, arguing their reasons. The culmination of the book is the final chapter,

25 *Antysemityzm: davni ta novi uperedzhennia*, cit., p. 10.

26 Ivi, p. 12.

27 *Chastyina 2: Antysemityzm – vichna borot'ba?*, Dim Anne Frank-OSCE ODHIR, Kyiv 2008, p. 10.





which recounts the friendship between Amal and Odelia, an Israeli and a Palestinian girl, who met in Sweden: the main concern of this second part seems to be the difference between Jews and the policy of the state of Israel, demonstrating that one should not hold all Jews responsible for the actions of the Israeli government<sup>28</sup>. The second book is focused on anti-Semitism in the contemporary world and, although it refers to many episodes of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, it is less focused on the specificity of the Ukrainian reality.

This perspective is confirmed in the final *Part 3: Prejudice. You 2?* Which addresses the questions of prejudice, scapegoating, and discrimination in general terms. The book recounts the real stories of nine youngsters (only two of them are Ukrainian citizens) addressing different kinds of discrimination: ethnic/national, religious and sexual orientation. It is noteworthy that homosexuality is included but there is no mention of gender discrimination: this is quite striking, especially in a country like Ukraine, where sexist views are still very strong. The book explicitly compares what happens in Ukraine and in the more tolerant Netherlands: it recounts in parallel the stories of a Jew and a homosexual from each of these countries. Homophobia seems to be the thorniest subject: the story of Sasha, a Ukrainian gay student, is reported in his own words, but there is no picture of him (unlike all other cases) and for privacy and security reasons even his name is a pseudonym. The teacher's book suggests making sure that the school and the students' parents are not completely against dealing with such subjects and to read more literature on this question before addressing it during classes. However, the questions on this case are a good example of how this manual has become a means to discuss personal views and tolerance: "Exercise 2. Let's be honest. A) What do people around you say about homosexuality? B) Do you

28 Thought not stated overtly, this is clearly the task of the book, as it appears also in the exercises, like one on page 11 which reads: "Why can one not blame all Jews for what happens in Israel?".







think that [homosexuality] is normal? Explain your answer. C) Do boys and girls talk about homosexuality in different ways? Explain your answer.”<sup>29</sup>. The other stories report cases of racial or national discrimination, like the case of Roma. The book provides many examples of people fighting for their freedom: on page 14 the Ukrainian dissenter of the 1970s and 1980s, Petro Hryhorenko, is included in a list together with Rosa Parks, Rigoberta Menchu, and Aung San Suu Kyi. The exercises call the students to active action: after asking them to analyse different posters against racism, the final exercise requires the students to decide what rhetoric techniques are more effective and to use them to compose their own poster against discrimination. Though one exercise asks the students to find an example of national discrimination in Ukraine, this point is not directly addressed in a concrete way: for example, there is no mention of the great problem of language discrimination and of the Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking divide in Ukraine, which was (and still is) often at the centre of the political debate.

All things considered, these three textbooks are an attempt to teach tolerance and solidarity in a multicultural society: the holocaust is used as a concrete historical example of intolerance, and the two main tasks of this series are to teach how to confront anti-Semitism and racism. However, the references to Ukrainian society are few and they lack concreteness, with the only exception of homosexuality. Further, the raw nerves of Ukrainian identity, like the difficult heritage of the OUN, anti-Semitism and neo-Fascism in Ukraine, and the Russo-Ukrainian divide, are not mentioned. This is perhaps due to the fact that these books are the outcome of an international project destined for many countries and cannot consider all the variables of different societies. Though representing an incredibly important and laudable initiative, this series partly fails in its attempt to concretely tackle the question of tolerance in Ukraine. The reason for this partial failure resides,

29 Castyna 3: *Uperedzhennia. You 2?*, Dim Anne Frank-OSCE ODHIR, Kyiv 2008, p. 7.





in my opinion, in the bond represented by the translation of an international initiative: both the two associations (UCHS and Nova Doba) and the three authors have demonstrated in other initiatives their competence and readiness to address questions like Ukrainian collaborationism or the Ukrainian-Russian divide in Ukraine. My conclusion is that international projects, though indisputably important, should give the adaptors more freedom, perhaps even to modify the structure of the books, in order to introduce specific regional sets of problems in each country.

