Remembrance as Balancing Act

The Public and Academic Handling of Eastern Europe's Jewish Heritage

Knowledge about the life of the East European Jews and the Shoah has grown in past decades. But the appropriate transmission of East European Jewish history and culture is highly demanding. Sometimes, there is a danger of remembrance of the Holocaust's victims sliding into commercialism and kitsch, and because Jewish life is often treated as a museum artefact, its renaissance ends up forgotten. Delphine Bechtel, Michael Brenner, Frank Golczewski, Rachel Heuberger, François Guesnet, Cilly Kugelmann, and Anna Lipphardt explain what kind of conclusions they have drawn from this balancing act for their work in museums, libraries, classrooms, and archives.

OSTEUROPA: *For decades, the Jews of Eastern Europe have been viewed through the prism of the Holocaust. What kind of consequences does this have for the way Jewish life in Eastern Europe is perceived? Is this view starting to change?*

Cilly Kugelmann: After 1945, there were hardly any Jews left in Eastern Europe who could not be associated with the genocide. The image of the East European Jews before National Socialism is highly differentiated, depending on whether one focuses on the history of the Jews in the Baltic states, Poland, or the Soviet Union. It ranges from the romanticisation of the shtetl, the study and portrayal of its less appealing reality, to the engagement of Jews on behalf of Socialist revolution in Communist parties, and their membership in the nomenclature of Soviet governments and institutions.

Michael Brenner: Given the almost total eradication of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, it is wholly understandable that the Shoah dominates our contemporary view of Jewish history. Unlike in Germany, where a polar perpetrator-victim relationship shapes the way history is viewed, the situation in Eastern Europe is more complex. In the wake of the German occupation of large areas of Eastern Europe, a competition of victims was established, which during the Communist era often resulted in the failure to acknowledge the specific suffering of the Jews. To this day, for example, some segments of Polish society refuse to recognise Auschwitz primarily as a place where Jews were annihilated. The process of working through the murder of the Jews in Jedwabne

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at the hands of their fellow Polish citizens has raised the question of the extent to which Polish victims of National Socialism also committed crimes against Jews during the war. This debate is intensifying in the discussion of anti-Jewish pogroms after the war. Ultimately, the image of "Jew = Communist" from the postwar years is still deeply rooted in society today and often serves as a model for anti-Jewish propaganda.

Rachel Heuberger

Rachel Heuberger: Even before the Shoah, the West already had a one-sided view of East European Jewish life and had reduced it to an idealised version of a pre-modern society with an intact religious tradition. Think of the romanticising images of Roman Vishniac, the glorifying interpretation of Hasidism by Martin Buber, or the trivialisation of eastern Jewish literature written by the likes of Sholem Aleichem. The urban intelligentsia and the enlightened Polish Jewry that tried to integrate into civic life were overlooked to the same extent as the members of the Socialist movements. As a result of the Shoah, with its destruction of East European Jewish life, this false perception has been reproduced several times over in our commemorative culture and is the only one to have been handed down. The few survivors were not and are not considered authentic Jews. As far as I can tell, there has been no essential change in this view.

François Guesnet: It is true that in the German-speaking countries, the East European Jews were viewed primarily through the prism of the Holocaust. However, this does not apply elsewhere in the world. For the German-speaking countries, this attitude basically signified a continuation of the racist and totalitarian perspective of the German master race: Only the murder of East European Jewish men and women was perceived, not, however, the individual lives, hopes, and aspirations that were extinguished by this genocide. However, there is no question that German-language research has also been focused on this suppressed perspective for some time. The "eastern Jews" – itself a misleading and stereotypical term, by the way – became a topic of interest during the 1980s. Trude Maurer and her work should be mentioned first. For years, it is precisely the historians and cultural experts who have been trying to make the loss of human life in all its complexity more imaginable. Here, the lifeworld-research by Heiko Haumann can be mentioned, but also individual contributions by Gabriele Freitag, Yvonne Kleinmann, Heidemarie Petersen, Gertrud Pickhan, or Katrin Steffen. The large share of female colleagues and the low participation of male colleagues is conspicuous and not coincidental. The situation is also different elsewhere in the world.

