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Postwar Trajectories of Former Ukrainian Rescuers and Their Jewish Charges: Purges, Passing, and the Afterlives of Genocide

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Introduction

My doctoral research on Ukrainian rescuers and their charges brought to my attention numerous avenues for further research, two of which I am pursuing as part of my postdoctoral research. The first concerns the fate of Ukrainian rescuers and their Jewish charges in the postwar period, both within the Soviet Union and beyond it, and the second – informed by ongoing initiatives in education and my own findings on what led people to rescue under threat of death – concerns social and civic responsibility, genocide prevention, and teaching "the rescuer mentality" to future generations. In this paper, I focus on the first, examining two phenomena that have received little attention in existing historiography.

It must first be noted that, while a significant percentage of rescuers and survivors remained in contact after the war – with survivors often demonstrating a gratitude-driven commitment to helping their rescuers, and there even being cases of children choosing to stay with their rescuers despite the survival of their Jewish parents – other rescuers and survivors were separated for decades by the Iron Curtain.

Yet the postwar fate of rescuers and their charges was characterized by far more than the question of whether these relationships endured. My postdoctoral research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the extent to which rescuers and charges – specifically those who remained in the Soviet Union in the decades that followed the war – were able to testify about their wartime experiences. Furthermore, my research explores the medium- and long-term consequences of rescue work and genocide survival on the respective lives of rescuers and charges, especially in light of the fact that rescue work did not benefit from widespread social reinforcement during the war itself and that both groups were forced to navigate shifting memory politics and evolving sociopolitical conditions after the war and through the fall of the Soviet Union.

In particular, I focus on two phenomena: first, the contrasting experiences of different categories of former rescuers targeted by Soviet postwar purges; and second, postwar, post-genocidal, and post-conflict "passing" as a tool for managing stigma, coping with wartime trauma, and creating social opportunities in a context of discrimination. Together, these phenomena illuminate a central question of my postdoctoral research: how do societies that suppress, instrumentalize, or selectively exploit the memory of genocide shape the lives of those who endured it, whether as victims, bystanders, rescuers, or perpetrators?

Repercussions, Memory, and Long-Term Precautions

The joy of liberation of Ukraine and the reunion of what was left of Jewish families was tinged by the dawn of a new *status quo* that the Soviet journalist and writer Vasiliy Grossman tragically summed up as a "Ukraine without Jews." It also marked the start of a new chapter in the fate of both rescuers and the rescued, whose individual lives and postwar relationships were greatly impacted by the sociopolitical and geographic conditions that followed.

It is well-known that Soviet authorities deliberately made no distinction between victims of the Second World War, referring to Jewish Holocaust victims as "innocent Soviet citizens," a phrase that was often even engraved onto signs marking mass Jewish graves and memorial sites. The reason for this was complex but ultimately lay in the desire to both uphold the myth of a "friendship of the peoples" and depict all Soviet citizens as having been equally targeted by the Nazis' brutality in a "Great Patriotic War." This argument effectively demoted the Jewish tragedy from a targeted genocide to a mere consequence of ideological struggle between Fascism and Communism.

The strategic use of language and memory had a monumental impact on the memory of the Holocaust in the post-Soviet space and on post-traumatic healing within Soviet society in the decades following the war up until the fall of the USSR. Amongst the many consequences of these postwar realities was that, despite the fact that local gentile populations were well aware of the reality of what befell their Jewish neighbors, conversations on this topic were largely forbidden in the public sphere and were relegated to intimate places like kitchens – a habit that lasted for decades.

This state of affairs understandably led to the assumption that public expressions of Jewish life did not exist in formerly occupied parts of the postwar Soviet Union beyond those used to garner favorable public opinion abroad or "neutralize accusations of antisemitism," as the historian Arkadi Zeltser writes in his book *Unwelcome Memory*, noting: "paradoxically, it was common even amongst Soviet Jews themselves to think that there was a total ban on memorializing Holocaust victims."

But despite the widespread opinion amongst scholars and the public that Soviet Jews "had been passive" in commemorating the Holocaust and that there were no monuments featuring "Jewish content" during the postwar period in the Soviet Union, the situation was more nuanced, he argues. In fact, culturally specific memorialization did exist as a "grassroots activity," including in the erection of monuments "outside the framework of large memorial projects," writes Zeltser, noting no fewer than "733 cities, towns, or villages in the territory of the Soviet Union where, prior to 1991, Jews themselves established one or more monuments to those killed." These initiatives, writes Zeltser, involved "small, scattered groups of people whose activities never fell entirely under the authorities' *diktat*, but who at the same time, by and large, were not in opposition to the Soviet system." This specification – the fact that the involved

individuals were not perceived as a tangible threat – likely explains why their initiatives were tolerated by Soviet authorities.

