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## HOLOCAUST SITES IN UKRAINE: THE POLITICS OF MEMORIALIZATION

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## Abstract

Through the ethnographic site of Pechora and its conceptual embodiments, I have sought to explore the overlaps of Ukrainian and Jewish memory, the politics of commemorative and memorial practices, the relationship of archival history to living memory, and the role of local Holocaust sites in contemporary social relations and identity practices. I aim also to provide a case study of the structure and meaning of the Holocaust in Ukraine, with its keen differences (from other regional sites of the Holocaust) in policy and practice, marking survivor and witness experiences and memories in distinct ways, which, for the most part, have yet to find articulation in official Holocaust discourses. The intersections of culture, power, and history inherent in processes of remembering and memorializing the Holocaust lie at the foundations of this study.



## Introduction

Holocaust sites in Ukraine, as elsewhere in Europe, carry a complex social memory of their own. This memory is shaped by their location and visibility, the stories they embody, and the physical and documentary evidence they leave behind. It is also shaped by the discursive appropriations of their memory as history by different parties, their memorialization in ritual and stone, or, in other cases, their partial or total erasure from physical or archival memory.

In Ukraine, in particular, sites of the Holocaust, including mass graves, memorials, and former ghetto and camp sites, occupy a special place in the local and national imagination of its inhabitants, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Holocaust sites exist everywhere and act as constant reminders of a recent, tragic past. Some occupy prominent places in villages and towns; others are tucked away in the woods and forests, beyond the daily purview of local inhabitants. And yet, their presence continues to be felt, whether or not they are deliberately remembered, forgotten, or ignored in public discourse and practice.

My study centers around a former Romanian camp in the village of Pechora in the Vinnitsa Oblast'.<sup>1</sup> The memory has been and continues to be shaped by Ukrainian and Romanian Jewish survivors and their descendants, the Vinnitsa regional Soviet government and its Ukrainian successor, and a handful of Ukrainian inhabitants from Pechora and surrounding villages.

The Pechora camp is located at the outermost northeastern border of Transnistria, the Romanian zone of occupation of Ukraine during World War II. Beginning in December 1941, Jews from the surrounding regions – Tulchin, Bratslav, Shpikov<sup>2</sup>, Trostyanets – and later from more distant regions – Mogilev Podolskii, Bukovina, and Bessarabia – were brought to Pechora to perish on the enclosed, wooded grounds of what had been a private estate (built by the Polish nobleman Pototsk in the eighteenth century), which was converted into a sanatorium for tuberculosis after the revolution.

Today the Romanian camp again operates as a sanatorium (health clinic), with few reminders of its former self. It remains set aside from the village by its stone entrance and gated walls. Jewish mass graves mark the peripheral landscape of the village but are hidden from immediate view, tucked deep in the woods at one end of the village and in the forested hills, where the old Jewish cemetery lies, at the

other. Survivors of Pechora continue to live in the regional centers, including Tulchin, Bratslav, Shpikov, Mlogilev Podolskii, although their numbers are rapidly dwindling through death and mass emigration to Israel, the U.S., and Germany. No Jews live in Pechora, though a small, vibrant community existed before the war and was also incarcerated in the camp.

### **Purpose**

Through the ethnographic site of Pechora and its conceptual embodiments, this study explores the overlaps of Ukrainian and Jewish memory, the politics of commemorative and memorial practices, the relationship of archival history to living memory, and the role of local Holocaust sites in contemporary social relations and identity practices. It also provides a case study of the structure and meaning of the Holocaust in Ukraine, with its keen differences (from other regional sites of the Holocaust) in policy and practice, marking survivor and witness experiences and memories in distinct ways, which, for the most part, have yet to find articulation in official Holocaust discourses.

Such research intertwines the disciplinary approaches of anthropology and history, with their differing emphases on multi-linear articulations of memory, memorialization, and identity, on the one hand, and documented historical analysis and chronological rigor, on the other. The merging of methodologies of archival evidence and complex ethnography is challenging and raises important philosophical questions for historians and anthropologists alike. These concern the relationship of history to memory and the uses of contemporary survivor and witness testimonies both for historical research on the Holocaust and for understanding processes of cultural memory and identity beyond issues of historical accuracy.

The study places a focus on the relationship of past and present. How do present-day memorial practices – including stone structures, ritual commemorations, and personal and communal narratives – shape public and private memories of the past, and how do they interact discursively with historical narratives built on archival research, alternately shaping and being shaped by them? The intersections of

culture, power, and history inherent in processes of remembering and memorializing the Holocaust lie at the foundations of this study.

### **Preliminary research**

In the initial stage of this ongoing research project, I conducted archival research at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), on a Charles H. Revson Foundation Fellowship for Archival Research. The resources of the USHMM archive include the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission Reports, a body of documents containing depositions, victim lists, survivor and witness testimonies, maps, and photographs, compiled by Soviet regional commissions following the liberation of Soviet territories from German and Romanian occupations. For the Vinnitsa Oblast', I found some documentary evidence of the existence of the Pechora camp from depositions, survivor testimonies, and some witness testimonies.

Building on preliminary archival research, I have begun to conduct ethnographic research in the Vinnitsa Oblast' of Ukraine. My familiarity with the Jewish community in Ukraine (and extensive personal contacts from previous doctoral fieldwork), my fluency in Russian, and my comfortable (and growing) knowledge of Ukrainian have facilitated this stage of the research project.

During two months of fieldwork in the fall of 2001, I was based in Tulchin, where the largest number of Pechora survivors continue to live, and I traveled to Bratslav, Shpikov, Pechora, Dankovka, Sirets, and other towns and villages in search of survivors and witnesses. In addition to extensive interviews of survivors and witnesses of Pechora (survivors often recounted experiences in Pechora and in one or more Romanian ghettos), I interviewed a husband and wife – both survivors of the Nemirov ghetto and camp; a survivor of Mikhailovka labor camp and several other German labor camps charged with building the road between Gaisin and Uman'; three women who spent time in Pechora and the German labor camps across the Bug river; and some witnesses of the Tulchin ghetto and the deportations from Tulchin to Pechora.

Through these interviews and discussions, the scope of my research project has both narrowed and expanded, as it has taken account of the interconnections among Holocaust sites in the Vinnitsa Oblast, bridging the distinction between *camp* and *ghetto* and between the German and Romanian zones of occupation. Just as Jews moved among these Holocaust sites during the war, often by force but sometimes in flight to safer havens (generally, the Romanian ghettos ensured a better chance of survival), these historical sites remain intertwined in personal memories and public discourses about the Holocaust in the Vinnitsa Oblast.

I will conduct further fieldwork in the Mogilev Podolskii and Bukovina regions of Ukraine and will hopefully make a brief visit to Moldova (formerly Bessarabia) as well. Bessarabian and Bukovinan Jews, forcibly transported across the Dniestr river into Romanian-annexed Transnistria in the summer of 1941, joined local Ukrainian Jews in the Mogilev Podolskii ghetto (and in other ghettos across Transnistria). Many Ukrainian and Romanian Jews from the Mogilev Podolskii ghetto were later deported to Pechora. Interviews among Pechora survivors from these regions may reveal differing sequences of Holocaust memory and experience, alternative debates about the memorialization of the past, and a different set of overlaps of Ukrainian, Romanian, and Jewish memory.

In short, the local politics of memory, community, and identity may raise a new set of debates about the past and its meaning in the present. At the mass grave site in the woods of Pechora, several monuments stand dedicated to the memory of those who perished at the camp. It is interesting to note that the two largest survivor communities, based in Tulchin and in Mogilev Podolskii, each have separate monuments to their respective victims. Moreover, their communal days of remembrance and commemoration are not coordinated with one another. It is my sense that ethnographic research in and across these regions, when evaluated as a whole, may point to variations in the lived history of the Holocaust in Transnistria and in the way that history is remembered and memorialized today.



