

## **“Teaching and Remembering the Holocaust in Russian Secondary Education”**

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**Paper presented at the 2021 ASN World Convention, 5-8 May 2021**

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### **Introduction**

Those who have shown some interest in Holocaust memory in today’s Russia are often familiar with the story of 19-year-old twin sisters Evgeniya and Kseniya Karatygin. They participated in a Russian entertainment TV game and, when asked to provide a definition of the Holocaust, suggested that it was a “wallpaper paste”<sup>1</sup>. The incident happened in 2012 and has drawn some attention to the lack of quality teaching about the Holocaust in Russia, especially when compared to the western “Holocaust fatigue”. It has demonstrated that Russian schools scarcely provided any knowledge about the systematic killing of Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators.

Since this almost decade-old incident, the situation with the teaching of the Holocaust history in Russian secondary and even primary schools seems to have somewhat improved. This is largely due to the activity of national and local collective and individual actors spreading the Holocaust history and memory among school students and teachers. The leading organization in this field is the Russian Research and Educational Center and Foundation “Holocaust” (hereafter - “Holocaust” Center) established in 1992.

However, another recent incident has demonstrated that speaking or writing about the Holocaust doesn’t necessarily imply conveying correct information about it. On 27 January 2021, the educational administration of the Leningrad oblast organized a webinar for school principals about the Holocaust. It turned out that one of the presentations was based on a compilation of several denialist theories and pseudo-linguistic hypotheses. Therefore, the purpose of the paper is to investigate not only when and where the history of the Holocaust is discussed within Russian secondary education, but also *how* it is discussed, and what exactly Russian students may learn about it at school. Various discourses are compared to the common narrative of the Holocaust provided for example by Yad Vashem<sup>2</sup> or USHMM<sup>3</sup>, and analyzed from the “cosmopolitan” memory perspective.

Indeed, the destruction of European Jewry by Nazi Germany has been a turning point in the western, and to some extent the global history of remembrance. Although it took several decades to acknowledge it as a “unique, historically unprecedented event” and as a “master symbol of evil”<sup>4</sup>, after this “collective anamnesis”<sup>5</sup>, this memory has spread around the world. Thanks to the growing number of Holocaust memorials and solid integration of the Holocaust

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<sup>1</sup> The incident has been reported in our doctoral thesis, O. Konkka, *À La Recherche d’une Nouvelle Vision de l’histoire Russe du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle à travers les manuels scolaires de la Russie postsoviétique (1991-2016)* (thesis, Bordeaux 3, 2016), pp. 565.

<sup>2</sup> ‘What Was the Holocaust?’, *Yad Vashem*, n.d., <https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about.html>.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Introduction to the Holocaust: What Was the Holocaust?’, n.d., <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust>.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, “On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The ‘Holocaust’ from War Crime to Trauma Drama,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 27, 49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431002005001001>.

<sup>5</sup> H. Rousso, ‘Vers une mondialisation de la mémoire’, *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* no 94 (2007): 7.

in many countries' history curricula fostered by the Stockholm declaration (2000), it is now a major if not a central feature of the Second World War memory. Moreover, the Holocaust, initially a European event, is now "remembered outside the ethnic and national boundaries of the Jewish victims and the German perpetrators" and is "memorialized by people who do not have a direct connection to it"<sup>6</sup>. The Holocaust is considered as a trigger for the emergence of the "cosmopolitan" memory<sup>7</sup>, also known as "globalized" or "transnational". The gradual transformations of this memory lead to its universalization, its "extra-territorial quality"<sup>8</sup>. In many states, irrespective their involvement in the Second World War, regardless of actual participation of their populations in the Holocaust, it has become a symbolic lesson of atrocities that humans are capable of, the biggest "cultural trauma"<sup>9</sup> of the contemporary world, and the dominant representation of evil that should be prevented at any cost. The "cosmopolitan" memory of the Holocaust has become the cultural foundation for the global human rights discourse and politics<sup>10</sup>.

The first part of the paper is dedicated to history curricula and textbooks. Following the Soviet tradition, the content of history teaching in Russia is divided into three separate components: world history, national history, and regional history, where students learn about their own federal subject (republic, oblast, krai, etc.). While Russian curricula are not very informative in general, history textbooks provide much more information about what Russian students are supposed to learn about the Holocaust. Our study involves 82 post-Soviet textbooks. This includes some rare specimens such as less-known textbooks of Russian history published in the 1990s and early 2000s, or regional history textbooks that often fall beyond the scope of scholars' interest.

The second part explores different extracurricular activities focused on the Holocaust history and memory. Multiple practices that have emerged in Soviet schools as part of the Great Patriotic War cult have survived the collapse of the USSR. They became part of what is now called "patriotic education", focused mostly, although not exclusively, on war remembrance. Therefore, when the Holocaust memory has gradually spread in post-Soviet Russia, it has partly integrated the already existing framework of educational and commemorative practices. Teachers who are actively involved in teaching about the Holocaust also encourage their students to conduct research on different aspects of its history and memory. Sometimes, their findings supplement school museums' exhibitions and collections. Students' research projects, school museums, commemorations, and pedagogical activities will be addressed in this part.

## 1. History curricula and textbooks

### 1.1. Official texts specifying the content of the history course

The first Russian post-Soviet law on Education adopted in 1992, as well as the current law adopted in 2012, state that educational standards should frame the compulsory content for

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<sup>6</sup> D. Levy and N. Sznajder, 'Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory', *European Journal of Social Theory* 5 (2002): 88.

<sup>7</sup> We use a shorter and simpler term "memory" as a substitute to a more accurate term "mode of remembering". See A. Erll, 'Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction', in A. Erll, A. Nünning, and S.B. Young (eds), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 1–15; A.C. Bull and H.L. Hansen, 'On Agonistic Memory', *Memory Studies* 9 (2016), pp. 390–404.

<sup>8</sup> Levy and Sznajder, 'Memory Unbound', 102.