Despite these initiatives, Zeltser does, nevertheless, stress that "the primary channel" of "Holocaust memory by Soviet Jews was communicative memory; that is, memory based on information conveyed orally, primarily within the family setting" – an observation that corroborates my earlier claim of conversations on the Holocaust being "relegated to intimate places like kitchens," in many Jewish and non-Jewish households alike.

A similar fate of silencing befell the wartime experiences of rescuers. In truth, stories of wartime rescue work of Jewish Holocaust victims escaped attention in the years after the war in both the West and the East, remaining unexplored in historiography and underdiscussed in the public sphere for many decades. In fact, as the historians Ari Kohen and Gerald J. Steinacher write in the introduction to their 2019 edited volume *Unlikely Heroes: The Place of Holocaust Rescuers in Research and Teaching*, "many of the brave men and women who are today regarded as Righteous went largely unrecognized seventy years ago and might even have been singled out for abuse by their co-nationals" immediately after the war.

In the postwar Soviet Union, however, Holocaust rescuers were an especially ambiguous category: theoretically expedient, on the one hand, yet extremely problematic on the other. As I showed in my doctoral research, while rescuers were people whose altruism and benevolence were morally advantageous for the reinforcement of the Soviet myth of exemplary wartime behavior, their very existence was proof of many inconvenient truths, the most obvious being that Nazi brutality against civilians took a unique form when directed at the Jews (and other targeted groups, such as the Roma people), such that, on a grassroots level, it could only be countered with risky and clandestine rescue operations. Another inconvenient truth was that the success of a rescue operation often necessitated a resourcefulness and ingenuity that could only come from bending the rules set by Soviet bureaucracy – an act which, though not necessarily malign, could, by its very nature, contradict the moral-political unity that the Soviets sought to embody. State-sanctioned antisemitism likely only compounded these dynamics, ensuring that rescuers of Jews were simply not seen as sufficiently important to overcome the ambiguities that rendered their category so problematic in official memory politics.

As the historian Amir Weiner astutely observed in the introduction to his book *Making Sense of War*, after the war, the Soviet Union saw "an acceleration in the continuous purification campaign that sought the elimination of divisive and counterproductive elements." Since "wartime conduct emerged as the key criterion in the evaluation of 'party-worthiness'," writes Weiner, all Soviet citizens soon found themselves "subjected to inquisitorial verification that raised questions such as 'Where were you during the German occupation, and how did you survive the war?' (which often implied 'Why did you survive?')."

In addition to pursuing active participants in the Holocaust and known collaborators such as policemen, as well as Axis-appointed administrative officials, Soviet authorities also targeted private individuals, namely professionals who worked for institutions that were requisitioned by the Nazis. This is important, because recent scholarship on life in Nazi-occupied areas of the Soviet Union has come to question the traditional definition of "collaboration." The rescuer – as an ambiguous player – was also confronted with the question of "how" and the corresponding assumption on the part of officials that if one had not been killed in the process, he or she must have collaborated or otherwise violated codes of conduct.

In its historiography, public discourse, and official commentary, the Soviet narrative therefore established and reinforced a victim-perpetrator paradigm that accentuated the

"irredeemability" of certain citizens. "The exclusion of certain groups from official representation of the Soviet fighting family, along with the denial of their unique suffering," writes Weiner, left "those groups politically invisible, without official recognition of their distinct, collective identities."

Occasionally, Soviet authorities exploited certain rescue narratives to reinforce the myth of resistance – but only when these narratives conformed to the acceptable memory mold. The example of Mother Maria Skobtsova (Мать Мария) – a Russian-born nun and canonized saint of the Patriarchate of Constantinople – exalted in the Soviet Union as a figure of the Resistance in the struggle against the Nazis in occupied France, is emblematic: the historical record repositions her as a rescuer of Jews in Paris.