## Theorizing Holocaust memory and history

I have thus begun to consider the debates about memory, history, and identity that are raised by Holocaust testimonies of Pechora. Discussions and interviews with survivors and witnesses in the Vinnitsa Oblast<sup>7</sup> reveal complex social, cultural, and interpersonal processes that shed light on theoretical and historical concerns. These include the impact of post-war politics on the shaping of local and national memories; the changing social and political conditions of memory politics in the late Soviet/post-Soviet periods; the collectivization/synthesization of Holocaust narratives; the substance of historical disputes; the nature of wartime Jewish relations and Ukrainian-Jewish relations (as shaped through the lens of more recent history and the present); the construction and meaning of postwar memorials; debates over numbers; debates over camp or ghetto or how to define a Holocaust site; debates over relative suffering; the impact of dominant historiographies of the Holocaust (with Poland as a model) on local sites of memory; increasing access to expert discourses and compensation schemes and their influence on local Holocaust discourse.<sup>3</sup>

The relationship of history to memory has been explored from different angles in academic research (e.g., Zemon Davis and Starn 1989; Langer 1991; Tonkin 1992; Boyarin 1992; Antze and Lambek 1996; Yerushalmi (1996[1982])). As my own research reveals, living memory, unlike the contents set down in an archival document, does not remain unchanged. It expands, shrinks, incorporates new understandings within its expressions, reexamines basic assumptions, institutionalizes (sometimes reifies) narrative and ritual patterns. Individual and social memory are fragile and vulnerable to outside influences and to internal mechanisms of forgetting, both deliberate and unconscious. Memory and the narratives that emerge from its preserves do not necessarily follow a historical chronology, or linear development. At times, fragments, images, or snapshots, displaced from accuracies of time or place, govern a narrative retelling. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek refer to the ambiguities, uncertainties, and gaps within memory that disrupt the continuity of identity and its relationship to the past (1996: xvi). Laurence Langer notes of Holocaust testimonies: "We wrestle with the beginnings of a permanently

unfinished tale, full of incomplete intervals, faced by the spectacle of a faltering witness often reduced to a distressed silence by the overwhelming solicitations of deep memory" (1991: 21).

The nature of individual and social memory raises a number of philosophical questions about the uses of contemporary survivor and witness testimonies for Holocaust research. Historians, concerned with issues of historical accuracy, question the reliability of Holocaust testimonies, the products of living memory in all its complexity. They point, for example, to the greater reliability of testimonies taken closer to the time of the events in question, *i.e.*, testimonies given in 1944-5 at the close of the war (*e.g.*, Robert Jan Van Pelt, discussing evidence for Auschwitz during a lecture at the USHMM in the spring of 2001). This approach envisions a linear process of memory loss and raises important questions for the work of anthropologists in a field largely defined by historical concerns. Similarly, Steven Jay Gould, taking a scientific stance, points to the fallibility of eyewitness testimony and the potential falsehood of memory, drawing on examples from his own failed certainties (1994). In such a light, Nathalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn ask: "If memory is an index of loss, and notoriously malleable besides, how can we remember truly?" (1989: 4).

Despite these apprehensions, I argue that survivor and witness testimonies hold clues to understanding cultural memory and identity – in this case, Jewish memory and identity – and their relationship to historical processes over time. The relationship of memory and identity to history is neither fixed nor unilinear; Jonathan Boyarin refers to this complex, multidimensional relationship in terms of "the need for a 'double gesture' toward our past" (1992). Zemon Davis and Starn emphasize the "interdependence" of memory and history (1989: 5). Their constructions imply an ongoing relationship that is at once temporal but not bounded by time.

The growth in open historical inquiry during the *perestroika* years of the late Soviet period spurred personal and collective explorations of the Holocaust experience (and of other historical moments that had been silenced or repressed for decades (see Wanner 1998)) and stimulated survivors to tap their memory reserves and actively redefine their relationship to the past, a process which continues today. Certainly, the patterns and priorities of contemporary Holocaust testimonies differ from those of earlier

testimonies given closer to the time of the events, but they are no less relevant to our understanding of the Holocaust experience and, in particular, to our understanding of the ways that experience is perceived and recounted by survivors and witnesses over time.

In reality, testimonies from the immediate postwar period are defined by their own ideological concerns and by a shortened perspective on the past. They lack the longer perspective of more recent testimonies on certain issues, including shifting Soviet responses to the Holocaust (including policies of retribution, repression, appropriation, and memorialization), the complexity of Jewish relations during and after the war, and the difficulties of social and economic reintegration in the post-war period. Antze and Lambek recognize: "The meaning of any past event may change as the larger, continuing story lengthens and grows in complexity" (1996: xix). Zemon Davis and Starn also assert: "The process of adjusting the fit is an ongoing one, subject to continual debate and exchanges in which memory and history may play shifting, alternately more or less contentious roles in setting the record straight" (1989: 5).

Still, the question of historical accuracy and reliability continues to pervade research in a field dominated more by concerns for unveiling historical truths than for exploring the complex ways in which people remember and relate to their pasts. Even the notions of "adjusting the fit" and "setting the record straight" prioritize "an obligation to remember truly" (*ibid.*). The relationship of memory and identity to history thus raises not only philosophical but also methodological questions. Most fundamentally, how can anthropologists working on subjects with a distinct historical dimension explore the complexity of memory without distorting history and, at the same time, without imposing values defined by historical concerns onto competing memories and narratives? Such are the questions, of both a philosophical and methodological nature, which I address as part of a consistent effort in my own research to mark, transgress, and transform the boundaries of history and memory, and even more so, the bounded processes of historiographic and ethnographic production.

This is particularly important in the study of Jewish history and culture, where cultural and historical boundaries and processes have continuously informed one another in thought and in practice,

... in textual, oral, and ritual traditions. So too, for the surviving Jews of Pechora, the history of the Pechora camp, and of the Holocaust in the Vinnitsa Oblast<sup>1</sup> and in Ukraine more generally, is deeply and irretrievably enmeshed with Pechora survivors' own personal, cultural, and social lives – as Jews, as residents of particular towns, districts, and regions, as Ukrainians (or potentially as Moldovans or Romanians), as former Soviets, and as bona fide survivors of the Holocaust. A greater understanding of this ethnographic intersection of Ukrainian Jewish memory, identity, and history is an essential contribution to Holocaust studies, Jewish studies, and Ukrainian and post-Soviet studies more broadly.

### **Empirical background**

In the case of the Holocaust in Ukraine, decades of official silence and suspicion of those who remained on occupied territory have postponed the inscription of a social history of the Holocaust and have left contemporary collective accounts divorced from any historical documentation of events. Although the policy of silence and shame never fully squelched counter-narratives challenging official Soviet historiography of the war,<sup>2</sup> a collective memory of the Holocaust has taken shape only since the later years of *perestroika*, responding to the changing social conditions of memory politics – including the possibility of late-Soviet recognition of the camps and ghettos scattered across Ukrainian territory, and more recently, the possibility of German compensation in the form of Claims Conference pension funds.<sup>3</sup>

This changing context of power and agency surrounding the practice of remembering has had certain consequences for the nature of contemporary Jewish relations, politics, and identity in Ukraine. While increased recognition of the Holocaust experience has afforded a certain level of collective agency in reconstructing and memorializing the past, it has also created new constraints on memory practices. For the past few years, the articulation of Holocaust testimonies in terms of the demands of the Claims Conference has preoccupied local survivor communities in Ukraine. What impact has this had on Holocaust memory? Antze and Lambek suggest that, “reinscribing personal stories into these public discourses often obscures their richness and moral complexity” (2001: XXIV). They assert further that

victims may be disempowered rather than empowered by outside recognition of their suffering precisely because expert discourses “have their own agendas and are themselves instruments of power” (*ibid.*).