Delphine Bechtel: After the Shoah, the history of the living Jews was indeed ignored. In Germany in particular, Jews were perceived solely as "dead Jews". This emerged implicitly from the systematic way the Shoah was investigated, through the reconstruction of the origins, the preparations, to the implementation of the annihilation. Jews thus became "Jews annihilated by the Germans". Anything that had to do with Jewish life was engulfed by the aura of the Shoah and consequently became "sacred",

"untouchable". There were also "imaginary Jews". In France, which is home to a large number of Ashkenazi Jews, Alain Finkielkraut used this term to describe the descendants of the victims of the Shoah who themselves no longer have any idea of their grandparents' culture. But their Jewish identity is based on the negative experience of the Shoah. In Germany, where far fewer Jews lived up until the 1990s, the "imaginary Jews" were construed by young Germans. It was known that the Jews were "the victims", but they otherwise remained unknown.

Anna Lipphardt: There are two prisms among the general public in the West: horror (Auschwitz) and kitsch (klezmer, shtetl, "eastern Jews"). In Eastern Europe, the Holocaust has been ignored for decades. Now, it is becoming the focus of attention. East European Jews are dedicating a great deal of intellectual energy to the issue. From the Jewish point of view, the life of the Jews living in Eastern Europe was also often viewed through the prisms of "horror" and "nostalgia". But a differentiated attitude also existed after 1945. The YIVO research institute in New York and the Yiddish cultural movement should be mentioned here. Josh Waletzky's documentary film "Image Before My Eyes" (1981) shed light on the multifaceted nature of Jewish life in Poland between the wars. In the interim, a growing number of impulses are coming from the younger generation of East European Jews, which does not wish to see its cultural heritage reduced to the Holocaust and the shtetl, and from Israel, where the one-dimensional Zionist version of history, which regards the diaspora as the prelude to Auschwitz, has lost its appeal. Young Jews are growing more interested in their Eastern European roots.

Frank Golczewski: A distinction must be made between the academic world and the general public. For the general public, the assumption that their perception is filtered through the Shoah is generally true. This has a political dimension, because the problems surrounding the Shoah are "clearer" than a discussion about today's "Jewish issues", and pre-Shoah history is interpreted as a history of "failure".
For academics, the lifeworlds of East European Jews before the Shoah have been of interest for many years. Think of the work by Verena Dohrn, Yvonne Kleinmann, Kai Struve, François Guesnet, and Gertrud Pickhan. Here, I would say to the contrary that research on the Shoah – to the extent that it was not purely research on the perpetrators – has only gotten underway more strongly in recent years. Here, I'd like to refer to the studies by Dieter Pohl, Michael Alberti, Jacek Andrzej Młynarczyk, Christoph Dieckmann, and Joachim Tauber. However, research into the Shoah is still limited, to some degree because work with so-called "ego sources", such as memorial books, has hardly developed. This work demands a great deal of source criticism and a knowledge of languages. With regard to the subjective view of the persecuted Jews, there is still a tendency toward projecting one's own attitude. Scholars of East European History in Germany are happy to leave the subject of the Shoah to German specialists such as Christian Gerlach, Götz Aly, or Andrei Angrick. However, the latter are frequently unable to make direct use of Hungarian, Slavic, Yiddish, and Hebrew texts. This may be a "technical" argument, but it is one that is clearly reflected in the type of research conducted.

Despite some differentiating studies, the perception among the general public, and often among academics as well, has been influenced by the ethnicisation of the Jews, which has occurred due to Zionism. References are made to "Germans and Jews", rather than "Jewish and non-Jewish Germans". A similar phenomenon applies in Eastern Europe, where the contrast between the full suppression of the Jews in public discourse (victims of the Shoah as "Soviet citizens") and the reinforcement of their identity by administrative measures (item 5 on the Soviet passport) is still rife. This results in terminological confusion. On the one hand, Trotsky, is defined or defamed as a Jew; on the other hand, it is said that he was not a "real" Jew, because he was a Bolshevik. The issue of assimilation (also an insult for assimilated Zionists) as a normal process of modernisation has hardly been touched upon. This also goes for the Soviet Union in particular, where assimilation was especially effective.