Ukrainian rescuers, in particular, first appeared in public discourse only after Stalin's death and Nikita Khrushchev's accession to power as the head of the Soviet Union. Most notably, in 1957, the Soviet writer and journalist Vladimir Chivilikhin began publishing chapters in the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* of what would become his book *Hello, Mama!* on the wartime rescue activities of Anna Zhovanik (Hanna Zhovanyk) and her friend Valentina Prusakova (Valentyna Prusakova), who rescued 37 abandoned or orphaned children, amongst them Jews, by running a kindergarten in the city of Bakhmach (Chernihiv oblast). As any such wartime institution would need to have been sanctioned by the occupants, Zhovanik and Prusakova – notwithstanding their humanitarianism – technically fall into a grey area in the Soviet narrative.

Why this rescue operation was singled out when similar stories from other Ukrainian towns remained obscured for decades is unclear. Even more intriguing is the question of why Chivilikhin – a conservative writer whose work later took a nationalist and conspiratorial turn – chose to "redeem" these rescuers, in particular. The answers may ultimately lie in the following considerations. Firstly, Zhovanik and Prusakova helped non-Jewish children, as well, which helped sustain the idea of universal victimization. Secondly, because local authorities refused to support it, the kindergarten had to survive on donations and goods the women stole from German storerooms. This confiscation of Nazi resources may have been viewed as an act of resistance. Thirdly, the chapters were first published during Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw – a time of relaxed censorship.

If rescue narratives could be tolerated within the Soviet memory space only on the condition that they conformed to the register of resistance, former rescuers nonetheless developed their own forms of parallel commemoration in the private sphere. Chivilikhin was only able to write his book after learning that Zhovanik had been receiving letters sent from different corners of the Soviet Union from the people she had saved as children – attesting to the existence of private and spontaneous practices of commemoration.

Phenomenon A: The Contrasting Experiences of Different Categories of Rescuers Targeted by Soviet Postwar Purges

During my doctoral research, I realized that former Axis-appointed administrative officials (such as burgomasters) who had rescued Jews during the Holocaust often escaped punishment for collaboration at the hands of Soviet authorities during postwar purges due to the strength of the testimonies of the Jews whom they had rescued. In my research, I refer to people who came to rescue despite having had roles that are assumed to not have been conducive to acts of wartime humanitarianism as "unlikely rescuers."

With regard to postwar purges targeting or sparing Ukrainian rescuers, I identify three patterns: first, selective immunity for some Axis-appointed administrative officials (such as burgomasters) who had rescued Jews thanks to survivor testimony and extensive rallying by former charges; second, the prosecution of non-collaborating civilian rescuers; and third, paradoxically, impunity for known perpetrators despite the Soviet Union's postwar campaign to purify itself of "traitors."

We see the first pattern, for example, in the story of Yefrosiniya Drobyazko, a registration official at the police station in Korop (Chernihiv oblast), who stole blank identity papers and filled them out in a Ukrainian name for her charge Fenya Chernyakhovskaya. The rescuer then set the station on fire to eliminate the risk of anyone noticing the missing forms. After the war, Drobyazko was convicted of collaboration, but Chernyakhovskaya spared no effort to secure her rescuer's release, ultimately succeeding, despite accusations as serious as that of "collaborator."

But such selective immunity was not extended in all cases. Appointed village elder of Trylivka (Vinnytsia oblast) by the Nazis shortly after his release from Soviet forced labor, Dmitriy Medvechuk burst into tears upon seeing the state of his childhood friend Kiva Flomin during the Holocaust. Not only did Medvechuk smuggle Kiva, his wife Polina, and their five children out of the ghetto and into his home, he also relied on his connections with the occupying authorities to tip off the Flomins whenever the Germans were near. Despite his wartime humanitarianism, Medvechuk was charged with collaboration after the war, and the Flomins' efforts to convince Soviet authorities that he had protected Jews and did not sympathize with the Germans proved unsuccessful.

At the same time, we see another phenomenon, where rescuers with limited interactions with the occupying powers – those who cannot be classified as traditional "unlikely rescuers" – were investigated, arrested, and even sent to camps in the years immediately following liberation for their alleged "unpatriotic" wartime conduct.

The rescuer Andrey Galich (Andriy Halych) from the village of Chervoni Polohy (Poltava oblast), for example, was punished after the war for paying a bribe to placate a would-be denouncer. After the war, accused of having stolen ears of grain from the *kolkhoz*, Andrey Galich was deported to Siberia and imprisoned for 15 years in 1947. The rescuer's son Grigoriy Galich (Hryhoriy Halych) specified in correspondence submitted to Yad Vashem that the family had also been subjected to collectivization and dekulakization well before the war and that his maternal grandfather had also been sent to a penal colony.