Molding Holocaust narratives to “perceived” outside demands, most often tied to compensation schemes, has had a certain impact on Pechora memories. The need for “authenticity”, imposed by these outside structures of power, has allowed certain local memory claims predominance over others, thereby serving to homogenize Pechora narratives, to weight historical disputes about camp events, to redefine an essential debate over whether Pechora was a camp or ghetto, and to stimulate discourses of relative and greater suffering which draw on the language of outside models of the Holocaust to legitimate local survivor claims.

While the current framework of Holocaust remembering has been imposed in part from outside, local actors have also played key roles in the politics of Holocaust memory in Ukraine and, specifically, Pechora, manipulating the need for historical authenticity to advance certain memory claims over others. One could perhaps argue that these actors – often the most educated and articulate segments of these small Jewish communities – “remember truly” (see above reference to Zemon Davis and Starn 1989), or at least “more truly” than other survivors, and thus carry the burden as community storytellers and bearers of the collective memory to establish a dominant narrative of the Pechora experience. Their memories have served as standards for comparison (often against no historical record) and have served to streamline the individual testimonies used to attain compensatory German funds.<sup>7</sup> The domination of certain individuals over the collective memorialization process, however, has also served as a point of conflict and disputed agency over the ways in which the past is remembered and memorialized, feeding into daily discourses on contemporary Jewish relations, politics, and identity at the community level.

### **Collectivizing Pechora**

In survivors’ accounts of Pechora, certain events and images are recurring. This is particularly the case in Tulchin, where survivors have lived side by side since the war and have retold and reworked their stories over decades.<sup>8</sup> Survivors appear at times unable to decipher their own experience from the

collective experience of the camp. This tendency has been further reinforced by the perceived need to streamline testimonies for the purposes of German compensation and by the influence in the past decade of certain local leaders, who have cast themselves as authentic bearers of the collective memory of Pechora. Recurring descriptions in survivor testimonies reflect the need of the survivor to show that (s)he was really there, that (s)he experienced the same horrific events and suffered from the same processes of disease, devastation, and starvation described by others. In one extreme case, a survivor perpetually interrupted her own testimony to ask, rather anxiously: "Have other survivors told you the same thing?"

Survivor testimonies describe the deportations, the initial settlement of inmates in the camp, and camp life more generally in remarkably similar terms, often using the same words and turns of phrase at key moments of the narration. In their descriptions of the deportation of Tulchin Jews to Pechora, for example, many survivors refer to the muddy and slippery unpaved road along which they were marched. They recall that those who walked too slowly were beaten or shot by Ukrainian *polizei* and Romanian gendarmes (some also suggest that Germans were present). They remember the open stable in Torkov where they spent the night<sup>10</sup> as well as other shared details (see below). Recurring events and images, and the shared words and phrases drawn on to describe them, thus perforate survivor narrations. Here it makes sense to single out only a few such recurring events and images for discussion.

In one such recurring event, a Bessarabian Jew sought to trade his belongings for a bucket of cherries (a forbidden yet unofficially tolerated bazaar between the Jewish prisoners and Ukrainian inhabitants of Pechora and other surrounding villages existed at one corner of the stone wall surrounding the camp). As he climbed onto the wall to make the trade, he was shot by a Ukrainian *polizei*. The bucket of cherries spilled to the ground inside the camp, and blood spilled down onto them. Survivors, who were small children then, confess that they considered reaching for the cherries but were repulsed by the blood. The Bessarabian Jew lay prostrated on the wall for days. Significantly, local Ukrainian inhabitants of Pechora, who lived through the war and were witness to the Jewish camp, also



"remember" the man shot while trading cherries.<sup>11</sup> This, uniquely, was an event witnessed from both sides of the stone wall of the camp, or, in any case, it became an infamous event that all believed they had personally witnessed.<sup>12</sup>

In another recurring scene, a prisoner was encountered in the basement of the main building,<sup>13</sup> gnawing on the breasts of a dead woman. Groups of children ran down to the basement to glimpse this horrific image. In both primary and secondary sources on Transnistria, references to the Pechora camp make note of desperate acts of cannibalism. Whether such references refer to this particular event or to others is unclear; more than one act of cannibalism most likely occurred at Pechora.<sup>14</sup> There is also the narrative of the vindictive groundskeeper, who, for hobby, enjoyed kicking over pots of scraps boiling on makeshift brick stoves in the square behind the main building.

So too, many testimonies recall the attractive Romanian Jew who turned crazy after losing his whole family to hunger and typhus; he ran around the camp naked, singing in Yiddish about his children and begging for bread. In addition to memories of such shared events, recurring images of hunger, cold, typhus, dysentery, lice and fleas, nakedness and barefootedness weave through all the narratives. That no food or water was provided at Pechora – unlike the single-meal-a-day at Auschwitz and other "model" concentration camps, that people fell like flies from starvation and illness at this "experimental" camp under the Romanians, no one omits from their personalized narrative of Pechora.

Perhaps most relevant in the tendency to synthesize the camp experience is the need among many survivors to assert their presence in the camp at the moment of liberation. Few survivors of Pechora in fact remained in the camp until the end.<sup>15</sup> In the final months of the occupation of Ukraine, when information about Romanian ghettos became available, Jews fled to Bershad, Tomashpol, Krasnoe, Djurin, and other ghettos. Moreover, in the final days of the German occupation of the region,<sup>16</sup> when villagers sensed the advance of the Red Army, they were more willing to hide Jews from the camp, and many prisoners sought shelter in their homes.

Those who remained in Pechora until the camp was liberated describe the camp being surrounded by Germans and remember hiding in the cellars and the basement, some under wooden planks, unaware

of day or night or how much time had passed.<sup>17</sup> When the front-line partisan unit entered the camp looking for survivors, Jews were afraid to emerge from their hiding places. Only the presence of a Yiddish-speaking Jewish captain, Boris Neyman, amongst the liberators reassured them.<sup>18</sup>

Other survivors describe liberation in more vague terms, with a focus on the Red Army troops that marched through the region, raising numerous questions about the presumed need to assume in full the collective narrative of the camp, including the narrative of liberation. (Of course, if people did not tell me themselves that they were absent from Pechora in the final months of occupation, I learned this from other survivors, who, in asserting their own presence at liberation, spoke of specific individuals who fled to the ghettos or were taken to the Romanian orphanage in Balti. One must also question the need of these survivors to exclude others from the collective narrative of camp liberation.

Despite the synthesization of these narratives among survivors, slight variations also point to the personalization of shared camp memories. Was the Bessarabian Jew who climbed the wall a man or a boy? Which Ukrainian *polizei* shot him? Was the prisoner gnawing on the woman's breasts a man or a woman? Some recount that the Romanian Jew who ran around the camp naked and sang in Yiddish was finally shot by a *polizei*. In other accounts, the man who kicked over pots of boiling scraps and potatoes was not the groundskeeper but Efim Vishnevskii. This infamous Jewish doctor from Tulchin was part of the Jewish administration of the camp. According to survivor testimonies, he held certain privileges including separate living quarters, and he behaved brutally towards other prisoners.