<sup>9</sup> J.C. Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 1st ed. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Levy and Sznajder, 'Memory Unbound'; Bull and Hansen, 'On Agonistic Memory'.

every type and level of education<sup>11</sup>. However, it was only in 2004 that the first *Federal component of the State educational standards for the general primary, general basic, and general (full) secondary education*<sup>12</sup> was adopted. This concise text provides only basic information about what should be mandatorily taught within a history course at school. The Holocaust is included in this list of compulsory topics. On the one hand, this is an improvement in comparison with the refusal of the Soviet historiography to acknowledge the Holocaust as a distinct phenomenon. It is an undeniable achievement of national actors such as the “Holocaust” Center and an expression of Russia’s willingness to implement international recommendations in this area. On the other hand, the text doesn’t specify what exactly should be taught about the Holocaust.

Since 2011, compulsory content of history teaching is presented in the text called the *Models of basic educational curricula for educational institutions*<sup>13</sup>. However, this text doesn’t provide any further details about what should be studied with respect to the Holocaust. In 2015, the Ministry of Education has decided that history should be taught according to a “linear model”, where each period is examined only once. Earlier, 20<sup>th</sup> century history was taught twice, in the 9<sup>th</sup> and then again in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Therefore, in more recent models of curricula, the Holocaust appears as part of the text dedicated to this particular level<sup>14</sup>. The new history curricula are as brief as the earlier version. One change is however quite important: the word “Holocaust” now appears twice: in the world and in the national history syllabus. Therefore, the mass destruction of Jews should be learned not only as part of the Second World War, but also as part of the Great Patriotic War. Another official and widely discussed text, *Conceptual Framework of the new methodological system for teaching the Russian history that includes Historical and Cultural Standard (2014)*<sup>15</sup> also demonstrates this willingness to integrate the Holocaust into the national history course. However, once again, these texts don’t specify what is the Holocaust and what should students learn about it.

The *Federal Basic Curriculum* is another important document that prescribes the amount of time that should be dedicated to different subjects in each grade<sup>16</sup>. The text doesn’t specify how many hours should be dedicated to the world and the national history respectively, leaving it at the discretion of teachers and school administrations. However, it stipulates that the “regional (or ethnic and regional) component” should occupy no less than 10% of the overall class time.

At least 144,000 out of 2,600,000 – 2,800,000 Soviet Jews annihilated during the occupation<sup>17</sup> were killed in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR)<sup>18</sup>. In theory, the Holocaust might be integrated into the 20<sup>th</sup>-century history course in all the federal subjects that have experienced the destruction of Jews during the occupation. However, the

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<sup>11</sup> *Zakon Rossiiskoj Federacii Ob Obrazovanii*, 1992, pp. Art. 7; *Zakon Rossiiskoj Federacii Ob Obrazovanii*, 2012, pp. Art. 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Federal'nyi Komponent Gosudarstvennyh Obrazovatel'nyh Standartov Nachal'nogo Obshchego, Osnovnogo Obshchego i Srednego (Polnogo) Obshchego Obrazovaniya*, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> *Primernaya Osnovnaya Obrazovatel'naya Programma Obrazovatel'nogo Uchrezhdeniya. Osnovnaya SHkola. Standarty Vtorogo Pokoleniya* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> *Primernaya Osnovnaya Obrazovatel'naya Programma Srednego Obshchego Obrazovaniya*, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Konceptsiya Novogo Uchebno-Metodicheskogo Kompleksa Po Otechestvennoi Istorii’, *Istoriya.RF*, 2015, <https://histrf.ru/biblioteka/b/kontseptsiia-novogho-uchebno-mietodichieskogho-kompliksa-po-otiechiestviennoi-istorii-1>.

<sup>16</sup> *Federal'nyi Bazisnyi Uchebnyi Plan i Primernye Uchebnye Plany Dlya Obrazovatel'nyh Uchrezhdenii RF, Realizujushchih Programmy Obshchego Obrazovaniya*, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> I. Al'tman and M. Gileva, ‘Istoriya Holokosta v Voprosah i Otvetah’, *Prepodavanie Istorii v Shkole 5* (2019), pp. 10–7.

<sup>18</sup> I. Al'tman, *Zherty nenavisti. Holokost v SSSR 1941-1945* (Moscow: Fond Kovcheg, 2002), pp. 286, 287. Kaliningrad oblast which was part of Germany at that time is not taken into account.

number of Jewish victims varies greatly in different regions, from several dozens or hundreds to several thousands. Three federal subjects of the Southern Russia (Rostov oblast, Krasnodar krai and Stavropol Krai) and two federal subjects of the Central Russia (Smolensk oblast and Bryansk oblast) have a particularly significant lowest estimate of Jewish victims, between 17,000 and 25,000<sup>19</sup>. The 6th region by a number of victims is the Pskov oblast, with a much lower number, 5,200<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, in order to verify whether teachers mention the Holocaust as one of the topics of the regional history course, we have selected two among the five above-mentioned federal subjects, one from the south (Rostov oblast) and one from the center (Smolensk oblast). We have randomly selected ten syllabi created by teachers from these regions. Only one of these texts mentions “the tragedy of the Holocaust”<sup>21</sup> yet without further details since the document itself is very concise.

### ***1.2. The Holocaust in the world history textbooks***

This part of the content analysis is based on 25 textbooks of world history published between 1996 and 2021. This selection includes at least one edition or version of the vast majority of textbooks that have been ever included in federal lists. Sometimes, two different editions of the same textbook have been studied in order to trace possible changes.