OSTEUROPA: *In Prague, Cracow, or other places that were important centres of Jewish life before the Shoah, a reconnection with Jewish traditions can be observed. What is your assessment of this development?*

Bechtel: The situation is not the same in all cities. The manner and timing of this reconnection with the Jewish past differ widely. In Prague, the synagogues and Jewish museums are an integral part of any visit to the city. The process of putting history in a museum began during the Communist era and progressed very rapidly in a situation where Jews were almost completely absent. In Warsaw, the Jewish Museum still hasn't been built. In general, there is relatively little in this respect. In the Kazimierz district in Cracow or on Oranienburger Strasse in Berlin, a substitute for Jewish life (Café Silberstein, Tacheles, Café Ariel) has been created for appearances, with much good will and bad conscience. There is something ghostly about this. In Ukraine, there is almost nothing.

Golczewski: This reconnection is partly trend and to a large degree commercial. What Neuschwanstein represents for some people is for others the Remuh Synagogue or the Old New Synagogue. This "reconnection" is a romanticisation, "coming out" is also a romanticisation of one's own vitae – comparable to the "Roots" movement among Afro-Americans. To this extent, it is impossible to be either for or against it, since this meets a basic human need, the need to make one's past "accessible". Religious highlights are better suited to this purpose than concentration camps. Atheists also visit the Cologne Cathedral or the Wailing Wall. However, one should not confuse this ultimately anachronistic "revival" with "real" present-day "Jewish life", in which this environment plays only a very limited role. For most, this is no different than in the gentile world with regard to secularisation and modernisation, including sporadic tourist visits to events with religious connotations – comparable to the hype surrounding the Pope.

Lipphardt: In my view, discussion of the history of the Jews in Eastern Europe after its decades-long suppression is appropriate and important. At the local level, awareness of the Jewish past has developed. The multiethnic past is seen as containing more potential than ballast. I would not call the restoration of former Jewish districts, the construction of

Jewish museums, and the klezmer festivals a "reconnecting with Jewish traditions", since much of this is taking place over the heads and needs of the local Jewish communities.

Guesnet: The question is what one understands by reconnection. In general, I can only welcome the fact that in these and many other cities, the Jewish presence and a multi-ethnic population are being remembered in different ways, whether in the form of festivals, film series, literary works, academic events, or other types of public discussion. In some cases, a kind of exaggerated street market gains the upper hand, in order to meet the need among Americans, Israelis, or West Europeans for proper souvenirs, for example. When I first visited Poland over 20 years ago, the carved wooden figures of traditional Jews were nowhere to be found. Is it such a bad thing that in the meantime they can be purchased in every Cepelia store? I don't think so.

François Guesnet

Heuberger: I see these developments critically. The so-called renaissance of Jewish life is based on a hotchpotch of economic interests on the part of the tourist industry, political considerations, and attempts by individuals, who are as a rule non-Jewish, to revive a glorified past. The real problems of the small Jewish communities on site are ignored.

Brenner: Aside from several noteworthy academic endeavours, this involves above all the commercialisation of Jewish heritage. Golem figures in Prague and dancing Hasidic dolls in Cracow have replaced the rich Jewish life that once flourished there. Notable efforts have also been made, such as the big klezmer festival in Cracow. Here, there is a reconnection with Jewish culture. However, given the absence of a significant Jewish community, this is a "non-Jewish Jewish culture". Ruth Gruber has described it as "virtually Jewish".

Kugelmann: Until now, the activities in the area of cultural references to the prewar Jewish population are repertory. It is well meant, but offers nothing else. The rediscovery of Jewish culture in these geographic regions is perhaps instead the first encounter with this culture for those who occupy their time with it, to that extent it is not a reconnection, but an initial confrontation as an attempt to deal with the history of the annihilation.