### **Disputed events**

Despite the apparent collectivization of memories of Pechora, certain significant variations occur in survivor testimonies. These reflect disputes over specific historical details, events, and concepts. For example, did barbed wire adorn the stone wall surrounding the camp? The testimonies of most survivors assert the presence of barbed wire, contributing to the difficulty of climbing the wall at night to escape to the surrounding villages in search of food. The oldest remaining survivor in Tulchin, however, insists that Pechora was not enclosed by barbed wire, only by the tall stone wall. Some others also leave barbed



wire out of their descriptions. Has the image of barbed wire been unconsciously appropriated from the Polish model of camps and ghettos? Moreover, is an assertion of barbed wire significant in the local debate about whether Pechora was a camp or a ghetto (see below)?<sup>19</sup>

The stone wall, much of which remains standing today, is also a recurring image in survivor testimonies. Those who were children in the camp emphasize the height of the wall and express disbelief that they were able to tackle the wall on a frequent basis to escape into the villages. Nonetheless, survivor narratives also describe differing strategies for tackling the wall, strategies which appear to have been tempered in part by age and gender. Whereas adults and boys often scaled the wall, girls frequently dug ditches under the wall and crawled through these small spaces (they had wasted away from hunger). In other descriptions, small groups of children escaping together piled spare stones against the wall or physically helped one another over. Finally, others exited the camp where the wall terminated in the Bug river, wading into high water in the summer and crossing over ice in the winter (this was most treacherous, as the Bug river served as the border between German and Romanian territory: German soldiers standing guard across the river frequently shot at Pechora prisoners). Interestingly, survivors today often assume common escape strategies, revealing an aspect of camp experience that has not been discussed or differentiated. All agree, however, that escaping the wall – whether under, over, or around – was a risky, life-threatening endeavor, as Ukrainian *polizei* often caught them and beat them on the other side.<sup>20</sup>

The most significant historical dispute about Pechora concerns the dates of a specific event in the camp, in particular, the period of an anticipated mass execution. Early survivor and witness testimonies from the spring of 1944 (shortly after the liberation of Pechora), reinforced by many contemporary testimonies, describe events leading up to a mass execution in the fall of 1942.<sup>21</sup> In early September, German trucks crossed over the Bug river and entered the Pechora camp in search of youthful labor. Young men and women from Pechora were transported across the Bug to the German work camps, where they were used as slave labor to build the road from Uman to Gaisin, before being shot in mass graves.<sup>22</sup>

Germans returned to Pechora a few days later to liquidate those Jews, mostly the elderly and children, who remained.<sup>22</sup>

In the interim, inhabitants from Pechora and surrounding villages were commanded to dig three mass graves in the woods; some of them warned Jewish prisoners of impending events. German trucks drove through the gates of the camp, loaded the first trucks with prisoners and waited for the signal to begin the *aktion*.

However, according to survivor testimonies, the Romanian commander of the camp Gr. (Gregorii?) Stratulat locked the gates of the camp and forbade the loaded trucks from leaving the grounds. Through the Romanian Jewish translator Paulina Zeltser (a young woman remembered in many recent survivor and witness testimonies), Stratulat declared that Jews would not be shot on Romanian territory (or that Jewish blood would not be spilled on Romanian territory).<sup>23</sup> Some survivor testimonies credit Paulina with a more direct influence on the outcome, weaving a tale of romance between Paulina and the commander into the narrative.<sup>24</sup>

The declaration of Stratulat did not stop the Germans from reappearing at various moments throughout 1942 and 1943 in search of forced labor; those unfortunate Jews transported to German labor camps would subsequently be shot in *aktionen* across the Bug.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, mass shootings did not occur at Pechora.<sup>27</sup> The mass graves in the woods of Pechora were later partially filled with the bodies of those who perished from starvation and illness; one mass grave, quite symbolically, remains visibly empty to this day.

Despite the forcefulness of these early testimonies from 1944 (of which most survivors are unaware),<sup>28</sup> and their corroboration by more recent survivors testimonies, an alternative narrative has emerged which dates the anticipated mass *aktion* to 1944, in the period preceding liberation. Survivors who support this interpretation suggest that the Germans, who surrounded the camp in the last days, simply did not have time to carry out the liquidation of the camp. They also suggest that the mass graves dug in the woods date to this later period. Stratulat is all the more revered for prohibiting the mass shooting in the face of impending retreat.

Most interesting, witness/bystander testimonies among elderly inhabitants of Pechora also point to the later date of the expected mass shooting. One man in his eighties recalls digging the mass graves in the woods; a woman suggests that her sister was among the diggers. They place the date somewhere between 1943 and 1944. The most interesting debates (in my presence) about the dating of this event occurred with members of the post-war generation of Pechora – the head of the village council, the principal of the main school in Pechora, a historian teaching in the school. They based their observations on contemporary survivor testimonies and on stories that circulated in Pechora in the post-war period. The head of the village council expressed disbelief that the Germans would not have tried again to liquidate the camp if they had first attempted as early as September 1942. He accepted the later date largely for this reason, and the others corroborated his theory.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, survivors who remember the events of fall 1942 were infuriated by this abrogation of memory among other survivors. I observed as Fira Bartik “corrected” another survivor, who described the anticipated mass shooting as occurring in 1944, prior to liberation.<sup>30</sup>

This historical discrepancy can be explained by several factors. As many young children survived by begging in the surrounding villages, they might spend two weeks at a time away, missing events inside the camp. One woman, for example, told me that she was warned by a villager on her way back to the camp in the fall of 1942, that the Germans were rounding up young people for labor. She stayed away for several more days, returning after camp life had calmed from the German disturbance. Orphans, in particular, who did not have relatives directly affected by the roundups, may not have been informed upon their return either about the roundups or the averted mass shooting.<sup>31</sup>

With regards to 1944, those (like Fira Bartik and her sisters) who fled to ghettos in the last months of occupation did not experience the anxiety of those who remained behind in Pechora.<sup>32</sup> Pechora villagers corroborated that Germans reoccupied the village of Pechora and the camp in the last days of occupation, taking over from the Romanians. This would explain Jewish accounts that Germans surrounded the camp and would support Jewish fears of a mass liquidation of the remaining inmates under German leadership. As the 1944 testimony of Liucia Solomonovna Sukharevich and Mania

Moiseevna Ribalova suggests, German terror was averted only by the March 17 arrival of the Red Army.<sup>5</sup>

### **Ghetto or camp?**

The conceptual dispute about whether Pechora was a camp or ghetto has both old and new roots and is full of emotions and resentments. It stems from the beginning of the German/Romanian occupation, when most Jews in the Tulchin, Bratslav, Shpikov, and Trostyanets regions were brutally uprooted from their homes and deported to Pechora. A small ghetto consisting of specialists was preserved in Tulchin and Bratslav. Larger ghettos were also preserved elsewhere in the Vinnitsa Oblast.<sup>14</sup> These Jews and their families remained in their homes (or the homes in which they were resettled with the formation of the ghetto), worked in their trades, and abided by the social and economic restrictions imposed upon the ghetto. Restraints on their movement and behavior were regulated by Ukrainian *polizai*.

Still, in the eyes of Jews deported to Pechora, the life of the ghettos was not comparable to the life of the camp. Uprooted without warning from the town centers (where ghettos had contained the Jews of the different regions destined for Pechora in the first months of occupation), Jews were marched by foot to Pechora beginning on December 7, 1941, carrying minimal belongings. (Jews arrived in Pechora from the different regions in stages: Tulchin Jews arrived first, followed by Bratslav Jews, then Trostyanets Jews, and later Shpikov and Mogilev Podolskii and Romanian Jews). Those that survived the trip were crammed into every shelter available on the grounds of the former sanitarium.

The first waves from Tulchin poured into the main building; contemporary survivor testimonies indicate that upwards of 60 people piled into each room, filling every space of the hard concrete floor. Those who arrived later moved into the basement, bathrooms, and corridors of the main building, into barracks, often with no doors or windows, and into the underground storage cellars. None of these shelters were heated. The prisoners of Pechora were denied food and water; they were not intended for forced labor. They were left to perish from starvation, cold, and disease. Many of the testimonies of

Tulchin Jews suggest that vaccinations given to the Jews of Tulchin in the days before their deportation (they were rounded up in the first school, taken to the bathhouse, stripped naked, sprayed with disinfectant, and given shots) were intended to precipitate rather than prevent typhus and other diseases. In Romanian documents and in early and recent survivor and witness testimonies, the camp is referred to as a death camp (*lager' smerti*) and as the loop of death (*mertvaya petlya*).<sup>35</sup>

Despite such devastating descriptions of camp life, Pechora was not recognized by Soviet authorities as a concentration camp. On the contrary, Jews who had remained in camps and ghettos on occupied Ukrainian territory were considered suspect in the post-war period. After initial attempts to be honest about their wartime whereabouts ended in rejections from jobs, universities, the Komsomol, and the Communist Party, Jews grew silent about their wartime suffering. I should emphasize that private acts of remembrance continued in the face of public silences, including annual visits among survivors to the former camp and mass grave sites.