The analysis confirms that all the post-Soviet editions, even those published in the 1990s, mention the destruction of Jews by the Nazis. The account of the Holocaust is usually scattered between the paragraphs presenting the rise to power of the Nazi Party in Germany, the Third Reich, and chapters on the Second World War. If all this information about persecutions and mass killings of Jews was gathered in one single text, it would occupy between several lines and 1,5 pages. This is between 1,5 and 3 % of the overall amount of text dedicated to the above-mentioned paragraphs and chapters that usually occupy between 35 and 45 pages. The attention paid to the Holocaust in the world history textbooks depends on the authors’ choice rather than on the period of publication. The only observable time trend is the progressive introduction of the term “Holocaust” itself. Indeed, neither of the textbooks from the 1990s use the word, while most of the 2000s and 2010s textbooks mention it at least once.

However, most of the post-Soviet world history textbooks fail to include basic elements of the history of the Holocaust<sup>22</sup>. The table below shows how many textbooks mention each of the 10 selected events or features of the rise of antisemitism in Germany and the implementation of the Final Solution in Europe.

<b>Number of textbooks (out of 25) mentioning the following events or features of the rise of antisemitism in Germany and the Holocaust</b>	
Antisemitism in the doctrine of the Nazi Party before 1933	15
Anti-Jewish policy in the Third Reich	23
Kristallnacht	12
Ghettos	13
“Final Solution” plan	10
Extermination of Jews in the camps	15
Mass shootings of Jews	6
Combat and resistance of Jews	4
Rescue of Jews	5
Collaboration of local authorities and populations	2

<sup>19</sup> Republic of Crimea, as well as the Kaliningrad oblast which used to be part of Germany are not taken into account.

<sup>20</sup> Based on Al’tman, *Zhertvy nenavisti*, pp. 286.

<sup>21</sup> Working program by a history teacher from Novoshahtinsk, Rostov oblast, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> For example, ‘What Was the Holocaust?’; ‘Introduction to the Holocaust’.

In addition to being fragmentary, the presentation of German Nazism and of the Holocaust in the analyzed textbooks often contains factual errors and inaccuracies. They can be grouped into two categories, which can be described in terms that Olga Gershenson uses in her analysis of the Soviet cinema: universalization and externalization<sup>23</sup>. Firstly, many errors indicate that the authors fail to present the Holocaust as distinct from other crimes of Nazism. Often, Jews do not appear in the first position among the peoples that were meant to be exterminated. Some texts, while presenting the victims of the concentration and/or death camps in 1941-1945, speak about “POWs and civilians”<sup>24</sup> or “men, women, and children unsuitable of work”<sup>25</sup>. One of the most popular world history textbooks of the 2000s and 2010s defines the Holocaust as “the policy of destruction by the Hitler’s regime in 1933-1945 of more than 16 million civilians and POWs in the *concentration death camps (sic!)*: 6 million Jews, 10 million Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, and others, considered by the Nazis as “inferior” nations”<sup>26</sup>.

The second category of errors and inaccuracies is related to the non-integration of the extermination of Jews on the occupied territories of the USSR in the account of the Holocaust. Indeed, the table above shows that only 6 textbooks out of 25 mention the “Holocaust by bullets”, and yet this is how the vast majority of the Soviet Jews were killed. Moreover, several textbooks among the most reedited contain a clearly wrong statement that all the 6 million Jews were killed in the camps. In other words, the Holocaust is narrated as an external event, as something that happened “outside the USSR”.

However, all the post-Soviet world history textbooks admit that Jews were particularly targeted by the Nazis. Many of them acknowledge the unprecedented character of the Holocaust and provide some details about life in camps and ghettos. It contrasts not only with the Soviet world history textbooks that totally silenced the Holocaust<sup>27</sup>, but also with those exclusively dedicated to the national history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***1.3. The Holocaust in the Russian history textbooks***

The content analysis presented in this part is based on 52 textbooks of Russian history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century published between 1992 and 2019 and includes at least one edition of every manual approved by the Ministry of Education.

Unlike the post-Soviet world history textbooks, those exclusively dedicated to Russian history have been rather slow to integrate information on the Holocaust. Indeed, 11 textbooks among those analyzed (21%) don’t mention Jews at all within the Second World War account. However, most of them were published in the 1990s and in the 2000s, and the amount of text on the persecution and annihilation of Jews has been gradually increasing through the last two decades. The overall number of lines on the Holocaust on different sections including chapters, questions, documents, and glossary, fluctuates between 0 and 20. This is less than 1% of the

<sup>23</sup> O. Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe*, Jewish Cultures of the World (New Brunswick, New Jersey ; London: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> L.N. Aleksashkina, *Noveishaya Istoriya: XX – Nachalo XXI Veka. 11 Klass: Uchebnik Dlya Obshcheobrazovatel’nyh Uchrezhdenii*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Mnemozina, 2005), pp. 144.

<sup>25</sup> E.J. Sergeev, *Vseobshchaya Istoriya. Noveishaya Istoriya. 9 Klass: Uchebnik Dlya Obshcheobrazovatel’nyh Uchrezhdenii*, in A.O. Chubar’yan (ed), 5th ed. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2011), pp. 88.

<sup>26</sup> A.O. Soroko-Cjupa and O.S. Soroko-Cjupa, *Vseobshchaya istoriya. Noveishaya istoriya: uchebnik dlya 9 klassa obshcheobrazovatel’nyh uchrezhdenii*, 9th ed. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2007), pp. 302; A.O. Soroko-Cjupa and O.S. Soroko-Cjupa, *Vseobshchaya Istoriya. Noveishaya Istoriya: Uchebnik Dlya 9 Klassa Obshcheobrazovatel’nyh Uchrezhdenii*, 13th ed. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2010), pp. 304.

<sup>27</sup> For example, a 1982 textbook, while speaking about the victims of Auschwitz, uses the word “people” and claims that “with particular cruelty, the fascist monsters annihilated Slavic population and destroyed national culture of the Slavic peoples”. V.K. Furaev (ed), *Noveishaya Istoriya, 1939-1981. Uchebnoe Posobie Dlya 10 Klassa Srednei Shkoly*, 13th ed. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1982), pp. 21.

average amount of text in the chapters about the Second World War (55 pages). The only yet impressive exception is a textbook that was edited in the early 2000s. It dedicates as much as 162 lines to the persecution of Jews by the Nazis in the occupied USSR<sup>28</sup>. Most of this text is an extract of a Babi Yar survivor Dina Pronicheva’s testimony, that the author uses to illustrate the annihilation of the Kyiv Jewry. This vivid and convincing document or similar primary sources are not exploited in the other post-Soviet school books.