OSTEUROPA: *What does the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union mean for research on Jewish history in Eastern Europe? Where has important progress been made? Where are there still gaps to be filled?*

Kugelmann: Archives that were previously inaccessible have opened their doors. More details from the process of mass annihilation and the attitude of the local population to these events can now be analysed using new sources.
Heuberger: The downfall of the Soviet Union and the opening of the archives have lent impetus to national historical perspectives. However, the Jewish history of individual countries is still not being adequately researched and documented. This may be due to a lack of knowledge of the languages needed and differs from country to country. Poland is taking a leading role in researching the lifeworlds of East European Jews, as is reflected in the number of new papers being written. Anti-Jewishness and antisemitism in the currents and institutions that are regarded as traditional opponents of Fascism, such as national movements, workers' movements, and the churches, should be researched and analysed.

Guesnet: There has been an enormous increase in the dynamism of the field. Here, too, the German-speaking countries are far behind. Progress has been comprehensive and cannot be restricted to specific issues. To a certain extent, this is due to the improved access to sources in Eastern Europe, but it is due first of all to the great curiosity in Jewish history and culture in Eastern Europe that has been demonstrated by colleagues elsewhere in the world. Eighty percent of the Jews living today have roots in Eastern Europe. The intensity of the discussion is increasing. Poland and Russia show the most dynamism. The most dynamic field internationally over the last 20 years has probably been research into Jewish mysticism, Hasidism. The greatest potential here is the incorporation of East European Jewry into the history of the Jews in Europe. Here are just two examples: East European Jewry was characterised by various specific features, and yet in familial, economic, cultural, and religious terms, these Jews were connected to the Central and West European Jews to a certain extent by highly stable and efficient networks. These networks must be researched. The second example is that there was more than one modern Jewish movement. There was also a modern Jewish movement specific to Eastern Europe, without which, in my view, the Prussian Jewish renaissance would hardly have been possible. This influence came not least of all from spiritual and intellectual stimuli that originated with teachers from Eastern Europe, who, as Heinrich Graetz grumbled, had "sullied" the German Jews. There was no Iron Curtain in Europe before 1945.

Golczewski: First of all, access to the archives has improved. Issues that had previously been taboo can now be worked on. A large number of source editions and fact-based accounts have appeared in Poland. However, the number of publications in other Eastern European countries has declined. A great deal of work has also been conducted in Poland on the problem of Jewish-gentile relations. Political debates, such as the dispute over Auschwitz, Jedwabne, and the new book by Jan Tomasz Gross, have created a great deal of movement.
A painful issue everywhere is collaboration, the depiction of which is minimised as far as possible. Attempts are made to expel collaborators from their own national community, if their existence is acknowledged at all. Another strategy is to convert their activities into a specific form of resistance against Germany. This is the case in Latvia, Slovakia, and Ukraine, for example.

East European historiography would benefit from a move away from the use of history for purposes of national affirmation and apologetics to a critical view of its own history (and politics). In Central and Eastern Europe, criticism is often restricted to the period 1945-1989 and is supported by old notions of the enemy (including anti-Jewish ones). A critical treatment of national identity in general (primordial notions of ethnic origins are widespread) and individual identity in particular (where the postulate of continuity and the "invention of tradition" dominate) would be beneficial.
It would also be productive to refrain from discussing "national" Jewries, but rather to study the historic groups that traverse today's national boundaries. Ezra Mendelsohn began with this kind of work in his day.