Only in the late 1980s, did survivors began to raise publicly the issues of recognition and remembrance. Burgeoning Jewish leaders in Tulchin (and elsewhere), who were themselves survivors, took up the cause of Pechora (and other Holocaust sites).<sup>36</sup> However, the initial response from the regional government of the Vinnitsa Oblast' indicated no archival record of any Pechora camp. In 1990, after two years of continued pressure from survivors, the regional government reconsidered, now citing archival proof of the existence of the Pechora camp (this archival material must have been under the noses of the regional authorities the whole time). A ceremony granting official documents of recognition to child survivors (*maloletnie uzniki*) of the Pechora concentration camp followed (child survivors were apparently the only category officially recognized or eligible for benefits), as did a ceremony inscribing a plaque at the entrance to the former camp, in memory of the thousands of peaceful citizens that perished there (more recently this plaque has been altered to specify the Jewishness of the victims).

Lack of recognition of the camp-like conditions of Pechora extended to intra-Jewish relations in (according to Pechora survivors' testimonies) unwilling to distinguish the harshness of Pechora from their

own experiences of wartime suffering. Debates over relative suffering have fueled tensions between ghetto and camp Jews from the war period to the present. These tensions, at their heart, concern Jewish expectations of mutual aid and compassion both during and after the war. In their testimonies, Pechora survivors (who fled to the villages and ghettos in search of food and shelter) often claim to have been better received and cared for by Ukrainian villagers than by their own fellow Jews in the ghettos.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, when Jews returned from Pechora to Tulchin after liberation, they claim they were treated with indifference not only by non-Jewish inhabitants who had dismantled their property and occupied their homes, but by Jews who had survived the Tulchin ghetto and failed to empathize with the losses of their fellow Jews. The lack of support from more fortunate neighbors bred deep resentments that continue to this day.<sup>38</sup>

The process of official Soviet recognition of Pechora (and other Holocaust sites) paved the way for current entitlements to Claims Conference pension funds. However, German pensions have also raised the conceptual issue of camp or ghetto once again. Despite the attainment of official Soviet recognition of Pechora as a *kontslager* (Ru) or *kontstabil* (Ukr) (concentration camp), Claims Conference pension funds in Ukraine have formulated Pechora as a ghetto.<sup>39</sup> Survivors deeply resent the equalization of Pechora with other Romanian ghettos and do not hesitate to point out the drastic differences in comfort levels and survival rates between Pechora and the ghettos.

Here I summarize the sentiment emanating from many survivor testimonies: "They slept in their own beds, their own homes; they worked, traded, baked bread. We starved, froze, had lice, fleas, were enclosed by barbed wire<sup>40</sup> and stone walls. We came back orphaned. Their families survived intact."<sup>41</sup> Some survivors suggest that Germany was unwilling to recognize Pechora as a camp because it did not fit into the Polish model of a concentration camp, equipped (as survivors imagine it) with gas chambers and crematorium.<sup>42</sup>

Other survivors point to the efforts of local Jewish leaders in the Vinnitsa Oblast', including the current head of the Tulchin Jewish community, Rita Shveybish (herself a camp survivor), to equate Pechora with Tulchin and other ghettos to ensure an equal pension among all survivors. Shveybish

suggests that if Pechora were given the status of camp, survivors would receive less money, as they would be treated as *arbeiter* (German forced laborers, mostly Ukrainians) who were sent to Germany during the war. This is a strange and untrue argument, but it points to the conceptual and historiographical confusion over the existence of camps on Ukrainian territory.<sup>43</sup>

The former head of the Tulchin Jewish community, Misha Bartik, who fought hard for Soviet recognition of Pechora as a *konstlager*,<sup>44</sup> explains the debate over defining Pechora as the continuation of earlier politics of relative suffering. According to his account, the current leaders of the Vinnitsa Jewish community (who were invested with the responsibility of helping survivors across the Vinnitsa Oblast' to complete the Claims Conference applications and, thus, had an influence on the classification of local Holocaust sites) are largely survivors of the Romanian ghettos. Resentful of moral distinctions among survivors and striving for a unifying narrative of the war, they ensured that Pechora was formulated on equal footing with other ghettos. Jewish survivors of the camps and ghettos who remain in Ukraine all receive the same monthly pension of 250 DM.<sup>45</sup> At the head of this debate is not an issue of money but purely the principle of how Pechora becomes defined within the Claims Conference pension scheme, and subsequently within the collective memory and social history of Ukrainian Jewry.

### **Relative suffering**

As indicated above, the concept of relative suffering, when applied by survivors of Pechora, becomes a powerful tool in the contemporary politics of Holocaust memory. After so many years of collective silence and personal denial, there appears now to be a need to compete for recognition of past suffering. Is there not enough compassion to go around?

Three women from Tulchin recounted how they weathered both Pechora and a series of German work camps, including Raigorod, Mikhailovka, Krasnopolka, Tirasovka, and Talalaievka, before escaping back across the Bug to the Romanian ghettos. Their stories are remarkable. As they reconstructed their

... emphasized the extreme conditions of the German work camps and the



fear of being shot if they grew too weak to work. They did not hesitate to emphasize that they suffered more than their compatriots in Pechora (although they were present in Pechora only for a part of 1942).

Older than many of the other survivors alive today, Roza Veinblat, Fanya Oleinikov, and Lyuba Karlik become animated in their testimonies: all three believed that they have an edge over other survivors in Tulchin; "I bet you haven't heard any other story like mine," each confides to me. Karlik emphasizes her contacts with partisans, which helped free her from the final work camp. Oleinikov trumpets her subsequent service as a nurse in a military hospital on the front lines: she went as far as Hungary and was demobilized in 1946. "Who else," she asks, "was in the Romanian camps, the German camps, and at the Front?" Veinblat presses a child survivor of Pechora, Raya Chernova, as Chernova checks her blood pressure (as a medical volunteer in the community welfare system that has arisen in recent years): "You have to admit that the German work camps were harsher than Pechora; almost no one returned."

Such individual memories challenge more complacent attempts to establish shared narratives of Pechora and Jewish survival and suggest that a small number suffered more and deserve greater recognition.<sup>46</sup> A still harsher strategy of remembering, however, entails ultimate denial of others' wartime experiences. Raya Yablonskii was deported to Pechora from Tulchin; however, she has lived much of her post-war life (since 1948) in Gaisin. Perhaps it is because of years of isolation from the collective memories of Pechora, which have been shared within communities of survivors, that Yablonskii is so defiant about her Pechora experience and yet also so insecure in her testimony. She keeps asking me, as she recounts an episode in the camp: "Is this how Jews in Tulchin describe it?" "Is this how others remember it?" "Have you heard this from others?" (see also above).

She appears fearful of diverging from the dominant memories of the camp legitimated by others, and yet she also feels a need to validate her memories by verbally questioning the right to Holocaust memory claimed by others. Yablonskii indeed questions the authenticity of the testimonies given by other survivors and challenges whether they were in camps or ghettos.<sup>47</sup> For the purposes of German compensation, such debates about relative suffering (as noted above in the debate about Pechora as camp



or ghetto) are meaningless. And yet, as my field experiences indicate, these debates are heated and passionate; they are indeed meaningful and potentially hurtful for those who engage in them.