The term Holocaust appears for the first time in a 2000 textbook and becomes more common within the next two decades. It is used in 29% of manuals published in 2000-2009 and in 71% of manuals published in 2010-2019. However, the fact that the official texts don’t specify what exactly should be learned about the Holocaust provokes its poor integration into the account of the occupation. In the half of the analyzed textbooks that use the term “Holocaust”, its definition is presented at the end of the chapter, within an inset, or in the glossary at the end of the book, while the paragraph on the occupation doesn’t mention Jews or mentions them among many other categories of people persecuted and killed by the Nazis. It doesn’t help to understand why a specific term exists for Jewish victims and why they were killed.

The account of the Holocaust in the national history textbooks is even more piecemeal and incomplete than it is in the world history textbooks. The table here below shows how many books among the analyzed 52 mention the main information of the persecution and annihilation of Jews on the occupied territories of the USSR.

<b>Number of textbooks (out of 52) providing the following information on the Holocaust on the occupied Soviet territories</b>	
Use the term “Holocaust”	23
Mention a specific plan of annihilation of Jews	6
Present Jews as specifically targeted category	14
Mention discriminatory policy regarding Jews	2
Mention ghettos as places where Jews were transferred	9
Mention Jews as one of the categories exterminated in the camps <sup>29</sup>	3
Mention Jews as one of the categories exterminated in Babi Yar	11
Mention sites of mass murder of Jews in the RSFSR	2
Mention acts of rescue of Jews	2
Mention collaboration of the local armed units and populations	6

This table alone shows how many of the Russian history textbooks barely go beyond a short definition of this term. One of the reasons is that the authors tend to gloss over the occupation as an inglorious dimension of the Great Patriotic War. The post-Soviet textbooks, just like the Soviet ones, organize the account of the war around the battles and military operations. The paragraphs on the occupation represent on average 6,5% of the corresponding chapters, and their larger part is devoted to the partisans.

However, the information on the Nazi policies towards civilians is particularly partial and inaccurate when it comes to Jews. First of all, as demonstrated in the table above, the mass murders of Jews are often illustrated by the Babi Yar, not by extermination sites on the Russian territory. Kyiv often appears as the only locality where mass destruction of Jews took place. Collaboration, when mentioned, is represented exclusively by Ukrainian or Lithuanian nationalists. It is the second dimension of the externalization of the Holocaust: it is not only

<sup>28</sup> B.G. Jakemenko, *Istoriya Otechestva: Chast’ II: 1940-2003 Gody. Uchebnik Dlya 11 Klassa Obshcheobrazovatel’nyh Uchrezhdenii* (Moscow: Tsentr gumanitarnogo obrazovaniya, 2003), 2:66–73, 81.

<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that the vast majority of Soviet prisoners of concentration camps, both on the occupied Soviet territory and abroad, were non-Jews, while Soviet Jews were quickly exterminated or transferred to ghettos.

located in Europe rather than in the USSR, but also in the other Soviet republics rather than in the RSFSR.

The universalization of the victims of Nazism is also much more frequent in the national history textbooks than in the world history textbooks. It is the one thing that all the errors summarized in the table below have in common.

<b>Number of textbooks (out of 52) containing the following common inaccuracies, gaps and generalizations</b>	
The extermination of Jews on the occupied territories is not mentioned	11
Programmed annihilation of Jews is presented as part of the <i>Generalplan Ost</i>	15
The annihilation of Jews is linked to the Nazi fight against Bolshevism	8
Jews are listed (within the same sentence) alongside other categories targeted by the Nazis	8
(only alongside the Romani)	8
Ghettos are mentioned without mentioning Jews	4
Camps are mentioned without mentioning Jews	25
Exterminations of civilians are mentioned without mentioning Jews	12
Babi Yar is mentioned without mentioning Jews	5
Death squads (such as <i>Einsatzgruppen</i> ) are mentioned without mentioning Jews	6

This data evokes another Olga Gershenson’s term, “Holocaust without Jews”. It is striking indeed that Babi Yar, *Einsatzgruppen* or ghettos can be presented without any connection to the ethnicity of the murdered. Even Auschwitz is not linked to Jews in 3 out of 4 textbooks mentioning it. Indeed, victims of the camps, mass shootings, and Nazi crimes in general are often referred to as “people”, “civilians” “local populations”, “Soviet citizens”, “the elderly, women and children”. When authors choose to specify who was specifically targeted, Jews appear among many other categories of victims: members of the Communist Party, of the Komsomol and of the local Councils (Soviets), POWs, political commissars, partisans and those who assisted them, the sick, the Romani, Asians and “other ethnicities”. In some earlier textbooks, Jews are not even included in this list. Often, no explanation is given as to why Jews were persecuted: very few books mention the Final Solution plan, antisemitism or the all-European character of the Holocaust. Moreover, 8 textbooks explain it only by the Nazi fight against Judeo-Bolshevism, which doesn’t explain why Jews were killed in other occupied countries as well. Another common feature of this “universalization” is focusing on the Russian or Slavic victims of the occupation. For instance, in 15 textbooks, the annihilation of Jews is firstly and sometimes exclusively mentioned within the presentation of the *Generalplan Ost*, which is indeed a rather indirect reflection of the Nazi antisemitism. They explain that the plan involved the extermination of 5-6 million Jews (or all the Jews) and 30 million Russians. In the face of this high number regarding the Russians, the Jews, when mentioned, do not appear as primarily targeted victims of the occupation.