Bechtel: It was better before things were turned into a museum. I will never forget seeing the old town in Lublin for the first time in the early 1980s. It had not changed since 1945: uninhabited, half destroyed with broken windows, Jewish words on the walls, and places where the mezuzot hung on the doors. It was as if history were "frozen", as if one could conjure up the past by travelling to the east. One saw the real situation head on, the annihilation without improvements. Now one sees just reconstructed buildings. Even if it is more attractive, perhaps more soothing for most people.
Even so, I do not agree with the competition to erect a Jewish museum in every city. In Warsaw for example, it would be much better, in my view, if Jewish history were integrated into the city museum, rather than building a separate "Jewish Museum". Jewish history is not the history of an exotic minority that you "attractively" portray in a special museum – and in doing so contain it – and then rub your hands and say: "There, now we've also got a Jewish Museum. Done!" In Warsaw, 40 percent of the population was Jewish. Jews were therefore an integral part of the city. That's why they should be an integral element of the permanent exhibition in the Warsaw City Museum.
In my view, the same applies to research. I am against special Jewish Studies if they form a type of academic ghetto. In departments for Jewish Studies at American universities, specialists have been trained who have an excellent knowledge of Jewish culture and history, but know little about other cultures. For this reason, they simply fail to appreciate their penetration. To the contrary, it is very important that scholars, together with researchers on site – be it in Cracow, Lviv, Vilnius, or elsewhere – build up an entangled history in which the Jews are not researched in isolation but in terms of their interaction with the rest of the city's population. Unfortunately, in some places, this is still wishful thinking.

Lipphardt: Finally, it is once again possible to research and teach the history of the East European Jews. The sources are accessible, and academics are free to focus on Jewish topics. Many younger historians have completed part of their studies in the West. They have international networks, and their horizons stretch far beyond their own respective national history.
The run on the archives, which began in 1989, has resulted in a large number of studies on the situation of the East European Jews in the 18th, 19th, and first half of the 20th century. Politics and institutional questions are at the forefront. Jewish urban or local history has also received new impulses. Academic interest in the Holocaust has increased in those areas that were not occupied by the Wehrmacht until 1941. How-

ever, controversial topics are frequently ignored, or, as with Jan Gross's studies on the history of Polish-Jewish relations during and after the Second World War, they result in such an uproar that there is no possibility of holding a differentiated exchange. To date, we know little about the postwar history of the Jews in and from Eastern Europe. I would also welcome more studies on everyday life and the cultural history of the Jews – and not only high culture!
Shared history offers great potential. Differentiated individual studies are not enough when it comes to writing an integrated European history. For some topics, we need research networks, in which academics with different linguistic, historical, and cultural skills can work together.

OSTEUROPA: *Jewish history and European history are inseparably intertwined. This is also true of East European Jewish and East European history. At the same time, the history of the Jews has always been a history of persecution. What significance does the knowledge gained from studying the Jews or East European History as a discipline have for your work?*

Brenner: I don't work on the history of the Jews of Eastern Europe, rather German-Jewish history, the history of the Jews in Western Europe and the United States, and the pre-history of the State of Israel. However, nobody working on modern Jewish history can ignore Eastern Europe, for that is where the greater part of the Jewish community lived until the Shoah. The descendents of East European Jews have shaped American Jewry as well as the State of Israel, so that it is impossible to separate Jewish history outside Eastern Europe from the region.

Kugelmann: The degree of persecution of the Jews and the way it was organised provides information on social developments with regard to the economic and demographic development of a region. For cultural history, the influence of the religious and folk customs of Christian cultures on the rituals and traditions of the Jews is of interest.

Golczewski: First of all, Jewish and non-Jewish history really are interwoven, even if representatives of both sides often try to portray their respective turf as "unsullied" by the other. In the linguistic (Yiddish), cultural (clothing), and religious (Hasidim and Pentecostal) fields, we can see developments that traverse and run parallel to these ostensible boundaries. For this reason, Jewish history is by no means always a history of persecution. It is also a history of religious and non-religious development, cultural transfer, economics, modernisation, Socialism, and nationalism. In addition, all categorisations of historical sub-disciplines are artificially created in order to overcome complexity. They should be consciously broken down without being removed fully so as to highlight this fact. However, if one assumes that East European History and Jewish Studies stand in opposition to one another – which one shouldn't, since each is an integral part of the other – then Jewish Studies allows normal historians of Eastern Europe to understand the intellectual and material development within the Jewish segment of society, a development that we often know only from the perspective of the gentile community (and that is warped accordingly) or from the point of view of

atypical "frontier crossers". The autonomy of the inside perspective often comes up short. This makes it possible to grasp the difference between the way the Jews saw themselves and the way they were perceived by others and thus contributes to analysis of the conflict and to a basis of mutual understanding.