### **The place of memory, the memory of place**

The debate about the way Pechora should be remembered and recognized is fundamentally tied to the image of place and to the embodiment of place within memory. Pierre Nora (1989) speaks about "*les lieux de memoire*" and Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn (1989), James Young (1989, 1993), Catherine Wanner (1998), and others have developed this notion in their work. Place has both the connotation of a physical site to be recalled and memorialized and of a conceptual site constructed and given meaning through memory practices.

Camp narratives of Pechora incorporate both these constructions of place and thereby create a memory image of Pechora that stands disjointed from the physical locality and yet overwhelms and engulfs it, marking Pechora as a site haunted by the past at every turn. This is not, of course, the image of the walled grounds held by most inhabitants of the village, who were never forcefully contained within them. For most inhabitants, who refer to the former camp by its current function as a sanatorium, these walls no longer represent enclosed terror; instead they encase a beautiful park ending in a spectacular view of the Bug River. This erasure of place is further reflected in the school/village museum standing across the street from the former camp, which highlights local partisans and soldiers who served at the Front, but omits any mention of the camp.<sup>48</sup>

Camp survivors, on the other hand, continue to envision the camp, even as they walk on the present grounds of the sanatorium. They see the high walls, even as they have crumbled in several places. They see Ukrainian *polizei* at their guarding places along the outside of the wall. They remark that the wall of the camp descended into the raging Bug River, even as today the river has receded and appears calm, and a tow path runs between the river and the wall. Survivors see the bodies of Jews scattered across the grounds where today people stroll along the tree-lined footpaths, and they see their belongings

lumped in the large fountain in the square before the main building. They imagine people crammed in the rooms and corridors of the building, in the underground cellars, and in barracks that no longer exist.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time that survivors pull these harsh images of hunger, death, and deprivation from “deep memories” (here I refer to Laurence Langer (1991), drawing on Charlotte Delbo (1985)), they also draw on outside models of the camp, contrasting the utter thirst and starvation of Pechora to the one-meal-a-day regimes in Polish concentration camps, which they have learned about in official Holocaust historiographies. So too, the image of the barbed wire, contested within survivor narratives of Pechora (some asserting and others denying its presence), may have been consciously or unconsciously appropriated from the Polish model of camps and ghettos and inserted into the local debate. Survivors were intimately acquainted with the walls of the camp and yet this historical detail remains unresolved (see also above).

In addition, many former prisoners assert that through a policy of disease and starvation, the Romanians intended Pechora as an “experimental” camp. Is this image too, drawn from the language of Auschwitz? As they imagine the camp with its high guarded walls, survivors emphasize the impossibility of escaping, even as they acknowledge within other memories that escape was the sole means of survival. The greater fluidity of camp/village borders in the Ukrainian context leaves survivors struggling for a language with which to describe the horror of the Pechora camp experience, even as they acknowledge differences from the better known historiography of the Holocaust in Poland.<sup>50</sup>

In a similar vein, Ancel, himself a child survivor from Romania as well as a historian, cannot accept the frequent assertions of Ukrainian Jewish survivors that they continued to flee from and return to Pechora. In his words, no one who escaped Pechora would ever return, except to take out their family (private correspondence). Indeed, Romanian Jewish survivors may have fled in greater numbers to the Romanian ghettos, received a better reception from their relatives and acquaintances in the ghettos (as compared to Ukrainian Jews, see above), and never returned to Pechora. Romanian Jews, however, also had fewer possibilities than Ukrainian Jews of interacting culturally or linguistically with the Ukrainian villagers in and around Pechora, and thus of benefiting from their aid and shelter. As they reach for a

defining language, both pulling from their own reserves of deep memory and from outside models.

Pechora survivors also challenge imposed frameworks of meaning.

Thus, survivor memories of Pechora, constructed personally and collectively over decades, clash with the image of place embodied in the concept of the ghetto. Here again I note the differing definitions of ghetto but suggest that survivors hold a concept of ghetto that is geographically confined to the Romanian zone of occupation. Pechora survivors have their own memories of the ghetto (initially in Tulchin and other regional centers in the first months of occupation, and later through brief, often hostile encounters or longer refuges before liberation), and they do not hesitate to emphasize the conceptual differences.

In the long struggle for power and authority to define Pechora, survivor memories have clashed with the state and its official silencing of the past. They have simultaneously fought against more subtle patterns of erasure and forgetting among local inhabitants of Pechora (concerning, in particular, the preservation and marking of mass grave sites but also the marking of the camp itself). More recently, Pechora narratives have found themselves constrained within the restrictive framework of the Claims Conference, articulating its own brand of Holocaust discourse (Antze and Lambek 1996: xxiv). This discourse has been partially influenced by local actors charged with preserving the collective memory. So too it has been in part embraced by ghetto survivors of the Vinnitsa Oblast' who remember a different experience of the war and seek to minimize distinctions in suffering.

Pechora survivors, who feel their experiences remain invalidated and unrecognized within the larger Holocaust narratives, continue to articulate counter-memories of the Ukrainian camp experience. While such living memories appear at times counter-productive and socially divisive, even cruel (and sometimes appear to be fueled by the appropriation of outside models of camp vs. ghetto, German vs. Romanian occupation), they nonetheless serve an important purpose. Counter-memories guard against attempts, instigated from without and from within, to codify the Holocaust into neat, simple categories and thus to "obscure the richness and moral complexity of Holocaust experiences and the memories of those who lived through them."

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Vinnitsa Regional Government Archive (DAVO) P-6022-1-15, pp. 246-9.

USHMMA, Ukraine Documentation Project, RG-50.226\*004

USHMMA, Ukraine Documentation Project, RG-50.226\*005

USHMMA, Ukraine Documentation Project, RG-50.226\*029

### **Websites**

<http://www.claimscon.org>.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pechora is located along the Southern Bug river in the Tulchin region (formerly Shpikov region) of the Vinnitsa Oblast' (province). "Peciora" is the Romanian spelling for the village and camp.

<sup>2</sup> Shpikov Jews were initially interned in Rogozna, a small village part way between Shpikov and Pechora. They were transferred to Pechora in the summer/fall of 1942, as were Mogilev Podolskii and Romanian Jews.

<sup>3</sup> While significant overlaps do occur in discussions of the theoretical and historical concerns raised here, only some of these concerns will be addressed in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> For a development of the concept of counter-memory, see Foucault (1977); Zemon Davis and Starn (1989); Wanner (1998). For discussions of the periodic intellectual and popular currents of dissent in Soviet society regarding the Holocaust and its commemoration, see Gitelman (1988); Pinkus (1988); Korev (1993). Counter-narratives, however, were most often limited to the privacy of people's homes and to family and friends, and, occasionally, to small gatherings at mass graves (see below).

<sup>5</sup> The Claims Conference is an international body of Jewish organizations, brought together (initially in the early 1950s) to negotiate with the German government for compensation on behalf of victims of the Holocaust. In addition to continued negotiations with Germany to liberalize eligibility requirements, the Claims Conference processes survivor claims and administers German compensation and pension funds to those deemed eligible. The more recent program for survivors living in Ukraine falls under the Central and Eastern European Fund (CEEFF) (see <http://www.claimscon.org>).

<sup>6</sup> A prime example of this dilemma concerns the exclusion of one Khaya Katsman from the Claims Conference pension scheme for Pechora survivors, due to some contradictory evidence within her testimony. Katsman's power to reclaim her past is clearly circumscribed by the framework of Holocaust discourse established by the Claims Conference.