### *Teaching the teachers to teach*

In 2012 the UCHS published its last educational book: this manual was specifically meant for teachers. The book, entitled *History of the Holocaust: Education and Memory*, consists of four chapters which address four questions: how to find time to introduce the holocaust into the ministerial programs, how to exploit the international day of remembrance and the local monuments to teach the holocaust, how to treat some particular questions of the holocaust in the teaching of history, and how to treat some particular questions in the teaching of law. The approach of the book is pragmatic: the first chapter includes some tables with the indication of the ministerial educational units which could be exploited to talk about the holocaust and a useful list of questions to ask when facing a document like a picture or a video from World War Two. One of the most useful pieces of advice is to introduce the holocaust not into the program of history, but into the subject called “regional ethnography” (*kraieznavstvo*), which also includes regional history: this particular subject of the Ukrainian school curricula confirms its elasticity and malleability, as demonstrated by Peter Rodgers’s study of the regional variations of national rhetoric in Ukrainian post-Soviet history





teaching<sup>30</sup>. The second chapter illustrates the many projects of the Centre and the various possibilities of collaboration with it, in particular with regard to the project financed by the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Germany about the valorisation of the monuments of the holocaust. Once again, the book promotes the teaching of history as the multinational history of the many nations of Ukraine and stresses the risks of the teaching and memorialisation of the holocaust:

The last twenty years of independent Ukraine saw the slow emergence of the memory of different aspects of the war against Nazism like the holocaust, the activity of the Ukrainian national movement, the fate of the Ostarbeiters and POWs, the question of the anti-Nazi and anti-Communist partisans, and collaboration... For this reason, now in our country and society a special question of a common memory of WWII of the different ethnicities has arisen. [...]

There is no understanding that [the holocaust] is part of the general history of Ukraine, a part of their own history, but there is a stereotypical persuasion or a prejudice that it is 'their' Jewish history and tragedy, let 'them' think about it, about how to preserve their memory.<sup>31</sup>

Teaching the history of the holocaust in the hours dedicated to the knowledge of regional history is a means to present the *shoah* as something close to the students, and therefore avoid a division between Jews and other nationalities.

The third and the fourth chapters contain some advice and many examples of exercises (including testimonies, pictures and indications of films) to discuss various aspects of the holocaust during history and law classes. They sometimes address even the question of collaboration, though not in a historical way: the book does not invite the students to question the behaviour

30 Peter W. Rodgers, *Nation, Region and History in Post-Communist Traditions: Identity Politics in Ukraine, 1991-2006*, Ibidem, Stuttgart 2008.

31 *Istoriia Holokostu: osvita ta pamiat'. Posibnyk dlia vchytelia*, UCVIH, Kyiv 2012, p. 56 and 61.





of OUN-UPA, but just to imagine what they would do in a similar situation.

Finally, in 2014, the Centre published another book, *In First Person: the History of the Holocaust in the Witnesses' Testimonies: A Training Manual*, which is a collection of testimonies with a very useful introduction on oral sources and a guide on how to collect and use them<sup>32</sup>. The task of the book was double: to provide the teachers with original sources they could use in classes, and a guide for those who wanted to collaborate, perhaps even with the help of their students, on collecting the testimonies of the last living witnesses of the holocaust in Ukraine.

### *Blending National and International Initiatives*

It is difficult to evaluate the outcomes of the UCHS's activities and publications, especially in such a short period of time. However it is incontrovertible that the initiatives of the UCHS have grown in numbers and participation in the last thirteen years: in 2014 the national contest for best paper on the holocaust written by a high school student registered nearly 100 participants from 15 different regions. In the same year three summer schools for teachers were organised, testifying to the increasing interest for these themes and to the success of the UCHS approach.

As demonstrated by this analysis, the UCHS has actively taken steps to preserve and foster the memory of the holocaust, intending it as a means to teach Ukrainian students how to fight against prejudices and introducing them to tolerant coexistence in a multicultural society. Though laudable, such textbooks, especially when they originate from an adaptation of international initiatives to the Ukrainian context, fail to address the thorniest questions linked to peaceful coexistence in present Ukraine. Addressing the question of the Russo-

<sup>32</sup> Vitalii Bobrov, ed., *Vid pershoi osoby: istoriia holokostu u svidchenniakhocheydytsiv. Navchal'nyi posibnyk*, UCVIH, Kyiv 2014.





---

Ukrainian divide in contemporary Ukraine would have been a risky but concrete step towards a less theoretical teaching of tolerance. More “Ukrainian” initiatives, like Podol’skyi’s first book, seem to have been more concrete and even more courageous in addressing the thorniest points of Ukrainian national history. However, in these publications there is no wider discussion of the Ukrainian collaboration in the holocaust, nor a reflection of how these facts could change the evaluation of merits and faults of Ukrainian nationalism during World War Two.