Guesnet: Since I regard neither East European History, nor Jewish Studies as independent academic disciplines with a specific set of methods, I can't say much about this issue – except, perhaps, that in most cases it is difficult to think of the one in comprehensive terms without the other.

Lipphardt: I'm not of the opinion that the history of the East European Jews "has always been a history of persecution". Certainly, it has always been a history of a minority that has suffered from discrimination more than other Eastern European minorities (except for the Sinti and Roma) and frequently from persecution. But despite the Holocaust, it should not be reduced to this. As minority history, it is a history of relationships, but it also stands on its own. It is also a history of Jewish self-empowerment, everyday Jewish life, and a separate Jewish cultural heritage – in interaction with its surroundings.
However, to return to the actual question: Since the end of the Cold War, East European History has developed or adapted an entire repertoire of research angles that have great potential for research into East European Jewish history: empire and border studies, multi-ethnic urban history, and the concept of neighbourhood. The sensitisation to spatial connections and local references, which accompanied the spatial turn in East European History, can also be seen increasingly in the field of Jewish Studies in relation to Eastern Europe. The concept of lifeworlds, as developed by Heiko Haumann, also offers exciting starting points for Jewish Studies.
However, there are several structural problems that impede a rapprochement between East European History and Jewish Studies. East European Historians who seek to research Jewish topics must acquire a solid knowledge of Yiddish and Hebrew and a comprehensive knowledge of the lifeworlds of East European Jews and Jewry in general. Conversely, East European Jewish history and culture cannot be researched without knowledge of Eastern European languages and a sound understanding of the non-Jewish environment. This cannot be learned in a crash course, nor by studying just history. Such exchange is hindered by the fact that at German universities, Jewish Studies are, understandably, geared primarily to the study of German-Jewish history and culture. This knowledge and these concepts associated with it cannot be transferred to East European Jews. It would therefore be helpful to strengthen Eastern European themes within Jewish Studies in Germany and to foster closer cooperation between East European History and those academic institutions in North America and Israel where "holistic" and inter-disciplinary approaches are used in classroom instruction and research on East European Jews.

Bechtel: Real life cannot be divided into academic disciplines. Researchers have been working according to philological categories (German, Slavic, and Jewish Studies, etc.) for too long. It is still far too easy to tell what kind of background a researcher has, and what their qualifications are. We should be growing out of this self-imposed

immaturity and take a genuinely free approach to studying the lifeworlds of the Jews and their neighbours. Even so, in my view, the field of East European studies in Germany, as one of the most active areas of research, has achieved a great deal: Young researchers have emerged who are proficient in three or four languages, including Yiddish, and can shed light on events from several points of view.

Heuberger: For me, as a representative of Jewish Studies, individual local and regional history studies with numerous documents are helpful. Interdisciplinary exchange has been hindered above all by the fact that important Hebrew works have not been translated and are therefore not known in Eastern Europe, just as the West became familiar with many East European works only years later.

OSTEUROPA: *Every era asks its own questions of history. Dan Diner describes the history of the Jews as a "paradigm of a European history". Is the history of the East European Jews also of specific relevance for present-day Europe?*

Golczewski: If Dan Diner meant that the history of the Jews contains everything that has been broached as a topic in other parts of European history, then this of course also applies to Eastern Europe. However, it does not necessarily follow that it is of relevance today. The Jewish group is too small proportionally – and too functionless, because it does not differ from gentile society. Here, I specifically exclude the history of Israel, which I regard as a colonial history. We don't yet know whether this history will follow the American or the Algerian model – or perhaps a totally different one. If one wanted to be completely heretical, then today one can see greater relevance in the controversial remarks by Faruk Şen [director of the Centre for Studies on Turkey in Essen, ed.] that the Turks are the new Jews. This may not be true literally, but it does raise the issue of the distrust that exists between mutually dependent groups with different value systems. When politicised accordingly, this distrust can lead to catastrophe.

Kugelmann: The treatment of minorities is a measure of a society's stability. The "paradigm" should be understood in this light and can be used as a model for analysing comparable situations.