We also see this in the story of Gerasim (Herasym) Dimitruk and his family – Sabbatarian peasants living on a *khutor* near the village of Ozierce (Volyn oblast), who kept their charge Pnina (nicknamed Pola) Brat hidden behind a wall in their cottage. When Soviet partisans came to collect her on 14 January 1943, the Dimitruks resisted for fear that the girl would be sexually exploited. Pnina was, nevertheless, taken in by the partisans and would spend the next three months cooking and cleaning for a unit of 29 men in the forest before being transferred to the partisan headquarters of Colonel Anton Brinskiy, where she became the assistant to a Jewish doctor. In January 1945, when Pnina returned to Ozierce to bid her rescuers farewell before her move to Israel, she learned that the Dimitruks had been deported to Siberia as punishment for refusing to fight in the Red Army. It is likely that the Dimitruks were pacifists due to their religious convictions.

What I find intriguing in these cases is that the fact of having rescued Jews during the Holocaust did not bear the same weight as "proof of good behavior" for this small selection of

rescuers as it did for the above-mentioned Nazi-appointed administrative officials who benefited from selective immunity, even in those cases where charges and a number of other witnesses were available to provide testimony in support of the rescuers.

The historical record suggests that altruistic rescuers who were persecuted during postwar purges despite not having been accused of collaboration were persecuted for reasons unrelated to their behavior during the war as part of a continuation of prewar repression. The fact of having rescued Soviet citizens or otherwise participated in resistance activities ultimately proved insufficient to rehabilitate individuals whom the state had already marked as disposable.

By contrast, a selection of rescuers from the "gray zone," namely "unlikely rescuers" such as some burgomasters, remained untouched, it seems because, despite the system's professed inflexibility in memory politics, Soviet society itself, namely the ordinary people enforcing official decisions, implicitly acknowledged the moral ambiguities involved in surviving the occupation. Ultimately, the shades of gray of the wartime experience seem to have been selectively mobilized either to rehabilitate certain individuals or to justify the postwar political repression of others. These outcomes depended both on the subjective judgments of those conducting postwar assessments and on the extent to which a rescuer's identity or wartime role was perceived as threatening to Soviet moral-political "unity."

What we ultimately see, most notably in the immediate postwar period, is that the same state that promised protection and justice – positioning itself as the moral authority over wartime behavior and claiming ownership of memory and redemption through demands of moral purity – offered no safe space for people whose lives fell into the gray zone. Yet this gray zone, with its wide range of gradients, was inescapable for virtually all survivors of Nazi occupation, enslavement, or imprisonment.

Moreover, the state offered limited therapeutic or institutional means to assist Holocaust survivors, rescuers, and other traumatized civilians whose experiences introduced unwelcome nuance into the official memory narrative. Rather than facilitating repair, the state reproduced conditions of fear, suspicion, and coercion that retraumatized neglected civilian populations and extended moral injury into the postwar period, while simultaneously maintaining loopholes that occasionally became pathways to redemption for voluntary collaborators. In this sense, the Soviet state may be understood as having committed a form of institutional betrayal.

Unacknowledged Trauma and the Limits of Institutional Care

Recent research at the intersection of history and psychiatry, such as the work of Benjamin Zajicek, offers valuable insight into how the Soviet Union clinically addressed the psychological consequences of war in the immediate postwar period. In a paper titled "From Psychological Trauma to *Kontuziia*: Soviet Strategies for Reframing Psychological Suffering During and After World War II," presented at a conference on postwar trauma in Berlin in June 2025, Zajicek examined how the diagnostic label of *kontuzhanyy* was employed almost universally for traumatized soldiers. Depending on the patient, this diagnosis could manifest in a wide range of psychological and somatic symptoms, ultimately functioning as an umbrella term that absorbed symptom clusters that would later be conceptualized as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although the term *kontuziia* is medically translated into English as "concussion" or "post-concussion syndrome," its application in practice, according to the postwar files examined by Zajicek, far exceeded corresponding neurological injury. Therefore, while acknowledging suffering, the state stripped it of specificity and meaning through diagnostic flattening.