#### **1.4. The Holocaust in the regional history textbooks**

School textbooks of the five above-mentioned Russian regions with a particularly high number of Jewish victims of the occupation have been examined. Only three of them mention Jews among victims of the Nazi crimes. Indeed, although at least 20,500 Jews were deliberately annihilated in the Krasnodar Krai and at least 17,000 in the Bryansk oblast, textbooks of these two federal subjects don’t mention them at all<sup>30</sup>. Both of them pay particular attention to the

<sup>30</sup> A.A. Zaïcev et al., *Kubanovedenie. Uchebnoe Posobie Dlya 9 Klassa Obshcheobrazovatel’nyh Uchrezhdenii* (Krasnodar: Perspektivy obrapovaniya, 2012), pp. 65–7; I.V. Alferova et al., *Istoriya Bryanskogo Kraja: XIX-XX Vek. Uchebnoe Posobie Dlya 9 Klassa Obshcheobrazovatel’nyh Uchrezhdenii* (Briansk: Kursiv, 2012), pp. 229–49.

fight against the invaders, and in the Bryansk oblast case, most of the chapter on the occupation (13 out of 20 pages) is focused on the partisans. The three remaining textbooks do mention Jewish victims, albeit to very various degrees. The *History of Smolensk Land* briefly mentions that “In June 1942, fascists shot around 2,000 Jews from the ghetto”<sup>31</sup>. The *History of the Don Land* also speaks about the mass annihilation of Jews and contains a picture of the monument in Zmievskaia Balka considered to be the largest single mass murder site of Jews in the RSFSR during the war<sup>32</sup>. The regional history textbook providing the most detailed overview of the local Holocaust history is the one of the Stavropol Krai. It lists the number of Jewish victims in the biggest towns of the region, gives a detailed account of the mass killings in Stavropol, and reproduces two textual documents regarding the Holocaust in Mineralnye Vody and in Pyatigorsk. *Stavropol Krai in Russia’s history* is also the only regional textbook mentioning the rescue of Jews and the participation of the locals in their annihilation<sup>33</sup>. However, this book is yet another exception in the landscape of Russian school manuals.

To what extent these trends in the presentation of the war affect classroom practices? Textbooks usually play a key role in organizing history classes, and lack of information on the Holocaust in the former reflects little or no attention to this issue in the latter<sup>34</sup>. Of course, there are teachers who cooperate with the “Holocaust” Center and are actively engaged in teaching about the Holocaust. However, taking into account that the overall number of hours dedicated to the Second World War in the curricula is often considered insufficient, those that wish to focus on this aspect of the war usually have to do it as part of extracurricular activities. This includes elective courses and additional history classes on the Holocaust, where teachers can use special textbooks and pedagogical tools edited by the “Holocaust” Center<sup>35</sup>. However, it turns out that the most common school activities related to Holocaust history do not necessarily involve history teachers.

## 2. Extracurricular activities focused on the history of the Holocaust

### 2.1. School museums

The Holocaust can be addressed in schools through other pedagogical tools, such as school museums. Indeed, in compliance with Russian and Soviet pedagogical tradition, about a quarter of around 41,300 Russian schools<sup>36</sup> have their own museum. These places, created and run by enthusiastic teachers of various disciplines, can host exhibitions on one or several topics, often related to history and ethnography. The official website of the Federal Center for Children and Youth Tourism and Local History Studies hosts a register of Russian school museums<sup>37</sup>. The old version of the website provided information about a much greater number of school museums, contained in separate spreadsheets available for half of the federal

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<sup>31</sup> D.I. Budaev and A.A. Il’juhov, *Istoriya Smolenshchiny XIX-XX Vek. Uchebnik Po Istorii Rodnogo Kraya*, 2016th ed. (Smolensk: Universum, 2016), 2:221.

<sup>32</sup> S.A. Kislicyn and I.G. Kislicyna, *Istoriya Donskogo Kraya: Uchebnik Dlya 9 Klassa Obshcheobrazovatel’nyh Uchrezhdenii* (Rostov-na-Donu: Donskoi Izdatel’skii Dom, 2004), pp. 81.

<sup>33</sup> A.I. Krugov, *Stavropol’skii Krai v Istorii Rossii (Konec XVIII-XX Vek): Regional’nyi Uchebnik Dlya Starshih Klassov Obshcheobrazovatel’nyh Uchebnyh Zavedenii* (Stavropol: Stavropol’servisshkola, 2001), pp. 261–2, 264.

<sup>34</sup> See I. Rebrova, *Re-Constructing Grassroots Holocaust Memory: The Case of the North Caucasus* (Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020).

<sup>35</sup> For instance, I. Al’tman, A. Gerber, and D. Poltorak, *Istoriya Holokosta Na Territorii SSSR* (Moscow: Fond Holokost, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> N. Bondarenko, L. Gohberg, and N. Kovaleva, *Obrazovanie v Cifrah* (Moscow: NIU VShE, 2019), pp. 37.

<sup>37</sup> <https://fcdtk.ru/museums>



subjects<sup>38</sup>. The analysis of these databases has demonstrated that 73% of Russian school museums are entirely or partially dedicated to the Great Patriotic War. Nevertheless, none of them is entirely focused on the Holocaust or contains at least one exhibition dedicated to this topic. This doesn't mean that at least some aspects of the Holocaust are not represented in school museums. The analysis of different sources, such as school websites and publications of the "Holocaust" Center, has provided evidence of at least 20 school museums mentioning persecution, annihilation, or rescue of Jews. However, 4 out of 20 identified school museums mentioning the Holocaust are located in Jewish schools, which reflects a still-popular idea about the "ethnic affiliation" of this memory. Moreover, persecution and annihilation of Jews, whose ethnicity is not always specified, usually appears as a marginal element of much broader exhibitions on the Great Patriotic War that follow Soviet narrative and visual patterns. Either way, these rare cases of referring to the Holocaust are like a drop in the ocean of about 8000 Russian school museums that host exhibitions about the war.

## ***2.2. Students' research projects***

When the Holocaust is mentioned in a school museum, this is often related to individual and group research projects conducted by students and monitored by a teacher. Framework for such projects is provided by multiple local, regional, and national conferences or contests. Since the early 2000s, the "Holocaust" Center organizes its own contest called "Memory of the Holocaust, the path towards tolerance" (since 2020 "Holocaust: memory and warning"). Students enrolled in secondary education can submit their research and artistic projects to this contest. The winners' works are published in the annual digest *We Cannot Be Silent: School and University Students Write about the Holocaust*. It is important to note that these students benefit from a particular context: their teachers, partners of the "Holocaust" Center, have a much better understanding of the Holocaust history than an average Russian teacher.

We have analyzed 103 secondary students' works published between 2006 and 2021. Many works are based on the analysis of primary sources, such as testimonies or archival documents, and study the Holocaust in the RSFSR. Thus, they represent an important contribution in broadening the geographic scope of the history of the Holocaust. The winners of the contest demonstrate good knowledge in this area. Unlike textbooks or school museums, they frequently point out in their writings the unprecedented nature of the catastrophe of European Jews and report the facts proving that they were not treated in the same way as other populations in the territories under Nazi rule.

Many authors also provide general reflections on the Holocaust and the relevance of this memory. High school students are aware that the Nazi genocide against Jews is often ignored, sometimes denied by their contemporaries. Thus, they introduce elements that aim to justify the exploration of this past. We find these elements in 60 out of the 103 analyzed texts. Research into this corpus reveals some interesting outcomes. First of all, many of the 60 above-mentioned texts use the arguments which elevated the Holocaust to the rank of a singular and symbolic event in the West. Half of the authors explain that this past must be known so that similar facts do not happen again, 30% believe that it is important to maintain the memory of the victims, and as many relate this memory to ideas of the value of human life, tolerance, human rights. In 5 cases (8%), this prompts the authors to more general reflections on the relationship between man and the state and even on the crimes of the Soviet regime, but this remains quite exceptional. 38% of students believe that phenomena similar to those which led to the Holocaust (racism, xenophobia, intolerance, extremism, neo-Nazism, nationalism, anti-Semitism) have reappeared in recent decades and/or are present today. The story of the genocide of the Jews should, they say, serve as a warning against these attitudes. Some authors believe

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<sup>38</sup> <http://old.turcentrf.ru/shmrf>

that post-Soviet Russia is affected by these trends. However, concerns about Russia are more present in older texts. We find them in 7 articles of the 2006 edition of the digest, and none in last volumes. In contrast, recent winners of the contest draw particular attention to the problem of Holocaust denial and Neo-Nazism abroad. This trend is closely linked to another shift that concerns the memory of the Great Patriotic War. Despite the well-known implicit taboo on the memory of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis in Soviet war historiography, phrases that refer to the official Russian account of the war can be paradoxically used to support the discourse about the Holocaust. Several authors call on the defense and preservation of the memory of the war that Russia inherited from the USSR:

Today there are politicians, historians, journalists who falsify the events of the Great Patriotic War, distort the facts, reduce the role of our soldiers in the victory over the fascists<sup>39</sup>.

Unfortunately, in today's society, there are people (including politicians from European states, members of nationalist and neo-Nazi currents) who attempt to question the history of the Holocaust by reducing or denying its magnitude. They reduce the role of the soldier-liberator<sup>40</sup>.

The attempts of the falsifiers to exonerate the real culprits, to reduce the role of the USSR in the crushing of Nazism, to denigrate the liberating mission of the Soviet Army, to question the toll of the war never stop<sup>41</sup>.

This trend is partly fueled by the “Liberators of Auschwitz” Project<sup>42</sup> started by the “Holocaust” Center with the support of the Foundation of the President of the Russian Federation. The project promotes research that focuses on Red Army soldiers and officers who took part in the liberation of the camp. Several works published in the last volumes of the collection *We Cannot Be Silent* were carried out within the framework of this project. On the one hand, it helps to legitimize discourse on the Holocaust. Students’ research about the “Liberators of Auschwitz” also makes an indisputable contribution to the historiography of the Second World War. On the other hand, this project leaves the victims of the Holocaust in the dark and feeds into the traditional narrative of war centered on the victories and exploits of the Red Army.

### **2.3. Commemoration practices**

However, most of the extracurricular activities focused on Holocaust memory do not involve personal or group research projects. These activities are based on various pedagogical and commemoration practices. These activities can take place outside schools: in front of a war monument or memorial, in a museum, or in a local public hall. Some of them are organized by – or in partnership with – the external stakeholders, such as Jewish associations. In this case, the risk to perceive the Holocaust memory as “Jewish” is increasing.

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<sup>39</sup> Sergei Konstantinov, « Poisk veteranov 286-j i 100-j diviziï, osvobodivshih Osvencim », in M. Gileva and T. Pisman (eds), *My ne mozhem molchat'. SHkol'niki i studenty o Holokoste*, ed. I. Al'tman (Moscow: MIK, Fond Holokost, 2017), 14:63.

<sup>40</sup> Ekaterina Pautova, « Mify ob osvobodhenii Aushvica (Osvencima) », in Gileva and Pisman, *My ne mozhem molchat'*, 14:68.

<sup>41</sup> Alekseï Kokorev, « Vklad evreïskogo naroda v Slovaekoe vosstanie 1944 goda protiv nacizma », in M. Gileva and T. Pisman (eds), *My ne mozhem molchat'. SHkol'niki i studenty o Holokoste*, ed. I. Al'tman (MIK, Fond Holokost, 2018), 15:30.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Osvoboditeli Aushvica - Proekt, posvyashchënniy soldatam Krasnoï Armii - osvoboditelyam konclagerei Aushvic i Bireknau’, n.d., <http://osvoboditeli.com/>.