Bechtel: These paradigms were already underscored by German and American sociologists at the start of the 20th century: the Jew as "alien", i.e. as an urban dweller, as "modern", as "neurotic", as "intellectual", as "cosmopolitan", as "outsider", as go-between, as European citizen par excellence. However, I am not sure whether that's still true today. The Jews are so "normal" statistically, so (petit) bourgeois, biased, educated and uneducated, communitarian, etc. – just like other people.

Guesnet: No, the history of the East European Jews has no specific relevance for present-day Europe. At least none that makes them more interesting or relevant than the history of the Greeks or the Catalans or the Germans. It is interesting and relevant in and of itself. It lends itself to the occasional comparison if anything. Currently, references are frequently made to the parallels in the history of the European Jewish

minorities and the Muslim minorities now living in Europe, and rightly so. However, the differences between the two should not be forgotten.

Brenner: Jewish history shows how quickly and brutally a culture with such an important influence on a society can disappear not only from life, but also from the memory of its surroundings.

Michael Brenner

Heuberger: Whereas in Western Europe, the model of emancipation meant the long sought integration of the Jews as individuals into society, the Jewish minorities in Eastern Europe were defined as an ethnic group and were recognised as such to varying degrees, depending on the region. This experience can be used as a "model" for a future multicultural Europe with different cultures and ethnic identities. As a minority per se, one that belonged to no other national movement, the Jews of Eastern Europe were also the only "Europeans in a spiritual sense". They embodied the ideals and concepts of a transnational Europe

OSTEUROPA: *Why does remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust play a subordinate role in Eastern European countries?*

Golczewski: That's not the case at all. The Holocaust is ultimately always latently present in its negation and the emphasis given a country's "own" victims. The entire Holodomor campaign by the Ukrainian government is aimed at equating the victims of starvation with the victims of the Shoah in qualitative and numerical terms. This acknowledges the existence of the Shoah – as well as the exclusion of the Jews from "real" Ukrainian society. For the historicisation of the new Ukrainian national identity, farmers are better suited than Jews. This process therefore says quite a lot about the essentialisation of the "Ukrainian nation".

The competition between victims is more ambivalent in Poland. Moreover, Christians and Jews commemorate their losses differently, something that fuels the competition. We know from soccer that in a rivalry, one takes the side of one's own "team", thereby making it easy to regard the other team as the "opponent".

Finally, the Soviet way of integrating Jewish victims into Soviet society without labelling them is not so absurd. This also reflects the attempt at the time to construe a Soviet people (sovetskii narod). Moreover, there is the fact that the perpetrators used the term "Judeo-Bolshevism" in their propaganda, an argument still used by some "historians" today. However, this version does not take into account the fact that groups always seek to remember their own victims. The way they make these victims their own differs significantly. For example, the German Democratic Republic (along with a bloc-party called the National Democratic Party of Germany) declared itself the representative of German "anti-Fascism". Thus in Poland, Israelis from the March of the Living stand opposite Polish nationalists. They each feel that the victims of the other side are of less

relevance than their own. However, in order to have this argument, both sides have to take into account the value of the Shoah's victims as a subject of debate.

Bechtel: For me, this is one of the most important divisions between east and west today. In Riga, L'viv, and Budapest, the victims of the Soviet terror are given preference as "our victims" over the "others", the Jews. National history is still being formed. At the same time, the image of "Judeo-Communism" is still vivid. In popular imagination, Jews still tend to be portrayed as executioners (NKVD men, Communists from Marx to Trotsky, Kaganovich as "the man responsible for the catastrophic famine in Ukraine") than as victims of the National Socialists' policy of annihilation.
The traumas of Soviet occupation have not yet been processed, nor has local collaboration with the Soviet authorities, even more so collaboration with the Nazis. If the victims of Stalinism are going to be glorified, one should not forget that in some cases these same victims of Stalinism had actively supported the Nazis. To work through and acknowledge this issue in all its complexity has taken decades in Germany and in France as well. I am troubled by the fact that categories such as "biological heritage", "ethno-national assets", and the "gene of the people" are so widespread in Eastern Europe. That has never augured well.