The purpose of diagnosis is not only to enable treatment. At a societal level, diagnosis legitimizes suffering, allows for narrative coherence, and enables witnessing – all essential preconditions for healing and repair, regardless of whether individual victims feel equipped to come forward. As the psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman writes in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*: "The response of the community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of the trauma. Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and the community depends, first, upon public acknowledgement of the traumatic event and, second, upon some form of community action."

Zajicek's paper led me to reflect on the many categories of victims who were never afforded institutional recognition, diagnostic frameworks, or public tools – such as proper remembrance – for processing trauma. Was there a diagnosis for Holocaust survivors who endured ghettos, camps, prolonged identity concealment, or underground hiding? For rescuers who experienced hunger, humiliation, violence, denunciation, and even wartime and postwar persecution at the hands of their communities and authorities? For Jewish and non-Jewish children raised in wartime orphanages? For women subjected to systematic sexual violence? For Ukrainians deported to Germany as forced laborers?

These questions are not posed for affective performance, but to underscore a structural problem. Clinical research has demonstrated that when traumatic experiences remain unaddressed, they often transform into long-term somatic symptoms, dissociation, maladaptive behavioral patterns, and intergenerational transmission. As the psychiatrist Bessel A. van der Kolk notes in *The Body Keeps the Score*, trauma can lead to "a recalibration of the brain's alarm system, an increase in stress hormone activity, and alterations in the system that filters relevant information from irrelevant" – changes that explain why "traumatized individuals become hypervigilant to threat" and "so often keep repeating the same problems."

By creating hierarchies of suffering, denying acknowledgement of suffering, and reinforcing shame and silence amongst those whose experiences are excluded, politically motivated selective care can prove particularly damaging in postwar or post-conflict situations. As van der Kolk succinctly states: "denial of the consequences of trauma can wreak havoc [on] the social fabric of society."

This brings us to a central concern of my postdoctoral research: the role of private meaning-making in the absence of public acknowledgment. Importantly, the absence of diagnosis does not necessarily imply the absence of processing. Many individuals and families – often unknowingly – developed private strategies for coping with trauma within family circles or informal social networks, provided such practices did not challenge official memory narratives. Private meaning-making would play a role in passing, silence, and patterns of intergenerational transmission in postwar Soviet society for both rescuers and their charges, as we will see in the sections that follow.

What I see clearly in the stories I am studying as part of my research on "Phenomenon A" is that liberation and the end of the war did not lead to survival in the way that people are accustomed to understanding it. For some people, survival continued as concealment, withdrawal, silence, and loss of social life.

Phenomenon B: Postwar "Passing" as a Tool for Managing Stigma, Coping with Wartime Trauma, and Creating Social Opportunities in a Context of Discrimination

The Soviet Union's obfuscation of the Jewish nature of the Holocaust, refusal to facilitate a public reckoning, and strategic instrumentalization of this horrible tragedy to purify the land of "traitors" prevented proper post-traumatic healing and interethnic reconciliation within Soviet society – one of the main reasons why some survivors, namely a selection of those who had been dissimulated as non-Jews during the war, chose to continue "passing" as non-Jews after the war.

In my doctoral thesis, I studied the idea of passing extensively in the context of dissimulation during the Holocaust in Ukraine – one of the three most important methods of survival under Nazi occupation, the other two being hiding and fleeing. Originating in sociology, the concept of "passing" refers to the ability to be perceived as belonging to an identity group – whether ethnic, racial, social, religious, or other – that is not one's own, or – through strategic adaptations in appearance, behavior, self-presentation, documentation, or a combination thereof – to render imperceptible those traits that would otherwise lead members of a dominant group to exclude one from their ranks.

In the context of the Holocaust in Ukraine – and the Holocaust in general – existing literature tends to treat dissimulation as a wartime tactic that is subsequently abandoned with the end of acute threat. While this interpretation is largely reasonable and accounts for a great deal, it fails to explain cases in which dissimulation did not end with liberation but continued into the postwar period. In particular, a proportion of Jewish survivors who had been dissimulated as non-Jews during the Holocaust chose to retain their non-Jewish identities for the remainder of their lives.

In my work, I have come to distinguish between two forms of passing: a more instrumental, or pragmatic, form intended to circumvent quotas and other discriminatory measures that impede people's ability to fully participate and thrive in society, and an existential, or survival-driven, form adopted out of fear for one's personal safety in the aftermath of violence, experienced either directly or vicariously. In the context of the postwar Soviet Union, instrumental passing often occurred when individuals tried to navigate logistical hurdles resulting from systemic antisemitism. Existential passing, on the other hand, emerged from an internalized understanding that exposure could result in annihilation.