The analysis of multiple reports on inauguration of new monuments to the Jewish victims (online media articles, photo reports from the website of the “Restore dignity” project<sup>43</sup>, publications of the “Holocaust” Center) demonstrates that school groups are very common guests at such events. Like many other war monuments across Russia, the newly opened or restored monuments to the killed Jews are sometimes taken care of by nearby schools. These monuments often become places of school commemoration ceremonies, such as “Memory guards” (“*Vahty pamyati*”), which involve members of cadet classes, patriotic clubs, *Yunarmia* units or regular students<sup>44</sup>.

However, extracurricular pedagogical and commemorative activities about the Holocaust can also be organized within schools. This is one of the main outcomes of our research into pedagogical tools shared on a popular teachers’ website *Infourok.ru*. We have analyzed 100 documents (scripts and slideshows) about the Holocaust uploaded on the site between 2012 et 2021. Their authors work in different schools (general and vocational) located 39 federal subjects. The initial goal was the study of how history teachers integrate the Holocaust into their classes while teaching about the Second World War. We have then discovered that only 13% of the files were created for history classes. The other 87% are scripts for various extracurricular activities involving one class or the whole school: “class hours” (“*klassnyĭ chas*”), “lessons of courage” (“*urok muzhestva*”), “lessons of memory” (“*urok pamyati*”), “lectures on political issues” (“*politinformatsiya*”), all-school assemblies (“*lineĭka*”), games, etc. Most of these practices have appeared in the USSR, which demonstrates that the Holocaust has been integrated into the Soviet pedagogical framework. Traditional pedagogical patterns also affect the content of the scripts. The vast majority of them are solemn performances where students play a rather passive role.

A second interesting fact is that 77% of these scripts have been uploaded since 2018. This seems to result from the fact that in the 2016-2017 academic year, International Holocaust Remembrance Day was for the first time listed in the annual Calendar of Educational Events<sup>45</sup> that the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation recommends to commemorate and to celebrate. We have indeed discovered that 32% of the scripts were clearly written for the events that were held on this occasion. This initiative promoted by the “Holocaust” center seems to have better succeeded in spreading the discourse about the Holocaust in Russian schools than integrating it into curricula and textbooks. However, given the very hierarchical nature of the secondary education system in Russia<sup>46</sup>, it is difficult to know whether these activities really come under the personal choice of teachers who have become aware of the scale of the Holocaust and the educational potential of his memory.

Another important discovery regarding the analyzed scripts is that only 40% of them have been created by history and humanities teachers. Among the authors of the texts, we can find teachers of literature, math, biology, chemistry, as well as primary school teachers, librarians, and educators. This suggests that many Russian schoolchildren learn about the Holocaust from those who are not necessarily well familiar with the history of the Second World War. Therefore, teachers are not always the authors of the entire script: they copy-paste paragraphs from books, websites, or other teachers’ works. Sometimes, the information

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Vernut’ Dostoinstvo — Memorialy zhertvam Holokosta’, n.d., <http://victimsdignity.ru/>.

<sup>44</sup> See O. Konkka, ‘Quand la guerre s’invite à l’école : les modèles et les pratiques de la militarisation de l’enseignement secondaire en Russie’, *Russie.Nei.Reports* (2020).

<sup>45</sup> *Kalendar’ Obrazovatel’nyh Sobytiĭ*, 2016.

<sup>46</sup> The interviews conducted by Anna Sanina illustrate the role of directives from the federal and regional authorities (Ministry of Education, regional and district education departments) in the organization of various educational and commemorative events. See paragraph 3.3 “The Basics of Succession” in A. Sanina, *Patriotic Education in Contemporary Russia: Sociological Studies in the Making of the Post-Soviet Citizen. E-Book* (Stuttgart: ibidem Press, 2017).

happens to come from the “Holocaust” Center publications or Russian-language pages of Yad Vashem and USHMM, but many texts seem to represent a last-moment compilation of texts from less trustworthy sources. Some of the analyzed scripts are not well structured, they contain contradictions and inaccuracies. In 39% of the texts, the Holocaust is extended to other categories, and its definition can be very broad:

The extermination of any group of people by any government<sup>47</sup>;

The large-scale extermination of representatives of different ethnic and social groups by the Nazis during the Third Reich<sup>48</sup>;

The death of a considerable part of the European population as result of repressions and its systematic extermination by the Nazis in Germany and the territories occupied in 1933-1945<sup>49</sup>.

Like in textbooks, this universalization of the Holocaust goes hand in hand with its double externalization. The majority of the analyzed texts (68%) illustrate the annihilation of Jews by the Nazis through events that occurred outside the USSR and/or Russia. A typical story revolves around the camps and the Babi Yar massacre. Only 32% of the presentations mention the facts that happened on the occupied territory of the RSFSR, although some scripts were written by teachers from the regions where the exterminations of Jews took place during the war.

Finally, like some authors of *We Cannot Be Silent*, teachers who organize activities dedicated to the Holocaust incorporate arguments that justify the attention paid to this memory. This seems all the more necessary as it was, until recently, little present in the school discourse. Some scenarios of educational and commemorative events aim to instill in students “a sense of tolerance by setting an example of what shouldn’t be done to other nations”<sup>50</sup>, or “lasting resistance to ideas of racism and of fascism”<sup>51</sup>. Many authors believe that this memory is an important lesson for a world in which conflicts, wars, racism and terrorism are ever-present. However, like some participants of the research projects contest, teachers can use the history of the Holocaust to defend the official account of the Great Patriotic War and/or to criticize the post-Euromaidan Ukraine:

Since the disintegration of the USSR, the Ukrainian authorities have taken the path of derussification of the country. [...] after Euromaidan and the integration of Crimea into the Russian Federation, the struggle against everything that is Russian became the logical continuation of the struggle against “Russian aggression”<sup>52</sup>.