<sup>7</sup> While visiting the Vinnitsa Regional Government Archive, I was witness to a scene in which the written testimony of one Pechora survivor was checked (by the archivist) against the living knowledge and memory of two such recognized "bearers of the collective memory". Those sections of the testimony which did not correspond to their living memory were apparently discarded from the "official historical narrative," which the archivist is attempting to record in her own forthcoming publication on the Holocaust in the Vinnitsa Oblast' (see below). While measuring testimonies by such a rigid standard does clearly "obscure the richness and moral complexity" of the Holocaust (see above reference to Antze and Lambek 1996), such a standard has also ensured collective results for German compensation claims. In the case of Khaya Katsman, the very same "bearers of the collective memory" have taken up her cause, writing to the Claims Conference on her behalf and reshaping her camp experience to fit the dominant narrative and secure just compensation for her suffering. These actors were furious that no one in the Tulchin Jewish community had checked the initial testimony of Khaya Katsman for irregularities before her application for compensation was submitted.

<sup>8</sup> During upcoming fieldwork, it will become apparent whether similar or differing recurring events and images emerge in the testimonies of local Pechora survivors in Mogilev Podolskii and Chernovtsy.

<sup>9</sup> This particular survivor moved to Gaisin immediately after the war, where few Pechora survivors lived. Her self-imposed exclusion from the post-war survivor community is the only possible explanation for her extreme anxiety concerning the correlation of her own narrative memory with that of other Pechora survivors (see below).

<sup>10</sup> This rundown stable still stands by the side of the now-paved road as one passes through the village of Torkov.

<sup>11</sup> This revelation emerged during interviews with local inhabitants of Pechora.

<sup>12</sup> Matatias Carp refers to a case in which two Jews buying cherries near the camp fence were shot by two gendarmes. This event occurred on June 18, 1943. See Carp (1947: 296); Ioanid (2000: 192) (reference to same event). According to contemporary survivors, however, the execution of the Bessarabian cherry trader occurred much earlier. One Shpikov survivor suggests that it occurred shortly after his arrival in the camp (fall 1942), prompting Romanian officials to prohibit the unofficial bazaar between inmates and villagers from occurring at the entrance to the camp. The bazaar was then moved to a corner of the camp wall along a side road, where it would be



less visible to the main thoroughfare. If the initial incident had indeed occurred before the main gates of the camp, this might explain why Pechora villagers share a strong recollection of the event.

<sup>13</sup> The main building was a three-story structure housing up to 30 prisoners per room; by several accounts the basement and the corridors served those prisoners closest to death.

<sup>14</sup> See Carp (1947: 368); Ancei (1986, Vol. XII: 573; *ibid.*, Vol. VII: 43-4) (originally from Carp Archives, Yad Vashem Archives, 0-11/92-100); Jagendorf (1991: 111); Ioanid (2000: 218) (translation of text from Carp 1947: 368). The document in the Ancei collection, drawn from the Carp Archives, contains survivor depositions from the first Romanian war crimes trial. Here the description of cannibalism refers to two sisters eating from the corpse of a young woman.

<sup>15</sup> About 350 Jews were found in the Pechora camp at the moment of liberation. See USHMM RG 22.002M, reel 4, 7021-54-1341, pp. 31, 163. Yet many more than this claim to be survivors of the Pechora camp. The Survivor's Registry at USHMM has registered more than 400 Pechora survivors in the U.S. alone. The Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation claims to have more than 400 testimonies from Pechora survivors, taken in the U.S., Israel, Ukraine, and elsewhere. These numbers do not include the majority of survivors who perished in the post-war years, before such organizations had access to their testimonies.

<sup>16</sup> According to local testimonies of survivors and witnesses, Romanians retreated in February 1944 and the Germans reoccupied Pechora and the region in the final days.

<sup>17</sup> According to the 1944 testimony of Liucia Sukharevich and Maria Ribalova: "On 12 March 1944 the transferring [*perekhodishchie*] German army encircled the camp and wanted to carry out terror." See USHMM RG 22.002M, reel 4, 7021-54-1341, p. 164. This image is reinforced by contemporary survivor testimonies.

<sup>18</sup> A written testimony of Boris Neyman in the Vinnitsa Regional Government Archive describes his liberation of the camp, as does his written correspondence in the late 1980s with Mikhail Bartik, a local survivor now residing in Germany (see below). See Vinnitsa Regional Government Archive (DAVO) P-6022-1-15, pp. 246-9.

<sup>19</sup> Carp refers to barbed wire surrounding the camp. See Carp (1947: 368); Ioanid (2000: 217).

<sup>20</sup> Further distinctions may arise in the narratives of escape of Romanian Jewish survivors of Pechora, reflecting a differing relationship to and differing images of the menacing stone wall (see below) (personal correspondence with Jean Ancei).

<sup>21</sup> See USHMM RG 22.002M, reel 4, 7021-54-1341, pp. 163-1, 164, 176. See also USHMM, Ukraine Documentation Project, RG-50 226\*004, *ibid.*, \*005; *ibid.*, \*129.

<sup>22</sup> The German labor camps, makeshift structures set up in villages along the road construction route, included Mikhailovka, Tirasovka, Raigorod, Ivangorod, Krasnopolka, Talalaivka, Chukov, Voronovitsa, and Nemirov. See USHMM RG 22.002M, reel 3, 7021-54-1271, pp. 11-3, 17. In the testimony of Shlemi Noikhovich Beider, it is suggested that 1200 Jews were taken to Chukov, Voronovitsa, and Nemirov in late August 1942 (*ibid.*, 13). See also USHMM RG 22.002M, reel 4, 7021-54-1341, p. 164, 166. See also Carp (1947: 368); Kruglov (1997: 15); Ioanid (2000: 217-8). Early testimonies are reinforced by the memories of a handful of remaining survivors of these transports to the German labor camps (see above and below).

<sup>23</sup> One witness testimony from 1944 suggests that the Germans returned to Pechora to carry out the mass *aktion* on September 7, 1942. See USHMM RG 22.002M, reel 4, 7021-54-1341, p. 176. According to 1944 testimonies and more recent survivor testimonies, Shpikov Jews arrived in Pechora only a few days before this event was to take place. They had been held in a separate camp in the nearby village of Rogozna from 6 December 1941 until August 1942, and were transferred to Pechora shortly after the first German transports were taken across the Bug and just before the Germans returned to carry out their planned *aktion*. See USHMM RG 22.002M, Reel 3, 7021-54-1258, p. 2; *ibid.*, reel 4, 7021-54-1341, pp. 160-1, 163-4, 172. The transports of Jews from Mogilev Podolskii to Pechora also occurred in the fall of 1942. Although Carp suggests that these transports occurred in October 1942 (1947: 285; 1994: 379), the 1944 testimonies of Mogilev Podolskii Jews suggest that they arrived earlier, sometime in late August or early September. Still, it is unclear from these testimonies whether they were present at the time of the planned *aktion*, as they do not make note of it. They do make note, on the other hand, of German transports across the Bug occurring in August and October 1942. See USHMM RG 22.002M, reel 3, 7021-54-1271, pp. 11-3, 17.



<sup>24</sup> USHMMA RG 22.002M, reel 4, 7021-54-1341, pp. 160-1, 164.

<sup>25</sup> One elderly Ukrainian witness, who continues to live at the far edge of the village of Pechora, as she did during the war (this part of the village still has no paved roads), claims that she often provided shelter and food to Paulina and her family. Jews often fled to the outskirts of the village to escape the surveillance of Ukrainian *polizei* and Romanian gendarmes.

<sup>26</sup> At least three more labor transports from Pechora to the German work camps occurred between 1942 and 1943. See USHMMA RG 22.002M, reel 3, 7021-54-1271, pp. 11-3, 17. See Carp (1947: 285, 288, 294); Kruglov (1997: 15); Ioanid (2000: 190-1).

<sup>27</sup> Some recent testimonies do refer to typhus victims being quarantined and then shot in the prepared mass graves.