This raises a critical analytical question: how is postwar passing different from assimilation, secularization, or silence? While passing may entail elements of all three, it cannot be reduced to any one of them. Assimilation, unless coerced, generally implies voluntary integration and does not require a denial of origin. Secularization, which concerns religious practices, similarly does not necessitate secrecy. Silence may arise from trauma or self-protection but does not inherently involve identity substitution or sustained management of how one is perceived by others. Passing, by contrast, entails the active and often ongoing management of legibility. Always protective or defensive, it requires the suppression, whether partial or complete, of one's identity in public spaces and usually confines transparency to a narrow, trusted circle.

Stories of postwar existential or survival-driven passing challenge the implicit assumption that wartime passing was merely situational and temporary, and that the postwar world necessarily enabled survivors to reclaim their suppressed identities with relative ease and authenticity. Instead, they suggest that passing can begin as a situational tactic but become internalized over time, and that strategies adopted under extreme conditions can solidify into durable postwar identity commitments. This raises a broader question: when does passing cease

to function as a tactic or a mode of survival and instead becomes a mode of being shaped by terror – and why does this transformation occur?

The term itself emerged in 1929, with the publication of the novel *Passing* by Nella Larsen – a mixed-race author of the Harlem Renaissance – which tells the story of an African American woman who was able to successfully integrate into and navigate "white" society due to her light skin. Following its publication, the term was adopted in the academic milieu, most notably by the sociologist Erving Goffman in his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), which explored "passing" as a form of identity management. In particular, Goffman saw passing as "the management of undisclosed discrediting information about self," that is the act of navigating stigmatizing or disqualifying aspects of one's identity in the face of "normals" – people who lack the relevant identity markers and who are prejudiced against persons who have said identity markers. He also noted that "the extent of passing can vary, from momentary and unintended at one extreme to the classic kind of deliberate total passing."

To understand the mindset of individuals who may have adopted passing as a survival strategy, it is useful to look at the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois – an American sociologist and the first African American to earn a doctorate at Harvard – particularly his formulation of "double consciousness" in *The Souls of the Black Folk*.

Du Bois argued that, as a result of historical conditions, African Americans developed a dual self-perception – an awareness of oneself as one knows oneself to be alongside an awareness of oneself "through the revelation of the other world," that is of a dominant society. He famously described this dual perception as a sense of "always looking at [oneself] through the eyes of others," of measuring one's worth "by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." Although articulated in a specific historical and racial context, the concept of double consciousness offers a powerful analytical lens for understanding experiences of oppression more broadly. Implicit in Du Bois's formulation is the internalization of externally imposed evaluation and of introjected shame – a form of shame that arises in environments where belonging is conditional.

Removed from their historical and structural context, passing and related phenomena have often been misunderstood or moralized in both scholarly and popular discourse, framed as a form of self-denial, moral failure, or even paranoia – an interpretation reflected in enduring tropes such as the "self-hating Jew" or judgments surrounding so-called lavender marriages undertaken to conceal stigmatized sexual identities. Such framings, however, frequently underestimate the intensity of stigma, social surveillance, and anticipated sanction as experienced by individuals who choose to pass. It is therefore more analytically productive to understand passing not as opportunism or self-rejection, but as a response to anticipated hostility.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that passing is best understood not as a lighthearted choice or a calculated deviation from authenticity, or even as an exaggerated response to imagined threats, but as a survival reflex conditioned by exposure to contexts where visibility carries unequal risks. These dynamics are most visible when passing occurs amidst or following captivity, violence, or other coercive circumstances – such as forced marriages, forced conversions, genocides, or other human rights abuses – or afterwards in societies that have evaded proper recognition, reparation, repair, and reconciliation.

This pattern is evident, for example, amongst crypto-Jews in Spain, Portugal, and their former colonies who, although forced to publicly convert to Christianity during the Inquisition, maintained Jewish practices in private for centuries thereafter. Another example of ritual survival under concealment, pointed out to me by Professor Uğur Ümit Üngör of the NIOD Institute

for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam, was observed amongst certain Armenian widows forced to marry Turkish men after the 1915-1917 genocide. Once a year, these women would isolate themselves and clandestinely practice traditional rituals related to Orthodox Easter, including baking the traditional yeast bread called the *choereg*.