The concern is growing among those who heed the calls of the Ukrainians to assert the superiority of their nation, to exterminate the “Moskals”. This is what the nationalists call the Russian-speaking nation<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Scenario of a course submitted by a professor-librarian from the Irkutsk oblast, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Scenario of an extracurricular manifestation submitted by an elementary school teacher from St. Petersburg, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Scenario of an extracurricular manifestation submitted by a professor of mathematics from the Moscow oblast, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Scenario of a history lesson submitted by a history teacher from the Kursk Oblast, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Scenario of extracurricular activity submitted by a history teacher from the Belgorod oblast, 2021.

<sup>52</sup> Scenario of a role-playing game submitted by a history teacher from the Stavropol Krai, 2018

<sup>53</sup> Scenario of an extracurricular manifestation submitted by a history teacher from Rostov oblast, 2015.

What do we see in the world today? The “mankurtization”<sup>54</sup> of a brotherly people, the Ukrainians, is taking place before our very eyes. The politicians who have come to power have shattered a once united people. They do this by following well-known Nazi scenarios. Civilians who disagree with the official Kyiv policy are exterminated: women, children, the elderly! They want to erase from the memory of the people the glorious pages of the friendship of the Russians and the Ukrainians, their misfortune and their common pride: the war against fascism that they have vanquished. Today's vandals are destroying the monuments which are the symbols of the common historical memory of the people<sup>55</sup>!

In such discourses, the Holocaust is instrumentalized in order to support Russia's political agenda. Its memory hardly conveys a message of peace and tolerance.

## Conclusion

It is obvious that schools play a very important role in fostering and spreading the memory of the Holocaust in Russia. In several Russian towns and villages, secondary educational institutions are important actors of the local Holocaust remembrance. We can say that to some degree, efforts of several national stakeholders, and especially of the “Holocaust” Center, paid off. In the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR, Russian schools taught almost nothing about the persecution and annihilation of Jews by the Nazi. Today, the Holocaust is integrated into history curricula and textbooks. Commemorations on January 27 are recommended by the Ministry of Education. Some teachers organize educational events about the Holocaust or participate in such events with their students. They encourage students to build projects on this theme and to participate in regional and national contests. Doubtlessly, today fewer Russian students would suggest that the Holocaust is a “wallpaper paste” than ten years ago.

However, the analysis of different discourses produced within the framework of secondary education has demonstrated that the Holocaust is not always presented as “unprecedented genocide, total and systematic, perpetrated by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, with the aim of annihilating the Jewish people”<sup>56</sup>, which became the biggest “cultural trauma”<sup>57</sup> of the contemporary world and has fostered the struggle for human rights. Indeed, different discourses within the framework of Russian secondary education often provide an unbalanced and deformed vision of the Holocaust.

Firstly, in textbooks and teachers' discourse, the Holocaust is not always presented as genocide of the Jewish people. It is often extended to other categories of victims. There is no clear distinction between the implementation of the Final Solution and the murder of multiple other civilians on the occupied territories. The tragedy of European Jewry is universalized and dissolved in a more general description of Nazi crimes.

Secondly, textbooks and teachers tend to illustrate the Holocaust by examples demonstrating what happened to Jews outside the USSR. Furthermore, while addressing the Holocaust on the occupied Soviet territories, they focus on Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, or Lithuania. The annihilation of Jews in the RSFSR is still rarely mentioned in textbooks and poorly presented in teachers' discourse. Rescue of Jews and collaboration of local people, including Russians, are rarely addressed. At the same time, mass killings of Jews in the Soviet

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<sup>54</sup> This is an allusion to the mankurts, slaves who have lost the memory of their past, mentioned in Chinghiz Aitmatov's novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*.

<sup>55</sup> Scenario of a “Class hour” submitted by a history teacher from Chelyabinsk Oblast, 2020.

<sup>56</sup> ‘What Was the Holocaust?’

<sup>57</sup> Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*.

Union as part of the Great Patriotic War are not always linked to what happened to them in the other occupied countries.

Thirdly, the Holocaust is not always presented as part of national history that students are supposed to perceive as their own. Although more and more non-Jewish groups and individual actors participate in teaching about the Holocaust and commemorating it, it is still sometimes perceived as a “Jewish” memory.

Fourthly, the history of the Holocaust is not always taught and commemorated for itself. In some scripts of educational activities, as well as in some rare students’ research projects, it is instrumentalized in order to legitimize Russia’s official memory or current political discourse.

Fifthly, the universal significance of this memory and its role in defending human rights are often unmentioned and unexplored. At best, learning about the Holocaust is considered important as a warning against neofascism, but it doesn’t lead to broader discussions, for example about the value of human life.

Indeed, attempts to add the Holocaust into the decades-old and thus very solid and traditionally “Holocaust-free” master narrative of the Great Patriotic War result in the fact that often, the latter takes over the former. The new awareness about the Holocaust doesn’t transform the way the war is narrated. On the contrary, the history of the Holocaust is “adjusted” to the traditional account of the war that hasn’t been really questioned or rebalanced since the Soviet era. This account hardly meets the criteria of the “cosmopolitan” memory. Today, thirty years after the collapse of the USSR, the cultural memory of the Great Patriotic War is still, and always more, militarized, and schools play an important role in this process. The discourse about the war is mainly focused on its bellicose aspects, on heroism and military victories, and the main presented figures are army soldiers and officers, as well as partisans. Many other categories of the wartime population, including different types of victims of the occupation, are, at best, remembered as abstract groups. Moreover, this narrative exonerates the Soviet government and the Red Army commandment, which doesn’t leave room for asking whether such a significant number of civil victims, including Jews, could have been avoided. The “Victory at any cost” discourse and oblivion regarding the darkest sides of Stalin’s internal policy during the war is not wholly compatible with the human rights dimension of the Holocaust memory. Therefore, through the efforts of national and local actors, especially of the “Holocaust” Center, teachers and students become more familiar with the history of annihilation of Jews by the Nazis. However, this history exists in parallel with the memory of the Second World War rather than becomes a part of it.

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