Guesnet: I consider the term "subordinate" problematic. If you look at the Poles, in the years since the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross' book *Neighbours* – and recently *Fear* – they have talked in detail about those victims of the Holocaust who were murdered by Polish accomplices in Jedwabne and elsewhere. This was no doubt necessary, but where was the "subordination"? At the same time, there is an urgent need to remember the victims of injustice and tyranny who suffered in such large numbers in Eastern Europe, in particular under the different authoritarian regimes and dictatorships that came to power during the 20th century. This takes time. Franco died in 1975, and it still took around 30 years before the bodies of the victims of the civil war began to be exhumed in Spain. Here, more is probably going on than one can learn about by simply following the major debates in the newspapers. To take just one example: In the Radogoszcz district of Łodz, there is a department of the Museum of the Traditions of Independence that was established in the ruins of a prison run by the German occupiers during the Second World War. In the night of 17-18 January 1945, the occupiers set fire to prison, which was full, and burned some 1,500 inmates alive. A good number of temporary exhibitions at this museum have commemorated the Polish and Jewish victims of the German occupation in exemplary fashion. Rather than lumping them together as a single group, the specific nature of the Łodz ghetto, for example, is shown very clearly. This doesn't mean, incidentally, that it's not irritating to note that there is still no separate memorial to the many hundreds of thousands of ghetto inhabitants who were murdered.

Heuberger: Here, I would refer first and foremost to antisemitism, which is still rife among various social groups, from the virulent political antisemitism in Hungary, to the clerics in Poland and nationalists in Ukraine, to the suppression of the Holocaust in Lithuania. As a result, the Shoah as well as anti-Judaism and antisemitism in its

various forms have yet to be confronted. This lack of discussion concerning their own past, as well as their role under Nazi occupation and collaboration, leads to the suppression of the Shoah's victims and above all to the complete negation of those few survivors who have not emigrated.

Kugelmann: The heroisation of the Red Army, the process of coping with the huge wartime losses, and the Communist master narrative of the victory over the capitalist hemisphere have not left any room for acknowledging antisemitism and the policy of annihilation motivated by it. This experience had to be suppressed the same way as other national narratives.

Cilly Kugelmann

Lipphardt: In my view, there is little sense in measuring the degree to which the countries in Eastern Europe have come to terms with their past by using measures geared to the current situation in the West. In the Federal Republic of Germany as well, it took a long time after the Second World War, before discussion of the Holocaust really started. I rather doubt whether this would have happened without an outside push, such as the re-education programme or the Eichmann trial.

Even if a lot has been achieved in terms of remembrance as a result of EU integration, East European societies are still in a state of flux. That includes the revision of Soviet and Communist versions of history. First, there was a revival of the struggle for political self-determination, which had lasted for decades and had been discredited by the Communists before 1989 as a form of bourgeois-fascist nationalism. This national, sometimes even nationalist re-assessment of the past strained relations between Jews and non-Jews. In particular, episodes that took place during the Second World War were assessed in contradictory terms. The problem is aggravated by a great lack of knowledge about the Holocaust and antisemitism. In the Baltic states, for example, many people who look back on a long history of political repression still regard themselves purely as victims. From this defensive position, they are neither prepared to confront their behaviour during the Holocaust in a self-critical manner, nor do they recognise that they now form the majority within the societies of sovereign states that should reach out to the local minorities with the same understanding and tolerance that they had previously demanded for themselves.

Remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust is without a doubt a key issue for a pluralistic understanding of society open to historical reflection within Eastern Europe. Remembrance must go hand in hand with a comprehensive process of working through the past. Collaboration, the stubborn persistence of the caricature of "Judeo-Communism" in Poland, or the "double genocide" in Lithuania should not be omitted. Remembrance would also include a fair-minded restitution of property and compensation for expropriation.

Brenner: For me, this closes the circle. I would give the same answer to this question as at the outset of this conversation.

Translated by Anne Güttel, Berlin