<sup>28</sup> Access to archival documents was denied in the Soviet period (see below). Even today, people are given only limited access and are rarely allowed to view original documents.

<sup>29</sup> I showed them the testimonies from 1944, which unwaveringly point to the early date, but they were unconvinced.

<sup>30</sup> Self-ascribed bearers of the collective memory, Fira and Misha Bartik, once leaders of the Jewish community in Tulchin, now live in Germany. They were visiting Tulchin in the first week of my stay. This action of "correcting" survivor memory correlates with my observation of the vice-director of the Vinnitsa Regional Government Archive, Faina Vinokurova, checking the accuracy of Pechora survivors' accounts with the Bartiks (see above). Their memory is taken to be the authoritative standard by which other memories are measured.

<sup>31</sup> Still, it does seem odd that inmates would not have discussed recent events among themselves and that these then would not have become part of the collective consciousness of camp survivors. They certainly did mark the consciousness of a part of the survivors.

<sup>32</sup> See USHMMA, Ukraine Documentation Project, RG-50.226\*005; *ibid.*, \*029.

<sup>33</sup> See USHMMA RG 22.002M, reel 4, 7021-54-1341, p. 164. Survivor accounts of the continued Romanian presence in the camp and the declaration of the Romanian commander Stratulat in defense of the Jews would not, however, fit with this later context. The two events appear to have become entangled in contemporary survivor narratives. Moreover, there is the discrepancy, in both early and later testimonies, of whether the Red Army or Soviet partisans actually liberated Pechora.

<sup>34</sup> In other regions of the Vinnitsa Oblast' under Romanian occupation – including Bershad, Shargorod, Kopaigorod, Dzhurin, Murafa – Jewish communities were confined to a small section of town designated as the ghetto but were largely left intact. Many of their numbers were later reinforced by Jewish refugees deported from Romania (Bukovina and Bessarabia), as was the Tulchin ghetto. Some Pechora survivors suggest that these other local communities were left in ghettos rather than deported to camps because of sufficient bribes, or "Jewish taxes," paid to the Romanian officials.

<sup>35</sup> See Carp (1947); Ancel (1986); Agmon *et al.*, (1994); Carp (1994); Kruglov (1997); USHMMA RG 22.002M, reel 3, 7021-54-1258, pp. 269, 271, 300; *ibid.*, reel 3, 7021-54-1271, pp. 11-3, 17; *ibid.*, reel 4, 7021-54-1341, pp. 31-33, 160-7, 171-6.

<sup>36</sup> In 1988, Misha and Fira Bartik began clamoring for recognition of Pechora as a concentration camp through a radio broadcast in Moscow, participation in a conference of child survivors of the camps and ghettos, a letter campaign to Soviet officials, and the drafting of a list of child survivors of Pechora from Tulchin (other communities of survivors drafted similar lists; these lists only included those who were age 14 and below at the start of the war). In response, the Bartiks began to receive encouraging letters from Pechora survivors residing all over the Soviet Union.

<sup>37</sup> Some of the Jews who escaped from Pechora came begging in the Tulchin ghetto. They turned to relatives and former neighbors for help but often found themselves rebuffed, even reported to the Romanian and Ukrainian authorities, by the fearful ghetto inhabitants.

<sup>38</sup> A similar relationship of misunderstanding exists with those who were in evacuation. One woman evacuee asked a camp survivor in my presence why she had not fled or joined the partisans.

<sup>33</sup> Arie Bucheister of the Claims Conference suggests that Pechora is classified by the Germans as a ghetto, not as a death camp, because "Jews were placed in Pechora to be worked, not to be killed . . . although . . . many in Pechora were shot" (personal correspondence). His assertions are not held up by early or recent survivor testimonies or by Romanian documentation on the camp (see above). Ancel, an expert on Romanian Jewry and Transnistria, states, on the contrary, that Pechora was a camp of destruction and that no one survived Pechora who did not escape (this last point is contentious, see below). Ancel contrasts the means of death from Auschwitz, but not the intent (personal correspondence). Moreover, although a certain percentage of Jews from the Pechora camp were transported across the Bug to German labor camps, Pechora itself was not a site of labor.

<sup>34</sup> The existence of barbed wire is disputed within survivor testimonies.

<sup>35</sup> Certainly, the definition of ghetto being used by Pechora survivors needs to be problematized. Strong distinctions exist between Romanian and German ghettos, the former largely regulated sites of hunger, filth, and disease, the latter of slave labor and periodic mass *aktionen* until the ghettos were fully liquidated. See Govkher (1992), Lower (2000). Perhaps, all that Romanian and German ghettos shared in common, differing from the camps, was the locus of confinement to a set of houses along a street or a few streets, rather than confinement to buildings (or in some cases stables or barns) fully displaced from amenities of home, house, or town. Ghettos on Ukrainian territory also differed from Polish ghettos in terms of the degree of confinement, the general lack of barbed wire, the greater interaction with local non-Jewish inhabitants. See Lower (2000).

<sup>36</sup> Clearly, not all Polish concentration camps were furnished with gas chambers and crematorium.

<sup>37</sup> In fact, a distinction has recently arisen in the language of the Claims Conference, distinguishing between *forced* and *slave* laborers, and respectively, between those who were deported to Germany and those who remained in labor camps under occupation in the East. The Claims Conference also distinguishes between Jewish and non-Jewish forced and slave laborers (see <http://www.claimscon.org>). Still, Pechora was not a labor camp such as those across the Bug river in the German zone, nor was it a Polish-style concentration camp. So how does the German government label Pechora?

<sup>38</sup> The Bartiks receive a German pension formulated for Pechora as a camp.

<sup>39</sup> The Bartiks, who now live in Germany, receive a larger monthly pension of 500 DM, correlated on the increased living standard of Western Europe.

<sup>40</sup> This mirrors the response by Pechora survivors to attempts by ghetto survivors to establish a shared narrative of suffering for Transnistria that does not distinguish Pechora from other sites.

<sup>41</sup> In Gaisin, in addition to Yablonskii, I interviewed Arkadii Burshtein, a native of a village in the Gaisin region, who survived a series of German labor camps – including Raigorod, Bratslav, Mikhailovka, and Ivangorod – before fleeing to the Gaisin ghetto to find his father, the one surviving member of his family. As a specialist, his father had been preserved in the ghetto. Together they survived a partial liquidation of the Gaisin ghetto and, with the aid of Ukrainian friends, fled across the Bug to Bershad in the final months of the German/Romanian occupation. Yablonskii questions his testimony and challenges his claim to surviving German camps. In her view, he was in "the ghetto" the whole time. Again, one must distinguish between the Romanian and German ghettos (see above discussion). One must also question the underlying motivation for such charged local debates over camp or ghetto and the right to certain memory claims.

<sup>42</sup> Local village leaders do express a current interest in incorporating a brief history of the camp, including archival documents and survivor testimonies, into the museum exhibit. Still, it is curious why the episode of the Romanian death camp, so central to the village's recent history, has (up until now) been pushed to the margins of forgetting in the public memory, especially when one considers that the chosen historical representations of the school museum are intended to transmit a collective memory to village youth.

<sup>43</sup> In my visits to Pechora with survivors, no one enters the main building which now houses the clinic. Instead, survivors continue to negotiate dead and dying bodies lining the corridors and basement and to recall endless hours of immobility and of killing lice with their fingers until their nails reddened with blood.

<sup>44</sup> Pechora survivors resent the question frequently posed (often by fellow Jews who were in Romanian ghettos or in evacuation) "why didn't you flee?" or, more accurately, "why did you continue to return?" questions which confirm

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what Langer calls "the vast imaginative space" separating survivors' "abnormal" and incomparable experiences from our attempts at understanding through values of normality and comparison. See Langer (1991: 19-22). Interestingly, survivors of different traumatic experiences (and sometimes the same) often impose comparative and normative models on one another's stories.