While postwar Jewish identity concealment has been discussed in broader sociological and diasporic contexts, deliberate postwar passing as a sustained identity strategy amongst Holocaust survivors in the Soviet Union has not, to my knowledge, been systematically examined as an object of study, despite the fact that representatives of Jewish communities and archivists are aware of this phenomenon and had to contend with it in the years after the Soviet Union, when families sought to "unpass." This is a phenomenon I am also exploring at present.

One documented example of what can potentially be described as existential, or survival-driven passing, is the case of Anna Krasnobrodskaya and her daughter Alla, both of whom escaped the death pits in Kirovohrad during the *Aktion* that took place on 30 September 1941. The mother and daughter were able to live with greater freedom only after Anna succeeded in obtaining false identity papers bearing the surname Ignatyeva – an assumed identity they would retain for the remainder of their lives in an expression of postwar vigilance.

The story of Anna Krasnobrodskaya and her daughter Alla becomes especially illuminating when examined in light of the family's biographical background, prewar patterns of identification, and the cumulative severity of their wartime experience. From an administrative point of view, the family demonstrated a clear trajectory towards greater assimilation across three generations, assimilation achieved not only through acculturation but also through intermarriage with members of the non-Jewish community. Yet, as the wartime experience made brutally clear, both Anna and Alla were nonetheless classified as Jewish under the Nazis' racial definitions of *Mischlinge* and were both herded to the killing site. For reasons that are not explained, the mother and daughter were miraculously spared at the very last moment by a German who inquired as to Alla's ethnic identity.

This extraordinary story leaves us with a number of important questions. Were Anna and her daughter more inclined to maintain their non-Jewish identities – and even their assumed names – after the war because of a newly internalized understanding of danger? Or was this decision instead a natural extension of a preexisting tendency shaped by assimilation, intermarriage, and prior strategies of social navigation? To what extent did the direct experience of the extermination process itself constitute an exceptional traumatic rupture that rendered this family more likely than other Jews who had used false documents during the war to retain their wartime identities after liberation? In other words, did proximity to the mechanics of mass murder fundamentally recalibrate the family's perception of risk in a way that made "unpassing" psychologically or existentially untenable?

There is no universal date when postwar passing ends. In some families, it ends only after emigration, in others once survivors reach old age and suddenly reveal their secrets to family, friends, or even acquaintances, sometimes when grandchildren are old enough to ask questions and understand, often after the fall of the Soviet Union, and sometimes not at all. As part of this ongoing research, I have already conducted interviews in Ukraine with representatives of Jewish organizations regarding the process by which post-Soviet Ukrainian Jews restored their Jewish identity in the absence of corresponding indicators in their official documents in the 1990s. Interestingly, I was told that the two primary methods for reestablishing one's Jewish identity in the absence of personal documentation were providing

archival records proving Jewish ancestry or relying on testimonies from other Jews who could swear that the person in question was indeed of Jewish descent.

As we have seen, passing often became intergenerational, with children raised with erased or fragmented identities, and often involved delayed identity recovery and contested recognition. In light of this, one can argue that "unpassing," just like "passing" before it, sometimes entailed a moral injury.

Conclusion

There is a vast body of literature on postwar trials in the USSR, the Soviet purge, memory politics, postwar antisemitism, and the representation of the Holocaust in Soviet cinema. However, while my project builds upon the findings of this well-documented historiographical framework, the specific phenomena I examine – the fate of rescuers and the rescued after the war, the impact of Soviet purges on rescuers, and the decision of some Jews to pass as non-Jews in the postwar period – remain unexplored in the Soviet context and are largely understudied in historiography in general.

This part of my postdoctoral research represents a critical extension of my doctoral work, which examined in depth the methodology, motivations, and moral psychology of rescuers during the Holocaust in Ukraine. While my dissertation focused on the moment of rescue, this new study seeks to understand the fate of these individuals and those they saved after the war, addressing a crucial question: what happens after survival in a society that does not engage transparently with the genocidal experience?

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of this reality is the endurance of Soviet memory politics into the present and its continued capacity to mobilize segments of the post-Soviet population toward exclusionary violence, as evidenced by Russia's war against Ukraine, where the instrumentalization of history has been used to justify crimes against civilians, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike.